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The Political Economy of Cultural Production: Essays on Music and Class

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**THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION: ESSAYS ON
MUSIC AND CLASS**

A Dissertation Presented

By

IAN J. SEDA-IRIZARRY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2013

Department of Economics

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By

IAN J. SEDA-IRIZARRY

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Richard D. Wolff, Chair

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DEDICATION

To Stephen A. Resnick (1938-2013), a mentor and comrade who provided a never-ending source of ferocious and critical inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation represents the end of a long process that started in the Spring of 2002, at the end of my undergraduate studies, when I realized that I finally had found something that could keep my impatient attention in a relative focus. Since then I have traveled a long and rocky road, both personally and academically, in what has been a learning experience that goes way beyond any initial expectations on my part. During this trip I have had the good fortune of having encountered many groups and individuals whose influence on me cannot be fully captured in these pages. Still, it is important for me to mention and thank some of them explicitly.

First I want to thank and express my deep love and respect for Stephen A. Resnick, whose critical voice keeps thundering in my head even after his physical departure. Steve had the patience, even before I officially entered the economics program, to address my never ending stream of questions. It was he who first listened to me about the possibility of engaging in this project, and it was he who has taught me the most about the importance of clarity and rigor in communicating, and how patience serves as the necessary complement. Watching the old man teach, both as his student and as his teaching assistant, and spending hours talking to him, are some of the most important and gratifying experiences I had in graduate school.

Richard D. Wolff was kind enough to step in as chair at the last moment irrespective of his hectic time schedule. Rick has inspired me by always making me keep an eye for the political in both the economic and the cultural and by showing me how teaching is a political act. As with Steve, I also feel very lucky to have been his student

and teaching assistant and to have seen him in action conveying complex ideas in simple terms, an art that is extremely demanding and most of the time underestimated in our blind discipline. Finally, his devotion to political praxis outside the academy is truly inspiring and it is decision that, in my opinion, should be imitated by all of those that proclaim themselves to work within the radical political economy tradition of Marxism.

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Mwangi wa Githinji was extremely generous in joining this project at the last second. We had spoken about music before and I had felt his passion for the topic from the beginning. It was also with him that I took what was probably the only course that looked like what real graduate class should be—it was about the political economy of agrarian change. Even though I was not enrolled I went to the class and even accepted to do a presentation on Lenin’s “The Development of Capitalism in Russia” which I had never read before. I am extremely sincere when I say that I wish more classes were like that one, where hierarchies were kept at an absolute minimum and where the informality of the class provided a great learning environment.

At UMass I was fortunate enough to be exposed to many other scholars who left a deep impression on me. Jim Crotty, Mohan Rao, and Sam Bowles provided important perspectives in my way of thinking and I feel lucky to have taken courses with them.

With John Bracey I took two courses in the W.E.B. Afro-American Studies

Department, one about radical thought in the third world which he co-taught with Agustín Laó-Montes, and another one a seminar on W.E.B. Du Bois. In both classes I was exposed to various thinkers and readings which opened up new continents of knowledge for me to keep pursuing. Bracey's level of encyclopedic knowledge is something I had never been exposed to and even though it would be impossible to copy it, I will always try to emulate his emphasis on historical detail when presenting an analysis.

During these years I was also very lucky to have seen and heard—and sometimes even met—important thinkers who have left deep prints in my way of thinking. Some of these were Noam Chomsky, Enrique Dussel, Michael Albert, Noel Ignatiev, Bertell Ollman, and Anwar Shaikh.

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A very important institution during my time at UMass was the Economics Graduate Student Organization. Within it we constantly debated on theory and politics, at school and at bars, played lots of games (basketball, soccer, chess, backgammon, cards,

tennis, darts, pool, ping pong, and class struggle) and showed that what makes the department special is the diverse background of students that want to learn from each other. Within this group I want to especially thank those of that entered with me to the program (Harry, Amit, Jen, Andy, Helen, Hasan, and Suh). I also want to especially thank Rajesh, Joe, Mike, Phil, Geert, Alper, Anil, Armagan, Ozgur, Hasan T., Deger, Bob, Bilge, Bengi, Sam, Katie, Mathieu, Smita, and Luis for welcoming me and making me feel at home from the first day of my arrival at UMass.

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Of course, none of this would be possible without the support of my parents and sisters. At times I wonder where they got the patience to deal with me and my immaturity.

Papi, Mami, Gre y Janice, ¡*los quiero un muchísimo!*

Finally, this work would not have seen the light of the day if it weren't for the support and immense patience of my sentimental comrade, Ilgin Erdem. In all of these years of struggle I have learned so much about myself from you that I simply cannot find the way to thank you enough for it. Your deep political devotion and seriousness to social issues is truly inspiring. And of course, without your smile and laughter I simply wouldn't have been able to move on. ¡*Gracias!*

ABSTRACT

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION: ESSAYS ON
CLASS AND MUSIC

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Overview

As an activity that produces wealth, musical production and its effects have largely been neglected by the economics profession. This dissertation seeks contribute to a small but growing literature on the subject by analyzing musical production through a particular class analytical lens of political economy.

A first problem that has encountered many within political economy, specifically within its radical variant of Marxism, is how to understand music in relation to the social totality. In the first essay of this work I provide a critical review of the literature that approaches music through the “base-superstructure metaphor”, a tool of analysis well known within the Marxian theoretical tradition. In it I show how assigning elements to either one or the other of these spheres and understanding the forces of production in terms of its technical dimension (i.e. technology) limits the analytical possibilities provided by Marx’s original insights.

In the second part of this essay I review the ways the concept of class has been used to analyze topics related to music within the Marxian tradition. I highlight how the essentialist moments of those particular class concepts lead to analyzes that obscure and sometimes contradict one of the main purposes Marx's original intent: to show the various guises that exploitation might take in a capitalist society.

In the second essay of the dissertation I theorize musical production with the aid of a class *qua* surplus analysis that highlights the process of the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus labor in relation to the production and dissemination of meaning associated with music as a cultural process. I identify various musical scenes and show the dialectic of aesthetics and musical labor.

In the third and final essay, I compare and contrast two discourses of theft: those of exploitation and of piracy. I focus my attention on the music recording industry and show how the adoption of a discourse of exploitation by musicians that are not exploited and their support in anti-piracy campaigns hamper, marginalize, and contribute to eliminating none-exploitative class structures. This result is important to the literature that explores how intellectual property poses constraints to economic growth and development in the so-called Third world where most of the pirate production takes place.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*What a fascinating field art history is, and
what scope for study it presents to a Marxist!*

-V.I. Lenin¹

Yes indeed! For years, the historical and sociological role of art in society has provided a massive venue for critical academic research and political activism, yet many of those that engage in such activities still believe its importance is miniscule compared to other realms in understanding social life. The latter prefer to point their critical guns at the political and economic fabric, which they conceive as being more important in the struggle to transform society. Contrary to those that uphold this perspective, this work, along with many others (i.e. Durán 2009, 2010, Fischer 1970, Hadjinicolaou 1978, Hemingway 2006, and Solomon 1974), recognizes that art practices provide a complex canvas for inquiry into human beings' social lives, where the political and economic dimensions cannot be de-linked from the cultural ones. To highlight this, in this dissertation I focus on only one of the arts, one that for many might seem to have transformed the most with the development of capitalism. That art is music.

The study of music has attracted the analytical gaze of many that want to understand this “most rarefied, abstract, and specialized of all superstructural activities” (Jameson, 2002). The effects of music on worker productivity at the workplace, its potential disciplining role in society, the aesthetical dimensions of its reception, and the ways it might complement nationalism to support capitalism have been some of the

¹ Quoted in Hadjinicolaou (1978: 3).

topics that cut across the macro-micro theoretical space in a contested literature related to the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of music.

This dissertation is an intervention in the debates concerning the relationship between the economic and non-economic realms in understanding how the capitalist social formation shapes and is shaped by human practices that involve the creation and dissemination of symbols and meaning, with a focus on musical production.² It specifically provides an analysis of how to connect music to the economic process of surplus production, extraction, and distribution, a topic that appears in many forms in the political economy tradition—for example, in the physiocratic analysis of the production and distribution of the *produit net*—and that is appropriated in a critical way in the mature contributions of Karl Marx.³ Interestingly enough, a surplus based analysis of music is lacking in most works that identify themselves as following the teachings of the German philosopher and revolutionary.

To connect music to the production, appropriation, and distribution of the surplus, I start by providing a general glimpse into a particular set of contributions within the Marxian theoretical tradition and their relation to an analysis of music to show how various debates have traveled through a variety of contexts and how they also reflect various positions across the ideological spectrum.

The recognition of an ideological character in any type of analysis, and of music in particular, is no minor matter given that one of the most renowned analyses of music in

² I use the term “capitalist social formation” to define a heterogeneous social formation—one in which various class structures co-exist—in which the capitalist class structure is dominant.

³ Without going into the debates regarding the “mature vs young” Marx, I use the term “mature” to refer to the theoretical works—published and unpublished—that Marx started producing from 1857 onwards. The first draft of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, written in the winter of 1857-58, represents the starting point of this theoretical endeavor.

relation to capitalism is the one offered by the great apologist of capitalist bourgeois society, Max Weber.⁴ In his celebration of the Occident, Weber posits a historical process of “rationalization,” which he seeks to uncover in the social practices of the West to explain its “superiority” over the Orient/East. Specifically, in his essay “The Rational and Social Foundation of Music,” published as an appendix to his renowned book *Economy and Society*, Weber analyzed the standardization and development of Western music in Europe as an example of the rationalization process which, in his understanding, led to the rise of capitalism in the West. For Weber, rationalization was a universal historical process and he was intrigued at the “possibility of detecting this process at work in the ‘irrational’ arena of culture” (Turley, 2001: 637).

Weber approached his object of inquiry by studying the bureaucratization of the Roman Catholic Church and its “rationalizing effect”, which for him explained the conventions associated with composition and interpretation that are associated with European Classical Music (e.g. notational system, standardized construction of instruments, structured harmony, etc.).

His understanding of western music in terms of mathematical rationalization is evident in his statement that:

All rationalized music rests upon the octave (vibration ratio of 1:2) and its division into the fifth (2:3) and fourth (3:4) and the successive subdivisions in terms of the formula $n/(n+1)$ for all intervals smaller than the fifth. If one ascends or descends from a tonic in circles first in the octave, followed by fifths, fourths, or other successively determined relations, the powers of these divisions can never meet on one and the same tone no matter how long the procedure be continued... This unalterable state of affairs together with the further fact that the octave is successively divisible only into two unequal intervals, forms the fundamental core of facts for all musical rationalizations (quoted in Feher, 1987:

⁴ “I am a member of the bourgeois classes, I feel myself as such, and I am educated in its views and ideals” (Weber, 1999: 134).

339).⁵

What is interesting and relevant for this dissertation, apart from the Eurocentric gaze that surrounds Weber's methodology (he would project back to the non-European world his findings), is how his positing of a "rationalization" process echoes a previous teleological (and also Eurocentric) approach that comprehends the development of history as moving from East to West, with Europe, and by extension America, as the maximum and final expression of world culture. I am referring to how Weber seems to secularize the ethnocentrism and the process of the development of the Spirit (*Geist*) that is present G.W.F. Hegel's work on the philosophy of history and social ontology (Hegel, 1956).⁶

I mention the case of Weber's approach and its tangency with the German Idealism embodied in the Hegelian ontology primordially because one of the fundamental methods employed in this dissertation rejects such an *a priori* determinism. Following the philosophical contributions of Karl Marx and Louis Althusser, in this work I adopt a dialectical and an overdeterminist epistemological lens in understanding the ontological constitution of music. This approach recognizes that the Marxist method uses a relational approach (see Ollman, 1978; Resnick and Wolff, 1987; Harvey, 1982) in trying to understand the different types of phenomena that participate in constituting a society.

Taking a leaf from Hegel's contributions on dialectics, but from a critical

⁵ Although his argument is beyond my limited knowledge of music, I find that Feher (1987: 340-342) makes an interesting point regarding how this purported "rationalization" of music is deceiving, as it can be understood as being "a dialectical formation *par excellence*." He also makes the related observation that "the impossibility of fully rationalizing music on the basis of mathematical principles is roughly coequal with the other spectacular admission of the limits of Western rationality, namely [Bertrand] Russell's resignation...[that] mathematics could no be fully based on logical principles (ibid: 352).

⁶ I would like to thank Mario Espinoza Pino for providing words for my thought process here.

perspective, Marxian analysis emphasizes that no object can be defined, or let alone understood, in isolation. The concrete, understood as the surface phenomena that we normally identify with the empirical—that which “appears”—, remains abstract unless other determinants are brought into effect.⁷ An understanding of objects, agents, concepts, events and so on must be approached in terms of their interaction with the other elements that make up the totality, some of which cannot be immediately captured by our senses.⁸ Objects are then conceived as being a locus of pulls and pushes enacted by other elements. Therefore, they are not static ontological entities. In other words, the constitution of an object is seen as the coming together of an infinite amount of influences and effects—the object is overdetermined.

It follows that “every object, constituted as the site of endlessly diverse influences emanating from all other objects, is correspondingly pushed and pulled in endlessly diverse ways and directions and is therefore endlessly changing” (Resnick & Wolff, 2006: 52). Objects are understood to exist in *continuous change*, therefore, they can be conceived as *processes*.

Following Resnick and Wolff (1987), we will identify and classify the infinite amount of processes that are at play in the constitution of entities, be it objects or human subjects, into four broad categories: economic (production and distribution of wealth), cultural (creation and dissemination of meanings and symbols), natural (biological, physical and chemical transformation) and political (the distribution of authority and

⁷ “The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse” (Marx, 1973: 101)

⁸ In many instances throughout this work the concept of overdetermination will be used instead of dialectics given that the latter term has lent itself to an application of dichotomies, binaries, and dualisms when structuring the objects of inquiry that does not correspond to the ontology of mutual constitutivity that this work understands dialectics to be. For a critique of uses of dualisms in social and natural sciences, refer to Lecourt (1975).

control).

Given the interest of this work in connecting a particular cultural process, music, to a particular economic process, class, we must specify the type of relations that these processes have. Recognizing that “the specificity of cultural processes cannot be determined within the Marxist discourse independent of the question of the specific conditions of existence of these processes” (Amariglio et al, 1988 : 487), our analysis cannot prioritize one process over another in the explanation of the “entity becoming”.

The notion of overdetermination used in this project, as appropriated and worked out by Althusser (1970: 127-186) and further developed by Resnick and Wolff (1987: 87-106) implies viewing agents, processes, concepts, events and so on in terms of their mutual interaction, recognizing that each one of them has conditions of existence that give them *concreteness*. Within this perspective no process can be reduced to any another process, and each unique process participates in the overdetermination of all the others. In other words, and specifically in relation to our tools of inquiry, the premise of overdetermination is that “each social formation is a complexly articulated totality of a number of class and non-class processes” (Ozselcuk, 2009: 155).

1.1 Defining Music

My adoption of overdetermination immediately recognizes an important and basic issue regarding music: *what is music?* There is an impressive amount of literature—comprising, contributions from a variety of disciplines, including the natural and social sciences—that tries to give a *definite* answer as to what music is. Philosophers, sociologists, composers, musicians, linguists, and semioticians have all tried to articulate an all-encompassing definition of what most agree to be an art. Given the commitment of

this work to an overdeterminist epistemology, I initially approach music, as I would with any other art, by conceptualizing it as a *social construct*, where no inherent and unique properties, qualities or essential elements are associated with what music is.

Still, given the purposes of this dissertation in trying to connect music to class in a non-determinist way, I recognize that viewing music as a social construct is a first approximation. To begin an overdeterminist explanation “immediately involves its own negation in the form of an essentialist argument” to be able “to connect any object of explanation to its context or environment” (Wolff, 1996). This inescapable contradiction is part of the “constitutive movement between the fullness and emptiness of meaning in terms of the unceasing dialectic between the essentialist and anti-essentialist moments in the production of a concept” (Ozselcuk, 2010: 162).

Given the above recognition and the need to concretize further the analysis, I define music as a cultural process where symbols and meanings about the world are produced through the *organization* of sounds.⁹ To engage in playing music would then imply disseminating that music/meaning. In other words, music is a way of producing meaning about the world while playing music is about disseminating that meaning. Now, the definition offered above, like any other definition, has some advantages and some drawbacks. In terms of advantages, one can start visualizing plausible connections between music and acts of labor to then proceed to an inquiry into potential connections between music and class. On the other hand, this way of understanding music does not differentiate music from, for example, the act of talking, in which there is also an organization of sounds. Or, given our interest on labor, how does one distinguish between

⁹ Even though he is not the precursor, I borrow this sense/notion of organization from Jacques Attali, who refers to music as “the organization of noise” (2002: 4).

labor that produces, let us say, noise, and labor that produces music? Or, to put it more trivially, when does noise become music? Given the complexity of what at first seems to be not possible; that is, to give an all-encompassing/*absolute* answer, I believe that it is important to stress that by identifying music as a cultural process we immediately highlight the *relative content of its being*: for example, how the process of playing music implies a kind of labor that produces noise as it happens together with particular cultural processes of producing meaning. In other words, and in a more general way, I assume that the combination of a labor process and a cultural process of a particular kind become music. This way of conceiving music makes it plausible to understand why what was once conceived as music at a particular moment, could be conceived as not being music at another moment. Another possibility is that at the same moment some might consider some sounds music while others do not. Yet again, I want to stress the “inescapable contradiction” that Ozselcuk (ibid) highlights as being part of the “constitutive movement” of a concept because of the “fullness and emptiness of meaning in terms of the unceasing dialectic between the essentialist and anti-essentialist moments.”

From a Marxist perspective, this methodological recognition leads us to view things in a different way, which leads us to ask different questions. For example, instead of asking if a piece of musical work is good or not, we would ask *who* believes this work is good and *why*? Again, our approach, where things are relative to one another, discards the possibility of conceptualizing things in terms of absolutes. That is why, as I mentioned before, things and the concepts that try to grasp those things, are conceived as being processes.

Given my interest in methodological issues related to the ones raised above, in the

first essay of this dissertation, I present a critical survey of some of the different ways the Marxian theoretical tradition has approached music. I first try to trace any possible hints left by Marx in his work that might provide a solid foundation for such an inquiry.

It is well known that in his analysis of society Marx used a plethora of categories that were organized at different levels of abstraction to try and give an account of the particular processes that made capitalism different from other forms of organizing the production and distribution of goods and services.¹⁰ He struggled continuously to provide a more or less coherent theoretical body of work that could serve as a tool for social analysis and revolutionary transformation. In this trajectory, categories from earlier thinkers were appropriated and criticized (*aufhebung*), new categories developed, and other categories relocated in a theoretical scaffold that not only emphasized movement and change, but that also, literally, reflected it.¹¹

Many followers have used the methods of Marx to make sense of a complex reality that presents itself in many ways to various people. Overwhelmingly, these thinkers have used the legacy of our German philosopher/revolutionary to highlight the economic and political dimensions of humans within capitalist modernity. Still, in a sense, many Marxists can be said to have sinned like the classical political economists that Marx so bitterly criticized for their reductionist conceptualizations of human beings as “beasts of burden”, as things, and as the discipline of modern economics prefers to state, “factors of production.” In this world, where capitalist relations are given, cultural

¹⁰ Enrique Dussel (1985, 1988, 1990) has probably the most systematic “archeological reading” which traces the development of Marx’s categories in his “mature works”, especially in the four drafts of *Capital*.

¹¹ An example of a category that in Marx suffers changes in its meanings, and is relocated in the theoretical scaffold, is that of *alienation*. See Fromm (2012) for a discussion as to why Marx realized that, contrary to what he believed in his earlier works, such a concept was not abstract enough, in the Hegelian philosophical sense, to provide a theoretical pillar for a critique of capitalism.

practices are rarely analyzed in relation to the political and economic realms, and if they are, they are considered less important. This is the reason why I emphasize the literature that uses of the base-superstructure architectural metaphor in its different forms to try and locate music within the societal totality. Along with many other thinkers, I am of the opinion that this ontological proposal is foreign to Marx's method and I proceed to show some of the consequences that follow from its adoption. Still, my review of the literature, although not close to being exhaustive, does not stop here.

Given my recognition of the importance that the economic process of the production, appropriation, distribution, and receipt of surplus has in Marx's mature *oeuvre*, in the second part of this essay I review some of the different uses of class that have been adopted, either implicitly or explicitly, by various thinkers within the Marxian tradition to analyze the phenomenon of exploitation in relation to music. Following Resnick and Wolff (2006), I stress the consequences of using determinist notions of class that posit power, property, and culture as the essential elements through which to evaluate and understand the economic process related to surplus value, a fundamental category in Marx's theoretical scaffold since he discovered and introduced it in his 1857 preparatory draft of *Capital* known as the *Grundrisse* (Dussel, 1985, 2008).

In this essay I also point to problems regarding the standard interpretation of the forces of production as technology in understanding the interrelations between elements within the base and between the base and the superstructure. Although not new, this critique, which was emphasized by Gramsci and Lukacs as a response to Bukharin's work, seems to have been forgotten with the penetration into Marxism of what, in my opinion, is an incompatible positivist philosophical position.

The recognition of the class process, understood in relation to surplus labor, is what motivates the second essay of this dissertation. In it I contribute to the literature by extending the class *qua* surplus analysis to connect class with music. Contrary to previous studies that also understand class in surplus terms to then delve on topics related to music (e.g. Mulder, 2008), I develop a theoretical scaffold that seeks to understand the class dimensions of musical production in different spaces. This analysis conceives the process notion of class as Marx's entry-point into social analysis (Resnick & Wolff, 1987), a recognition that differentiates itself from others that view, for example, commodity production and commodification as Marx's theoretical starting point. This difference in entry-points is important to highlight given our overdeterminist approach.

1.2 Class structure and its products

An important issue that arises when trying to understand the potential connections between class and music is that of the *economic form* that the product of musical labor takes. By economic form I refer to the relationship that the product of labor has to its producer and other agents in society. Is the product produced for consumption by the producer or is it produced with the aim of exchanging it for another product, or for money, to eventually get access to other products? Is it produced as a gift?

