"FAVOURITES OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY":
POPULAR RADIO AND RISK MANAGEMENT

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates from a social-institutional perspective, the rationale for the dominance of one type of format over another in commercial radio. I argue that the panoptic sorting and selecting of target markets is responsible for the present status quo - radio which is dominated by particular formats and which has come to exclude the diversity that characterized popular radio in the past. In addition, the increasing reliance on information access and control as facilitated by technology, has led many commercial stations to follow the most important demographic group, i.e., the market most sought after by advertisers. Currently, this group is the "baby-boomers", and the proliferation of A/C, Classic Rock, Oldies and "Soft Favourites" stations reflect this strategy. This marketing emphasis also effectively marginalizes the great majority of new, non-mainstream music to non-commercial formats.

The Vancouver radio market is investigated in respect to these issues. I present data from interviews with local radio programmers to understand 1. How do the perspectives of station executives affect format decisions? 2. What factors are most influential in determining format and to what degree are these factors standardized? 3. To what degree is information shared and distributed (i.e., an open market) among competing radio stations? 4. How have format considerations changed over the past twenty years? and 5. To what degree do station executives rely on standardized information collection techniques to influence and/or determine decisions regarding the format? The data from commercial sources are compared with public, college and co-op radio material to highlight the importance of economics in formatting decisions.

I suggest that an economically-based rationality characteristic of media operations in a "risk society" largely determines the format possibilities in commercial radio. This in turn, limits the choices available to the radio listener. Although cultural implications are not discussed in detail, this thesis will provide substance for arguments examining the effects of the exclusion of an important cultural-expressive form from mass distribution.

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Chapter 1- Commercial Radio in the Risk Society

Introduction

This thesis concerns a sociological problem. A good friend of mine and an esteemed sociologist once told me that the best sociology comes from a particular problem of understanding in the often taken-for-granted social milieu. The problem, very simply stated is thus: How is it that one form of entertainment culture could be "popular" in one or more pop culture media and not in another?

Alternative music[1] is suggested as an example of a form of entertainment in so-called "popular culture" that is effectually assessed as "unpopular" by the decision-makers of commercial radio, a supposed vanguard of music popularity. Making the problem acute is that several key indicators suggest that Alternative music qualifies as a "popular" musical style. If commercial radio is audience-driven in that it plays the music that its listeners want, then why does the vast majority of Alternative music not appear on the playlists and formats of these radio stations?[2] I present several arguments early in this thesis to suggest that it is a policy of risk management within the organizational economic rationality of commercial radio that is of prime importance in this problem.

My goal in taking this approach is an attempt to understand the problem without resorting to conspiracy theories (*"they* don't want to play *our* music") on the

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[1]Otherwise known as "grunge" music, Alternative emanated out of the Seattle music scene in the late 1980's and early 1990's with headline bands such as Nirvana, Soundgarden and Pearl Jam to name only the most popular in terms of notoriety in the recording industry. I do not make any claim to define Alternative music in neat categorical terms, but for the purposes of this thesis I will use the term to denote music that defines itself as outside the typical mainstream of "hits" radio. It is generally loud, fast, aggressive rock music stripped of the strings, multiple re-takes and synthesizers that characterize so much rock n' roll of the 1970's and 80's. It is not heavy metal or punk, though these are influences. It is the music of basement and garage bands; not pretty or polished, but energetic and socially-conscious.
[2]A similar question could be raised about the lack of Dance, R&B, Rap, Reggae and other music styles "popular with young people but not played with any regularity by commercial radio stations in this market. I have deliberately chosen to use Alternative music as an example in this thesis, but the reader may infer the data contained here to other so-called "youth music".

one hand, and strict economic determinism ("if there was a market, we would play it") on the other. I offer some rational arguments substantiated by data which suggest that neither of these arguments is particularly worthwhile. I suggest that radio operates within a framework which has come to characterize all commercial media enterprises in this day and age- the increasing attention to risk in a highly competitive entertainment market. I make a further argument in the last section of this thesis that this risk rationality marginalizes certain listening audiences. It is this marginalization that is popularly referred to as an "us vs. them" conflict of two demographic groups - the baby-boomers vs. Generation X.

The Risk Society

Risk, as it is used in this thesis, refers to a specific rationality where the threat and the danger of a possible or potential action becomes the focus of concern and the dominant consideration in the decision to do or not to do something. In this sense, risk carries a two-part meaning. 1) It is a definition that suggests danger, threat or injury. Actions or behaviours suggesting negative consequences come to be associated and assessed as risks. Smoking cigarettes is a risk in that the dangers to one's health are known to a large degree and the decision whether or not to quit often involves the degree to which one takes the risk seriously. In the economic sense, risk is a term that suggests the possibility of loss. It is often suggested that taking risks implies opening oneself up to the threat of loss, in that certain actions which endanger the security of the investment are seen as "risks". Investment planning is often associated with risk in that certain investment vehicles are assessed on a risk scale, with the potential gains being equated with potential dangers of losing one's money. 2) Risk is also about the process of calculating the probabilities of profit against loss. It is the rationalization that

suggests one course of action over another in order to minimize loss to produce gain. It is at this point where we can see risk in an institutional sense, where risk becomes a rationality which allows variables to be weighted according to how they may increase or decrease the likelihood of goals being achieved.

In the risk society, the rationality of systems become concentrated on the management and assessment of risks. Risk becomes the basis on which the decision is made. A great deal of this type of rationality results from the fact that the consequences of actions are not known in a definitive sense. Risk rationality then is the process of identifying, classifying and assessing risks on the basis of what is known and more important, what is not known. "To put it differently, in the risk society the unknown and unintended consequences come to be a dominant force in history and society" (Beck, 1992:22).

Yet these risks that are evaluated and the framework in which they are considered do not exist outside of society. The industrial society actually creates a great number of risks, suggesting that the so-called progress of society generates an increasing supply of risks. By extension, the ideas and methods necessary to account for such risks must become increasing complex. But risks produced by modern industrialized societies are theorized, considered and pondered. They are often outside the direct control or perception of a society.

> In modernization risks, then, things which are substantively-objectively, spatially and temporally disparate are drawn together causally and thus brought into a social and legal context of responsibility. As we have known at least since Hume, however, presumptions of causality escape our perception. They must always be imagined, implied to be true, believed. In this sense too, risks are invisible. The implied causality always remains more or less uncertain and tentative. Thus we are dealing with a theoretical and hence a scientized consciousness, even in the everyday consciousness of risks (Beck, 1992:28).

This reference to science is significant in that the call to science to deal with these risks goes largely unanswered. That is, the realm of expertise legitimated by science is not able to explain away the potential harms of the risk society. "Science's rationality claim to be able to investigate objectively the hazardousness of a risk permanently refutes itself" (ibid: 29). The scientific experts compete against each other to identify and assess risks, but these are always based on probability and never on a "known" quantity. This does not suggest that science is of no value in risk assessment – quite the contrary. It is more correct, however, to state that scientific rationality cannot eliminate the risks of a modern industrial society.

It is this product of the risk society, the problem of risk which must be subjected to the rigours of scientific study and yet which does not succumb to its examinations, that is of principle concern here. When examined from an economic perspective, this presents a conflict in that the rationality that requires answers, can only offer probabilities. Thus, greater and more complex methodologies to determine these probabilities are employed. The precise effects and outcomes of actions in a highly competitive late capitalist market are not "known" per se, they are modeled, projected, predicted and hypothesized. Yet more up-to-date and precise claims must be always be made. At the same time, the dangers and threats of miscalculation become more apparent. The increasing complexity and diversity of the market promote a risk rationality which is based on what to target and what to avoid (Gandy, 1993: 89). This avoidance aspect becomes crucial in competitive environments, especially where losses are highly significant. This is the case in Canadian commercial radio, where the industry as a whole has lost a significant amount of its revenue base in recent years (C.R.T.C., 1991). I argue in this thesis that the risk rationality in the competitive environment of commercial radio in Vancouver, determines the limits and possibilities

of format choices available to listeners. The increasing dependence on probability calculation to minimize loss to produce gain, is an excellent economic example of one manifestation of the risk society.

The Business of Commercial Radio

Some points of clarity need to be stated to substantiate my argument. Commercial radio is first and foremost a business. "Radio stations are in the business of making money, not the business of playing music" (Rothenbuhler, 1987:81). Starting from this point we have to acknowledge as well, that businesses are ever-mindful of protecting their market share in competitive environments and therefore they inevitably manipulate and control information. Creating new sources of revenue is still important, but it is the protection against loss to enable the constant flow of existing capital that uniquely characterizes doing business in the "risk society".

The attempt to manipulate and control information to protect against loss is conceptualized by Oscar Gandy (1993) as a process of "panoptic sorting". Borrowing a concept from Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault, Gandy argues that through the processes of identification, classification and assessment, the modern corporate actor "sorts individuals into categories and classes on the basis of routine measurements. It is a discriminatory technique that allocates options and opportunities on the basis of those measures and the administrative models that they inform" (ibid: 15). Thus, in the case of radio, this argument suggests that the "individuals" mentioned are the listening audience, and the "categories and classes" are the target markets which are determined as having varying degrees of value.

A value is placed on a particular class of listener not in terms of their worth as loyal listeners or fans of the station, but in terms of their worth as potential consumers of the advertiser's products. While all consumers have value, there is a market of supply and demand for certain segments of the consumer market, and advertisers target certain consumers for their products. The audience is segmented in ways that match numerous consumer characteristics, such as age, sex, income, as well as music listening preferences to products that are offered in the marketplace (Cantor, 1994:163-164). Indeed, the advertising market has become considerably more skilled in recent years with the aid of computer technology, in narrowing the scope of target markets. Upper income female professionals above the age of 35 who reside in upper-class neighborhoods, for example, are the current target of choice for many advertisers (ibid:164).

Of course, the point is to entertain the listener in between the advertisements, so the radio advertiser must select a station that will most likely entertain his or her type of consumer. A format is selected on the basis that the music, talk, personalities and overall image or "sound" of the radio station meet the needs of the advertiser. But what the advertiser is really buying is access to an already defined market. That is, the advertiser is buying the radio station's ability to produce X number of potential consumers - people who are likely to be receptive to whatever the advertiser has to sell. It is for this reason that media critics often refer to the advertiser as buying the audience (Smythe, 1981; Picard, 1989; Peterson, 1994).

The radio station identifies itself and its listeners by its format. It is a carefully selected mix of elements that characterize the station as appealing to one group and not to another. The station attempts to identify its format with its market and its market with its format. In this way a bond of loyalty and "trust" is built between provider and

receiver. The listener seeks a station with which he or she can identify and the station needs to manipulate this connection in such a way as to promote the idea that the station meets the listener's particular needs. This is evident in so much of commercial radio's own advertising, in that it affirms that "its your type of music". The emphasis on individuality is important, for it stresses the symbolized individual as being uniquely associated with the format of the station. This is seen in countless examples in modern advertising culture where the link between individuality and product is continually forged to manufacture a new identity- the brand-identified consumer (Gandy:1994:10).

This trust relationship between service provider and receiver is interesting in the context of radio because of the level of abstraction involved. The listener is to a large degree an imaginary entity to those inside the station's environment. Even with all of the advanced research into the profile of the listener, there is no direct contact and no direct personal relationship between parties. Further, radio is a blind medium in that it offers its audience no visual image of itself (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1991). The listener has only the aural sense with which to construct the image, and must fill in the conceptual gaps about information relayed and the people who distribute such information. Giddens (1991) suggests that abstract relationships such as this involve trust, as there are no moral rewards offered such as there would be in personal exchanges where each party is known to the other. The listener is asked to accept that the voice they hear is speaking directly to him or her and that the programming they hear is made with their particular interests in mind. The relationship involves a number of trust issues between the station and the listener, most notably that the programming is directly affected by the listener in terms of requests, but also by the promotional spots and regular chatter that suggests that the listener "owns" the format in some way. A personal relationship is suggested, based on trust, which is manipulated

to produce loyalty and identification with the format. I will have more to say on the issue of trust and the corresponding risks involved, in the last section of this thesis.

The trust relationship is much less of an issue between the station and the advertisers, as the buyers want to know exactly what the seller is offering and how the seller intends to deliver the intended results. Specifically, the advertiser wants to know how the format will not only deliver the consumer, but the right consumer. The format delivers to the advertiser a target market of listeners who identify with the image of the station and who possess certain characteristics that qualify them as desirable in one way or another for the purposes of marketing. It does not deliver a mass in the sense of a large diverse group; rather it offers to the advertiser a more narrowly defined homogeneous collective which is of a higher value (Barnes and Thomson, 1994). Commercial radio formats over the past twenty-five years have become more sensitive to this narrowing of markets and the specialization in radio is proof positive of this development. This is in large part due to the need for stations to carve a niche in a competitive market and to attempt to deliver what the others do not. It also suggests that advertising agendas such as profiling and delivering a market have become important variables in the radio industry and especially in radio programming.

One could argue that the segmentation of markets has produced a wider range of programming choices for the consumer, and the narrowing of markets and market ideology has meant that radio is paying more attention to what its listeners want to hear. The question must be raised then about whether what exists on the radio today is an example of "choice" and whether the listener is the beneficiary or the victim of this narrowcasting. Can it still be called *choice* if so much of commercial radio is formatted using standardized principles?

One important point to remember here is that there is competition for markets beyond those specified by radio stations. As Peterson (1994) suggests, there exists a creative tension caused by the differences between the markets sought by radio and record companies, and the actual audiences themselves. Radio for its part, has become more cognizant that playing more established hit songs, the records that have a known success factor, is the easiest way to gain and hold listeners (ibid:173). The reliance upon "gold" has become noticeable in the proliferation of Oldies, Classic Rock, and Favourites of Yesterday and Today type formats. As more stations began playing more of this type of music, the newer artists attempting to get their music played, have had to "fit" their music to the sound of this style. This represents one aspect of how old and new music have been combined into the same format to produce what Peterson refers to as "predictable" radio.

The record companies have, over time and to a certain extent, developed their markets and their products outside of the immediate scope of radio. Dance clubs initially popularized disco and Latin and Caribbean-influenced rock, MTV brought us New Wave[3], and non-commercial stations were vital in the development of Punk Rock's success. It can be argued then that radio has, on several occasions, occupied a rearguard position as opposed to an avant-garde spot in respect to musical innovation (Peterson, 1994). It also suggests that the record buying market, the mass audience and the record companies need not necessarily be in sync. But the question that concerns us here, and the question that is generally not answered in the field of media critique, is Why does radio ignore music that is "popular" in other media and how is it possible for this to occur?

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[3]MTV, in its early days needed a ready supply of cheap music videos, and the demand was met in the UK, where record companies had been producing these videos for several years to promote their artists' albums and concert tours. Thus, the early MTV generation became an audience for a style of pop music that most probably would have achieved much less success on radio alone (see Barnard, 1989).

Peterson suggests that we may have a situation like the late 1940's, where the music that is offered is not the music that is wanted by a large segment of the audience (1994:174). This suggests that the music media have somehow lost touch with their listeners and that the music industry as a whole, has suffered because of this. But while he does not offer a more in-depth account of how this mismatch is manifest, he does make one distinction that is crucial to the understanding of the main problem of this thesis. He argues that audiences and markets are two very different concepts, especially as they are applied in commercial radio.

> The images that communicators hold of their audiences are ... selective. And because the audience that communicators know is constituted by the methods and categories of measurement currently being employed, it seems appropriate to reserve the term *audience* for all the people who actually receive a media message, and the term *market* for the audience as it is currently conceptualized and measured by media decision makers (1993:171).