Marx starts *Volume I of Capital* by focusing on the predominant form the product of labor takes under capitalism. He writes that "the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities," with commodities defined as products that are produced for exchange and not for consumption by the producer. Many have understood this passage to mean that the most important and distinguishing feature of capitalism is commodity production. This is

not surprising if we point out that the notion of class that informs most of those that adopt this perspective is defined in terms of property relations. These property relations, in turn, constitute what are understood to be the relations of production, which are seen as a fundamental element, along the forces of production, in the comprehension of the economic base which is said to determine an ideological superstructure. Specifically, this understanding of class prioritizes the separation of workers from the means of production—they do not own them—and, therefore, they have to sell their labor power in exchange for a wage to be able to eventually acquire their means of subsistence.¹² This separation from the means of production and the exchange of labor power has as an outcome the production of commodities.

The present work understands commodity production as one of many possible non-class economic processes which might be associated with the capitalist fundamental class process.¹³ According to this understanding, there is no necessary unique relationship between the pattern of ownership in the means of production, commodity production and class structure. Class, as the way we understand it, precludes such deterministic conclusions and can visualize commodity production, for example, in non-exploitative class structures. We might have an organization of production where those that produce the surplus then appropriate and distribute it collectively, a surplus that might be embodied in commodities (the products produced by this particular organization of production are for exchange and not for direct consumption of the producers). This type

¹² The possibility of an “outside” of capital is normally not conceived in these approaches. See Bhattacharya (2010) for a theoretical analysis of the non-capitalist outside in relation to primitive accumulation. Bhattacharya and Seda-Irizarry (2012) use the non-capitalist outside to critically evaluate the literature on the latest capitalist economic downturn.

¹³ There is a distinction between Marx's entry-point in his presentation and his analytical entry-point. As Resnick and Wolff point out, Marx made the tactical decision to begin *Capital* with commodities and markets too” (Resnick and Wolff, 1987b: 157).

of class structure, which we will refer to as communist, has commodity production happening within a non-capitalist class structure, on the very general ground that it is non-exploitative.

In volume III of *Capital* Marx himself is very explicit about the problem of identifying commodity production per se as *the* defining characteristic, instead of one of the conditions of existence, of the capitalist class structure when he says that “[t]o produce commodities does not distinguish the capitalist mode of production from other modes of production, but rather that commodity is the dominant and determining character of its product” (Marx, 1894: 1019). In other words, yes, the products of capitalism take the commodity form, but that is but one characteristic, that taken *by itself*, does not define capitalism.¹⁴ The same happens with the categories of money, wage labor, markets, etc.

In terms of the relevance of these issues to the present work, some people can, for example, own the means of production (musical instruments) and still produce commodities, and this production might take place within an exploitative or non-exploitative class structure, an issue that we will delve into more detail later. Again, we see how the different conceptualization of class used in this work contrasts with those that historically have dominated Marxian discourse, a difference that is shown in the way the analysis is shaped by different entry-points.

Returning to Marx's opening statement in *Capital* regarding commodities, Resnick and Wolff (2004: 64) provide a very comprehensive description of what is at work here:

¹⁴ For a non-essentialist approach discussing the various elements that are at play in the constitution of the capitalist class structure, such as dispossession, wage labor and commodity production, refer to Bhattacharya (2010: 15-17).

Following this kind of dialectical logic, once Marx introduces commodity production, he immediately explores its relations with other social processes as his way of progressively constructing/enriching the meaning of—quite literally defining—commodity production. Like every other process to which Marx relates it, commodity production is the site of the effectivities of those other social processes. The latter include the many non-class processes cited in the first two hundred pages of *Capital*: wealth produced for sale, wealth possessed of a use value in and to society; wealth produced by concrete labor using a particular technology (the forces of production); wealth exchangeable for a universal equivalent (money); and so forth. Marx's predecessors noted many of these non-class processes (as he acknowledged). What Marx adds that is new and that reworks his predecessors' insights is his connection of commodity production to the capitalist fundamental class process, i.e. to exploitation. Marx reveals the production and appropriation of surplus as a dimension of capitalist commodities. Class processes (surplus production, exploitation, etc.) and commodity production are theorized as conditions of each other's existence, mutually constitutive, components of each other's definitions in an altogether original formulation.

As we previously noted, many of the concepts that Marx deploys in his theoretical developments undergo transformations as more and more determinants are dialectically introduced and connected, with the concept of "commodity" being no exception. In terms of his concrete analysis of the commodity form and its relation to capital, Marx states that "[t]he commodity that emerges from capitalist production is different from the commodity we began with as the element, the precondition of capitalist production" (quoted in R&W, 2004). Again, *change* is what characterizes, not only the entities that constitute the social totality as we explored in our discussion of overdetermination, but also the dialectical method used to try and understand the development of those entities understood as processes.

1.3 Commodity production and value creating labor

The discussion presented in the previous section on the commodity form and its place within Marxian discourse in relation to class analysis provides us with a bridge to

another topic related to our development of an understanding of some possible connections between class and music.

It has generally been agreed that music became an object of commerce with the advent of printing, which “put music in the hands of new kinds of performers who were largely amateur, with less extensive knowledge of the learned conventions” (Chanan, 1994: 111). The printing of musical scores was the concrete object that was produced to then be sold.

Even though the above statement regarding music and printing points out that music became, in a certain way, an object of mass production and distribution via printing, it also seems to imply that music can only take a commodity form if it is a physical object. In other words, it can be understood that music became a commodity once it took on a material form, specifically with the reproduction, via printing, of musical scores. In present times, this could also mean that the only musical commodities that exist are basically records, be it, for example, in LP, cassette, CD, or MP3 forms. This conclusion, combined with Marx's opening statement of *Capital* regarding how we see wealth in the form of commodities around us, would seem to imply that labor which produces services is labor that does not produce wealth. In other words, the process of the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus is strictly limited to production processes that have as an output a physical object. What then is to be made of performances by musicians in a setting where no tangible object is being produced?

Marx's discussions in *Grundrisse*, *Capital* and *Theories of Surplus Value* on the capitalist fundamental class process, although sometimes inconsistent, clearly point to one direction: the commodity form is not limited to any physical object that endures after

the production process is done.

The debate surrounding the materiality of commodities in general can be traced, in its most important manifestation, to Adam Smith's discussion of “perishable services” (Smith, 1776). For Smith, perishable services refer to activities that do not “fix or realize [themselves] in any permanent subject or vendible commodity, which endures after the labor is past”. The most cited example regards the labor of personal (menial) servants which is not productive in the sense of not creating wealth for the master; these servants do not regenerate the funds which purchase them. Smith also includes in this category of perishable services musical performance.

In theoretical terms, no surplus value, the form that surplus labor takes under the capitalist fundamental class process, is produced to be appropriated. This conclusion led Smith, in Marx's view, to make a wrong generalization: only labor that produces material commodities is productive labor.

In lengthy passages in his *Theories of Surplus Labor* Marx explains how the productive-unproductive distinction must be based on examining the social-relationships at play. In other words, the distinction is not about what type of concrete labor is done (cooking, cleaning or sewing), nor is it about the product being material or immaterial.¹⁵

For example, Marx comments that “for labor to be designated productive, qualities are required which are utterly unconnected with the specific content of the labor, with its particular utility or the use-value in which it is objectified. Hence labor with the same content can be either productive or unproductive.” (Marx, 1867: 1044, emphasis in original). He shows how the activity of a singer might or might not be productive labor

¹⁵ “[T]his distinction between productive and unproductive labor has nothing to do either with the particular speciality of the labor or with the particular use-value in which this special labor is incorporated” (Marx, 1861).

and how it might be part of the sphere of circulation instead of that of production. Again, singing by itself does not define what relationship is at play in terms of the position it occupies in the process of production, appropriation and distribution of the surplus.

Given the astounding amount of literature produced addressing this topic, we will not try to give a comprehensive review of it here.¹⁶ As mentioned earlier, we do recognize that Marx's writings on the productive-unproductive distinctions are not completely consistent. For example, it seems that such a distinction is limited to the capitalist fundamental class process. On other occasions he talks about commodity production in non-capitalist fundamental class processes as unproductive.¹⁷

Still, we want to say some words about the performance of services (non-tangible goods) and their potential relation to the capitalist fundamental class process given our interest in relating class to music.

1.4 Commodity producing services and the production of surplus value

As we mentioned before, the production of commodities is not limited to the production of tangible goods. For example labor power, understood as the capacity to work at a certain level of effort and intensity, is a commodity that is not a tangible good.

Services provide a very interesting case for the application of the Marxian framework. This category, which finds its main expression in bourgeois economics, might or might not involve the production of capitalist commodities and hence might or might not involve the creation of surplus value.¹⁸ Marx refers to commodity-producing

¹⁶ For a discussion of the debates surrounding the productive-unproductive distinction, and their relationship to other related debates concerning the concept of the “working class”, refer to Hunt (1979) and Resnick & Wolff (2006, 100-107).

¹⁷ “A singer who sells her song for her own account is an unproductive worker” (Marx, 1963: 401)

¹⁸ In *Volume 2 of Capital* (1886) Marx explains how, for example, circulatory services are examples of unproductive labor that does not produce surplus value, even though they might help in the realization of it; they occupy a subsumed class position: “Costs of circulation, which originate in a mere change of

services as “types of work that are consumed as services and not in products separable from the worker and hence not capable of existing as commodities independently of him, but which are yet capable of being directly exploited in capitalist terms” (Marx, 1867: 1044)

In this variant of commodity production, the “use-value perishes with the activity of the labor power itself” (Marx, 1861: 165). Now, for the labor that produced this service commodity to be considered as productive, the labor power must be purchased by a capitalist with the aim of expanding value, just as in the case of a tangible manufactured commodity in which case the labor power “materializes and fixes itself to the object” (ibid). In other words, the labor power must be exchanged against capital, not revenue. If it were exchanged against revenue, it would imply a *decrease* of the overall fund of money that the capitalist has—it would not imply the expansion of value.

In terms of the circuit of productive capital applied to services,

$$M - C[LP, MOP] \dots P - C' - M'$$

what we have is that the production and consumption of services generally cannot be separated. In other words the P -C' stage “is essentially 'compressed' in time (and usually space) in what effectively is a single stage” (Tregenna, 2009: 14). This theoretical observation regarding commodity-producing services is important for locating musical labor operating within class structure relations.

Musical labor that takes the commodity form and is represented through a live performance is a clear example of how both the simultaneous production and consumption of the final output, the performance itself, can be part of the capitalist

form of value, in circulation, ideally considered, do not enter into the value of commodities. The parts of capital expended as such are merely deductions from the productively expended capital so far as the capitalist is concerned” (ibid: 139).

fundamental class process which is inscribed in the circuit of capital presented above. Meanwhile, musical labor that goes into composing to then sell the score of the piece composed can be regarded as a more traditional case where a tangible good is being produced and where there is a separation in time and space between the production and consumption of the commodity. In this work we will explore how these ways of making music, composing and performing, relate to the *mass repetition* commodity form (i.e. records) and the class structures in which that production takes place.¹⁹

For now, we want to summarize and stress two important points relevant to this work. First, a musical performance can take the commodity form: it can be exchanged for money, such as in a concert where the musical group or individual which engages in musical labor is paid for performing.²⁰

Second, commodities might be produced by non-capitalist fundamental class processes. As mentioned before, capitalism might have as one of its characteristics generalized commodity production, but to produce commodities is not exclusive to capitalism understood in class structure terms. The same applies to other institutions related to commodity production, such as markets. You can have, as it indeed happened, slave fundamental class structures that interact with markets.²¹ In this case, markets served as institutions for allocation of human beings who were property of others to

¹⁹ For example, we will take a look at how “[r]epetition began as the by-product of representation...[and how]...representation has become an auxiliary of repetition (Attali, 2002: 85).

²⁰ Such a presentation might or might not refer to the representation of a musical score. I point this out because the evolution of the score is tied to the development of western music. For an interesting discussion of how the development of notation and the commodification of the score affected musical production, refer to Chanan (1994: 54-137) and Attali (2002: 47-85)

²¹ The Transatlantic Triangular Slave Trade is probably the most known historical manifestation of this confluence between markets and slave fundamental class processes. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries slaves, in their majority coming from western and central Africa, were sold to European traders to labor in the Americas. See Williams (1994: 51-84) for a classic account of this process.

different sites for their exploitation.

With the previous examples I want to again highlight how the definition of class used in this work is an anti-essentialist one. Even though we define conceptually class as a process of the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor, the ontology of overdetermination and the contingency derived from it liberate it from any fixed closures. In other words,

[t]he process-oriented notion of class decouples it from any necessary attachment to fixed identities and demands, predicates of class-belonging (in terms of property, income, occupation, position in power hierarchy, cultural habits, and so on), pre-constituted entities or social groups (e.g., working class), essentialist logics, privileged sites (e.g., factories, migrant, neighborhoods, miner towns), and fundamental behavioral predispositions (e.g., resistance against “alienation”). A (contingent) relation to class is enacted whenever and wherever surplus-labor is produced, appropriated, and distributed (Ozselcuk, 2009: 165-166).

To conceive class processes within the ontology of overdetermination—which emphasizes breaks, change, movement—while at the same time recognizing the possibility of *relative stability* which the notion of contingency implies, forces us to look at the distributions of surplus and their dialectical/constitutive relationship to the production and appropriation of that surplus. By emphasizing the *constitutive outside* of the class processes—their conditions of existence—we can explore the possibility of the reproduction of those processes, always within the uncertain horizon that overdetermination posits.

The essay connecting the class process to music not only identifies how to conceptualize the class processes in different musical spaces and in relation to other spaces where class processes are happening, but also seeks to open a space for understanding in a non-essentialist way how aesthetics can be connected to class

processes.

In all of this development I put emphasis on occasions where living labor is performed by the interpreters (there are some examples of musical labor that involves other activities apart from performing) in different musical spaces. As I mentioned before, there are musical spaces that are spatially and temporally separated from the consumption of the music. It is the digital and mechanical reproduction which we take in the final part of the essay and which we then use to examine a case study in the third and final essay of the dissertation.

The discourse of exploitation is one used by many within the music industry and it is one of the contributions of my work to locate these agents within the class-as a process matrix that guides my work. The third essay represents a case study in how, when the class analytics are deployed, a different discourse arises that contributes to undermining the prevalent and hegemonic perceptions of reality. Specifically, I take a look at the phenomenon of musical piracy, one which is articulated through the analytical coordinates of property and power, in relation to the Music Recording Industry (MRI). The story that comes out of my analysis is one where analysis of the value flows demonstrates how individuals that locate themselves in particular class positions actually belong to different ones. As will be shown in the essay, this has immense political and cultural repercussions, not only for those that directly participate in the MRI, but also for those that are part of the excluded surplus populations that engage in economic activities in the so-called informal sector across the world, many of which can be regarded as taking place in non-exploitative class processes. I see a major contribution of this essay, not only in its questioning of the dominant discourses of how this media industry

operates, but also in its opening of a political space to understand ways in which alternative non-exploitative class structures might benefit cultural production.

In general, this dissertation contributes to the growing literature that seeks to free the Marxian theoretical tradition from the various types of determinisms that have characterized many of its developments in its 150 years of existence. To do this, we seek to intervene in the debates concerning the different roles of art, and more specifically music, in the capitalist social formation.

The Marxian theoretical tradition has always, among its various distinct purposes, highlighted class struggle and its possible connections to the complexity of realms that constitute human social existence throughout history. The purpose of this is pretty straightforward, *to transform reality*.

Capitalism and its effects has been the preferred canvas for laying out such a critique, and generations of scholars, activists, and revolutionaries have actively taken part in the struggle that seeks to rid humanity of the injustices and suffering that capitalist modernity has brought upon us. This dissertation seeks to contribute to those endeavors.

CHAPTER 2

MUSIC IN THE MARXIAN TRADITION: A CRITICAL SURVEY

“Any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determined superstructure,”

-Raymond Williams, 1980: 31.

“In contrast, to the rather dialectical formulations of Marx and Engels, [this] conception has been made into a rigid schema, a schematization that has had devastating consequences for aesthetics”

-Herbert Marcuse, 1979: 3.

2.1 Introduction

The analysis of music and culture and their role in society is one that has attracted the attention of many within the Marxian theoretical tradition in its 150 years of existence. Perspectives on aesthetics, the place of music in the social totality, the culture industry, intellectual private property, ideological interpellation, reception theory, and many other topics have been scrutinized by a variety of Marxist thinkers with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Not surprisingly, the questions asked, the methods employed, and the extensions proposed exhibit the richness, complexity, and contradictions of the tradition as a whole.

Also important, and in various ways symptomatic, is the fact that many within the Marxian tradition have decided to not devote much ink—if any at all—to the subject of music given that, contrary to other elements and relations in the social totality, music is conceived by these thinkers as being merely a derived phenomenon of “more

fundamental” elements (i.e. the economy). Even Marx himself refers to cases that can be tied to musical production as being “so insignificant compared with the totality of production that they can be left entirely out of account” (Marx, 2000 [1861], 411).

In this chapter I want to do three fundamental and interrelated things. First, I want to present a critical survey of several of the Marxist thinkers that have tackled the topic of music. In doing this I will narrow the review to put a critical emphasis on the methodological schemes that have been deployed by these thinkers in their examination of multiple topics related to music. This way I can also try to account for those that did not regard music as an important topic to analyze. Second, and intimately related to the first, I want to simultaneously stress the particular epistemological and ontological perspective that informs our inquiry, that of the dialectic as I understand it through Marx’s own work and via its further elaboration and refinement through the concept of overdetermination in the work of French philosopher Louis Althusser.

Finally, I want to see the ways in which the concept of class has been deployed, if at all, by these thinkers. For this, my point of departure is the understanding that class refers to the economic process of the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus labor as worked out by Marx in the three volumes of *Capital*, and reframed and expanded by Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff (1987, 2006). In the next chapter I will develop this theoretical framework in relation to music.

2.2 Music in Marx

It seems appropriate to first proceed with an examination of the works of Marx himself to see what he had to say about music before delving into what Marxists have written on the subject. This could throw some light into understanding the further

developments within the tradition regarding this topic.

Still, when one looks for any theoretical developments in Marx's work, what we find is a collection of scattered fragments across his correspondence, journalistic output, and theoretical *oeuvre*. We also find letters written by others with anecdotes about Marx's opinions about a diversity of musical pieces, composers and interpreters.

The possibility of Marx explicitly writing about art almost materialized in 1857 when he was asked to write an entry about "aesthetics" as a contribution to the *New American Cyclopaedia*, which was directed by the editor of the *New York Tribune* and whom Marx knew.²² Our German thinker declined, communicating to Engels that "[i]t is a puzzle to me how 'Aesthetics' should be treated 'fundamentally' on a Hegelian basis, on one page" to which Engels replied "Dana must be crazy to stipulate one page for aesthetics" (cited in Lindley, 2010).

Even though it is a complex and speculative issue to ascertain how Marx would approach the topic of art, and more specifically music if he had ever written such a page, it is important to recognize that his theoretical writings do include many references related to music. Discussions regarding the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, the way labor is organized in private capitalist firms and the possibilities of non-capitalist alternatives are part of the themes in which music makes an appearance, even though the purpose is usually to give examples and make parallels with the theoretical developments that Marx is expounding.

For example, in volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx discusses how "[t]he capitalist mode of production has brought matters to a point where the work of supervision, entirely

²² Marx was the correspondent on European issues for the *New York Tribune*, which was edited by Charles Dana, from August of 1852 till February of 1861. In 1857, Dana invited Marx to write various entries for the encyclopedia project, which at the end contained almost seventy entries from Marx.

divorced from the ownership of capital, is always readily obtainable” and how “[i]t has, therefore, come to be useless for the capitalist to perform it himself” (Marx, 1894). He then proceeds to give an analogy between the orchestra and the factory to illustrate the above: “[a]n orchestra conductor need not own the instruments of his orchestra, nor is it within the scope of his duties as conductor to have anything to do with the “wages” of the other musicians” (ibid).²³

Another example can be found in chapter 12 of the *Grundrisse*, where Marx describes the qualities that labor would have, as “unalienated activity” (Lindley, 2010), as a result of the passing of the capitalistic stage of development via socialist revolution:

This does not mean [he went on] that labor can be made a joke, or amusement, as Fourier naively expressed it in shop-girl terms. Really free labor, the composing [of music] for example, is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort. The labor concerned with material production can only have this character if (1) it is of a social nature and (2) it has a scientific character and at the same time is general work, i.e. if it becomes the activity of a subject controlling all the forces of nature in the production process (Marx, 1973).

In his *Theories of Surplus Value* Marx uses music to make his distinction between productive and unproductive labor:

[One cannot] present the labor of the pianist as indirectly productive, either because it stimulates the material production of pianos, for example, or because it gives the worker who hears the piano recital more spirit or vitality. Only the labor of someone who creates capital is productive, so any other labor, however useful or harmful it may be, is not productive from the point of view of capitalization; it is therefore unproductive.

Even as early as the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* we see Marx mentioning music in his discussions regarding human laboring activity and the relations between humans and nature:

²³ According to Channan (1994: 11) Marx was the first thinker pose the analogy between an orchestra and a factory.

Just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has *no* sense for the unmusical ear—is [no] object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers—it can therefore only exist for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity; because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as *my* sense goes (has only a meaning for a sense corresponding to that object)—for this reason the *senses* of the social man *differ* from those of the non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective *human* sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, *senses* capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present. (Marx, 1844, emphasis in original)

These and other *mentions* leave us hanging with regards to the possibility of a coherent theory of how to conceptualize music in Marx's writings, although some of them, as we will see later, are helpful in critiquing later analysis of music.²⁴ Still, we do know that music and culture in general were not part of the various outlines of his planned work (see Dussel, 1985, 1990 and Rosdolsky, 1977), of which he only got to publish in his lifetime 1/72 of the planned whole (Dussel, 1990: 26).