The classic case to illustrate the difference between audiences and markets is the 1960's story of two competing tobacco companies and their sponsorship of two prime time television programmes in an attempt to increase sales of their products. Each company, using a different network broadcaster, was attempting to get the largest audience share in the same time slot, thereby getting the most exposure for their product. The theory at the time was that more exposure equaled more sales, and thus the competition was fierce. One company sponsored the *I Love Lucy* situation comedy, while the other chose to back the drama series *Medic*. As Peterson (1994) writes,

> *Lucy* regularly received a higher market share. The sponsor of *Medic* canceled the program because of its relatively low ratings, and *Lucy* went on to be one of the top-rated programs of all time. Subsequent research found, however, that the cigarette advertised on *Medic* gained greatly in sales, while sales of the brand advertised on *Lucy* remained flat. Apparently, the broad comedy of *Lucy* attracted an audience consisting primarily of nonsmoking youngsters and older adults who did not smoke or who were set in their smoking preferences, while the tense real-life dramas of *Medic* attracted a younger adult audience more malleable in their cigarette preferences (1994:171-172).

I will explore this issue in greater detail later in this thesis, but it is enough to state at this point that the differences between the two terms account for a substantial part of the answer we seek.

A quick recap here before I carry forward the argument. I began by arguing that radio is primarily a business, and as corporate actors in late capitalist markets, radio stations must pay particular attention to minimizing loss to promote profitability. I referred to Gandy's position that increasing amounts of consumer surveillance are employed to "know" the listener as much as possible to determine the best methods for selling the consumer their product. Listeners are stratified according to their worth or relative value to the station and its advertisers, and this homogeneous aggregate is then purchased by the advertiser.

A format is constructed with these variables in mind, and the mix is intended to appeal to a certain audience. This audience is more correctly termed a market because the entertainment industry in general and radio in particular, have become much more skilled at defining which segment of the audience they wish to attract. This targeted group is then "delivered" to the advertiser. The format as the prime tool for bringing revenue into the station is considered successful if it can deliver the required market to the consumer. It is only natural then that the marketing and programming departments work together. The format is constructed and maintained with the successful procurement and stability of revenues as its primary task.

I am suggesting more than just the development in information gathering as a factor in which decisions are made about radio formats. I argue that the drive to access and control greater amounts of information by agents in radio organization has become to a large extent, an end in itself. I suggest that the simple "knowledge = power" equation in radio has produced positive and negative results. While I do not wish to

minimize the fact that advances in technology and marketing design have enabled radio stations to become much more aware of who is listening and for what reason; I promote the idea that this knowledge has been "colonized" for economic purposes and at the expense of a perhaps nostalgic notion of *broad*casting. It should be stated, however, that radio is not more guilty of this "knowledge is power" trend than any other commercial media, and what we are seeing here is the product of the "knowledge society[4]" and not conspiracy.

"Knowledge is Power"

It is trendy in the popular press to speak of the "information age", and to suggest that information is a resource that has come to constitute power for its bearer. Yet it is more enlightening and more applicable to think of this "need" to amass substantial amounts of information as a process of filling in the requisite gaps in a knowledge system. Bohme and Stehr see this system as becoming increasingly "scientized" in the sense that it is structured, authoritarian, and objectified. Knowledge then becomes expertise, and capacity for action increasingly limited to so-called "experts" (1986:9). The "scientization" of knowledge then requires that every effort must be made to make the "unknown" - "known", because the capacity exists, and capacities must be fulfilled.

Michel Foucault points out however, that entities to be classified and differentiated are not always within the visible realm, and thus inferences must be made (1973:136). These inferences or blind spots are the constituency of the expert knowledge of the marketing director, the research consultant and the programming director in commercial radio. It would be impossible and counter-productive to gather information from every prospective or current audience member. Modeling,

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[4]From Bohme and Stehr (1986), *The Knowledge Society.*

inferencing, profiling and other highly technical terms are used by researchers and consultants to design a composite image of the quasi-fictional listener. A process such as this fills in gaps with the expert knowledge of what is expected or common. "When the paridigmatic vision of the panoptic machine is linked with the futures of bureaucratic organizations and the individuals who stand at their helms, the incentive to find precisely what has been predicted is often too powerful to resist" (Gandy, 1993: 17).

This knowledge then must be applied in some way that affects the economic picture of the enterprise. In the case of radio, the knowledge is assessed in such a way as to differentiate between what is and is not possible, with risk as a major if not singularly determinant variable. This is not to suggest that mistakes are not made, for of course they are[5]. The point is that the knowledge is used in purposive, deliberate ways by experts to determine what is available. This aspect of the "difference machine", as Gandy uses the term, may produce a conflict between what could be offered and what is available.

There are many potential sources of knowledge for the radio professional to assess whether or not a format is meeting its objectives. On the surface, there are listener requests, the input from record company representatives, BBM ratings, trade magazines and other elements of pop culture such as other media, which could be used to provide knowledge on what the audience wants. I now want to address each of these to give the reader an understanding of how these other ways of knowing are prioritized, and what this means in terms of the objectives in format considerations.

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[5]A good discussion of the problems created by too much marketing information and by conflict among experts, is found in Peterson's analysis of National Public Radio in the mid-1980's (1994:177-179).

Ways of "Knowing"

BBM Ratings

By far the most widely known method of information gathering for broadcasters, ratings are, for better or worse, the single most influential source in determining a radio station's economic success. This is not to say that they are the most important or the most valued tool of the station programmer, as I shall demonstrate at a later point. It is important however, not to understate the importance of ratings for the marketing of the station. To the programmer or music director, they are one indicator or measure of the station's success in delivering the programme that listeners want to hear. To the current and prospective advertiser, ratings represent the dominant measure of how well that station is doing with the target group. If the advertiser is selling acne cream, it is important to understand which radio station has the highest ratings for 13 to 17 year-olds. In contrast, the developer of condominiums in New Westminster is certainly not interested in marketing to this crowd. More likely, he or she is looking at an older group, with significantly different characteristics. Their market would probably be 25 to 40 year-old urban professional couples.

The ratings book is a tool for the radio station's sales force, and it is a catalog of sorts for the advertiser. Thus, matching is done to fit the target group with the buyer. It is for this reason that advertisers are called primary or direct consumers of radio, as they are buying access to a particular market or target group (Bogart, 1991)[6]. The station then, is selling that group to the advertiser, and BBM ratings are a popular tool toward that end.

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[6]It should be mentioned that radio has a number of audiences. Shareholders, advertisers, professional peers, musicians, listeners (conceptualized as audiences or markets) and any number of other categories of people all can be defined as audience groups. What is relevant here is that certain categories take precedence based on their value and their risk factor.

While ratings do serve the additional, or perhaps prior purpose of indicating listener preference, it is true that they have many problems as a measurement tool. Ross Eaman (1994) outlines several of these in his discussion of the CBC, although the issue certainly applies to both public and private radio. The most oft-heard criticisms of ratings argue that they reflect the agendas of advertisers and are not used primarily as voting tools for listeners; that they are biased toward heavy listeners (read consumers) and predisposed against light listeners; that they suggest equality of programming choices where in fact, it does not exist; that they suggest equality of audiences, when this is incorrect; and last, that they suggest a fictitious picture of popularity being comprised of both enjoyment and audience size (see Eaman, 1994: chapter 9).

It is not my purpose here to display these arguments in full, as this is done quite skillfully by Eaman and others in this field. Rather, I should like to bring forward what I feel to be the relevant issue. Ratings, being primarily a tool used to market audience groups to advertisers, lack the depth to be genuinely useful to station programmers and salespeople as indications of the complex preferences of the target group. True, the ratings book is used in deciding format continuation or changes, or personnel moves. Yet the true value to radio station programmers is its representational value. The book, published four times a year by the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement firm, represents a picture of the station's success (or lack thereof) to its customers, to other media, and to regulatory bodies. What it does not represent is the complete picture that the programmers and sales people need to see.