2.3 Music and totality in the Marxian tradition: The base-superstructure metaphor

Although Marx did not develop a theory specifically focused on music, many of his followers did try to connect his contributions towards an understanding of society to both art and music. The starting point in several of these works, for which we want to provide a general review, has been to locate the social practice of music within an ontological grid, that is, within a societal *totality* that seeks to explain the relationships among the parts that make up the whole and also the relation between the parts and the

²⁴ It is also important to note that Engels was also avid music fan, who, contrary to Marx, did possess some degree of technical knowledge about the subject. See Lindley (2010) for a review of his correspondence pertaining to his appreciation of music, with some of the letters mentioning Marx on this topic.

whole.²⁵ In general, these debates have taken various *dualist* forms where, for example, oppositions between structure and agency, humanism and structuralism, and subject and object have been posited, dualisms that normally imply a determinist understanding of that totality and which constrain the rich possibilities offered by the dialectical analysis of mutual constitution and determination that is one of the hallmarks of Marx's analysis.²⁶

A favorite analytical device that has been deployed by many within the Marxian tradition to express the connections between different realms of society, specifically between the mode of production, the non-economic realms, and the social formation, and which has also been used to conceptualize historical change, has been the base-superstructure metaphor.²⁷ Inspired more by Engels' work (1975, 1987) than by Marx's own writings, this particular and very popular interpretation defines and posits a base, which is understood to contain economic relations of production and the level of development of the forces of production—the latter usually equated with technology—and then “*assumes* that it has powers of determination over cultural and political practices” (Amariglio et al, 1989, my emphasis).²⁸

Others who have used the base-superstructure metaphor in less deterministic ways have been more cautious in their approach and have described music as “the most

²⁵ Although there is no space here to go over these debates in detail, we should state that these relationships have overwhelmingly been posed in a deterministic dual manner, as Althusser (...), Hindess and Hirst (1977), Cullenberg (1994), and others have emphasized, were either the parts determine the whole (i.e. Cartesian totality) or the whole determines the parts (Hegelian totality). Either way the category of totality is seen as one of the fundamental contributions of Marx (see Lukacs). In contrast, Dussel claims that before one speaks of totality in Marx one should talk about the category of “living labor”, which then opens up the analysis to the possibility of a necessary “outside” of capital, which implies that the totality is not a Hegelian self-reproducing totality.

²⁶ In the discipline of economics this division can be seen, for example, in the entry points that characterize Keynesian and Neoclassical economics. See Resnick and Wolff (2012) for a discussion of these debates within the discipline and Lecourt (1975) for a critique of dualisms in the natural sciences.

²⁷ For an excellent review of the historical development of the modes of production and social formation theories, see Olsen (2009).

²⁸ See Williams (1991: 407) for a thorough discussion of cultural analyzes that conceive of a determining base and a determined superstructure.

rarefied, abstract, and specialized of all superstructural activities” (Jameson, 2002). When combined, these approaches imply that music not only occupies *by definition* a secondary role by virtue of it being part of the determined superstructure, but also, within the elements normally identified with the superstructure (i.e. laws, ideas, power) it is treated as a mystical human activity.²⁹

The power of the base-superstructure approach is purported to be derived from the explanatory power it provides based on the logic of causation. This deterministic approach, which is usually equated with *historical materialism*, has been interpreted and developed in two different but related ways. The first interpretation is one in which the non-economic realms are absolutely subsumed to the economic realm; that is, the non-economic is a simple reflection of the economy. The other interpretation recognizes a so-called “relative autonomy” for the non-economic, but in the *last instance* the latter is determined by the economic, that is, by what is understood to be the mode of production. For our present inquiry we only want to highlight the fact that, irrespective of the *difference in degrees* between both approaches, at the end the economic is theorized and understood to be the *determining source* of all non-economic phenomena.

Following Olsen’s review of the literature (2009, 181), we can state that the general theory of society that is implied by the base-superstructure metaphor as initially developed by a sector of the Marxian tradition can be summarized as follows:

1. The economic base, or mode of production, is joined by an ideological superstructure to give form to a social formation.

²⁹ Chanan (1994: 5) captures this realization of mystification when he asks “[w]hat is it about music that lends itself to such fantasies? What embarrasses us about it? Why does it seem so difficult to talk about music in social and historical terms? Why does it seem to resist the kind of understanding and interpretation to which the other arts lend themselves so much more readily?”

2. The mode of production is composed by the forces and relations of production.
3. The social formation then follows three sociological laws, which are:
 - a. A necessary conformity between production relations and the character of productive forces.
 - b. A necessary conformity between superstructure and the economic base
 - c. Progressive development of the productive forces.

This general framework, which many uncritically posit as the ABC of Marx's contribution, has been used countless times by countless authors to analyze a plethora of economic and political topics, from the analysis of transitions between historical modes of production to analysis of international conflict among nations. To a lesser degree, but still not surprisingly, it has also been applied to topics regarding culture, and within it specifically music.

An illustrative example of this deterministic perspective that posits a determining economic base is given in Georgi Plekhanov's essay "Historical Materialism and the Arts" (1899). In this work, the Russian theoretician engages in a "dialogue" with Charles Darwin's book *The Descent of Man* to show how the English naturalist moves from a biological to a sociological determinism that is compatible with how "a complex association of ideas is created and determined in the last analysis by the economic conditions and the state of the productive forces of the given society" (ibid).

Plekhanov is clearly echoing Engels' "last instance" determination by the economic realm (Engels, 1975), while at the same time specifying the elements within the mode of production (i.e. technology) that are prioritized in this understanding. But his is not a mere statement. Plekhanov then proceeds to provide us with an analysis of the

connection between rhythms, melodies, and harmonies of different societies and races with different modes of production. His technological determinism is striking.³⁰

“...the primitive producer in the course of his work readily follows a certain time and accompanies the movement of his body with singing or with rhythmical jingling of various trinkets. But what determines this rhythmical beat kept by our primitive producer? Why only these and no other bodily movements? This depends on the technological character of the given productive process, on the technique of the given production. Among primitive peoples each form of labor has its own song, the refrain of which is always adjusted to the rhythm of the productive movements.” (ibid)

As can be observed from the conclusion of our Russian theoretician, not only is the economic base determinant over the superstructure, but also one of the elements of the base, i.e. technology, is more determining than the relations of production.

As is well known, this technological determinism consistently made its appearance, although sometimes in a contradictory way, in the Marxian tradition throughout the 20th century, especially with the thinkers of the II International. Nikolai Bukharin’s *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* (1925) is another classic example of an extreme non-dialectical and mechanical conception of the relation between the base and the superstructure. This approach, which reduces the whole societal scaffold to developments in technology, was vehemently criticized by Lukacs, when he stated that:

“Technique is a *part*, a moment naturally of great importance, of the social productive forces, but it is neither simply identical with them, nor (as some of Bukharin’s earlier points would seem to imply) the final or absolute moment of the changes in these forces. This attempt to find the underlying determinants of society and its development in a principle other than that of social relations between men in the process of production) and thence of distribution, consumption, etc)- that is in the economic structure of society correctly

³⁰ This example from the year 1899 questions Olsen’s hurried assertion, based on some works of Plekhanov in 1896, that “after the content of Engel’s letters became known, Plekhanov *rapidly abandoned* the position to present a very different image of society as a relatively complex system of mutual interaction and diverse causality in subsequent works” (Olsen, 2009: 186, my emphasis).

conceived-leads to fetishism, as Bukharin himself elsewhere admits”, (Lukacs, 1966).

Antonio Gramsci also reacted to Bukharin’s analysis by identifying its lack of understanding of the “necessary reciprocity” and dynamic interaction between base and superstructure (Gramsci, 1975: 1052). The critique of both Lukacs and Gramsci points to a limit in the conceptualization of forces of production which abstracts from one of the moments of dialectical constitution within the economic base.

The expression “forces of production” for both Bukharin and many others within the tradition is usually equated to its technical instruments’ component, a view that externalizes labor power from those forces and therefore occludes the dynamic dialectical relationships among the different social spheres. Interestingly enough, one of Marx’s comments, which we quoted at length at the beginning, and which mentions the development of the “musical ear” and the development of the senses, does recognize the mutually constitutive dynamic between human beings and their tools, other human beings, and their surroundings. Let us quote the relevant section:

Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man’s essential being is the richness of subjective *human* sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, *senses* capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present. (Marx, 1844, emphasis in original)

As Marxist philosopher Georg Fromm points out (Fromm, 2011: 232-233), the meaning of the above passage from the young Marx can be interpreted and illustrated with examples from the history of music. Fromm reminds us of Beethoven’s encounter with the *pianoforte* and how it enriched his musical sensibilities, to the point that the

composer wants to “transgress the expressive limits that the instrument had achieved till that moment” (ibid, 233).³¹ Still, Fromm seems to posit a teleological Hegelian understanding of this dialectic between the object and the subject when he states that:

“the rhythm of the progressive development of the appropriated *object* does not only produce a corresponding enrichment of the musical sensibility, but also, and because of it, expands the horizon of the *subject* (the composer) as he discovers unedited and unsuspected possibilities till that moment; something which in turn forcefully stimulates the effort to produce the corresponding *objects*-that is, the most versatile, powerful and expressive- to realize these new possibilities. This in turn stimulates again the creativity of the musical *subjects*, in a continuous process of dialectical interaction between the musical *object* and *subject*, the development of the appropriate instruments, and the corresponding development and enrichment of the musical sensibility” (ibid, emphasis in original, my translation).

Although Fromm, following the young Marx, emphasizes the dialectical interaction between object and subject, he seems to make of what is a potential and possible outcome a necessity.³² This teleological perspective, present in the work of the young Marx and in that of many of his followers, is inconsistent with Marx’s conceptualization of processes as being overdetermined where the *possibility of possibility* does not, in any way, imply necessity. This latter perspective is probably most clearly expounded in much of his mature work like when, for example, he tries to develop a theory of crisis and he speaks of the “abstract form of crisis” and why it “turns from possibility to actuality” (Marx, 1968: 515). While I do not negate the possibility of concrete cases where such a dialectical interaction, such as the one Fromm describes, could take place, there is no *a priori* basis from which to deduce theoretically that such

³¹ Fromm also provides examples regarding Mozart’s relation to the Mannheim chamber orchestra and his friendship with composer Joseph Haydn (Fromm, 2011: 233-237).

³² It is worth mentioning that Fromm was a student of Herbert Marcuse at Brandeis University, with Marcuse being one of the most distinguished exponents of what has been called “Hegelian Marxism.” His 1933 review of Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and his 1941 book *Reason and Revolution* are considered to be two of the fundamental works in this variant of Marxism which seeks to highlight the presence of Hegel throughout Marx’s work.

processes will lead to an outcome of mutual “development” between the object and the subject. When analyzing concrete cases, a vast array of determinants can enter a picture to, for example, nullify and reverse such a process (Marx’s analysis of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall is telling). This is important to highlight because many of the perspectives that support the thesis of a linear progression of history can be traced to this Hegelian/teleological conception of the totality.³³

2.4 The theory of reflection

In the last section we saw how Plekhanov’s analysis of rhythm seeks to convey the idea that culture and human thought in general (elements of the superstructure) in some way *mirror* an underlying “objective reality” that is defined by the mode of production. In the Marxian tradition, this theory of *reflection* finds its most famous expression in Vladimir Lenin’s work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), a work that for some has “no place for dialectics, for Hegel” (Zizek, 2004: 179).³⁴ In these theorizations, the base-superstructure metaphor provides the scaffold for claims that conclude that cultural processes are reflections of *underlying* economic relationships.³⁵ Using this perspective we see that art, ethics, religion, and philosophy are homogenized by socioeconomic history, which reduces them to a “useful but helpless puppetry” (Goldstein, 1996/97).

³³ Mainstream economics does have its own manifestation of a “theory of stages” in its development literature with the work of W.W. Rostow on the “stages of growth” (Rostow, 1960).

³⁴ It is worth pointing out Karl Popper’s statement that “Lenin’s book on empiriocriticism is, in my opinion, truly excellent” (Colletti, 1970, quoted in Zizek, 2004:179). Popper was one of the fundamental figures of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of analytical philosophy whose influence reached Marxian economics via the work of G.A. Cohen (1978), which conceived the base-superstructure dynamics in a mechanical way following a technologically deterministic telos. For a critique of the latter’s work, and the school of “Analytical Marxism” that it inspired, see Amariglio, Callari and Cullenberg (1989).

³⁵ Marx’s statement (1859) that “[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” is usually used to argue for a mirror/reflection approach. See Resnick and Wolff (1987, 2006), Hindess and Hirst (1975) for a critique of these interpretations.

In some sense the work of Adorno regarding the “culture industry” and popular music can be viewed as a particular variant of the reflexive approach. Even though Adorno challenged the view of art as an independent and autonomous practice (at least for non-western music), he proceeded to impose a specific logic for the production of goods under capitalism in terms of having, as their purpose, the profit motive.³⁶ Together with Max Horkheimer, Adorno viewed the culture industry as an “assembly line” with a rationality of a “synthetic, planned method of turning out its products (factory-like not only in the studio but, more or less, in the compilation of cheap biographies, pseudo-documentary novels, and hit songs)” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979: 163). For Adorno, the composition of a song “had become a mechanical operation motivated purely by commercial gain and social manipulation” (Negus, 1996: 37). Forms of music that might have not have their origins within the modern culture industry, were thought to be as “subsequently being subjected to its industrial commercial logic” (ibid).³⁷

As can be seen from these excerpts, Adorno not only provides a particular case, but also elevates it to an all-encompassing absolute. In other words, the possibility of capitalism and its “industrial commercial logic” entering the realm of music production is equated with *all* musical production being subsumed in function of the needs of capitalism. Autonomy is then defined in relation to this logic, where “the autonomy of

³⁶ It is important to note that Adorno does use a notion of autonomy for music in relation to the profit motive. For example, in his essay “Culture Industry Reconsidered” Adorno refers to music that is not governed “by the principle of their realization as value, and not by their own specific content and harmonious formation”. For him, it is with the commodity form that such autonomy from the profit motive starts to evaporate: “[e]ver since these cultural forms first began to earn a living for their creators as commodities in the market-place they had already possessed something of this quality. But then they sought after profit only indirectly, over and above their autonomous essence” (Adorno, 2001: 99).

³⁷ It is important to note that Adorno has been criticized for being ethnocentric, elitist and Eurocentric in his views on music, observations that Jameson (2007) does not share when he says that this analysis “can scarcely be reduced to sheer opinionated or elitist vituperation against ‘bad art’”. For an interesting analysis as to the relation between popular music being “simple” because of it being appropriated by capitalist recording industries, please refer to Finkelstein (1948).

works of art, which of course rarely ever predominated in an entirely pure form, and always permeated by a constellation of effects, is tendentially eliminated by the culture industry, with or without conscious will of those in control” (Adorno, 1975: 13).

The technological-as domination-approach that can be derived from the above analysis obscures how opposition to capital might be articulated. As Dyer (1999: 53) explains, it even becomes “difficult to explain even the basis of their own (Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s) critical viewpoint.” This logic views any potential radical art practice as being unable to resist the commodity form—which is essentialized as what distinguishes capitalism—and its relationship to capitalist practices. In other words, the individual cannot escape the determining power of the structure, a conclusion that is incompatible with an overdeterminist lens where such a contradiction is not necessarily resolved in one way or another.³⁸

In other words, what is missing from Adorno’s analysis is how the subject—the musician—might actively participate within this commodification of spectacles and works of art to try and “organize subjectivities” (Madra, 2006) in radical ways. In this respect, Adorno’s analysis is parallel to Harry Braverman’s (1974) analysis of the worker being a passive object of capitalist designs, that is, an entity that cannot pose resistance. This does not mean that the musician will be victorious in his quest to shape other people’s views on topic, but it underlines the fact that, in his work, Adorno resolves the contradiction that Marx identified long ago between the humans that create their own history, within limits provided by history. In other words, the dialectical analysis of subject and object is subsumed under the base-superstructure determinism.

³⁸ Madra (2006) explores some of the tensions between the commodification of spectacles and works of art and the conscious effort of artists to “organize subjectivities” in radical ways in the context of the Venice Biennial.

Unfortunately, in the Marxian theoretical tradition this dichotomy between the objective and the subjective has manifested itself in the appearance of a “two-sided” Marx. On the one hand we have the subjectivist Marx of the *Communist Manifesto* that states that class struggle is the motor of history. On the other, we have the Marx that focuses on the tension between forces and relations of production as determining social revolution. We believe that if the concepts of objective and subjective are to be used, then Marx’s statement that “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” points to how the subjective is pregnant with the objective, and vice-versa, and that this dichotomy between the objective and subjective Marx is a false one (Rieznik, 2009: 203). Marx’s method cannot fit this dichotomy into its dialectical logic of mutual constitutivity and overdetermination.

Along these lines, it is important to mention the contributions of important scholars within the field of cultural production whose works rejects the dichotomies between the objective and the subjective and between the structure and the agency that have pervaded much social analysis. For example, Pierre Bourdieu has developed the concepts of “habitus” and “field” which try to transcend “this false dichotomy” and which look “to develop a concept of agent free from the voluntarism and idealism of subjectivist accounts and a concept of social space free from the deterministic and mechanistic causality inherent in many objectivist approaches” (Bourdieu, 1993: 4). These concepts in turn contribute to the undermining of any notion of *absolute stability* and predetermined outcomes, whose own effect is the negation of dialectical contradiction and change, a characteristic present in the Marxian tradition itself.

For example, Adorno's earlier fatalistic prognosis about the fate of music leads us to one of Gramsci's observations in his note on "Art and the Struggle for a New Civilization", that a "given socio-historical moment is never homogenous; on the contrary, it is rich in contradictions" (Gramsci, 2000: 393). This recognition of the richness of contradictions is one that many within the Marxian tradition have tried to incorporate in their approach towards music by focusing on its cultural dimensions, that is, the possible meanings and symbols associated with it.

In this regard, thinkers like Georg Lukacs, Ernst Bloch (and also Adorno) have written about Western music and "its struggle to create music separated from exterior meanings and to develop autonomy" (Lilienfeld, 1987). This purported possibility of autonomy, which echoes debates surrounding science and modernity (see Latour and Woolgar, 1979 and Rieznik, 2009), seeks to locate music outside the coordinates of social practice, thereby negating how music can be perceived as a contested space that continuously threatens the status quo. Max Webber is an example of this celebration of modernity given that for him "(mathematical) rationalization was the guardian spirit of Occidental Music" (Feher, 1987:148). It is not surprising that music that is conceived as not autonomous is labeled as "ancient music", music that is "always inseparable from ritual, legend, dance and poetry; its meaning was given to it from the outside" (ibid).

The preceding example does not exhaust how the practice of music in its cultural dimension has been theorized within and outside the Marxian tradition but we might benefit from Steiner's (1967) recognition that a more general and related way of conceiving the development of work in aesthetic criticism and music by Marxist thinkers identifies two lines of thought.

One of them is inspired by Engels, “who valued art less by the political intentions of its creator than by its inherent social significance” (Jay, 1996: 173). This strand of thought is contained in the works of many thinkers, but it is with members of the Frankfurt School that we see it worked out in the most developed ways. Adorno’s analysis of the *culture industry* is probably the most recognized example of this strand.

The other one focuses on an “unabashed political partisanship” that is based on writings by Vladimir Lenin. In this view, the burden of responsibility is placed on the author of a piece, especially given the recognition that art does have representatives and interpreters at opposite and contrary ideological positions. Specifically,

“[e]very artist, everyone who considers himself an artist, has the right to create freely according to his ideal, independently of everything. However, we are Communists and we must not stand with folded hands and let chaos develop as it pleases. We must systemically guide this process and form its result.” (Lenin, 1957)

In this perspective, one element within the superstructure is seen as more important than another one: the cultural process of production and dissemination of meaning is explicitly tied to politics. A methodological focus that is derived from this is a privileging of the lyrics and their explicit political content over other dimensions of the work of art, such as the instrumental arrangement.³⁹ For some, this view “ultimately culminated in the sterile orthodoxy of the Stalinist socialist realism” (Jay, 1996: 173) where a transparency was assumed between aesthetic forms and reality.⁴⁰ This general idea led thinkers like Lukacs to conceive a similarity between the “the laws of art with

³⁹ Bertolt Brecht’s emphasis on the “primacy of lesson over...form”, which seems to imply a specific didactic or political effect, can be read as an example of this (quoted in Held, 1980:83).

⁴⁰ The topic of “socialist realism” under the Stalin regime in the USSR refers to the state sponsored development of art that served to glorify the party and the government by creating a “communist myth”. For many, what was sponsored was “business like artists” that created “business like art” which was not much unlike the commercial art of the West (Chegodaeva, 2003).

those of the sciences and revolutionary politics” (Bruno, 2013: 71, my translation).

This conception of transparency, which at heart implied imposition, would be criticized by Trotsky:

“The Marxian conception of the objective social conditioning by art and its social use does not imply, when talking about politics, a wish for the control of art by orders and decrees. It is false to say that for us what is new and revolutionary is only the art that speaks about the worker, and its absurd to pretend that we require poets to describe exclusively the chimneys of a factory or an insurrection against capital. Of course the new art has to concede attention to proletarian struggles, but the plow of this new art is not limited to some numbered furrow; on the contrary, it should plow all the terrain and in all directions” (Trotsky, 1971: 89, my translation, quoted in Bruno, 2013: 73).

Still, renowned musicians of that era, like German composer Hanns Eisler, would explicitly care for both the musical and political content expressed in the lyrics of their works. For example, in three radical musicals in which he collaborated with Bertolt Brecht (the plays *Die Massnahme* and *Die Mutter*, and the film *Kuhle Wampe*), Eisler

“combined Schonberg’s twelve-tone system with older forms of choral music such as the oratorio in order to destroy the listener’s individual identification with nineteenth-century harmony and to replace it with collective communication. Eisler thus sought to infuse his compositions with a political message on the levels of both form and content so that they would be, in Albrecht Betz’s (Betz, 1982: 116-117) evaluation, ‘both resolutely destructive (of bourgeois values that had become threadbare) and constructive, in that they put into practice and rendered tangible ideas of collective activity under new circumstances’”, (Chametzky, 1987: 5)

In the winter of 1937-38, Eisler and Ernst Bloch wrote two essays, “Avant-garde art and the Popular Front” and “To Inherit Art”, which reflect a preoccupation with the usefulness of art in political struggle. Specifically, they were trying to see how various diverging aesthetic practices could be united under one political flag—the Popular Front—, as an extension of the political collaborations against Nazism. As Chametzky reminds us, at the same time it is important to appreciate how these essays represent a

break from socialist realism as “the Communist International moved to a more restrictive aesthetic” with “significant Marxists [advocating] greater artistic freedom as the proper strategy of a Popular Front against the fascists” (ibid: 3).⁴¹

The historical background to which Eisler and Bloch reacted to with their writings is one where political struggle between groups is present. In that particular case, their writings serve as an appeal to the “masses” against a particular section of the bourgeoisie that sought refuge in fascism. Although not presented in a systematic way (it was not their intention to be theoretical) they use masses and proletariat basically without distinction, an observation that leads us to our final topic in reviewing several of the Marxian approaches to music. How does the concept of *class* fit into a Marxian analysis of music?