Consider that the BBM ratings book is a report card which gives only a snapshot of the station relative to its competitors. While it can show indications of trends, it gives little contributory information on consumer preferences for what the station is really selling- advertising time. Broadcasting executives learned a long time ago that the

picture of audience share and consumer preference was more complex than meets the eye, and the aforementioned story of the competing tobacco companies is a testament to this fact.

That story and many other lessons learned by broadcasting professionals, promoted the idea that ratings were limited in their value to sell consumers to advertisers. In radio, ratings were and still are a promotional device that shows the results, in part, of the work programmers have done with the on-air sound over a period of time. Yet, programmers and sales people know enough not to rely on ratings, both because of their limited access to and information about potential markets, and because of their immediate obsolescence feature[7]. Ratings, to some extent, tell the programmer what he or she has been doing right or wrong over a recent past period of time. What they do not provide, is enough information about what the station should do next.

Record Industry Representatives

Consider the situation of two radio stations with substantially different formats, one playing "Contemporary Hits", and the other promoting "Golden Oldies". If your job is to go into that station on a regular basis to promote new material, you would most probably spend the majority of your efforts on the former station. In fact, you might be better off passing on the Classic Hits stations altogether, as most of their listeners already own the product you are selling. Your directive is to sell what is new and upcoming, while the classic hits station's programme is to sell what is old and familiar. It is no

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[7]The contradiction between the "immediate obsolescence" of ratings and the "continuity factor" of music on commercial radio is made more clear if one conceptualizes ratings as tools which measure the popularity of what already exists, not what *could* exist. Further, ratings are often used to assess the viability of on-air personality changes, promotions or programmes, rather than individual songs. The music aspect of the format is much more stable than the job security of the morning disk jockey.

surprise then that the record company representatives spend the majority of their efforts on convincing programmers of contemporary hit formats of rock, pop, and country, to promote and play their product (Barnard, 1989).

We must remember however, that the programmer's primary responsibility is not to sell records- that is the job of the record company. There is no doubt then that the task of this agent, the industry representative, has become much more difficult. This is especially relevant when one considers that so few radio stations now are consistently playing new non-established material (Peterson, 1994). The record company representative must promote many uncharted and often unheard of acts to programmers and music directors, who are more concerned with consistent success and the maintenance of the format sound. The representative is also faced with ever-increasing competition from other information sources that attract the programmer's attention. Finally, the record company representative has to accept that he or she is viewed with a degree of scepticism by risk-conscious radio station staff, especially the programmer and music director. These agents, in order to sustain any degree of success in a highly competitive field, must be on top of music industry trends, issues and personalities. In this sense, what the record company is offering is rarely an unknown entity, as radio staff already have a pretty good idea of the trends in the business. The programmer, knowing what is already "out there", wants assurance that the product will perform in his or her market. That being the case, one could suggest that if the record company really has actively to sell the station on the artist- then the product probably has not done enough to make the sales job easy for the record company representative.

Requests

I need not spend a great deal of time discussing requests, for programmers and music directors, in designing formats and playlists, do not spend a great deal of time considering them either. The reason is a simple one. Listeners call up a radio station to hear a favourite song. The odds are that they call the station that they feel will most likely play the song, and perhaps for this reason, they may call the station that has played the song in the past. While listeners by and large know little of format decisions; they do know what to expect from the station in terms of broad music styles. One doesn't call a classical music station to hear Garth Brooks.

At the same time, radio stations play requests not to keep one listener happy, but to give the impression that the station is playing the music their audience wants to hear. It must be made clear however, that first and foremost, a radio station plays only the music it already considers part of its format. So, whatever requests are played, have already been pre-approved by the music programming staff. Those that don't fit the bill are passed over. It is for this reason that many requests are taped, and then played later as if they were live. This not only gives the disc jockey and technician the time to find the track; it also allows the staff to consider whether the request fits the format. The result is that the disc jockey talks to the audience member over the phone on the air, hears the request, and then immediately plays the selection. Not only does this add to the presentation and flow of the programme - it also suggests to the audience that the radio station listens to *them*, and gives them what they want right away. They appear to be in the driver's seat, and that station is a place that plays *their* music.

This is a particularly interesting point from the aspect of "authorship", in that commercial radio provides a "necessary illusion" that the listeners determine what is aired. Radio can then claim a greater level of interactivity with its audience than other

media. Other than audience polls, television and newspapers do not offer the same type of user proactivity. In radio, the response appears to be much more immediate. In fact, "authorship" is denied because the listener's action must fit the pre-existing format of the station.

Music Industry Trade Magazines and Newsletters

When you have a great number of people in important positions who need to take account of massive amounts of information in order to do their job, you will have greater numbers of people trying to supply that demand. Trade magazines are attempts by programming services, record companies, advertising firms, ratings companies, research consultants, and any other business that wants to sell something to someone else in the industry, to get their product in front of their audience. They represent a news format heavily packed with advertisements. The articles and reports are thinly disguised ads, suggesting that the trend is "this" or "that", and that the smart radio executive should take note of certain types of music, musical groups, technologies, etc... Beyond that aspect, radio trade magazines are a way for radio personnel to obtain knowledge from others in the business. Articles and editorials are often written by radio professionals in other markets, explaining their general market strategies, characteristics, and problems. Ownership issues, including corporate trades and major personnel moves are also highlighted.

Just as in any other industry, trade magazines are valued by some and ignored by others. Many radio personnel will find only certain items of interest to them, usually those that have a bearing on their markets. But here, as in the case with record industry representatives, the information has to be viewed by the programmer or music director as only one of a number of possible sources of information. As well, because the person

in question is programming for a particular market, and perhaps a particular market niche, he or she will often view this information as a sceptic. That is, how does this data relate to me, make me more informed and provide me with information that I do not already have? Trade magazines have to be seen as contributory data. The business of radio is too competitive in terms of segmented markets to suggest that trade or newsletter information is anything other than background material. One further point should be made here, and this is that trade magazines which show hot new music groups and trends, are of little use to the "gold" stations. In contrast, their interests are much more likely to be demographic research trades. As in many institutional environments, information flow is structured around use value.

Private Research

As stated previously, in an information age, knowledge is power in radio as in any other competitive industry. A radio station, in the business to make money, has to be concerned with getting precise, accurate and timely information about a host of variables which affect his or her bottom line. As I stated earlier, BBM ratings are of marginal value in directing the course of action for programming. The radio executive wants to be informed about taste preferences of the market, i.e., about the goods they buy and don't buy, their work and leisure activities, their modes of transportation, their sources of news and information, their standard of living etc. In short, the research-conscious radio person wants to intimately know his or her target so that they can offer a product that fits that targeted person's lifestyle. They want to make the unknown - known. As Ang (1991) suggests, the goal of audience research is to give substance or control to the broadcaster where there previously existed "uncertainty". With respect to this effort Gandy rather darkly states...

The professionals involved in market research and risk analysis are not substantially less scientific in their methods and certainly no less consequential in their conditioning of behaviour than any who fall within Foucault's category of the objectifying social sciences. They are all characterized by the same "vast compilation of data, the proliferation of dossiers, and the continuous expansion of new areas of research developed concurrently with a refinement and flourishing of the disciplinary techniques for observing and analyzing the body, so as to make it more available for manipulation and control (1993:23-24).

We must remember that radio stations generate revenue by selling advertising time. Beyond the ratings, they need to show prospective clients why their product will deliver the audience that will buy the advertised good. As the reader may recall from the story of the *I Love Lucy* television programme, the highest ratings do not necessarily move the most product, though they certainly are important. It is more important that the seller of advertising time **know or appear to know** what the market needs. He or she needs to deliver the access route to the consumer, and also to be able to deliver the message to the consumer that will most likely result in higher sales for the client. But knowledge implies that you have some basis on which to rest your pitch to the client, and this means quite simply that you have to demonstrate to the client by numbers, charts, graphs etc., that your station can deliver the market that the others cannot.

We have a fundamental problem here. If a salesman of a bottom-ranked station is out competing in the same market as the top-ranked station, is it not the case that the advertiser will take one look at the ratings and realize that they can reach a much larger market with the more successful station? Well to some degree this is true, and salespeople of low-ranked stations work harder to bring in clients. On the other hand, the conceptual and practical differences between audience and market must be recalled.