2.5 Class and Music

When reviewing what Marxists have had to say about music, one is struck by the quantity and complexity of topics that have been studied. Up till now we have tried to give a general—and by no means exhaustive—review of the various themes developed by that tradition. Still, we have not dealt with the theoretical concept of “class” in the Marxian tradition, a concept that is fundamental in differentiating Marx’s work from that of others., in part because it connects with one of the dimensions of human life that Marx highlighted throughout his *oeuvre*, that of human labor.

Given that music is an act that involves the exertion of brains and muscles, labor as a process and the study of its organization is fundamental for a Marxian understanding

⁴¹ It is important to note that Bloch and Eisler wrote those essays in the form of a conversation between two positions, one which believes in straightforward communication with the masses and the second one which puts the emphasis on artistic sophistication, yet “neither is subsumed within a totalizing framework” (Chametzky, 1987: 30).

of musical production. This is so because Marx lays particular emphasis on how the labor of a group of people can and does sustain the livelihood of another group of people in society who do not labor. His emphasis on the *surplus* and the way its production, appropriation and distribution is organized provides the analytical lens—Marx’s entry point—from which one can delve into the complexities of how the socio-economic system behaves. Fundamental in this analysis is the recognition of the possibility of exploitation and the diverse class structures that might support it, where the ones who produce a surplus do not appropriate it. I put emphasis on the process of exploitation because most Marxian class analyses emphasize this economic dimension when talking about the role and position of those that engage in musical labor within capitalism.

In our work, we will refer to class as an economic process “in which unpaid surplus labor is pumped out of the direct producers” (Marx, 1967; quoted in Resnick and Wolff, 2006: 92-93). Classes would then be defined as groups of people who “share the common social position of performing surplus labor or of appropriating it from the performers or of obtaining distributed shares of surplus from the appropriators (Resnick and Wolff, 2006: 119).⁴²

This definition of class as a process contrasts with other definitions that, for example, might conceptualize class in terms of the oppressor versus the oppressed, those that own means of production versus those that do not, or those that are conscious or feel part of one group or another. These interpretations of what class is in terms of power, property and culture are found in various contributions within the Marxian tradition and

⁴² Marx's analysis of the forms these class relations take served as his basis for a critique of the political economy of the time. The celebration of the vast accumulation of wealth for the benefit of society's citizens that is read in Adam Smith's work was given a new angle when that accumulation and prosperity were explained on the basis of the *exploitation* of a whole section of the population.

do find support in Marx's own writings. Still, we view them as incompatible, not only with Marx's treatment of class throughout his mature work, but also with the distinct overdeterminist epistemology at play in his theorizations.⁴³

Most analysis of music that identify with a Marxian outlook have basically applied a composite conceptualization of class. These approaches combine, for example, the lack of property and control in the means of production with the oppression that musicians are said to suffer. Others might combine culture and power and so on. What we also find in common is a silence regarding class as surplus, a silence that has theoretical and political consequences.

Take for example the question that Norman Kelley asks in the introduction to an edited book: "Why is it that blacks have developed many musical genres yet have no real control or ownership in the recording industry?" (Kelley, 2005a:1). In his analysis of the music industry in relation to black music, Kelley identifies a "structure of stealing" that has consistently mediated economic relations between whites and blacks in the history of the United States. He criticizes various public black intellectuals (such as Cornel West, bell hooks, and Tricia Rose) for "trying to decipher or decode 'black cultural expressivity' or 'representation'" instead of focusing on "the development, production, marketing and distribution of popular music" (Kelley, 2005b, 17). In this sense he echoes those that have critiqued Western Marxism for its emphasis on the cultural dimensions of musical production while abandoning the economic and political realms.⁴⁴ Still, we find his embrace of political economy problematic.

⁴³ For a thorough review for this and other interpretations of how class has been perceived within the Marxian tradition, refer to Resnick and Wolff (1986)

⁴⁴ For example, in his book "The Culture Industry" (2001), Adorno talks about profits but not about exploitation.

At first sight Kelley's emphasis on "stealing" seems to be another way of talking about exploitation, given that the latter term recognizes unpaid labor. Still, in his insightful historical and institutional analysis of the "white controlled industry", the author appeals to such robbery via, among other things, the violation of publishing rights and royalties, concepts that are based on a property understanding of economic relations. In no way does he problematize those property claims in terms of a class analysis that might reveal, for example, that those claims represent redistributions of surplus created by others who might not be part of the black artists that he identifies as those being exploited and oppressed.⁴⁵ One of the messages that can be derived from his essay would be that if blacks controlled the industry, they would not be exploited, i.e. the structure of stealing would cease to exist. This essentialist conclusion completely disregards the class analytics based on who produces and who appropriates the surplus.⁴⁶

Class analysis based property and control over means of production seem to encounter problems given that *in many* instances musicians own and control some or all of the means of production of music—mainly the musical instruments. Renowned music scholar Frank Kofsky recognizes this when he presents another variant of the composite class approach. He identifies the reason for the exploitation of black musicians in their lack of control over the means of distribution. He tells us that a "jazz musician, of course, does own the tools of his trade, so to speak, but is nonetheless alienated from what he himself has created by the fact that he must depend on those who control the means of

⁴⁵ The chapter "Piracy and Exploitation in the Music Recording Industry" in this dissertation provides such analytics.

⁴⁶ A class analysis for Motown records, in the case of blacks, and Fania records, in the case of Latin-Americans, would show how blacks can "steal" from blacks and latinos from latinos, even though "they" are the ones that have some "control" of those firms. In a parallel fashion, an analysis of the class structure of independent record labels, which are seen as the "non-exploitative" alternative to multinationals, would also uncover the economic reality of exploitation. These three cases are part of my future research agenda.

distribution—nightclubs, festivals, concerts, radio stations and above else, booking agencies and recording companies—in order to bring his music before the public to earn a livelihood from it” (Kofksy, 1998: 19).

Kofksy’s insight is very helpful in identifying possible *conditions of existence* for the exploitation of black musicians. In this case, his focus is on how to realize the surplus labor embodied in the commodities so that it takes the form of surplus value (money). Still, his approach ends up being essentialist and unable to give a consistent account of the rise of black outlets for music where there is control over the means of distribution that do not exclude exploitation of black artists. Such was the case of Motown Records, renowned, among other things, for its *payola* activities in using the radio waves and disk jockeys to expose its catalogue of artists and exclude those of other competitors (Posner, 2005).

Jacques Attali (2002: 37) probably provides one of the most conscious and valuable efforts to highlight the class dimensions of musical production. As he recognizes, for “Marxist political economy, the question ‘How does music create value?’ becomes ‘What kind of musical labor produces surplus-value?’.” He focuses on Marx’s analysis of the productive vs unproductive labor distinction to focus in the labor of composers and to analyze how, through time and changes in technology, the composer transforms from a producer of surplus to a receiver of it. It is worthwhile to quote him at length:

“the productive workers who create money are performers, and the people who produce instruments and the scores. But when the composer receives royalties on a work of his that is sold and represented, he remains curiously estranged from the wealth associated with him, since as an independent craftsman he is outside the capitalist mode of production. Good sense, however, requires that we recognize that he indirectly participates in the production of wealth in at least two ways: first

when productive workers (workers in music publishing) manufacture, using this stockpile of information and capital (in other words, using their past labor, another's past labor that has been appropriated by the entrepreneur, and their present labor), a commercial object (the score) who sale to a musician (professional or amateur) realizes surplus-value; second, when the wage earning musician, having acquired the score, represents the work" (Attali, 2002: 40-41)

For Attali, the flow of income that the composer receives in the age of mechanical (and also digital) reproduction is a cut of the surplus, "his remuneration is therefore a kind of rent...and...is independent of the quantity of labor he provides" (ibid).

Interestingly enough, a huge omission is present in Attali's work; he focuses on the composer and his relation to the interpreter through the reproduced musical score but does not extend his analysis to the interpreter and the reproduced record. That is, he focuses on a particular case of the production and dissemination of music.

In Attali's analysis, the musicians are simply exploited, irrespective of the fact that the reproduced records (let us assume for simplicity's sake that he or she is also the composer) and the money they generate are also relatively "independent of the quantity of labor he provides".⁴⁷ In other words, he does not recognize that the musician can both produce surplus for others, and receive surplus produced by others.

Chanan (1994, 1995) shares Attali's omission when he also focuses on the commodification of music and the changing role of authors/composers without analyzing the role of musicians as interpreters in relation to reproduced records. That is why for him, the musician is also exploited irrespective of the social relations of production (in our terms of surplus, not property) at play. Still, unlike Attali, he understands exploitation in terms of disputes over royalties regarding their size and application, a conclusion that comes out of his use (conscious or unconscious) of a class as property approach.

⁴⁷ We analyze this in detail in chapter 4.

Unlike the works we have reviewed above, Catherine Mulder (2009) explicitly uses a notion of class based on the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus. Her work on the experience of Broadway musicians seeks to connect the economic process of class with cultural and political processes that shape the subjectivities of an insecure workforce. The strength and weakness of her study is that it is focused on a particular case: it highlights how class transformation can potentially happen through union struggles but it unfortunately does not provide a general theoretical framework for understanding the exploitation of musical labor in various musical spaces. It is this weakness which we seek to remedy in the following chapter of this book.

2.6 Conclusion

The above examples in no way exhaust the different uses of class in the literature. We just wanted to give a general overview of the limits of essentialist uses of class defined in terms of property, culture, or power, uses that do illuminate some dimensions of the analysis (like pointing to concrete conditions of existence that are at play in particular cases) but also obscure the potential economic process of exploitation and do not foresee some of the plausible potential political consequences, consequences that are discovered via a non-essentialist surplus based definition of class.

At the same time, we also reviewed the ontological standing of music in various Marxian analyses that use the architectural metaphor of the base-superstructure in their analyses. As we saw, many of these analysis do not recognize that the social practice of music production does have an economic dimension that places this cultural activity with others as sites of struggle that are not more or less important.

I also want to emphasize my agreement with Raymond Williams that these

“loose” and “popular” applications of the base-superstructure metaphor implicit in the theories of reflection are not part of Marx’s intention:

“So, we have to say that when we talk of ‘the base’, we are talking of a process, and not a state [...] We have to revalue ‘superstructure’ towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced, or specifically-dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue ‘the base’ away from [the] notion[s] of [either] a fixed economic or [a] technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real, social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations, and, therefore, always in a state of dynamic process” (Williams, 1980).

This emphasis of Williams on the “dynamic” is fundamental, not only for the particular topic touched upon here, but also for the tradition as a whole. In the analysis presented I mention it in terms of the problem of *fixing* elements as being part of either the base or the superstructure, as in the example we gave about how to understand technology beyond its technical sense. But we also see this when purported “class” categories such as “peasants,” “landlords,” and the “proletariat,” are uncritically used in trying to articulate various alternative class theories. Specifically, I am referring to how such approaches are blind about the possibility of the same person occupying different class positions (i.e. producer, appropriator, or receiver of the surplus). In other words, fixing an individual into one particular category obscures the different non-capitalist and capitalist class positions that such individual might simultaneously occupy, thereby erasing class struggle in a myriad of social sites.

CHAPTER 3

CONNECTING MUSIC TO CLASS

Nowhere has the Marxian doctrine of base and superstructure been more damaging than in Marxism itself, where the specialists of the base—the commentators on capitalism, the strategists of revolution—are encouraged to feel little more than contempt for the culture workers of the superstructure, unless the latter offer legal and juridical analyzes or happen to produce this or that politically relevant Ideologiekritik.

—Frederic Jameson, 2011: 4

3.1 Introduction

In its complex and uneven development, the Marxian theoretical tradition has produced a number of works that have sought to understand the role of music in capitalism. From Theodore Adorno's work on popular music and the culture industry, to Jacques Attali's analysis of music as "prophecy", what we see is a rich array of works that in one way or another seek to anchor themselves in Marx's analysis of the capitalist class structure.

In this chapter I want to take a leaf out of that tradition and try to connect music to what I understand to be one of the key contributions of Marx's *oeuvre*: that of seeing and analyzing the dynamics of society through the analytical lens of class. Specifically, I use a particular interpretation of Marx's work that posits class as the economic process involving the production, appropriation, distribution, and receipt of surplus. My intent is to delve into the potential mutual interaction between the class process and music, with emphasis on musical performance.

As stated before, for the purposes of this analysis, music will be understood as a

cultural process where sounds are organized to produce and disseminate particular meanings. An example of this could be the feelings evoked by musical pieces whose lyrics appeal to particular social constructs, such as nationality, ethnicity or social class. *The Internationale* with its cry “Arise, you wretched of the earth”, which then develops into an appeal against oppression and exploitation is one example of specific meanings being disseminated through music.

Another example refers to how the use of certain instruments and their particular sounds is identified with the production of music in particular places and epochs⁴⁸. For example, the development and use of synthesizers brought a whole new range of possibilities for various musical genres that adopted it. Sometimes these possibilities are related to new styles that are identified as marking different eras within the same musical genre. These and other examples underline how different meanings can be, not only explicitly attributed to a piece by the composer or performer, but can also be interpreted by those who received the meaning in a variety of ways.

Another important dimension of cultural processes is that they co-exist with many other processes, be it natural, political or economic. An example of a natural process related to the creation of music might be related to the creation of sounds via the vibration of a string in an acoustic instrument (ex. guitar) and its relation to the particles that surround it, which can potentially produce a whole host of possible sounds, with different pitches within the musical registrar. Another example would be the process of breathing while playing wind instruments (i.e. trumpet, clarinet, flute, trombone, and saxophone).

⁴⁸ In the case of Latin music, the trombone sound has been identified with the NY Salsa movement of the mid 60's and 70's as opposed the “Big Band Sound” of the 1950's which along trombones, included trumpets and saxophones.

Besides natural processes, political processes also take part in shaping music. They can refer to issues of power in terms of who wields power over whom. This dimension can be seen, for example, within an orchestra itself in the relationship a director of an orchestra might have with the other members of the orchestra in terms of assigning solos, deciding when the musical transitions to other parts of the piece should start, what type of accompaniment should follow a soloist and so on.⁴⁹

Other political processes might involve property rights over the music and the role of unions in setting contract rules for orchestras and individual musicians with their employers.

Conceived as an activity, economic processes also participate in the constitution of music. Such processes *might* include class, commodity production and exchange, borrowing money, renting etc. For example, any particular musical activity may (or may not) include an exchange of money. A street musician might or might not get money for playing music in a public space. He might or may not need to pay the government for being able to use the street as a public space for his performance.

The examples provided above give a taste as to the diversity of processes that participate in the constitution of the musical performance. Music is thus conceived as a site where various elements combine and assert themselves in different manners.

3.2 Musical Scenes

For the sake of clarity in our analysis, we want to recognize that musical production and dissemination can take place in a variety of places like in streets, clubs, bars, churches, houses, and coliseums. All of these physical spaces witness different

⁴⁹ In the Soviet Union, the function of the orchestra director was banned in 1921 because it was seen as an institution that embodied capitalist values.

social practices in their cultural, political and economic dimensions. For the sake of clarity, we will refer to these physical places where music is produced and/or disseminated as *musical scenes*. Still we need to further specify what we mean by production and dissemination to understand better the concept of musical scene.

First, the terms production and dissemination might or might not need to happen together. For example, a composer or and arranger writing down the score for a musical piece in a desk or computer can be understood to be producing music—there is a sheet or a screen where musical notation is being written to represent such piece. This act by itself does not imply dissemination. It would if, for example, the piece is also mechanically or digitally reproduced to be shared (maybe sold), or if a musician or a band interpreted the piece.

At the same time, dissemination might or might not imply production. To perform a written piece is to produce, in another form, the musical ideas written in a musical score. On the other hand, to engage in selling albums does not imply that music is being produced.

In the same way that we saw how the production and consumption of services can sometimes not be separated, here we see how the production and dissemination also might or might not occur at the same time in what we have referred to as musical scenes. This is important because a working hypothesis of this dissertation is that the fundamental class process of engaging in surplus labor and appropriating the fruits of such labor might or might not be present in the different musical scenes.

Within these musical scenes a plethora of activities related to music take place. As Barry Shanks has argued (1988), there is usefulness to the use of the notion of *scene* “to

account for the relationship between different musical practices unfolding within a given geographical space” (Straw, 1991: 373). We then follow Straw's appropriation of this perspective in his defining of a *musical scene* as a “cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization” (ibid).⁵⁰

One possibility for starting to approach the dynamics of a musical scene in creating signs and symbols is to focus on the relationships involving the subjects present at those particular scenes. A group of those relationships can be categorized as being between those that perform music and those that consume it.⁵¹

This can be clearly seen in the relationship that playing music might have to an audience that is dancing. In many cultures, like in those that contain Afro-Caribbean elements, such a relationship might be an active one, where the crowd reacts to the music and the musicians, especially the percussionists, react to the dancers. This gives rise to a “give and take” mutually constitutive (dialectical) dynamic where the music affects dancing and dancing simultaneously affects the music performed.⁵²

Another related example might be a musician engaging in an instrumental improvisation.⁵³ For example, the genre of *jazz* has been referred to as “collective

⁵⁰ A very interesting interpretation related to the development of new musical spaces and scenes, specifically the concert, is given by Chanan. For him, the concert, understood as a “public performance by professionals before a paying audience”, serves as a “central institution of bourgeois musical life” given that the concert is used to fill the leisure time of the educated classes (Chanan, 1994: 132-137).

⁵¹ Here I am making a strict division between the musicians and the public, even though musicians do consume the music that comes out of that particular dynamic with the public, a consumption that will have effects in the future production as we will see later.

⁵² In terms of Afro-Caribbean music, Quintero (2009) looks at how the activity of dancing, specifically dancing by couples, manifests itself in the constitution of a “Caribbean identity”.

⁵³ I loosely define improvisation as music that is not written down, as opposed to composition. Contrary to the previous example regarding dancing and percussion, in this particular one improvisation takes place

improvisation”.⁵⁴ Now, on what basis does the improvisation happen? Putting aside for a moment perspectives that emphasize the “unconscious” or “subconscious” dimensions of this practice, the perception that improvisation comes “out of the blue” fails to capture the complexity of processes that go into this musical practice. This is so because improvisation “is a form of composition” (Finkelstein, 1988: 71). There are of course elements of spontaneity, that might relate to an infinity of factors (such as the environment in the musical space where the solo is performed, how the musician feels physically and emotionally that day, etc.), but on many occasions there is also a composition aspect to improvisation in the sense that the musician is developing his solo based on ideas that he had worked out previously. As Finkelstein states, “[i]t is the height of superficiality to imagine that a hot solo emerges directly from a performer's 'unconscious'. People simply cannot create on a consistent level this way” (ibid: 72).

As in the previous example relating dancing and performing, a musician that is improvising is also reacting consciously or unconsciously to the people who are witnessing her performance elements that are part of the musical scene. In many instances she wants to shape their mood in particular ways, while at the same time being shaped by them. For example, knowing the success of particular *clichés* in her repertoire of resources might participate in her mind *in the constitution of what is to come* in the

within a time interval explicitly provided by the arrangement so that the musician can improvise. In the dancing/percussion example the percussion might be just playing a rhythm and adorning it with details that correspond to dynamics between dancers and musicians (*is this clear?, rephrase?*)

⁵⁴ I base this brief section mainly on Sidney Finkelstein's *Jazz: A People's Music*. I identify three dimensions to the expression “collective improvisation.” First, we have the most general sense of creating at the moment. This creation might involve pre-given structures, such as rhythms, that are then put together in new ways. Second, within those rhythms variations can be instituted to “adorn” the piece. And finally, spaces within the piece being played are allocated to particular musicians so that they can improvise in their respective instruments. The reader will notice that these three dimensions are intertwined and that there is a dialectical/constitutive interplay between structure and agency.

development of her solo to try and elicit particular reactions.⁵⁵ The dichotomy between improvisation and composition within a musical scene seems to blur *once the present is not only a function of the past, but also of the future.*

These examples of musical practices within our musical scenes give rise to a parallel discussion of the agency/structure dichotomy touched before, where such an approach fails to capture the richness of the interplay between determinants.

The conceptualization of a musical scene used in this work is consistent with our overdetermination approach to the social formation. A musical scene would refer to the confluence of a non-class vector of cultural determinants taking place in a physical space. As will become clearer later on, those cultural elements participate in overdetermining the class processes that might or might not be present in both time and space.

In terms of ethnomusicology, the musical scene approach opposes itself to the idea of a unique relation between those that consume music, and the location they occupy within the social matrix.⁵⁶ Negus poses it as “a challenge to the assumption of a 'homology'—the idea that all the parts that go to make up a style (most notably dress, dancing and music) form a unity that expresses 'the whole way of life' of the subcultural group” (Negus, 1996: 23).

An assumption that derives from the musical scene approach is that the practices of the people that participate in a musical scene are not shaped in one particular and rigid way by the fashions of the music industry. As we mentioned in relation to the work of Adorno, people are not necessarily seen as passive and manipulated “victims” of a culture

⁵⁵ Clichés refers to those lines that musicians repeat in improvised solos—they can be interpreted as being a kind of signature of the musician. Many musicians try to both use these clichés and at the same time they try to evade them when improvising.

⁵⁶ For this section, I mostly base myself on Negus' (1996) work on popular music.

industry given that the culture industry cannot control.

This last point is taken by Negus, for example, to criticize the work of Hebdige (1979) on *punk culture*. Negus focuses on Hebdige's "one-sided causal theory of homology" (Negus, 1996: 24) where the practices of participants respond to specific social conditions *in a homogenous way*. Negus also emphasizes how "subcultural" practices can be appropriated by other groups and used in different ways; "they are not necessarily always going to take on the same form or fit neatly into subcultural categories" (ibid: 25).

The above is important because it emphasizes how musical scenes do not have an inherent logic or an insuperable teleology with exclusive effects on those that participate in it. The dynamics at play are the product of the pulls and pushes of an array of factors that combine in uneven ways and bring about a diversity of musical practices and symbols that might participate in the constitution of class processes, processes that might be happening simultaneously in terms of musical production and/or dissemination, or of class processes outside of where the musical scene is taking place.

In the following sections will investigate the intricate connections between class and music via the interplay between the musical scenes where music is performed and disseminated and the possible class structures operating in them. As part of our analysis we will also focus on the *aesthetic dimensions* of the products of musical labor performed in those musical scenes.

3.3 Labor and Music

As I mentioned at the beginning, in this work we understand music to be a cultural process where sounds are organized. To identify some of the forms in which this

organization of sounds might happen, we follow “the very unmusical idea of dividing what is essentially indivisible —music—into... separate processes” (Chanan, 1994: 5).⁵⁷ These processes, which are tied to concrete types of work, might include singing, arranging, composing, playing musical instruments, working as a disc jockey, etc. In this work we will mainly focus on the production and dissemination of music via the interpretation of musical instruments, be it as a group or individually. The important thing is that with the definition of music that has been advanced I imply a deployment of mind and body, a recognition that presents an initial potential connection between music and class: *labor is expended*. In other words, labor is a component of musical activity.⁵⁸ For purposes of this work, and taking into account the particularities of musical production, labor being expended might imply production for use or for exchange. Commodities, for example, might or might not be the outcome of musical labor.

The following sections will address various questions that our treatment of musical labor within a Marxian approach prioritizes. How does music overdetermine class? Does musical labor happen within a class processes? In what ways does the product of musical labor in one site participate in overdetermining class processes at other sites? Can musical labor occur at the same time as labor is directed at producing other goods by the same workers? How might particular class structures affect the aesthetics of the product of musical labor?

⁵⁷ Chanan quotes composer-conductor Lukas Foss, who identifies two processes: composition, the making of music, and performance, “which is also making music” (ibid). This definition could serve as an initial approximation to our intent in this work and our particular definition of musical activity as the organization of sounds, but it cannot accommodate the labor that goes into producing a record, where sounds are also organized when, for example, the process of *mixing* takes place.

⁵⁸ In this way I think I evade getting into issues such as “the wind is music to my ears” problematic. This also opens up music activity, not only to performance itself, but also to composing and arranging given the importance, for example, of printing in making music an object of commerce, more specifically, a commodity.m

3.4 Music as a condition of existence of class

The act of laboring, be it for the production of use or exchange values, goes beyond the immediate act of physical exertion. The deployment of body occurs simultaneously with a deployment of mind and it is here where psychological factors are intertwined with the possible outcomes of the labor process. These psychological dimensions are overdetermined by an infinite amount of factors, of which music might or might not be a part of. For example, Harold Courlander (1963: 90) remarks that:

“[F]rom northwestern Africa to the Cape, the African tends to think of music as heard action, and of any silent rhythmical activity as an echo of music. Singing, and sometimes percussive effects, customarily accompanies the cutting of trees, the clearing of brush, the hoeing of fields, the hoisting of sails, the hawling of a hawser, the pounding of grain in a mortar, and the winnowing of rice. An individual alone working at such tasks may depend upon singing to complete his physical activity”⁵⁹

This example presents how music can become a condition of existence of laboring activity in the sense of providing comfort to those that toil.

Business firms have long understood that the environment in which workers are producing the goods and services does affect, in one way or another, the quality and intensity of the work. Management divisions within the firm developed out of this recognition for the need to try and shape the behavior of workers at their jobs. From the implementation of methods of disciplining, like supervision, to the use of alternative structures for organizing production, firms are always trying to consciously participate in the shaping of the attitudes and actions of their employees. In other words, they want the

⁵⁹ A worker in South Africa told Courlander that the work could not be done without musical accompaniment: “without singing we have no strength”. In another case, a worker in Alabama recounts that “singing just naturally makes the work to go easier. If you didn’t have singing you wouldn’t get hardly anything out of these men.” (Courlander, 1963: 91).

outcome of the overdetermination of the worker, in terms of how he thinks and how he works, to bend in the firm's favor, which might imply the production of more surplus to be appropriated.⁶⁰

Music itself has been used as a tool to try and get the desired outcomes of, for example, increasing worker productivity.⁶¹ In the literature this has been referred to as “functional music”, which is music that has been *deliberately used* to attempt to influence human behavior. As Negus (1996: 34) observes, “buried away in many business magazines and management journals are reports of behavioral studies which seek to understand how ‘functional music’ can be used to manipulate the buying patterns of supermarket shoppers, the eating habits of patrons in restaurants, the well-being of passengers waiting in airports and the productivity of workers in factories, shops and offices.”

In terms of the use of music in workplaces and its relation to worker productivity, studies have ranged from putting particular types of music as background music to letting workers themselves use radios to choose the music of their liking.⁶² The results of these studies vary both in terms of the effect on productivity, be it positive or negative, and in the weight of the effect. Still, two things do stand out in all these various works. First,

⁶⁰ It might imply increasing surplus, for example, if productivity increases at a higher rate than wages.

⁶¹ An increase in worker productivity might increase the surplus appropriated by the employer in two related ways. First, it could imply a decrease in the costs of production relative to a given selling price if worker's wages are not adjusted in a proportional and positive way to the increase in productivity. Second, an increase in productivity enables the firm to sell at a lower price, thereby attracting surplus created in other firms that still have not adopted the technique that enabled our firm to increase its productivity. For a discussion of the way markets redistribute surplus value between firms and how those redistributions provide the seeds for instability in the capitalist system, please refer to Resnick (2001).

⁶² The literature is simply too immense to cover here. Some examples that refer to works published in business and psychology literature regarding music and its potential effects on productivity are Lesiuk (2005), and Fox and Embrey (1972).

employers are conscious about their intent to get more out of their workers.⁶³ Efficiency, understood as a relation (in all of its qualitative and quantitative dimensions) between the inputs and outputs (in terms of the relations between costs of production, selling price and potential profit) dominates their approach.⁶⁴

The second general characteristic that pervades all these studies is that, simply put, workers are not as happy as they could be in capitalist workplaces. The conscious use of music to try and provide a soothing effect to boost morale and hopefully increase productivity reminds us of Marx's famous statement that the worker “feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home” (Marx, 1844). It is clear that the workplace in general is a site of struggle and a locus of many factors which, like music and class, intersect in a variety of ways. In the next section we focus on work-sites that involve production of music itself (the musical spaces and scenes we discussed before) and alternative class arrangements that might or might not be structuring that production.

It is important for the reader to understand that the analysis that follows does not seek to be exhaustive. Specifically, this work cannot in any way claim to cover all the possible music scenes where different types of musical production take place. Also, many of the examples I pose to analyze within a class analytic lens are ones that correspond to my personal experience with a particular type of music.⁶⁵ In this sense many might find the examples provided as irrelevant to the particular music they listen to. This is

⁶³ In the same way that firms try to shape their employees via music, they also focus on shaping the buying patterns of costumers. Again, the literature is simply too massive to be covered here, but a sample of this particular literature is Areni (1993) Brunner (1990), and Milliman (1982).

⁶⁴ For an interesting discussion which problematizes the concept of efficiency as an objective aim of the firm, a numerical measure, and a social outcome, refer to Wolff (2002).

⁶⁵ I refer to my experience with Afro-Caribbean music, specifically with Latin Jazz and the numerous rhythms that have been subsumed under the umbrella term of Salsa.

something this work cannot escape: the development of the theory in this or that road is overdetermined by the experiences of the author and is inescapably partial. Still, the following will hopefully provide some useful groundwork for those that want to engage in further research within a Marxian approach regarding the variety of cases not discussed here.

3.5 Musical labor with no class process

To talk about labor expended in the production of music, as we did in our definition of what music is, does not necessarily imply that a class process, understood as the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor, is taking place. In other words, musical labor might or might not include the necessary labor and surplus labor components which are part of the elements that define if there is a class structure and what type of class structure might be present. This work will keep conceptually distinct and separate those moments where a class process is happening and those others where it is not present, but will take into account how those moments might relate to each other.

For example, a person might be engaged in playing a serenade for a loved person, a process that might be interpreted as not entailing the necessary and surplus labor distinction. Such an act can be understood as a *gift*, where the act of gift giving implies to “exceed, transcend, or abandon mercantile equivalence” while engaging in risk, spontaneity, pleasure, and superfluity (Osteen, 2010: 570).⁶⁶

Another example might be a musician or a whole musical group going over a score and practicing a piece or a repertoire to be interpreted later in front of an audience.

While practicing, the musicians are engaging in musical labor, in terms of the

⁶⁶ The understanding of the gift is beyond the immediate investigations of this work. Also, as Osteen (ibid) puts it, “no matter how we measure and analyze the gift, some aspect seems to elude our efforts to corral it into categories.”

organization of sounds and the exertion of mind and body, but there is no class process present. Still, this musical labor, which is not being performed within a class process might have repercussions on class processes that involve musical production later on.

3.6 Class and non-class musical scenes and other work-sites

Suppose the repertoire that was being rehearsed in our previous example is then performed in front of an audience on a weekly basis in a club, and value is being derived from that activity in the form of the fee charged in the entrance for having access to the show. If the people who are willing to pay money for the presentation consider the show to not be good enough, they will probably not attend next week, contact their friends about it, etc. When the musicians come to play the next week, the musical labor that they perform will probably not generate as much value as it did the week before, where people were willing to pay an entrance fee to see the show. If the owner of the place is the one who occupies the fundamental class position of appropriator, she will not get as much surplus (if she does indeed get any after paying the musicians for their performance) as compared to the previous week, which might prompt her to not hire that particular group again. This example shows how musical labor that is performed outside of a class structure might influence both the musical labor performed in a particular class structure and the surplus produced and appropriated within it. The aesthetic dimensions of the final product and the possibility of it being sold are intricately related to what happens in musical spaces where class might or might not be present.⁶⁷

To go even further, this example, which highlights the notion of time in terms of

⁶⁷ Marx captures this dialectical relationship between production and exchange when he says that “[t]he need which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it. The object of art—like every other product—creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object” (Marx, 1973: 92).

the engagement of musical labor (rehearsal) outside of a class structure and its possible effects on musical production within a class structure, also helps us to approach how class outside musical scenes might affect music within our overdetermined picture. Specifically, there are situations where those that perform musical labor to sustain themselves also engage in labor at other sites given that the money derived from their musical labor might not cover all of their needs. In other words, musicians might not be professional in the sense of gaining their sustenance exclusively via their musical labor—they might indeed need to have other jobs.

If we recognize this possibility, another way of perceiving how class affects music might be to emphasize how time and its use are articulated in a persons' life. Without going into the specifics of centering an individual in the sense of describing him or her as first a musician and then as another type of worker, what should be clear is that devoting time to one activity takes time away from another. For example, to have a full time job not related to music might take away time from the practice needed to be able to successfully interpret music at musical scenes where class processes are taking place and money is being earned for the musical labor performed. Also, to have to play music to complement the income derived at the other job might have consequences in the other job. Playing till late at night to then wake up early and attend another job might bring into the picture work exhaustion, which might have a direct manifestation in the productivity and the quality of work of the person in the music and non-music jobs. These examples highlight how the musician, in his or her attempt to reproduce the value of the labor power offered, can find themselves in situations where such a reproduction is always overdetermined.

3.7 Musical Labor, Class, and Aesthetics

The interplay between musical scenes and class processes happening within and outside those scenes can have aesthetic consequences in the cultural process of musical production. A musician that can barely make it to rehearsals, who then performs poorly in the musical scenes where class processes take place—and income is derived—might be substituted by another musician who performs the same instrument given the fear that, for example, the group will not be hired again to play at a particular musical scene given that there are other groups that might be seen as providing a better show. This substitution of one musician for another can alter qualitative dimensions in the musical product of the group as a whole.

For example, in some types of music there is a lot of freedom within the musical structures, such as rhythms, to accompany a melody. Within these rhythms the musicians might employ a whole array of resources to embellish their interpretation so that the rhythm does not end up being a monotonous repetition upon which a melody is erected.⁶⁸ A change in the musician might imply a different set of abilities and skills and therefore a different repertoire of techniques to adorn the rhythm being played.

A new musician might also imply different dynamics between the musicians. As in the above example, musicians in various musical styles and traditions that like to adorn their playing while accompanying a melody many times resort to dynamics with other musicians to embellish the piece. For example, in the Afro-Caribbean tradition of Latin music this might be seen when a piano player is taking a solo and the percussion is providing a rhythm so that the piano can improvise on top of it. In many instances one will see the percussion section reacting to the solo and the soloist reacting to the

⁶⁸ Here again I use Latin music with its Afro-Caribbean rhythms as a guiding example.

percussion. One change in one of those individuals will bring about different outcomes. The new musician might not like to be that active, or might not have the musical resources to participate in those dynamics, and will just stick to the rhythm pattern.⁶⁹

The point is that different work-sites, with their particular class structures, affect and are affected by each other and they, in turn, do have effects on the aesthetic dimension of the cultural production that the musical labor engages in. This last point regarding the effect on aesthetics is not limited only to the live performances. It is also relevant for when the music takes the tangible commodity form of the record.

To give an example that might be considered an extension of the previous one, suppose that in the musical scene where these performances happen along a class process, part of the dynamics that develop are related to an orchestra's decision to record a number given the welcoming approval of the crowd to the new tune or repertoire. This might lead the orchestra to move to another musical scene (recording studio) which might be related to other class processes within the production of music in terms of the mass production of a record. An important question would be, what position within the whole process of mass production and its relation to class does the orchestra occupy at the various moments in this chain of musical scenes? Also, in what ways can this chain be transformed and undermined and what are its effects on the cultural production?

These questions will be dealt with in detail later. Still, it is very important that we stress an initial possible relationship between various musical scenes, where class

⁶⁹ It is also important to emphasize that even when the same musicians are playing the same tune in various places, that same tune will always be different because of the overdetermined character of the musical scenes where these interpretations take place. The solo might be a different improvisation, the reactions of the percussion section also will differ, different crowds bring different emotions, the type of musical space will lend itself to different dynamics, the acoustics of the place might not be the same, and so on. Of course, the degree of difference between one performance and the other also depends on the type of music being played. Classical western music, for example, is more rigid in its structures than Latin Jazz in the sense of the spaces provided for musicians to move outside the score.

processes might be taking place, and how these scenes might relate, not only to each other, but also to the aesthetic dimension of the final product.

In our example we had a situation in which we moved chronologically from the musical scene of the night club to the recording studio. The description of this movement had as one of its assumptions that the particular characteristics the final product would have, in terms of which songs to record, was in part a function of how those songs had been perceived by the crowds during live performances. This ordering in the chain of musical production is not absolute or mechanical. An inversion in the order is quite possible. Nowadays it has become common for many orchestras and groups to first record and then play at various musical spaces. A first element that should be apparent is how *the public has become a passive spectator*. From initially participating actively in what is to be recorded, the music recorded now seems to have no input from the public. Musical tours presenting the new repertoires and records, and their diffusion through the radio waves before any live performance, have become commonplace. Also, the musical spaces and scenes where many of these performances take place have moved from taking place in the street or the club to taking place in huge coliseums and stadiums, factors that will have their own effects in the constitutivity of the musical production and its aesthetics.

3.8 Musical Labor embodied in a performance

To try and approach the various issues raised above in a more coherent and organized way, let us now focus our attention at moments where musical labor is translated into a product conceived under a particular class processes to then be exchanged. By proceeding this way we hope to explore the relationships between the

different musical scenes and class processes happening at the diverse musical spaces in more concrete ways and their relationship to the aesthetic component of the products of musical labor.

Before, we gave examples of how the relationship between different musical scenes might affect the aesthetic component of the products of musical labor. Now we will insert and relate class to those spaces and see how it offers a different picture of what is happening at diverse musical scenes. We will examine not only under what conditions surplus might be produced and appropriated, but also how is it distributed and how do these two processes (the fundamental and subsumed) participate in shaping the musical scenes. Some possible effects on the aesthetic dimension of the products of musical labor will be shown from this interplay between class and musical scenes.

Finally, we will give some examples as to how musical scenes react back and have effects on the class structures in an exercise that seeks to show the unevenness, richness, change and cross-fertilization of those sites of social production.

3.8.1 FCP based on musical labor/performance

To examine the different dynamics at play when musical labor is considered productive in the sense of creating a surplus, let us start with delineating, in the form of questions, three general dimensions which will guide the analysis. First, does the musical labor produce a product or service? Second, is that product or service exchanged? Finally, what are the underlying economic relations in the production and exchange of the musical product or service in terms of the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus?

Consider an example similar to the one presented in the previous section and

which is applicable to a wide range of musical styles, countries and cultures. In this one we have a musician that performs in a musical space—let us say a club—once a week for a three hour set, lets say from 8-11pm (this is just one of many other possible performances the musician might have in other places and he is one among many musicians competing for performing in those spaces—in other words, there is a market). For such a presentation the musician charges the club owner \$150 (\$50 an hour).

In this example, we have that the owner of the bar charges an entrance fee for the people who come to the establishment while the musical performance is going on. Let us suppose that the fee is \$10 and on average, 50 people come every week to see the musical presentation, which is also the maximum capacity for the place. That means that \$500 dollars is generated at the door, which implies that the owner of the place, assuming there are no other costs associated with bringing in the musician, ends up with a total of \$350 dollars every week after paying the musician the 3 hours of work.

In this example we have a person engaging in musical labor which produces an intangible commodity which is the performance or representation of music. In our language, this is both production and dissemination of music.

Between the producer of music and the owner of the locale, there was money exchanged—the \$150 dollars that the owner of the place paid her for the 3 hour performance. There is also another exchange, the one between the owner and the public via the fee charged at the door. The question arises, what type of social relationship of production was at play in terms the production and appropriation of those \$350 dollars that the owner of the club got at the end of the night?

Let us again reiterate that to approach this issue of the organization of the surplus

we cannot view the property relations of the means of production as *defining* what type of class structure we have in hand. That the musician brings her own keyboard, or uses an acoustic piano that is not his property (as in most piano bars) does not *by itself* define the organization of the surplus. To put it in more technical terms, “how raw materials and means of production are made available to the direct producer is a different and separate issue from whether and how surplus labor is produced and appropriated” (Resnick & Wolff, 2006 : 373).

In the scenario that we have before us, a service—specifically a musical performance—is being produced and exchanged for \$150 dollars from the perspective of the one who engages in musical labor. The owner of the club pays those \$150 and receives \$350 dollars from the performance. In this example, these \$350 dollars would not have happened if the musical performance had not taken place. As stated earlier, people are paying to see the performance and the charging of the entrance fee is related to when the music is being performed. This implies that the \$350 dollars are not tied to any labor by the owner of the club, but to the musician, who is the direct laborer. The question then becomes, who is appropriating those \$350 dollars? Do we have an exploitative fundamental class process at play here?

The \$350 dollars clearly end up in the hands of the locale owner. Can it be said that the musician appropriated them and then proceeded to distribute that same quantity to the club owner? The answer is no, the musician does not appropriate the money. He gets hired and paid by the club owner out of the money received at the door, money that is directly related to the musical labor that the musician engages on (as stated at the beginning, without her performance there would be no money charged at the door). The

main conclusion is that the musician is exploited by the club owner; she performs musical labor which brings in money, but she does not appropriate it. She participates in the fundamental class process as producer, not appropriator. The question that follows is, what particular exploitative fundamental class structure do we have in this musical space that we have chosen for scrutiny? Is it a slave, feudal, capitalist, or maybe another exploitative fundamental class process?

This example does not refer to a slave class structure. The musician is not a property of the owner of the club. She can go and engage in musical production in other musical scenes (e.g. other clubs). Of course, this does not rule out the possibility that a slave class structure might take place in a musical scene such as a club. There is no necessary unique mapping between the musical space and the class structure present.

It also does not seem to be a feudal fundamental class structure because the surplus of \$350 was not delivered to the owner. The surplus is not a rent that the musician is passing on to the club owner for the sake of having access to a musical space (the club). It would be so if it was the musician who appropriated the total \$500 dollars that came out of his production of the performance and then paid.⁷⁰

Finally, it is not feudal because this particular example “requires the intermediary role of markets, prices, profits or wages in the relation between the producer and the appropriator”, characteristics that are part of the conditions of existence of another exploitative fundamental class structure, the capitalist (Resnick and Wolff, 2006: 164).

⁷⁰ Marx explains in great detail how the rent of a landlord can be based on surplus labor appropriated by the capitalist or, to put it in a more precise way, how rent is a form that surplus labor can take. In our example, if the musician had appropriated the \$500 and given the \$350 to the club owner, that surplus labor could be interpreted as being produced and appropriated by an ancient or self-employed musician, surplus that then takes the form of rent. That sense of producing surplus labor in a non-exploitative class structure is understood by some as “self-exploitation” (see Gabriel, 1989).

If we conceive this example as a musical scene where a capitalist fundamental class process is taking place, then the \$150 paid by the owner of the club out of the \$500 obtained from the performance can be interpreted as the value of labor power. The \$350 which the owner appropriates is then the surplus value generated by the surplus labor of the performer. The outcome of this exchange between the musician and the owner of the club can be regarded as a capitalist commodity-producing service, where the labor power is exchanged against capital instead of revenue because it produced surplus value (Marx, 1861: 165).

In terms of the conditions of existence related to property in the means of production, in this particular example we find that the musician might own some of the means but not others. For example, the stage for the performance might be seen as one mean of production owned by the club owner, while the instruments might be owned by the musician. Clearly one cannot deduce the class structure based on the pattern of ownership in the means of production.

Also important is the fact that in any given situation the value of labor power is historically conditioned and overdetermined. This is important because at the end of the day the musician might not be able to cover her needs to be able to reproduce her labor power with those \$150. This might happen, if she only performs once a week in that locale, a situation that might prompt her to perform on various places on a same night and during the whole week. That she is able to do such a thing depends on an infinity of determinants. For example, there might be competition between musicians and bands for limited spaces for playing where the performance is remunerated. As we mentioned before, this might lead the musician to seek employment outside the musical market in

jobs that have nothing to do with the particular musical talent, a situation that, as we saw, brings about a whole plethora of new determinants and contradictions that can manifest themselves both in the life of this person and in the products of her musical labor.

3.8.2 SSCP based on musical labor/performance

So far we have focused on one side of the class structure, that is, the production and appropriation of surplus labor (the fundamental class process). Still, as we recognized earlier, the constitution of the class structure—its being—would be incomplete if we do not take a look at the processes related to the conditions of existence of the fundamental class process (the subsumed class process) which relate dialectically to it.