The salesperson of the low-ranked radio station does not go to the client armed with figures showing low audience ratings- he or she is instead armed with a number of research studies demonstrating that a particular market is currently being under-

served and that the radio station in question can deliver that market. This technique is not confined to the stations who need to cover low ratings. The top stations in any market rely on private market research to create new sales opportunities and to solidify their current base. Research done by the station, gives a much clearer picture of who the market is, and how they can be reached, than any other single method. Private research allows broadcasters to carve out niches in the market that is already inundated with sellers trying to reach buyers. In this sense, advertising strategies are designed to meet very particular needs, to access a very particular market which may include the variables of age, sex, skin colour, income, social status, employment, etc...

I have already mentioned that radio is struggling to compete in a late capitalist market which provides the consumer with a vast array of entertainment choices. Radio then, has to be adaptable to meet not just the identified needs of the consumer, but also the unidentified needs. Private research firms are employed toward this end, and whole formats have been designed around the data which these firms provide (Lorimer, 1989). It was through this research, for example, that the format of "soft favourites" was born. Market research identified a massive demographic group known commonly as the "baby-boomers", who did not want to be introduced to the new single. This group wanted the familiar songs of their youth, and they did not want to be jolted with loud, angry rock and roll. They, by and large, were settling in to a comfortable middle-age lifestyle, and they wanted the music that would accompany that life pattern. I will have much more to say on this subject at a later point, but it bears mention that the value of private research cannot be underestimated in cueing radio professionals to fitting and filling the needs of the market.

To this point I have focused my attention on the theoretical aspects of format creation in commercial radio in order to demonstrate how audiences are segmented according to their value as consumer target groups. I argued that panoptic sorting within a system of economic rationality has produced a dominant ideology in radio which identifies, classifies and assesses markets on the basis of perceived risk. I further suggested that the need to gain greater amounts of specialized knowledge about markets has resulted in a radio scene over-reliant and dependent on stability and consistency, and which lacks the impetus for innovation.

It should be emphasized, however, that non-commercial radio with its lack of advertising, is able to programme its formats in a completely different manner. In college radio[8] for example, risk only enters the domain of format creation in considering government regulations concerning content limits of certain types of programming such as Canadian music. Yet this type of risk is minimal at best because it is static - there is no potentiality or future tense to this type of risk as it exists in commercial radio. Revenues are much less of a concern, particularly with college and co-operative radio. This is not to say that station managers or programming directors[9] do not worry about money in these environments. In co-op radio, the station manager must constantly make efforts to keep the station operating by bringing in non-advertising revenue such as member donations from individuals and corporate sponsors. This is quite different from profit revenue, and has no impact upon the format other than a request to the on-air personnel to ask for more money to keep the station alive.

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[8] I use the term "college radio" to denote both university and college-based radio stations.
[9] It should be noted that many co-operative stations have no programming director as such, principally because there is really no programming to direct. I speak more about this aspect in the next two sections of this thesis.

The difference between bottom-line and profit revenues cannot be understated because formats are not affected. Both college and co-op radio have a pre-stated mandate to deliver a wide range of eclectic, non-hit, programming that is specifically non-commercial in its nature. There are no numbers in terms of ratings or audience satisfaction figures. The programming and the financial health of the station are two quite distinct issues, and this allows non-commercial stations such as these to be as different from for-profit radio as they possibly could be.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's radio division is similar in some respects to the college and co-op stations in that it's revenues are non-commercial, but it is a national publicly-funded concern, and therefore must be seen to deliver the type of service that its benefactors wish. Again though, there is no strict and immediate financial effect on the format, in contrast to commercial radio. Revenues are set for the upcoming budget year, and while there are concerns to use the revenues more efficiently to avoid waste and overlap, there is no direct financial link to the format. Programming more or less of a certain type of music or current affairs will have no direct impact upon the money that CBC radio will receive in the next year.

As in all non-private operations, a mandate is set for accountability. The format must represent the Canadian public, and therefore the programming must reflect the interests of Canadians as a whole[10]. CBC radio operates under a partial exemption order from the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission which treats it as a service distinct from commercial radio. As a national service, the CBC must reflect the interests of all the regions in Canada. For this reason, major format decisions are made several times a year by regional radio directors and programming vice-

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[10]While the Canadian Broadcasting Act does mandate all regulated broadcasters to conform to standards which protect and promote Canadian culture, the CBC is viewed as having a special relationship to this model. It is for this reason that the CBC is treated as a "special exemption".

presidents in a consensus format. That is, the regions are represented in a general policy which is distributed nationally and influenced locally.

The CBC radio does not run advertisements, and thus the format is not directly determined by the immediate financial considerations of sponsor revenues. This is not to suggest that the format is unaccountable, for CBC radio is directed by the C.R.T.C. to program a format with its listeners directly in mind. The policy suggests that the audience, in its widest sense, is the direct beneficiary of the format, and therefore that its needs are of considerable importance. It is for this reason that CBC radio participates in BBM ratings. Exactly how the ratings affect the format and other accountability issues are covered in the next section.

The following chapter of this thesis describes in much more detail and from an empirical perspective, the decisions involved in formatting a radio station. The majority of the section involves data gathered from interviews with programming directors and station managers in commercial radio formats in Vancouver. For contrast, I also include a discussion on non-commercial formats, using material from interviews with key personnel in these fields. The reader will also find information on satellite programming services, record sales, trade magazines and music television.

Chapter 2 - Research Data

"Doing Radio" in Commercial Formats

In the first chapter I presented a quotation which suggests that it is agents of organizations rather than individuals that should be the focus of an investigation which examines rationality within systems. It is for this reason that I have chosen to examine risk in popular radio in terms of how decisions are made by executives who use set patterns, categories or structures to manage their occupational environment. For radio in the risk society, this translates into carefully planned decisions which are based on established principles of minimizing loss to produce gain. It also suggests that the unknown quantity is "colonized" to the degree that all perceived threats to profit are investigated, categorized, and possibly limited or eliminated.

Where the operating principles of radio as a business enterprise are based on economic growth and stability, we would expect to find that agents within these organizations direct their work-related actions toward these objectives. Thus, the goals of the business are the goals of the employee, and ideas and actions are made to conform to the organization's agenda. This is the crux of organizational rationality within the economic framework - the business must succeed, so the agents involved must give that concern priority.

It is for this reason that I directed my research efforts toward understanding how the business of "doing radio" is manifest in the actions of commercial radio executives. My hypothesis was that the decision-making process in the modern radio industry was itself formatted, in that risk had become a primary concern within economic rationality. One method of looking for this rationality within such an organization is to hear the voices of these professionals, and to let them express their

views on the variables which are involved in the creation and maintenance of radio formats. This approach allows the theory to "speak for itself", in order to give a better understanding of how radio works.

In order to give the subject the opportunity to express him or herself with the freedom to stress which issues were most important, I chose to interview radio professionals in a semi-structured format. After arranging a mutually convenient time and place for the interview[11], I took with me a set list of 31 questions which were arranged in categories of "change", "formats", "market considerations", "economics", and "the audience". The questions, however, were arranged in such a way so as to permit the subject to carry a particular issue beyond the limits of the particular inquiry. The individual questions were by no means closed, with the offering being carefully phrased to allow for broad to narrow answers, according to the inclination of the respondent. More depth will be given to the questions in a later section of this chapter, but for now, I would like to discuss in more detail the subjects whom I interviewed, their roles, responsibilities, and pressures in modern-day popular music radio.

The Programme Director

Why did I choose the programme director over numerous other radio station personnel who are involved with the on-air product? The answer is actually quite simple. The programming director, or "PD" for short, has become almost solely responsible for the radio station's product - that is, everything that comes out of the box. This is a fact that became quite obvious in my early research for this project. The PD's responsibilities not only involve, but also overlap, the duties of all other personnel in the station. While he or she may not hold the title of station manager, they are responsible

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[11]All interviews were done at the place of business of the subject.

for managing the station's output. They have some measure of control and/or influence in almost every aspect of radio operations.