In our example we identified a surplus of \$350 appropriated by the owner of the club. We now need to examine what possible uses that surplus might have which contribute to the possibility of the reproduction of the fundamental class process.⁷¹ In turn, the ability to pump the surplus from the direct workers will continue providing the basis for subsequent surplus distributions.

First let us take a look at ways that sustain the fundamental class process without necessarily increasing the surplus in the next period. Specifically, let us look at the hiring of unproductive workers whose wages come from exhausting the surplus produced by the musician and appropriated by the club owner, and to advertising activities as a means to try and guarantee the realization of a surplus value.

The spectacle provided in the club might need the labor of people who, even though they do not produce value, contribute to the possibility of the show being given

⁷¹ In this example we are abstracting from other fundamental class processes that might be happening in the same physical space and we are assuming that the surplus available comes exclusively from the musical labor. An example of other employed productive workers whose work might be a source of surplus are cooks who work in the kitchen of the club and produce plates of food which are sold, with the cooks receiving less than the value of the produced meals.

night in and night out. For example, the surplus could be used to hire bouncers to ensure security and give the potential paying fans a feeling of safety. These bouncers provide a security service that is deemed unproductive *from the perspective of the club owner* because they are not producing a commodity that is being sold which realizes surplus and is then being appropriated by the club owner.⁷²

A person that welcomes people at the door and collects the entrance fee would also be an example of an unproductive worker hired by the club owner.

Another example of a subsumed class payment deriving from the surplus produced by the musical labor that does not contribute to an increase in the surplus produced in the next period might be the money paid to a radio station to announce that on a particular date and time the club will again provide a musical show for people to attend to. This advertising activity addresses the need for *realization* of the product's—the musical performance—value and the surplus labor contained in it.

In our example, the wages paid to the musician, which serve as a proxy for the value of labor power, amounted to \$150 dollars. Given that the capacity of the place is for 50 people and the fee at the entrance is \$10, at least 16 people will have to attend the performance for the value of labor power to be covered (\$150) and for surplus to be realized (in the case of 16 people attending, only \$10 is the surplus). Remember that the value generated by the performance must exceed the value paid for the performance for a surplus to exist. The role of advertising via the radio is to make sure that more than 15 chairs—let us use chairs as a measure of capacity—are occupied so that surplus value is

⁷² Still, these bouncers might be considered productive if their service to the club is being provided by some security agency. In other words, they work for a security agency and the bouncer's product—the security service for which they charge the owner of the club—is sold for an amount that does not equal what the individual bouncer gets from his boss at the security service agency.

generated.

From this example we can then pass to one where the surplus is used to augment the available surplus in future performances. Given that one of the variables that shapes the size of the surplus is the capacity to accommodate people, the owner might decide to buy more tables and chairs, expand his locale, or simply buy another place for performances to take place. All these decisions, which have as their aim to increase the surplus, might or might not achieve their aim. There is an infinite amount of factors that might combine in such a way as to not guarantee the outcome of an increase in the surplus. For example, expanding the locale might imply higher property taxes and an increase in the use of utilities, whose combined costs might more than counter the gains because of the increase in capacity if the entrance fee remains fixed.⁷³ And if the owner decides to increase the entry fee to the customers they might decide to go somewhere else. Of course, all of these dynamics also depend on who is the artist playing. There might be a sufficient and significant excess demand for the particular artist employed to enable a price hike in the entry fee. At the same time, given the recognition this artist might have, he or she might ask for an amount of money per hour that might be significantly higher than the \$50 of our initial example. All of these situation point to the fact that the outcome in terms of the surplus realized by such decisions made by the owner is overdetermined.

Now, what about our musical scene and the products of musical labor? In what ways could these surplus based decisions entailing subsumed class payments participate

⁷³ One possible outcome is that if all club owners act the same way, the intended consequence could be the opposite. Marx's deals with such a fallacy of composition situation when examining the profit augmenting moves that the capitalists engage on, and their relation to the possibility of the rate of profit to fall while the mass of profit might be both increasing or decreasing.

in affecting the aesthetic qualities of a performance?

As per our epistemological standpoint, we recognize that all these decisions by the owner will have consequences and effects, some of which will be imperceptible, on the dynamics taking place within the musical scene and on the aesthetic qualities of the products of musical labor. Given this recognition of the impossibility of accounting for all the potential effects, we will limit ourselves to a few examples.

First, if the locale is expanded, the relation between the music performed and the audience might be transformed. Given the increased capacity of the locale, the music might end up serving as background music instead of being the focus of the people who attend the place. People might be willing to pay the entrance fee, not for the sake of the music per se, but because they might like to hang out in a place where there are lots of people. In other words, such an enlargement of the place might open up the profile of those who attend, from people who strictly paid to see the music, to a group that not only includes them, but also people who might find the place attractive other reasons apart from the music.⁷⁴

This change in environment can be reflected in the discourse of *intimacy* that many musicians use when referring to playing at particular musical scenes which are small. Many times the issue of intimacy comes up in conversations where the musician is talking about playing in a stadium or coliseum and how it relates to playing in a bar or club. Still, we do not need the extremes in size to notice that the composition of the public, which might be related to the increase in the capacity of the place via the physical enlargement of the locale, will have effects on how the musician performs her musical

⁷⁴ The reader must remember that this is just an example. I am in no way positing that a small place will always attract only people interested in the music being played.

labor.⁷⁵

Another example of the effects that the decisions related to subsumed class processes might have on the musical scene relates to the (1) competition between individuals and groups for access to performing in musical spaces from which they derive their primordial income, and (1) competition between musical spaces for the employment of particular orchestras.

The distributor of the surplus—the owner of the club in our previous examples—might want not only to obtain a surplus from the musical performance enacted on his musical space, but might also want that musical space to be recognized as the best one for listening to a particular type of music. He might engage in all the different types of subsumed class payments that we discussed (advertising through the media, expanding the capacity, providing security), and others (remodeling the locale, getting a better sound system, etc.) to try and shape the perception that people have of his business. These expenditures can be understood as being oriented towards achieving a *status* both in the eyes of the public and in relation to other institutions that are part of the musical environment, such as recording companies that might, for example, ask for the locale for recording live a performance that will then be mass produced.

The competition between musical spaces does not take place solely on the basis of the cheapening of commodities (i.e. which place charges the lowest entry fee).

⁷⁵ It is commonplace to hear some musicians complain about people not listening to their music. In a crowded place with some people talking while others listen, a bass solo might pass unnoticed by many, whereas a percussion solo might stop people from talking to see what is happening. This lack of attention can manifest itself in a variety of ways, from a musician asking the director to cut his solo short, to him playing more aggressively to capture the attention of those not listening.

In a related way, the categories of “dance music”, “easy-listening”, etc. cannot capture how the music is used by the public that experiences it. For example, Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1999) recounts how he was appalled at the scene of people dancing instead of fixing their eyes on what Duke Ellington's orchestra was doing.

Competition also takes place on the basis of *differentiation*. This is important to emphasize because the same way that musical spaces compete on the basis of making themselves different from other places, applies to individual musicians and orchestras that might also engage consciously in competition via differentiation.⁷⁶ This process of differentiation and *identity construction* will have effects on the music composed and performed as part of the development of the music in general.

It is important to notice that musicians might compete against each other for musical scenes much in the same way musical scenes might compete with each other for having particular musicians play at their locale. Which institution—the musical group or the musical scene—has more bargaining power (a political process), which is one among many determinants that will affect the size of the surplus, will vary from one situation to another depending itself on a myriad of factors. Again, we have to emphasize how such musical scenes are the site of various political, economic, and cultural conditions of existence that affect and are affected by the class process where a surplus is produced and appropriated.

Now, if we are to engage in an overdeterminist analysis of the possible connections between class and music, an important question is, how does the music affect the class processes going on in particular musical scenes.

A first recognition is that musical scenes, as physical sites, might include acts of labor that are not necessarily categorized as musical labor. For example, let us suppose

⁷⁶ An example of this consciousness is the Richie Ray orchestra in New York City which developed during the final period of the Big Band Era in NY during the mid 60s. According to Ray, “our strategy was to try and sound different. We achieved this by combining elements of jazz, classical music, rock and Afro-Caribbean music within the same musical arrangements. We also emphasized the trumpet sound as part of our identity to differentiate us from the more common trombone sound of the time” (my translation; Santana & Seda-Irizarry, 2009)

that the club offers food and drinks that are prepared by cooks and bartenders employed by the club owner, who appropriates a surplus derived from those productive (in the Marxian sense) activities that produce goods and services that are being sold. It is reasonable to expect that the consumption patterns of the people who are exposed to music will be affected by it, a factor which might affect the intensity of work of those other producers.⁷⁷ More drinks or food might be demanded, which might imply a increase in the turnover of goods produced by those workers who might have previously been working under a lower intensity in terms of the amount of labor expended per hour of time when there was no music playing.⁷⁸ Such increase in the production and selling of goods and services might then report a higher mass of surplus value for the owner to be appropriated.

In terms of music affecting the same class process that produces it, things can also go many ways. A musician might be invited to participate in other sites of musical production given the success of the performance. These other sites might involve alternative class structures or the same class structures with different outcomes for the musician in terms of the amount of surplus that is extracted and the amount of money paid as a wage. For the owner of the place that originally hired the musician, this might mean the need to replace the musician to be able to appropriate a flow of value from the musical activity upon which many of his subsumed class payments were based. The outcome of this replacement would also be overdetermined, which could, for example,

⁷⁷ Intensity here refers to an increase in the amount of labor expended over a given time interval. In this case the output would increase but not by an increase in productivity (labor expended remains constant while output increases).

⁷⁸ Of course, the opposite is possible; people might consume less because more of their time is spent dancing. Also, this would also be a function of the amount of people present when music is playing in comparison when there is no playing.

jeopardize the conditions of existence of the locale itself.

This and other examples should point to the complex ways in which music affects class, both within and outside the musical scene that might have other products being produced and class structures corresponding to those products.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter we provided a general scaffold from which to approach some of the possible relationships between class and music, always highlighting how class affects music and how music affects class. For this we used a specifically Marxist epistemological position with our application of overdetermination to understand the interactions between music and class, and we combined it with a particular understanding of class derived from Marx's mature works that emphasizes the relations of production in terms of the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor.

We then used the concept of musical scene to highlight the possible connections between class and some of the aesthetic dimensions of the products of musical labor. The application of all these concepts and the articulation of possible relations between them led us to uncover, not only some of the possible relations between class and music, but also the contradictory ways in which social reality is expressed, ways which have not only cultural and economic dimensions to them, but also political.

Now, an important aspect of musical production we did not touch upon was the one related to the mass production of music records and files. This topic brings about important questions. For example, how can one conceive the musical labor that is embodied in a record? Can musicians be potentially exploited in relation to the social relations that underlie the production of the material commodity form of the record?

In the next chapter, we will explore in more detail the implications of these and other questions. We will do so by examining the music recording industry and how it deals with the charges of “exploitation” made by some musicians while at the same time dealing with “unlawful” reproduction. In other words, we will examine two *discourses of theft* within the music recording industry.

CHAPTER 4

PIRACY AND EXPLOITATION IN THE MUSIC RECORDING INDUSTRY

In principle a work of art has always been reproducible.

Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men.

Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of gain. Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new.

- Walter Benjamin (*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*)

Information is a fugitive resource...we are just beginning to face the contradictions between the systems of private property and of information acquisition and dissemination...[we may see] an increasing tension between legal relations and fundamental economic determinants.

- Kenneth Arrow (*Technical Information and Industrial Structure*)

4.1 Introduction

The recognition that capitalism, in comparison to other socioeconomic systems, has brought about huge technological breakthroughs and immense increases in overall material wealth is undisputed. Even the system's most well-known critiques, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, recognized in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* that “[t]he bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together” (cited in Tucker, 1978: 477). Part of what is not undisputed and has generated intense debates among positions along the whole ideological spectrum is how these developments relate to the sustainability of the system as a whole. In other words, does the development of the

capitalist social formation⁷⁹ itself plant the seeds of its own dissolution?⁸⁰

The Music Recording Industry (MRI) has been considered by many as an exquisite example of how developments within and outside this capitalist industry have contributed to its undermining. Specifically, the phenomenon of piracy, understood as the *unlawful reproduction* of compositions, records, songs, arrangements and other music related materials, has been pointed out as a main mover of the huge reported losses that the recording industry has been experiencing during the past decade.⁸¹ What is contradictory in these outcomes is that they can, in part, be explained by the development of the industry itself. More specifically, the music recording industry has developed and put into the hands of the consumers products and techniques that lend themselves to undermining the same industry that provided them.⁸² In this process of transformation, the role of the musician within the chain of production and distribution has changed in ways that have direct and explicit effects on the continued process of cultural reproduction.

This essay seeks to understand the phenomenon of piracy in relation to (1) the musicians and personnel that *legally produce and reproduce* the music within the MRI which organizes this production and has property rights over it, and (2) the pirates that *illegally* reproduce the recorded music and often times sell it at lower prices than the

⁷⁹ I use the concept of “capitalist social formation” to denote a society where capitalist relations are dominant. In other words, I recognize that there are non-capitalist social relations in a society existing side by side to capitalist ones.

⁸⁰ Joseph Schumpeter's work (1975) is perhaps the most explicit within the mainstream about capitalism's inherent contradictions which might serve as a basis for the collapse of the system.

⁸¹ Titles such as “Piracy Pillages Music Industry” (USA Today, April 8th, 2002) and “Music Industry Counts the Costs of Piracy” (NY Times, January 21st, 2010) give just a taste of how this phenomenon of “music theft” is being connected to the erosion of revenues and profits of recording firms.

⁸² For the Marxian political economy tradition this is no minor matter given that capitalist development is putting back in the hands of the salaried workers the means of production and subsistence. It has always been understood that an important condition of existence of capitalism is precisely the separation of the workers from the means of production. See Harvey (2003, 2006) and McNally (2011) for a discussion of this process under neoliberalism.

MRI. I specifically want to take a look at the claim that the recording artists are being exploited by the recording industry and how these claims are related to the phenomenon of piracy. This paper demonstrates how, in some instances, the musicians are not exploited and that the discourse of exploitation that they accept to describe their relation to the MRI helps to reinforce the persecution, marginalization and elimination of non-exploitative class structures that reproduce the music outside the MRI. These alternative production and distribution sites are crucial in providing some sort of sustenance to people whose livelihoods cannot be accommodated within the formal sector of the economic system, while at the same time providing musicians and their products with an important alternative outlet for exposure and recognition.⁸³

I will first give a brief overview of the music industry and its recent developments. Then I will present and use a particular political economy approach that focuses on the concept of *surplus* to then relate it to exploitation and the process of the production and reproduction of records. Finally I will present the political as well as the economic implications of such an analysis.

4.2 The MRI, Piracy, and Musicians

The MRI is currently dominated by three major recording firms that are commonly referred to as “The Big Three.”⁸⁴ These firms are Universal Music Group, SONY Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group.⁸⁵ In total they account for more than 80% of the market share in the United States and around 70% of worldwide retail

⁸³ With this I am referring to the fact that the activity of piracy takes place in the “informal sector” of the economy and is done by people who cannot sustain themselves solely on the jobs that the system provides them, if it does in fact provide them with those opportunities.

⁸⁴ Alexander (2005: 119-123), Roberts (2005), and Kelley(2005) provide a general historical review of the MRI that informs much of the institutional detail provided in this section.

⁸⁵ The British multinational EMI Group was the 4th biggest firm, but was bought by Universal Music Group in 2011.

sales.⁸⁶

The history of each of these firms is characterized by various common traits. First, their particular histories are made up of various mergers and acquisitions, with various smaller labels/subsidiaries under their wings covering different markets.⁸⁷ Historically, “each (except Time Warner, which was founded in 1958) can trace a long lineage in the music recording industry dating back to the turn of the twentieth century” (Alexander, 2005: 124).

Another common trait is that all of them handle the publishing, production, reproduction and distribution of music. This vertical integration distinguishes them from other labels that do not have at their disposal the resources or influence necessary for such an expansion. Finally, all of them are branches of larger media conglomerates that operate in the realms of television, motion pictures, internet, and book publishing, among others.⁸⁸

Apart from the Big Three, there is a group of smaller labels that combined have amounted to approximately 15% of the market share.⁸⁹ They are usually termed “independent labels” because they operate without funding from the bigger labels and not one of them owns more than 5% of the market share.⁹⁰ As a whole, the revenues for the

⁸⁶ The precise numbers are a matter of debate given that the two major estimates, presented by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), use different methodologies.

⁸⁷ An example would be Columbia Records, which is considered as an American label (produces and distributes within the U.S.) and is owned by the Japanese firm Sony Music Entertainment.

⁸⁸ For example, Universal Music Group, which is the largest of the Big Three, is owned by the French Media conglomerate Vivendi SA, formerly known as Vivendi Universal.

⁸⁹ It is important to mention that success for small labels is usually followed by its take-over by one of the dominant firms. For example, Chanana (1995: 156-157) documents EMI's take-over of various successful small record labels and other firms related to media in its quest for expansion and diversification.

⁹⁰ There are still other ways of defining what independent labels are, but I am following here the definition given by the Association of Independent Music, which represents independent labels in England (<http://www.musicindie.com/about>)

world recording music market in terms of recorded units (CDs, cassettes, LPs, digital records, etc) are estimated to be in the 15 to 20 billion dollar range. Although relatively small, this industry is without a doubt culturally important given that it can be seen as a depository of history, an institution that participates in the shaping of society, and a ground for facilitating cultural exchange. In the eyes of many, the recognition of all of these roles in society by the MRI seems to give the slogan “if you attack industry, you attack culture” some credence.⁹¹

Now, what has caused a buzz, especially with the coming of the 21st century, has been precisely an “attack” that is said to have caused declining revenues to the MRI. Both in terms of units sold and value realized in terms of total retail sales (see *Table 1*), piracy has been said to be the cause of what many consider to be the downfall of very important branches of the Music Industry as a whole.

Table 1: Total units (in millions) sold in various categories (albums, singles, DVDs, and VHS cassettes)

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
U.S.	744	640.9	542	398	306
Japan	295.5	279.6	251.4	230.8	187.6
Germany	142.8	140.5	133	122	116.9
U.K.	207.7	190.7	155.5	142.3	128.6
France	136.39	99.7	79.95	61.7	57.2

Source: IFPI annual reports

The relationship between the phenomenon of piracy and the Music Recording Industry is a complicated one, where the lens of the law which seeks to expound and

⁹¹ This seems to be the insinuation of much of the published documentation of some of many of the Music Industry's institutions, like the RIAA, the IFPI, the Canadian Recording Industry Association (CRIA) and the British Phonographic Industry (BPI).

uphold property rights and remuneration schemes is constantly trying to adjust itself to new outcomes brought about by developments of all sorts, with technology being probably the most important one (Chanan, 1994: 147-156). One example is the issue of intellectual property rights.⁹² This is so because the constant application of new recording and sampling technologies has made identifying who produces and interprets, and therefore who should get remunerated, not an easy task.⁹³

The other example, and the one most intimately related to piracy, is the realization that the revenue base, from which the payments to the people who participate in musical production comes from, is getting smaller as companies keep reporting losses in their sales (see *Table 2*). These losses are in part explained by the lowering of the entry barriers to this industry that new technologies have facilitated and that put pirate producers as major competing reproducers and distributors of recorded musical merchandise.

Table 2: Total Retail Value (in millions) in U.S. Dollars of units sold.

Country	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
U.S.	11195	9651.4	7985.6	5977.4	4562
Japan	4883.5	4495.2	4174.5	5171.1	4244.5
Germany	3330.4	2029.1	2142.2	2370	1945.8
U.K	2146.4	3051.1	2696.4	2274.9	1730.5
France	1940.3	1661.7	1471	1342.5	1157.5

Source: IFPI annual reports

As expected, record labels have not remained passive to these developments that threaten to undermine them. The need to identify and legally process those who engage in copyright infringements based on illegal reproductions has required a significant amount

⁹² In his 1969 essay “What Is an Author?” Michel Foucault shows how the “author function” in history has continuously transformed; a recognition very pertinent for our analysis here.

⁹³ Chanan (1995: 161) specifically focuses on how sampling has brought about problems in terms of ownership an copyrights.

of resources, not only to adjust the law, but also to enforce it to try and offset the fall in sales.⁹⁴

In 2010, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI, 2010) reported that worldwide sales of recorded music had fallen by 10%. This fall was occurring even though digital sales had risen as part of the industry's efforts to enter and conquer digital reproduction and distribution, which had positioned itself as an alternative medium for the distribution of music.⁹⁵ Still, the reproduced physical records (i.e. CDs, vinyls, DVDs, etc) still represent the vast majority, and their sales fell worldwide by about 16 % causing overall industry revenue to decline to about \$15.8 billion in 2009 from about \$17.5 billion a year earlier (ibid).

In the case of the United States, the increase in digital sales has not made up for the losses in the physical reproductions. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which is the trade association of the MRI, reported that in 2010 a 12% increase in the dollar value of downloads could not offset a 20% fall in the total dollar (retail) value of physical goods in comparison to the year 2009.⁹⁶ Still, although legal digital downloads are increasing, their share within total downloads is minuscule even if exact numbers are basically impossible to estimate. According to a BBC News article published

⁹⁴ The International Intellectual Property Alliance, which has as one of its members the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), is constantly lobbying with governments around the globe to follow copyright laws and enforcement regimes in over 80 countries. This is not surprising given that significant items that are exported by countries are considered copyrighted materials. In the case of the United States this items indeed constitute the majority of exports, amounting approximately 125 billion dollars.

⁹⁵ The fall in overall sales and revenues is also in part attributed to two phenomena, one that can be considered exogenous and the other one endogenous. With regards to the former, the drop in world demand following the 2008 recession has obvious, although not calculated, consequences. In terms of an internal reason, the move towards digital reproduction and distribution seems to have eliminated the “New Ecology of Mass Culture” (Chanan, 1995: 157) where the transition to new formats implied the reissuing/recycling of old catalogues.