As stated in the preceding chapter, there has developed an increasing emphasis on the fortunes of the station (advertising revenues) as influenced by markers of success (ratings, research targets). Thus, the for-profit station is directed toward obtaining the audience for which the advertisers are willing to pay. The PD's job is to deliver that audience. By and large, the PD no longer has the *primary* responsibility of programming the music on a daily basis - this is the responsibility of the music director (MD). The other types of programming, i.e., news, sports, and weather, are also managed on a daily basis by the respective department heads. We can say then that the PD is more responsible for directing the team of professionals, and less responsible for the routine functions of daily operations. It is the format that is of prime concern to the PD.

I have discussed that the format *is* the product of the station, and this product has to be tailored in such a way as to appeal to the advertiser and his or her investment dollar. Because of this fact, the PD has had to become more aware of various research methods and techniques, so that the station's audience includes (and perhaps focuses on) the advertiser's market. If the PD is primarily responsible for the format, then he or she is, by extension, primarily responsible for the revenues of the station. In this light, the programming of the format must take into consideration the needs of the marketing department. The degree to which this organizational rationality has changed over time was one of the issues that was brought out in the interviews.

The Interviews

While it is certainly true that there are other personnel within the radio station who could facilitate an understanding of day-to-day operations, I felt from the outset of this project that my focus should be on the key decision-makers who are ultimately responsible for the station's format. It was my intention then, as I began to determine an interviewing schedule, to arrange a separate interview with each station's programme director.

However, due to economies of scale in late capitalist competition, a single owner may, and often does, operate several stations within the same enterprise. At the same time, the managing of several formats is often controlled by the same programming director. An "oldies" station and a "classic rock" station may appear to be completely different operations from the sound of the format through the radio, but in terms of the dynamics of media economies, they may be run as though they are the same. This is indeed the case at several stations in the Vancouver area. The very same PD responsible for a country station also programmed an adult-contemporary format (AC). Another programmer was managing "soft rock" and "oldies". In today's radio scene, it is an established trend in media operations to run two or more stations in a chain, even where the formats are substantially different[12].

This trend toward efficiency in directing radio operations substantiates my thesis of modern-day radio as primarily a business operation. Further, it suggests that economic principles such as standardization, stability, order, risk management, resource efficiency, and multi-tasking, are more much prevalent in radio today than ever before. Economic efficiency and risk management are extremely important variables here, as

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[12]I suggest that local radio best fits this economic model as compared to television and newspapers with different format and market orientations.

fewer people make decisions with greater responsibility and greater consequences. Those decisions then, take on the character of late-capitalist economic principles already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, i.e., assessment and identification of threats toward loss, increasing awareness of potential gains to be made by minimizing risk, and increasing need and ability to control resources through technology.

Accounting for the fact that several programme directors controlled the formats of at least two stations, I often found myself asking the subject to wear two different hats in the same interview. This actually worked out quite well, as I suggested that each question, where relevant, be answered separately with respect to the characteristics of the format in question. A particular inquiry such as "Where do the record industry representatives fit into the programmer's role", *could be* answered quite differently from the "pop" perspective as opposed to the "oldies" viewpoint. What turned out to be the case, more often than not, was that very similar answers were given for each format. I make arguments concerning this situation in the last section of this thesis, but I was intrigued at the ability of the PD to manage what *appear to be* two quite different roles with relative ease. This disparity between the perception and the reality is significant, for it demonstrates that there is really only one role - the business of radio determines that one role is all that is necessary.

Data were collected from almost all of Vancouver's radio stations, including a range of formats from "golden oldies" to "dance", from "country" to "college". In addition, I managed to speak to marketing directors and station managers, as a few PD's shared these roles as well. Many of the programme directors interviewed had worked their way through the radio industry as disc jockeys, music directors, advertising salespeople, as well as many entry-level positions, and thus could provide me with

additional insight into other facets of radio operations. In total there were 12 interviews covering commercial, non-commercial, and network / satellite services.

The actual interviews with private radio station programming directors were scheduled in advance through an initial request letter on official University of British Columbia letterhead. This letter gave a brief description of the thesis research problem and the general types of questions which I proposed to ask. I suggested that I would telephone the recipient in the next week to arrange for a mutually-convenient interview date and time. At this point, I informed the potential subject that my questions were intended to provide me with data to assist me in understanding the nature of format creation and maintenance, and that no direct quotations would be used in the text of the thesis. I made this assurance because of my understanding of popular radio in major markets as a highly competitive industry. I therefore wanted my subjects to feel at ease to discuss, as much as they felt comfortable, their ideas and emotions regarding their position in the station and in the business, and about popular radio in general. I present now, the data of the interviews with the programme directors, divided into the sections:

- *Personal data*
- *Change and Technology*
- *Formats*
- *Ratings*
- *Competition*
- *Trends*
- *Economics, Influence and Risk*

Personal Data: The Background of the PD

There were a total of 31 questions in the interview, and two of these inquiries related directly to personal data of the PD, such as how long they had worked in the industry, how long they been a full programme director, and what other formats they had programmed. As expected, all of the PD's had been in the radio business for at least

ten years, with a few having worked in radio for more than twenty years. Length of experience in programming was also substantial, with the average being in the 15 to 20 year range. With respect to other formats in which PD's had worked, the average here was 4, with the low being 3 and the high being 7.

The data suggest that PD's in this market were experienced professionals who had spent considerable amounts of time in the position and in the radio industry. They were well-traveled in the radio business, and through present or past experience, represented almost every current format found on popular radio. These professionals were well-equipped with the knowledge and experience to answer the research questions posed to them, even where an issue may have been outside of their current format area.

Change and Technology

I asked the PD's questions regarding change in popular radio to assess the degree to which they make a distinction between a radio which was more music-driven and one which puts more emphasis on market factors. I wanted to get a sense of movement in the direction of radio, if any, to understand how popular radio has come of age in a late-capitalist market. From the PD's perspective, I was interested in what these changes would mean to the job function, and how this might affect the prioritization of variables in formatting a station. Technological changes would most probably be important as well, as the argument can be made that the products of technology often precede their need, suggesting that changes in format variables might be produced by the fact that something *can be* done as opposed to the need that something *should be* done. Last in this section was a query regarding innovation, to understand the PD's assessment of popular radio in terms of its ability as a medium which leads the audience as opposed to

following it. This also suggests how the programmer feels about the general direction of

radio in comparison to the time period in which they began the job.

Table 1: Change and Technology

	How has the role changed since you started in the business?	What role has technology played in the changes in your position?	In what ways has the audience changed and how has this affected your position?	Is radio more or less innovative now than in the past? Why?
A/C	More competition, more research-oriented. More need to understand market dynamics. Much more competition.	The growing trend toward the FM signal. Digital automation and storage capabilities. Allowed us to be better managers - taped programming, time shifting etc.	Less uniform - more specific in needs. Radio has changed in its views of them. They are tougher to research, they have more interests and are more diverse.	More. (Not as much as listeners want) - Less overall. Programmers doing less programming and more marketing. More.
Oldies	Utilizing more research applications. More responsibility for the overall sound. More knowledge of people management needed.	Computer information technology i.e., music library, cart system.	It's harder to find the cultural centre. Harder to unite cultural groups. - we give the audience more choices - program toward the niches.	More.
Classic Rock	More emphasis on the established artists and the tried-and-true. No major changes. More emphasis on quality control.	Voice tracking, satellite feeds, networks. Loss of real personalities, and trend toward computer research.	Listener patience has diminished. It's harder to sell product. They are more fragmented - radio has had to become more narrowly focused.	Less. We're moving toward trend of American niche formatting. Radio has less personality. Market-oriented.
Pop	More research-oriented. PD has become more responsible for everything that station produces.	Computer database management. Projections, modeling - allows PD to sculpt sound toward niche.	We've trained the audience to be more discriminating by giving it more choices.	More. We're learning to use new tools to understand the market.
Country	Role is growing every year - many more responsibilities and duties.	Network feeds - radio is becoming virtually automated.	Audience is more "modern". We have a younger crowd who want younger personalities.	Less. It's become much more narrow and market-driven and less changeable.