⁹⁶ The data from the *2010 Year-End Shipment Statistics* (RIAA, 2010) reports physical goods in terms of units shipped, which does not necessarily mean all of them were sold.

in 2011,⁹⁷ the IFPI estimates that “95% of all music downloads are illegal.”⁹⁸

These losses have led to a variety of responses by record labels. One of them has been to reduce their productive capacity. For example, in January of 2011, Sony closed a pressing plant in New Jersey that reproduced 18 million CDs a month (ibid) after it had earlier closed the operations within the same plant related to vinyl reproduction.⁹⁹

Another response has been to lower the suggested prices for retailers to try and augment the volume of units sold in what is considered to be an elastic demand market given the lower barriers of entry that technology has exposed.¹⁰⁰ Finally, record labels are offering musicians what are called “360 music deals.” These deals arise out of the recognition that many musicians nowadays make most of their income from live presentations and merchandise sales. Record companies have reacted and actively moved to be involved in all of the logistics regarding those activities. In other words, they do not limit their relationship with the musician solely based on the records produced and sold.¹⁰¹

Apart from the struggle between record companies and pirates in terms of the reproduction of music, another important battle is fought out between musicians and the record companies. The focus of this struggle is over the royalties assigned to musicians

⁹⁷ BBC, *Global music industry launches new bid to stop piracy*, January 20th, 2011.

⁹⁸ In 2008 Atlantic Records, which is a unit of Warner Music Group and which had recorded the likes of John Coltrane, Ray Charles and Phil Collins, became the first record label in the U.S. to report more sales via downloads than via the selling of physical records (NY Times, November 25, 2008).

⁹⁹ Waldfogel (2011) takes a look at how the supply of music, in terms of new releases, is affected by the lack of incentives of producers based on the lack of demand related to alternative pirate reproduction. His results discredit the notion that pirate production and reproduction contributes to a lower supply of new recorded materials and that enforcement of intellectual property schemes associated with monopoly markets structures encourage new supply to continuously develop.

¹⁰⁰ In March of 2010 Universal Music announced a plan for 2011 to set a price ceiling of \$10 on CD's. A mid-year report for 2011 by the firm Nielsen Sound Scan shows that total album sales, including CD's, have risen 1% in the U.S. in comparison to last year. Still, there has been no systematic analysis tying such increase in sales to the lowering of unit prices.

¹⁰¹ During the late 1960s Motown Records, apart from dealing with the record royalties, got involved in the touring, and publishing of musicians in what can be considered a forerunner to 360 deals.

for participating in recordings.¹⁰² Irrespective of the various forms that the contractual payment schemes can take, where, for example, a session rate and a related overtime rate is paid to the musicians for their work in a recording studio, there might also be an agreement regarding variable payments to musicians based on the units of records distributed and sold. These *royalties* can represent a percentage of the gross or net revenues made by the record label on units sold, depending on the type of deal that is made.¹⁰³

This struggle between musicians and record labels over the royalties associated with unit sales has normally been expressed with the language of *exploitation*. Specifically, some musicians claim that record labels are exploiting them *because their share in the revenues is not a fair one*.¹⁰⁴ While major record labels make millions out of units sold, the remuneration of musicians cannot be compared in terms of its quantitative level.¹⁰⁵ This struggle between musicians and record labels, in terms of distributive shares, is the starting point of my inquiry.

4.3 Production and Exploitation

From a political economy perspective, this tension between musicians and record

¹⁰² In the example I develop in this paper I will take a look at situations where the company hires the musician. It is also common for musicians to buy the services of a record label in producing, reproducing and distributing the record, in which case the musician's income would depend exclusively on his/her sales and where breaking even in terms of covering the costs incurred is an initial priority that the record company might not have a real interest in.

¹⁰³ Some contracts do not imply an initial lump sum given to the musician, as in the case where musicians purchase the services of the record label for producing and distributing.

¹⁰⁴ Many musicians also claim that they are exploited in other "musical spaces," and not only by record labels, but also by a whole host of other characters (e.g. bar owners, show promoters, orchestra directors, etc). I take a look at these other musical spaces and individuals and their relation to the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor in another chapter of my dissertation.

¹⁰⁵ Musicians represented by the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) can make record companies sign a Sound Recording Labor Agreement, which stipulates, among other things, a 3% royalty based on the suggested retail price of each unit sold (Krasilovsky and Shemel, 2007: 57). Apart from this, there are other types of agreements where the percentage in royalties to be awarded to the musician varies depending on what is claimed to be the base upon which the percentage will apply.

labels that is articulated through the discourse of exploitation immediately posits the necessity to investigate the ways musicians participate in the ways that production is organized. This is so because at its most general understanding, the concept of exploitation implies that the direct producer is not only producing a quantity of value that exceeds the value he gets paid, but also that he/she has no say with what is to be done with that *extra*, which we will call the *surplus*. A surplus is produced whenever the labor processes in an economy produce more than what is needed to maintain the producers at the standard of living to which they are accustomed and to replace the materials and restore the machines used or used up in production. Exploitation would then refer to a situation in which the direct producer does not *appropriate* the surplus.¹⁰⁶

In our case, the claim of injustice by the musicians in reference to the size of the cut they get out of the revenues has an important implicit assumption if it is to be considered a situation in which exploitation takes place. That assumption is that the musicians are part of the *direct producers* of those copies. In other words, they participate in the production of the surplus and therefore are considered as being exploited given that they have no say with what is to be done with the fruits of their labor, either in terms of them getting it as part of their wages or allocating it for other purposes.

In this work, the concept of *class* is deployed in a particular way in which people are *classified* according to the position they occupy in relation to the grid of production and distribution of surplus. Following Resnick and Wolff (1987), I define class as the economic process of the production, appropriation and distribution of the surplus.¹⁰⁷ As

¹⁰⁶ The provocative Marxist conclusion derived from this is that those who do the work do not take the decisions, and those who take the decisions do not work.

¹⁰⁷ This approach to class contrasts most of the Marxian literature that define class in terms of property in the means of production. See Resnick and Wolff (2006: 91) for a discussion of the implications of these

mentioned before, exploitation would then be defined as a situation where those that produce the surplus do not participate in the appropriation, and hence the distribution of it.¹⁰⁸

As Karl Marx recognized, this process where “surplus-labor is pumped out of *direct producers*” (Marx, 1967: 791, my emphasis) can take many economic forms (slave, feudal, capitalist, communist), forms that I will refer to as *class structures*.¹⁰⁹ In my opinion, an important realization that derives from Marx's contribution is that the direct producer in capitalism is probably engaging in more labor than what would be otherwise needed under a different set of social relations.¹¹⁰

Since my analysis focuses on the reproduced records, I focus on them as commodities, that is, *products of labor* that are produced for exchange and not immediate consumption by the producer. The important aspect here is that the direct producer *actively* engages in labor to produce a commodity. That is, the direct producer employs tools and equipment and transforms raw materials in his/her laboring activity to produce a commodity that will, in one way or another, help in the reproduction of society. In general, “the production process is a labor process, a basic human activity, without wish

and other distinctions in relationship to how class has been used.

¹⁰⁸ Contrary to what many economists might argue, there is a concept of exploitation in neoclassical economics with Alfred Pigou's work *The Economics of Welfare* (1920) and Joan Robinson's discussion of it in *The Economics of Imperfect Competition* (1933). In these works exploitation is defined in terms of wages not equaling the marginal product of labor, which contrasts with the opposite conclusion given by Euler's theorem of product exhaustion under conditions of perfect competition. For a review of this approach refer to Flatau (2001). In terms of the difference between Pigouvian and Marxian notions of exploitation we can say that in the former, workers' wages are less than the value they produce at the margin, while in the latter workers do get paid appropriate wages (in relation to the value of their labor power) but such value is less than the total value they produce.

¹⁰⁹ I prefer this term to “mode of production” because the latter seems too all-encompassing. Also, the term class structure puts more emphasis on the micro level of the firm in terms of the relations of production prevalent in it.

¹¹⁰ A much discussed issue is whether workers, given that they are the ones that produce the surplus, should be entitled to it or not. For a discussion regarding Veblen's analysis of Marx's association of “theft” and “robbery” to labor being exploited by capital, refer to O'Hara (2000: 50). For a general discussion regarding the “ethics” debate surrounding surplus appropriation, refer to Madra (2006).

the reproduction of society would be impossible” (Shaikh, 1982: 68).

Still, it is also important to recognize that there is also *indirect labor* contained in the commodities. This labor is embodied in the means of production (tools, equipment, raw materials, etc) that are combined with the direct producer to produce the commodity. In other words, commodities have a past and present labor component.

Marx uses this distinction for the types of labor to make an argument relating labor to value.¹¹¹ At the most abstract level, the total value of a commodity consists of the average, socially necessary labor embodied in the means of production (dead labor) that were used up in the production of the particular commodity and the labor expended in the current production period (living labor).¹¹²

$$\mathbf{L_T = L_d + L_l} \quad (1)$$

In the case of capitalist production and exploitation, the direct producer is combined with means of production (fixed and circulating capital), and produces a total amount of *new value* that is greater than what he/she receives in wages. Therefore, we can further decompose equation 1 into

$$\mathbf{L_T = L_d + L_n + L_s} \quad (2)$$

where $\mathbf{L_n}$ would correspond to the necessary labor that is compensated via a wage, and $\mathbf{L_s}$ would correspond to the surplus labor which produces what would account for the difference between the value the worker produces vis-à-vis what he gets (i.e. the surplus

¹¹¹ The vast literature debating the algorithmic relationship between values and prices is beyond the scope of this article. Still, it is important to recognize that there are well known critiques of Marx's use of labor as the substance of value. For example, in Volume 1 of *Capital* Marx supposes that commodities sell at their values while in volume 3 he assumes that they exchange at their prices of production that reflect an equalization of the rate of profit across and within industries and which can be understood as being long run equilibrium prices. For a rebuttal of the critiques that point to this as evidence of inconsistency, see Shaikh (1977, 1982), Kliman (2007) and Kristjanson-Gural (2009).

¹¹² I mention the most abstract level because the more concrete level of prices of production, upon which market prices gravitate, involves further determinations that are not needed for our analysis to define what a direct producer is.

value).

We can express our labor relationships to the elements that constitute the value of the commodity following Marx's well known formula,

$$W = C + V + S \quad (3)$$

where C stands for constant capital,¹¹³ V for variable capital, S for surplus value, and W for the value of the produced commodity. We see that the new wealth created by the worker through his/her labor would be V + S.¹¹⁴ Still, the worker gets paid a wage (V) for what he/she sells to the capitalist, which is not his/her labor (the actual value of what he/she produced) but instead gets paid for his/her capacity to work— his/her labor power.¹¹⁵ The capitalist gets the use-value of the workers' labor power (the ability to work and produce value) while giving him/her the exchange value of it (the wage)—there is a commodity exchange between capitalist and worker.¹¹⁶ At the end, the capitalist is said to appropriate the surplus value (S) when the commodity is sold.¹¹⁷ In other words, not only does the worker engage in labor for which he/she was not paid (surplus labor), but also the capitalist keeps and decides what to do with the surplus value derived from that

¹¹³ In Marx's theory it is understood that the value of the C-goods (means of production) are transferred to the value of the produced commodity. Still, this brings further complications of devalorization, specifically related to fixed capital. See Perelman (1999) for a discussion of these issues and their relation to crisis theory.

¹¹⁴ From the capitalist perspective, C+V would be the cost of production.

¹¹⁵ Marx's distinction between labor and labor-power, in combination with the classical political economy assumption that value is derived from labor, is crucial for this result. The worker does not get the equivalent of the new value that he/she has produced, but gets a wage that equals the value of his/her capacity to work, which is the commodity that he/she sells to the capitalist in the market.

¹¹⁶ Marx assumes that equal exchange differentiates between industrial capital and merchant capital, where profit is made on the basis of unequal exchange, buying cheap to sell dear.

¹¹⁷ Probably one of the most debated ideas in economic theory derives from this analysis: the source of capitalist profit is the unpaid-surplus labor performed by workers. By defining the rate of profit in value terms as $R = S/C+V$, Marx demonstrates how an increase in the rate of exploitation necessarily leads to a higher rate of profits with all else constant. Notice how this contrasts with standard explanations of profit in terms of "waiting" (a reward for delayed present consumption- saving), the marginal physical productivity of capital, and profits based on Pigouvian exploitation.

selling of the product that was produced by the labor of others.¹¹⁸

Coming back to the concrete case of musicians and their relation to the recording industry, the implied assumption made in the discourse of exploitation is that musicians participate in the creation of the new value embodied in those commodities produced and sold, mainly records.¹¹⁹ That is to say, musicians would be part of the circuit of industrial capital that takes the following well known form:

$$\mathbf{M-C (MOP, LP)...P...C'-M'} \quad (4)$$

The capitalist uses money (M) to purchase commodities (C) in the market that serve him as inputs (means of production and labor power) in his/her production process (P) that has as a result an output (C') that can then be sold for money (M').¹²⁰ For this to be considered a capitalist circuit relating circulation to production, the condition $M' > M$ is necessary. That is:

$$\mathbf{M' - M = \Delta M} \quad (5)$$

$$\mathbf{\Delta M = \pi} \quad (6)$$

In this abstract model, where we assume that commodities sell at their values, the only way a capitalist would engage in such trouble is if the outcome is one in which he derives a profit ($\pi > 0$), where profits and surplus would be understood to be the same.¹²¹

Once we move to more concrete situations, we know that the appropriator of the

¹¹⁸ The capitalist does not necessarily consume the entire surplus. This is so because he/she is required to make various distributions of the surplus to make sure that, for example, the process of reproduction keeps going on. For a critique of work that emphasizes that the surplus is mainly productively invested in the expansion of productive capacity for the sake of accumulation, refer to Norton (1994). Crotty (1993) examines the assumption of accumulation as “provisional” for the model set up in Volume 1 of *Capital*.

¹¹⁹ This article will focus on the example of physical record production and sales, although the general argument can be extended to digital reproduction.

¹²⁰ Marx assumes equal exchange in his presentation, which means the value of $M = C$ and the value of $C' = M'$, therefore tying the source of profit to the realm of production.

¹²¹ The concept of profit in this abstract model can be seen as referring to gross or sales profit given that we are abstracting from various costs that are not directly tied to production.

surplus, in this case the entrepreneur or capitalist, needs to distribute the surplus in various ways to secure the conditions of existence of the production process which brings him the surplus, and which includes paying himself.¹²²

In the case I focus on, it is clear that the commodity to be sold in the market is constituted by the reproduced units (the records), which are represented by C'. The royalties paid to musicians are then paid out of the revenues made when they are sold in the market. The question is, do those royalties represent a value produced by the labor power (V) of musicians which was bought by the capitalist to produce those copies, or do they represent a cut of the profit (M'-M) realized when the records are sold? Now that I have laid out my understanding of exploitation, let me take a closer look at how records are produced and *reproduced* to then locate the musician inside this process.¹²³

4.4 Production and reproduction of records

It is common for musicians to seek contracts with record labels for the development of new record projects or for record labels themselves to seek out musicians for such endeavors.¹²⁴ Once these projects are accepted, either these record labels assign a producer for the album or the musicians themselves choose one (in some cases one of the musicians of the group might serve as the record producer). This person works out the budget to be incurred, might have a say in the type of material included in the record, the type of recording technique used, and other technical matters. In our example the

¹²² In volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*, Marx explores various ways in which the surplus can be used. For example, a cut of the surplus can be “given” to merchants to increase the turnover time, and therefore the mass of surplus that the capitalist appropriates even though the rate of profit per unit might be decreasing. Other uses of the surplus can be to pay rents, taxes, and interest, and to hire guard labor.

¹²³ Tregenna (2009) extends Marx's analysis of production and exploitation to the service sector, which has direct application in analyzing musicians' labor and possible exploitation when performing.

¹²⁴ This description of the music industry is available at the website “Music Production: How does it take to produce a song?”: <http://www.audiorecording.me/music-production-process-how-does-it-take-to-produce-a-song.html>. With music industry I will be referring, in most cases, to the major corporate record labels.

recording label pays for the estimated costs of production.¹²⁵

Once the repertoire has been decided the band goes into a recording studio, which might be rented or be owned by the record label. The record producer normally hires an engineer who manages the equipment while the recording takes place. Once everything is recorded, a mixing engineer is hired to put together all the different pieces in terms of the audio recorded. The record label and the artists will then approve or not the audio that has been realized. Once this step is completed then a “mastering engineer” is hired who will prepare the tracks for commercial production and replication. The product of the mastering stage is the “master CD” or “master record.” If the record label and artist approves the master CD, then resources are allocated by the record label for the art related to album design, the advertising strategy and the mass replication.

Now, after all this general description pertaining musical production via the music industry, the question still stands, what position do the musicians occupy in this chain of production in relation to the final product that is sold in the market, that being the mass produced records?

4.5 Locating musicians in the class structure

If one looks at the scholarly literature regarding the relationship between musicians and record companies, the conclusion shared by most, is that the musicians are exploited by the record companies, who are said to make millions out of the records while the musicians make a comparably smaller amount.

For some, the exploitation of musicians by recording labels is the outcome of the

¹²⁵ We will not go into much detail here, but musicians might also put their own money into the production of a record instead of being funded by the record label. The reason that many try to get a contract with renowned record labels is that these companies provide massive advertising, and have significant influence over the means of distribution, such as the radio and the TV.

companies' control over the means of production and distribution (Kofsky, 1998; Finkelstein, 1988; Washburne, 2008). For others it is so evident that it warrants no explanation at all (Chanan, 1994; Attali, 2002). If you ask musicians themselves, they seem to be divided about this issue.¹²⁶

Before starting my inquiry into this problematic, let me point out that there are many techniques used for recording. Some of them involve recording the whole orchestra together in the same room. Others have musicians playing simultaneously but in separate quarters, and still others record one musician at a time, so that at the end they can combine all the different takes of all the different instruments into one performance with multiple instruments.¹²⁷ The point is that, irrespective of the technique, there is labor taking place on the part of the musicians, and as mentioned in the section on exploitation, the application of labor is an important element in outlining and understanding the concept of exploitation.

For it to be considered as exploitable the labor of the musicians must be expended *directly* in the creation of the commodities to be sold—they have to be part of the *direct producers* of the good that is being exchanged.¹²⁸ In the description presented above, regarding the production of records, we saw a whole host of personnel that took part in the production of the record, from the sound and mixing engineers that deal with the technical aspects of production, to the composers and musicians that write and interpret

¹²⁶ The interviews I conducted with the musicians in Latin-American music environment, specifically those that play Afro-Caribbean music, support this view.

¹²⁷ An example of this would be to record first the bass and piano. Then the percussionists are brought in to record “on top” of the bass and piano (they listen to these pre-recorded instruments and play to them). The brass section would then record on top of the whole rhythm section (including bass and piano) to then finally add voices and chorus.

¹²⁸ Notice that intellectual property is irrelevant once we pose the situation in terms of the recognition that those who produce the commodities receive a value that is less than the value of the wealth they produced when combined with the means of production. Again, our basic question is about whom directly reproduces, via his/her labor, the commodities to be sold.

the music. Now, the important question is; what is the good that is being sold in the market?

Clearly, the master record is not going to be sold on the market. It will be further used in the process of reproduction as an input. The labor of the musicians was directly involved in its production, as we saw in section 4. Therefore, it seems there are two plausible interpretations regarding the relationship that the musician's labor has to the massively reproduced records.

First, suppose that recording the tracks of the master record took five hours of the musician's labor, which is also understood to be the average time that this particular type of record takes. Also suppose 100 copies are reproduced. Those who assume musicians are exploited would have to claim that those 100 copies have embodied in each of them either five hours of living labor from the musician or 1/20 of an hour (3minutes) each record if we distribute the five hours among the 100 records.¹²⁹

Another possibility is to claim that those 100 copies do have the musician's labor embodied in them, but that that labor is dead labor. Why dead? Because the musicians participated in the production of a good (the master record) that would later be used as an input to produce the replications—the master record becomes part of the means of production employed by capital. In other words, their labor participated in producing one of the elements that makes up the *constant capital* component for the production of the 100 copies. Which of these two approaches is plausible?

To help solve this problem, it might be useful to remember Benjamin's dictum in the epigraph, where he says that “in principle the work of art has always been

¹²⁹ I am using the living and dead labor classification instead of the living and embodied labor classification given that I want to use the notion of “embodied” to refer to both types of labor, living and dead, contained in the commodity.

reproducible. Man made artifacts could always be imitated by men” (Benjamin 1969: 223). Benjamin's appeal to history provides one possible way to approach our problem.

For a moment, let us hypothetically go back in time to the beginning of the 20th century, where different technologies for recording were present. In those times, to get 100 copies of a song (let us now, for the sake of simplicity, suppose that a record is the same thing as one song) there were basically two options. Either the same song was recorded 100 times or 100 recorders were put around the musician while he was playing music, options that posed an obvious barrier to mass production. In these two cases it can be said that the labor of the musician embodied in each of those 100 records was living labor and therefore it could be claimed that the musician was a direct producer of those 100 records.

Going back a bit further back in history, the above story of recording technology is similar to the one regarding the production and reproduction of musical scores during the 16th century, when the composer and the performer was basically the same person. The advent of printing facilitated the mass reproduction for the scores of musical pieces, and led to a clear divide between composition and performance, and even influenced the form and style of music (Chanan, 1994: 115). Interestingly enough, the literature regarding the relation between the composer and the mass production of his musical scores identifies him/her as a receiver of one of the forms that surplus value can take, which is rent. The royalties received by the composer from every unit sold of a reproduced musical score represent a claim on the surplus based on a contractual agreement derived on intellectual property principles and laws. In other words, this rent can be seen as constituting a mechanical reproduction fee. As I mentioned at the

beginning, the class analysis I undertake is not based on property—although property relations are an important condition of existence of the outcomes—so let me now pass from the legal description to the political economy analysis.

Once a composer wrote down his/her score, every other score reproduced (not by him/her with a paper and pen, but by a printing press operated by another person or by another person copying down the score) can be said to contain his/her labor, but only as dead labor, not living, active labor. The ingredients for the process of reproduction are already given and what is needed is somebody who combines and transforms them into a new commodity. The composer has no part in this process of transforming those inputs, via living labor, into outputs. Or simply put, once a mold or original is produced, other copies could be produced of the musical score without the composer moving a finger—for all purposes he/she can be dead. The flow of income that the composer receives in the age of mechanical (and also digital) reproduction is a cut of the surplus, “his remuneration is therefore a kind of rent... and... is independent of the quantity of labor he provides” (Attali, 2002: 40-41). There is no living labor *of the composer* embodied in those copies. His/her labor is embodied, but only as dead, past labor contained in the original piece which is used as an input towards the reproduction of more copies.