Nearly all of the PD's in every format suggested that emphasis on research had

become a major concern in popular radio. The programmer was much more likely to

be spending his or her time attempting to understand the market, both in terms of the

consumer and the competitor. The answer to the first question appeared to set the tone

in all the interviews, as every PD interviewed suggested that information collection and

assessment had changed the role to a large degree. The answer from the A/C format is

interesting for its emphasis on the "need to understand market dynamics". Here it is

shown that the PD's role has grown considerably, in that their responsibilities go well

beyond the station's format. They must take into account the local competition as well

as national and international trends in the industry. Market trends must be considered,

especially where they have the potential to affect the bottom line. Thus, a large part of the PD's job has become market analysis and "looking at the numbers".

All of the subjects stressed the importance of technology and it was equally important in every format. Technology has had major effects on every aspect of radio operations from producing the product to understanding the market. Emphasis was placed on database management, where programmers are able to call up a number of variables to model or "sculpt" the sound of the station without actually having to change the format. Programme directors have the ability to access massive amounts of information to examine how the station's sound could be altered to stress certain defined targets. One example of this is profiling, where a target market is defined, and the programmer can plug in a number of variables which are designed specifically for that group. A selected focus group can assist in determining whether that particular mix of music, talk, pace, advertising etc., will work or not with the larger audience.

Another important use of technology has been the developments in hardware. Digital technology has allowed improvements in access to pre-recorded material and its delivery. It was suggested that better access has allowed PD's to become better managers, in that it allows more tools to be under the control of one person. Satellite technology, for example, has enabled the station to utilize programming sources far beyond its previous capabilities and geographic reach. Network feeds can deliver music, news, sports, weather, advertising, talk programming and even the disc jockey's patter. The local station can choose, according to variables such as its budget, to use short or extended feeds from external sources. Some stations utilize satellite / network programming for up to half their broadcast day.

There appears to be a fair bit of consensus among the programmers concerning the audience in terms of fragmentation and the efforts needed to reach a more

narrowly-defined audience. Four of the five formats here suggested that the audience had become more particular in terms of its tastes and that it had become necessary for the programmer to gain more information on how to serve those needs. It was also suggested that the audience has become more culturally diverse. In addition, the larger audience group has more choices for entertainment, and so more of the PD's job is spent trying to reach a group that has become more scattered. This question of audience change raises an interesting problem- "Has radio adapted to the change in the audience or has radio "manipulated" audience groups by directing its product in certain ways?"

It is interesting to note that the Pop format, which plays the largest amount of non-established music and therefore does the most on-air experimentation with its sound, suggested that commercial radio has "trained" the audience by giving it more choices. It could be argued (although by no means a definitive assessment) that the less-established format has a less-established perspective, in that here, the emphasis is on following a different path from research-dominated programming. This aspect of the Pop format is brought forward in a later section of this chapter.

There was no real consensus on the issue of innovation in commercial music radio, as it appeared that some programme directors focused on the advances in technology to assert that radio has made advances in delivering the services that consumers want. Other programmers in different formats, suggested that radio has become more attached to what research directs, that is, to relying on what is established before altering the delivery of the product. Clearly, depending on whether one sees innovation in terms of marketing or rather in terms of the overall picture, the answers can be quite different. This suggests again the "half full - full empty" argument, in that research-dominated radio adds to, or alternatively detracts from, what radio was in the past.

Formats

Programmers consider various factors in the formation of the playlist, and give priority to some over others. The boundaries of the format and playlist are other considerations here, as narrow target-driven formats are highly structured entities usually designed for a particular group of listeners. The broader format is often a mix of several styles of music, talk, pacing and personality, and much less niche market-driven. Risk management demands a tighter, more controlled format. Thus, the formats which utilize the greatest amount of established old gold and current hit artists are more likely to shy away from non-standard, non-established material to which the target market has not already been introduced.

Table 2: Formats

	What factors or elements are put into the formation of the playlist?	In what ways is this format different from others you've worked in?	Do you get requests for music outside the normal operating format? What do you do in such an instance?	Have you ever felt that the format of your station was too narrow or too broad?	How much new music from non-established artists do you play?
A/C	Research, target marketing, conservative factors - whether or not it fits the "sound".	More attempt to appeal to both old and new. Very conservative. More narrow - risk oriented.	Yes, if on playlist. - We get requests but we don't play them.	Can't be too narrow. Can be too broad. We want more variety but it's dangerous.	Don't play "breaking artists". Seldom. More adventurous at night.
Oldies	Has to fit the "sound". Lots of research. It's all about blending the mix.	More niche formatted and more emphasis on stability and familiarity.	No. - Only if on playlist.	There are too many niches in pop radio. Danger in being too broad.	No.
Classic Rock	Indep research, some record sales, trades. Compatibility with existing format.	Very established and risk sensitive. More stable and consistent. -Leaning toward taking more chances.	Only played if on existing playlist. More leeway in evening.	Can't be too narrow. Can be a danger in playing it too safe with this target market.	30-40% "new" artists. Try to promote local talent.
Pop	What's "hot" is blended with existing "sound". Also look at what people are tired of.	We look at the audience's needs first. Willing to take more risks - filling a niche not served.	Yes, if they fit the existing format.	We had to broaden because we were too target-driven. Needed a bigger audience.	60% new.
Country	Trades, other cities in NA. Mostly gut feeling - adding to what you already know.	Tighter format - format is looser in evening.	N/A	Perhaps too broad.	Gold to current (90's) ratio 30:70. Danger in bringing in too much "new" at once.

Research information and whatever "fits the existing sound" were the most important factors for the majority of programmers across formats. Most if not all major commercial radio stations today employ at least one consulting firm to advise and provide information on format decisions. Private research has become a major variable that directly influences all decisions concerning the format and playlist. Because of the tight competition in most major markets, radio stations are not willing to risk making errors in formatting on air. They are much more likely to use a number of data sources, especially consultants, to test and project reactions from the audience. Conservative influences are the most important in the creation and maintenance of formats in popular radio. This is slightly less so in the Pop format than in others, but here too, the programming director is unlikely to make a major change to the format style without consulting the "numbers". Pop, country and the classic rock station which is attempting blend in newer music, are the most likely formats to draw upon record sales, music trade magazines, and concert attendance to assist in decision-making.

The majority of programmers interviewed suggested that their current format did not differ significantly from others in which they have worked, but that the current style is more geared toward a particular niche in the market. Terminology such as 'conservative', 'risk-oriented', 'narrow', 'stability', 'familiarity', and 'consistent' were stated in the interviews with regard to their current format. The pop format was the exception here, with programmers noting that they had chosen to go into territory where the other stations were not - the niche not served. This meant deliberately taking risks and taking into account other factors beyond target marketing. They felt that the younger crowd who wanted a greater proportion of newer non-hit material as well as dance and some rap, were under-served. The programmer made a distinction between this and other previous formats of the station, noting that in this particular format, they

had chosen to swim against the tide to some extent. This is not to say that this wasn't a marketing decision based on attracting a greater market share.

There was complete agreement across formats in regard to listener requests. Only those songs which are already on the playlist will get played as a request. To a degree, this makes perfect common sense as a rock and roll station should not be expected to play a country song. That listener would be directed to call the station most likely to play that request. However, formats are the result of careful research, planning, coordination, and effort. Most radio stations and especially those who are "hits" or "gold" oriented, script and plan everything that goes over the air with an eye to the total "sound". A listener request that is outside of the established boundaries of the format is then considered to be a risk. This is especially relevant in daytime radio where the largest and most lucrative audience tunes in. Thus, a song requested which stretches the format has a more likely chance of being played in the evening.