This example of the fate of the score and the relationship in terms of values flows between the composer, consumer of the scores, and the reproducer gave rise to immense debates concerning how the law would apply to assign payments to the parts directly and indirectly involved in the production of music.¹³⁰ Still, what interests me here is how this story can be used to locate musicians in the production process of the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus when the commodity sold in the market is the

¹³⁰ Attali (2002: 90-101) provides an overview of such debates.

reproduced record.

The crucial point seems to be the recognition that the reproduction of more and more records can go on without the musicians incurring in living labor for each one of those new products. If we accept this, then the conclusion follows that the living labor that the musicians did perform when they were in the studio was embodied in a product, the master record, that later served as an input in the reproduction of copies, but that itself was not sold in a market as a commodity.

Following this class analysis, from the above we would have to conclude that in our example the musicians are not exploited on the basis of the mechanical mass repetition/reproduction of the master record that they helped produce. *The royalties they receive that are, for example, proportional to the amount of units sold, can be interpreted as a cut of the surplus that they receive that takes the form of rent based on an agreement on the application of intellectual property rights.*¹³¹ The value realized upon which royalties can be paid is not based on the work musicians performed, but of the work others engaged in. The musician, just like the capitalist, enjoys the fruits of the labor of others.¹³²

In the general example, the master record was not exchanged for money by its owner. The musicians and personnel were paid to produce a use-value for the record label to be later consumed as an input in another production process with the purpose of exchanging the new product. Again, musicians (and the other personnel involved in the

¹³¹ Even if we accepted the claim that 5 hours of labor incurred by the musicians to produce the master record should be interpreted in terms of them being distributed among the records produced, the continual reproduction of the records would make the share of labor contained in them smaller and smaller, basically tending towards zero amount of labor time.

¹³² Again, I want to emphasize the difference between saying that the musicians did not produce the value and saying that they deserve it.

production of the mold) could be said to be exploited if, for example, the record label sold the mold to another label and paid the recording personnel a quantity below what it acquired from the other record label to which they sold the master record. That difference could then be interpreted as being surplus value and the relations of production could be seen as exploitative, given that the record label, which we pose as the capitalist, appropriated more value than what he advanced whereas the producer got back less value than what he produced.

In the case where musicians were hired by the recording company to record, and were paid for the time spent on recording in a studio, again we would not have obtained surplus value if the “master record” was not sold. The musicians are said to exchange their labor power against revenue, not capital, because the mold by itself is not directly producing surplus given that it is not being sold (there is no surplus value *directly* derived from its production and exchange).

Finally, an important question would be; who, then, are the direct producers of the records? Given our recognition that the final product to be sold at the market are the mechanically reproduced records, and that the basis of newly created value is living labor, we would have to conclude that the exploited, if they exist, should be located inside the printing presses that mechanically reproduce the records to be sold.

In the case of digital reproduction, things are a bit different because the costs of distribution and reproduction of the songs are basically zero, which combined with the fact that not much labor, if any, go into such processes, would lead us to the conclusion that not a great deal of new value is produced, let alone appropriated.¹³³ The general

¹³³ This outcome of a “value-less” commodity is worked out in detail by Teixeira & Rotta (2013). Although not fully developed here, my dissertation does make this extension related to digital reproduction and

conclusion that follows from the political economy analysis of value in relation to labor is that as the socially necessary abstract labor required for reproducing a record falls, the capability for reproduction increases given the lowering of the costs of reproduction. To be able to make significant amounts of money out of the production of such easily replicated commodities, record companies will have to engage in activities that bring about monopoly rents.

4.6 Anti-Piracy as a Condition of Existence and the Role of Musicians

Capitalist firms and their board of directors receive and distribute the surplus produced by others in a variety of ways to try and maintain their existence and competitive position within the industry. We can state that the existence and success of such firms have a variety of economic, cultural, and political conditions of existence. The same applies to the music recording industry.

In its pursuit of profits, the MRI must make a variety of distributions of the surplus to secure its condition of existence as the appropriator of that produced surplus. Given that piracy poses a threat to them, record labels must spend money in trying to shape the meanings and symbols people attach to piracy to try and countervail the potentially undermining effects of pirate activities, such as illegal reproduction.

Musicians have been used as part of these strategies to shape the ideological landscape. Many have taken part in media productions where they directly address their fans to dissuade them from buying pirated copies. Although there are various ways in which this message has been communicated, an important constant within this multiplicity has been the message that piracy involves a *robbery* from the musician along with a *theft* aimed at all the personnel that took part in the production of the record.

distribution in relation to value-less commodities and rent-seeking by monopolists.

This discourse of robbery and theft has sometimes served to put aside the tensions between record label and the musicians for the sake of unity against piracy.

The musicians give voice to the record label when recognizing that their royalties come from the revenues derived out of the legally distributed and sold units. Their particular tension regarding the distribution of those revenues has no meaning if there are no revenues to distribute in the first place. In this outcome, there are musicians who undoubtedly believe they took direct part in the production of value embodied in those reproduced records, therefore they see piracy as theft and robbery directed towards them. Others struggle because, even if they recognize that they did not produce the value, they do benefit from the redistribution of it into their hands via their royalty contracts.

In many cases, record labels know that the precarious economic situation of many of various musicians will make it easier to get them to endorse anti-piracy campaigns. In the case of those that are relatively well off, such a support seeks to reinforce their affluent social position. Still, the reality that music itself does not provide economic sustenance for a vast majority of musicians is not sufficient to convince many about condemning piracy.

On the other hand, a well known counter-argument is that piracy extends the reach of advertising and that in turn increases the chances of musicians being invited to play live at different venues. If it is difficult to evaluate which argument has more of a following, what is certain is that musicians can occupy diverse class positions in relation to the production and appropriation of the surplus, positions that will shape their affiliations regarding the topic of piracy. They can be the receivers of surplus produced elsewhere, as we saw with the rents they receive as royalties, or they can receive wages

that come out of their direct exploitation which can happen when they perform live in various musical spaces.

Considering the above, it can be concluded that both our political economy analysis and the anti-piracy position agree on the fact that there is something that is not being paid for. For the anti-piracy discourse, those who buy pirated copies are receiving a use-value without paying for it, or if they do pay for it, they pay a person who does not occupy a legal position to be receiving that flow of money, meaning themselves (the label). On the other hand, according to our surplus approach, surplus itself is defined as being unpaid labor, and record labels appropriate the surplus from those who reproduce the records which are then being sold legally. Musicians find themselves stuck between alternative interpretations of the world and their reaction will be overdetermined by a whole host of variables that no analysis can account for.

In general, the way musicians and consumers think about piracy is clearly no minor matter in relation to the interests of these corporations. The discourse of “robbery” and “theft” common to these discussions is used to shape how consumers feel and act in relation to piracy. Take for example the RIIA, which states in its web-page the following regarding piracy:

“It’s commonly known as ‘piracy,’ but that’s too benign of a term to adequately describe the toll that music theft takes on the enormous cast of industry players working behind the scenes to bring music to your ears. That cast includes songwriters, recording artists, audio engineers, computer technicians, talent scouts and marketing specialists, producers, publishers and countless others.”¹³⁴

By continuously bombarding consumers via the media about the ills of piracy, the major record labels represented by the RIIA try to sustain their positions of power within the

¹³⁴ http://www.riaa.com/physicalpiracy.php?content_selector=piracy_details_online

industry.¹³⁵

Not only does the MRI and the RIIA intervene ideologically in trying to interpellate consumers to understand, accept and adopt the lens of the legal, but also direct interventions are made with those that are said to violate the law.¹³⁶ A cut of the surplus is also given by the record labels to a whole host of institutions that represent them inside and outside the music industry, both at the national arena—like with the RIAA, and in the international arena -with the IIPA, to take an active part in searching and identifying those who violate the law. Hundreds of subpoenas are handed out by the RIAA to individual consumers who are suspected of incurring in copyright violations.¹³⁷

Direct repression and ideological intervention are then the direct outcomes of particular surplus distributions to maintain the cultural and political conditions of existence of the process of surplus extraction, and profit making of firms. If people connect what is illegal to what is wrong, then many might decide against buying pirate copies, even if they are cheaper. The strategy of product differentiation in this case can be understood in terms of morals and ethics related to the conditions under which a product is said to be produced.¹³⁸

Finally, another struggle seems to be taking place between the citizens of the first

¹³⁵ Notice that the media in turn is controlled by the large transnational conglomerates that are owners of the companies that make up the MRI. For a discussion of the role of the mass media in shaping society, refer to the classic study of Herman and Chomsky (2002).

¹³⁶ I use the term “interpellation” in the Althusserian (1978) sense of trying to shape the imaginary of the subject, in this case in the interest of the MRI.

¹³⁷ Business Week online reported that: “In early September [of 2003], the U.S. music industry is planning to break every known rule of corporate public relations by suing hundreds of high school valedictorians, pilots, firefighters, entrepreneurs, and other seemingly upstanding citizens for stealing songs online. The legal confrontation will pit a small group of powerful, technophobic oligopolists against a hip, youthful army of digital sophisticates -- who are the very heart of the companies' consumer base.” (http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/aug2003/tc20030829_5018_tc078.htm)

¹³⁸ It is well known that firms have on many occasions appealed to nationality with their “buy local” slogans.

world and those of the underdeveloped third world. Piracy means unemployment for the former and sources of income for the latter, even if it does not represent major economic gains.

The continents of Latin America, Asia and Africa are the major markets for pirated materials and centers of pirate production while Europe and the U.S. are expected to suffer huge losses in retail sales and employment.¹³⁹ What is interesting with this is that with the coming of the digital age, pirate operations have opened up the space for non-exploitative class structures of self-employed people that reproduce physical records from the digital files downloaded and stored in computers.¹⁴⁰

In Latin America, specifically in countries like Colombia, Mexico and Peru, this has resulted in a revival of various music environments and the development of new groups that prefer to produce the music themselves and distribute it massively and freely to improve their chances of getting invited to play in various scenarios - knowing full well that their real source of income is the live performance, an expenditure of living labor.

Still, these positive outcomes do come with a backlash. On the international arena, the IIPA has put countries in a “watch list” for not improving their enforcement regimes and failing to pass new laws that are claimed to “encourage local investment,

¹³⁹ According to the IFPI, it is estimated that 1.2 million jobs will be lost in Europe because of piracy (IFPI, 2011: 5).

¹⁴⁰ I have conducted various interviews in which I confirm that in Colombia, such situation is indeed very common. The self-employed, for example, do their own CDs- they do not just replicate existing records. A certain level of knowledge is tied to these pirates and social status is many times associated with such knowledge. Still, the income earned serves as a complement to income gathered in other activities both within and outside the formal sector. Unfortunately no estimates exist to try and approximate an analysis of the class composition of Colombia in terms of how production is organized.

creativity, innovation and employment”.¹⁴¹

Also very important is the fact that “free trade” agreements between countries always have clauses pertaining to copyrights and intellectual property rights of the goods to be part of the commercial activities. In the case of those agreements that include the United States, such issues are no minor matter given that, as mentioned before, the proportion of exports that is encapsulated in this world of intellectual property comprise the biggest share of all exports. The success of the informal sector in breeding non-exploitative class structures is up for grabs.¹⁴² What is clear is that capitalist development engenders instability and tension between social groups and nations, and those situations affect directly the livelihoods of millions of people around the world, especially those who cannot be accommodated within the system and seek a way to earn their living in the informal sector.

4.7 Conclusion

The reproduction of records by other entities other than the established record labels themselves is in part a function of the lower barriers to entry that technology and the internet have facilitated. Given that these alternative outlets for reproduction normally sell their product at lower prices, which reflects the fact that they require less socially necessary labor to produce, a challenge to the survival of the firms is posed in terms of its reproduction activities in the formal sector. At the end, it seems that the cheapening of commodities asserts itself as the fundamental imperative of competition. Record labels have reacted to these new developments by spending enormous amounts of money to

¹⁴¹ <http://www.iipa.com/aboutiipa.html>

¹⁴² I do not mean to romanticize the informal sector. I recognize that within it, especially with regards to other types of economic activities, exploitation makes its presence felt and sometimes in worst ways given the lack of protections to workers, who in many cases are in their majority women.

lobby for new laws to be passed so that they get some sort of protection from these new competitors that are deemed illegal. Some musicians have taken part in these schemes to shape public perception while others realize that transformations are making the long run look bleak for the traditional MRI. What is clear is that the discourse of exploitation by musicians participates in the suppression, and marginalization of potential non-exploitative class structures that might pose a challenge to the economic hegemony of the exploitative MRI.

Musicians and their intervention in the struggle for value flows against the dominant recording industry pose a situation in which those that create the value are not part of the picture. The representation of a struggle between musicians and major record labels obscures the struggle of sectors of the worldwide population that participate in creating wealth, and which legally are considered as thieves in relation to the reproduced product.

The relevance of this issue is not only evident in the amount of pirates that are said to illegally participate in unlawful actions, but also in terms of the movements, institutions, and trends that participate in the micro and macro landscape. From pirate parties that have recognition in the European Union, to the copy-left publishers that share their products, the mechanical and digital reproduction of commodities has redefined the economic arena of production and distribution as a whole. Capitalism has yet again provided the elements to view it in a new light, a light that not only illuminates, but also potentially helps to undermine it.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The reader of this dissertation will have noticed that in exploring some plausible connections between music and class I have taken a couple of steps backward. That is to say, I have problematized some of the theoretical tools that have been used in different works to approach this subject.

As a dissertation that is located between the boundaries of a critical tradition, i.e. Marxism, this work recognizes that those boundaries are always fluent and porous. A constant rethinking of the entry-points, theoretical categories, and their applications is intrinsic to an approach that precisely emphasizes change and transformation. More importantly, it realizes that such actions do have important repercussions.

The three essays that make up the body of my contribution in one way or another reflect the above. The critical self-examination of a tradition and its consequences is written all over these pages, or at least, that was my intent.

In the first essay of this dissertation I filtered a vast and heterogeneous collection of works on Marxism and art to produce a critical survey of some of the authors that have approached the topic of music.¹⁴³ Following Williams' (1980) observation that "[a]ny modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determines superstructure," I focused my attention on how the base-superstructure architectural metaphor been deployed to explore the place of music in social totality. At the same time I have tried to show with some of the cases how this deterministic approach is inconsistent with the Marxist dialectic and

¹⁴³ The inquiring reader might want to look at Salomon (1984) for a general survey of analyzes on art by some of Marxism's most important thinkers.

Althusser's overdetermination, approaches where a notion of mutual constitution reigns over positivist notions of causality to understand being.

To start with, I traced many of Marx's remarks involving music and art that might provide a plausible basis for my project of connecting class to music. I then focused on the methodological orientation that the Marxian tradition had developed right after Marx's death in which an economic base is understood to have powers of determination over cultural and political practices. As is well known, this approach basically implies that if we "solve" the economic problems, the rest of the problems will also be taken care of. With the experience of 20th century socialism, we know that, not only were the non-economic problems not solved, but neither were the economic ones.¹⁴⁴

For my work, the critique of the base-superstructure metaphor is important because it recognizes the political potential of cultural activities in seeking to transform the economy without falling into determinisms that might, for example, posit an aesthetic view that equates "good" music with non-exploitative class structures, socialism, communism and bad music as being produced under capitalist relations. The critique of Soviet Realism by many Marxists (for example, by Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler) points to a dialectic between content and form in the musical piece that escapes the grasp of the base-superstructure metaphor as a device to explain the complex roles and attitudes artists.

Also, with the Gramscian insistence on the reciprocity between the base and superstructure we see him intervening theoretically to debunk a determinist methodology that lent itself, for example, to making the case for the forced expropriation of millions of

¹⁴⁴ Resnick & Wolff's (2002) analysis of the experience of the USSR goes further by showing how the reproduction of exploitation took place by being hidden under the veil of property and power conceptions of what socialism and communism mean.

peasants in the Soviet Union's quest to "develop the forces of production", with this *productivist* criteria echoing the profit criteria of capitalism.

In the review of the base-superstructure literature I also highlight how thinkers normally considered outside that tradition (i.e. The Frankfurt School) also sin in their approach by positing a passive subject as the receiver of a bombardment of signs and symbols through a Culture Industry. It is shown how this approach closes the avenue for understanding the possibility of ruptures with hegemonic practices that might come from within that industry.

Another important aspect of my literature review is the focus it has on the different ways the concept of class has been utilized by the tradition to engage in critical analyzes of capitalist reality while presenting possible alternatives. Theories of class based on ownership and control of the means of production *and distribution* are shown to have, given their inherent determinism, economic and political outcomes that might not be the desired ones by those that apply this analysis. I specifically highlight works that focus on the economic process of exploitation—the pumping out of the surplus from the direct producers—to provide an analysis that seeks social change. While well intentioned, I show how the blindness of these works to the class qua surplus process brings about analysis and conclusions that might further hamper attempts to provide alternatives to capitalism.

Finally, in this essay I highlight and criticize some of the studies that explicitly try to trace and locate musical labor within the coordinates of the productive-unproductive labor distinction. A common problem that I find with this literature is the way it manages the mechanical and digital reproduction of music and the value flows that emanate from

it. This is more concretely seen in the last part of my work when I take a look at a case study regarding the Music Recording Industry.

By reviewing some of the rich literature on music that comprises the Marxian tradition, I have indeed taken a step back to provide my own Marxist approach to music. Contrary to potential studies that might want to imagine and reconstruct Marx's thought on music and aesthetics based on the fragmentary writings that appeal to music, I use a particular interpretation of Marx's work based on the contributions of Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff to approach music and its multiple relations to the social and natural totality. In other words, I prioritized his method of inquiry into the workings of society rather than on his concrete and scattered fragments on the very subject of music to guide my development of a particular Marxian understanding of music.

I start essay that tries to connect class to music by recognizing the possibility of multiple musical spaces where the class process might or might not be taking place. I do this to highlight the fact that the same person might occupy multiple class positions, and that the same concrete living labor might have different relationships to the process of production, appropriation and distribution of labor.

I then explore how musical labor performed in various musical spaces to understand the class dimensions of musical production. Throughout I try to show how music affects class and vice versa, without positing one or the other as being more determinant. I also try to show how musical spaces where no class process is taking place are related to those where the class process is present. I see as a contribution the extension of other works in highlighting how such labor affect each other, and specifically how these relations might have concrete effects on the aesthetics of the

music.

Next, I differentiate between the different types of commodities that might have musical labor embodied in them (e.g. performance and records) to combine them with different examples of musical spaces to see how alternative class structures, either exploitative or non-exploitative, might look like.

I then follow up and analyze how different distributions of surplus, the subsumed class process, sustain and undermine the class process. For example, I take a look at the aesthetics changes that might take place because of particular surplus outlays that might seek to augment the surplus.

Finally, I provide a long section on how to analyze from a class perspective the musical labor embodied in a record. In this analysis I trace value flows starting from Marx's assertion that it is living labor that which creates value. From this I arrive, for example, at conclusions that oppose or contradict most of the literature that has tried to document the exploitation of musicians by record labels. This topic is what I study in detail in the last part of my dissertation.

The last essay of the dissertation combines two related topics that are probably the most discussed in the economic literature regarding music. They are intellectual property and the phenomenon of piracy with the Music Recording Industry being my case study.

I use the recognition of a discourse of theft in both radical political economy and in the discussions on piracy to compare and contrast the premises of these positions. Specifically, I use a class analysis to identify the relationships between living and dead labor and then tracing them to the components of the value equation. It is through this method that royalties are identified as rents, that is, as a particular form the surplus takes.

Once this step is taken it becomes clear that the basis of the discourse of exploitation that is adopted by many musicians becomes a struggle over distributions of already produced surplus in which the musicians *directly and indirectly* contribute to the production of the value. This last point is no minor matter when we posit the importance of living labor in Marx's scheme which points, in our analysis, that the value contained in the *reproduced* mechanical and digital units is not one *directly* produced by the musicians.

This contradiction between how the musicians describe themselves in relation to the production process, and the position they occupy in the class analysis, has important consequences. I show how the discourse of exploitation adopted by musicians, and the support many of them give to anti-piracy policies, does in fact hamper, marginalize, and eliminate the possibility of non-exploitative class structures that reproduce music illegally. As the reader will see throughout these pages, keeping theoretically distinct the perspectives that a legal, as opposed to a class analysis, has, brings about different perspectives. I try to capture this by focusing on both the production and the distribution of the surplus; that is on the fundamental and subsumed class processes at play in musical production.

I end the essay by reviewing some of the impacts that the "piracy as theft" approach has to then highlight the possibilities for an alternative outcome not dominated by the capitalist class structure.

While not in any ways exhaustive, the topics that I cover in this dissertation open the door for further research that uses class analytics to approach many issues within cultural production.

As part of a potential future research agenda along the lines of this dissertation, I have identified various topics that in my mind would contribute to struggles related to how to combine culture with economic and politics. A first topic would be that of interrogating the category of “independent labels”. It is well known that in a world where big multinational corporations control various markets, some critics have seen the alternative in precisely the size dimension. Just like many prefer competition to monopolies, some critics have celebrated the independent record label as an alternative to the multinational recording labels. Be it on the basis of nationalist/cultural or economic arguments, many believe that the way to, for example, provide the artist with a better remuneration for her efforts, is to support small independent record labels. Not surprisingly, in none of the analysis that I have seen, has the economic dimensions of the organization of the surplus been studied. It is interesting to note that “power” in the market becomes the main axis of scrutiny in those analyses.

A second and related line of further research would focus on culture being the pillar of various musical analyses. A class analysis of particular historical firms, would look at the class structure of those enterprises to see how the distributions of surplus both support and undermine the perspective people have on the cultural value of such a firm. For example, for the Afro-American case I would study Motown records, while for the Latin-American case I would study Fania records. In these cases I would explore, for example, how do anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist messages contained in the records might be circulating the world via a capitalist commodity—that is, if in effect they are commodities produced within a capitalist class structure. I would pay close attention at how the exploitation of musicians might facilitate the liberation of other human beings at

different places and moments. The point is that it seems to me that a class analysis of the music recording industry opens up a new continent of possibilities for struggle given the break with the teleology of historical materialism as well as the reductionism of the base-superstructure framework that a class qua surplus analysis provides. This type of analysis would be part of a broader movement that is breaking away from the realities of 20th century socialism in trying to reinvigorate a political activism constrained by the teleological understanding of social evolution embedded in many radical analyzes based on a determinist understanding of Marx's critique of modern society and the capitalism that inhabits it.

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