Another point of general agreement is the emphasis on "not being too broad" in the format range. Some programming directors suggested that it is not really possible to be too narrow in today's radio marketplace[13]. This suggests that generally, commercial radio is not in the business of trying to win a broad audience with a broad range of programming to serve some notion of public need. It is more the case that radio formats today are more "successful" if they target a narrow group of people with certain defined characteristics. Since the format is well researched before it is employed, this suggests that research drives formats. I will have much more to say on this point in the final section of this thesis.

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[13]It should be stated that there is a possibility of a format being too narrow, but the general consensus among programme directors interviewed here was that there is much more danger to the bottom line of the station in being too broad and not being able to deliver a specific target to the advertisers.

The issue of playing non-established artists is one which divides formats in terms of their target market and in terms of their position vis-à-vis C.R.T.C. regulations. The Commission currently requires commercial music stations on the FM band "to limit the use of hit material to less than 50% of the popular music selections broadcast during a broadcast week" (Gant et al, 1993: 222-3). A "hit" has been defined as any musical composition that has reached one of the Top 40 positions on a chart in a nationally or internationally recognized trade publication" (ibid). AM radio formats are not limited in their ability to play the "hits". Yet it must be noted that the C.R.T.C.'s definition of a "hit" is better defined as a "current hit". The FM station is not limited in its ability to play old hits. It is for this reason that I queried the PD's regarding non-established artists (NEA) and the degree to which they get exposure on the particular station. Although the definition of a NEA is somewhat open, we could suggest that it is an artist who has not had a previous placing on the Top 40 or Top 100 charts. By playing a NEA, the radio station would be introducing the song and the artist to the listener and promoting the sale of their record or concert.

As table 2 presents, the expected answer of this question regarding NEA's from the Oldies and Classic Rock stations is 0 to 40%. The Classic Rock stations have recently begun to increase their NEA quota, which may be a result of the recent ratings success of the Pop format and the awareness of this so-called unserved niche market. Of interest also are the responses from the Adult Contemporary and Country stations. The A/C format is known to listeners by many catch phrases such as "soft favourites", "hits of yesterday and today", "music for your life" etc. What you will not hear on this type of station is a phrase such as "music you've never heard before" or "tomorrow's hits". This type of format is built on the tried-and-true system of playing consistent familiar music that has an instant recognition factor. There are no surprises and even the "new"

music is drawn almost completely from musical artists who have a history of chart successes. The country station, similar to those in other markets, does play a fair bit of "new" music, but again, the majority of these selections have been proven on the charts and in other locations.

Ratings

It seems that ratings are a contentious issue with just about everyone. In the popular press, television ratings are often accused of being an undemocratic tool used by networks to provide just enough data to reinforce what decisions have already been made. Other accounts suggest that media programming is often focused completely on ratings, and that overall, the program content suffers because of them. Media-types do not usually sing their praises either, for ratings represent a standard tool that holds little relevance for what information they need. Ratings appear to be a necessary evil for both audience and the broadcast media, and I was interested in how programmers view them and how ratings fit into the grand scheme of formatting the station.

Table 3: Ratings

	Is there a link between the ratings book and job security?	Are ratings a measure of job performance?	Are ratings more important now than in the past? Why or why not?	Are ratings the dominant consideration in radio on-air operations? Should they be?
A/C	Yes, to a degree. Ratings = $$. Depends on ownership.	They are, due to importance of ratings economically. Taken with grain of salt.	Always important but private research is gaining ground. Ad agencies buy ratings.	Yes in competitive markets. They don't address under-served markets - low reporting.
Oldies	Yes. Short term no - long term yes.	Yes. Some good programmers are out of work based on ratings.	Yes, but good programmers keep them in perspective. Don't knee-jerk.	Yes, but too much $$ spent on research may not be a good thing for radio.
Classic Rock	yes. 1 point = $750k. Depends on ownership.	Yes but you try not to panic. More important in niche formats.	More important. It's what advertisers think that counts. Current book counts.	Yes. No.
Pop	Yes.	Yes, especially in big markets.	They are dominant but they're inconsistent and unscientific.	Yes. BBM is getting better and they are still critical to the station financially.
Country	Yes, but it depends on ownership.	To a point, but you have to recognize the limits of BBM.	They will always be important as long as revenue is tied to ratings.	Most important element in pop radio today is $$. Therefore ratings are dominant because they determine $$.

All the programme directors interviewed for this research agreed on the issue of the ratings' relationship to job security. Some were more unequivocal than others, but there appeared to be a general consensus on the fact that ratings have a direct relationship to revenues. As such, it must be understood that factors which affect ratings, especially in a negative sense, are viewed intensely by programme directors, station managers, and owners. Further, the stakes in major markets such as Vancouver are very high, leading one PD to assert that one point in the BBM ratings scale has a value of $750,000.00. With that much riding on each book in a given ratings period, the programmer has to make every possible effort to make sure the numbers are at least as good as, if not better than, the last book[14]. It also calls into question the flexibility of the station's management and ownership, as a loss of 2 points in a ratings period represents substantial downward pressure on the advertising rates which the station may charge. Thus, a "bad book" as it is called, has the potential to make station employees, especially on-air personalities, nervous about their job security. It is most likely that the immediate effects will affect the on-air personnel, even though their "agency" in respect to the radio operations is minimal. Again, the actors are much less "stable" and much more expendable than the overall "sound" of the station, as listeners will often tune in at certain times to hear a particular personality.

The programme directors interviewed suggested that the type of ownership factors into the reception of negative ratings at the station. Owners who cannot stomach a loss in a particular book are much more likely to demand immediate changes. One of these changes may be the format, but it must be noted that a format, like a hockey team, is made up of a number of different contributory elements. It is not

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[14]BBM (Bureau of Broadcast Measurement) ratings books are published three times yearly and involve a ratings period (sweeps) in a very similar manner as television Neilson ratings. A good discussion is found in Eaman:1994.

practical to change the entire team when a string of losses occur. Likewise, in radio wholesale changes are usually more of a last resort. It is much more probable that the smaller units of influence will be changed in some way. Ratings also measure smaller time periods during the broadcast day, and these figures along with the station's private research, give a more accurate picture of each part's performance. It must be stressed however, that ratings represent a unit of value for the advertiser who decides where to allocate his or her budget. Thus, a disc jockey in the early morning drive-time slot whose ratings are down, may well start to pay more attention to the classified section of the local paper, because he or she knows that they now represent a risk to the station in terms of market value. The PD is in a similar position, but as stated, they are responsible for the entire product, so it is more likely that their position will be evaluated after the other changes have not proved successful.

There was a little more reservation shown with regard to the relationship between job performance and ratings, suggesting that ratings are viewed with considerable scepticism inside the station. The independent research of the station is considered to be much more reliable than the BBM survey, and thus a particular disc jockey's lower performance in one book which contradicts the station's private research is likely to be discounted. Where there is consensus between private research and BBM, or where the trend is seen as considerable, the game changes. One must remember that ratings are important for their representational value, and in this sense, the risk element comes into play as a negative number represents a potential loss of revenue.

It does not appear from the responses that ratings are losing importance in commercial radio, but the programme directors interviewed suggested that the value of private research is becoming more prominent within radio itself. That being said, it was stated that as radio becomes a higher stakes enterprise in the arena of tight competition

for segmented markets- the ratings game will be played with increasing fervor. With each ratings point carrying more and more value, it is becoming the case that it is the potential to predict and influence ratings that is gaining ground. Those methods and practices which precede BBM and help to minimize negative ratings will be more valued as the stakes rise.

Competition

Does the competition in major markets affect the type of format decisions that are made in commercial radio? It may well be that competition is a standard variable in all commercial markets regardless of location, but the PD's I spoke with suggested that competition was becoming more of a factor in directing the path of radio, especially in the bigger markets. This set of questions was designed to generate understanding of the issue of organizational rationality based on the competition ethic. More specifically, I wanted to know whether the idea of winning and keeping (or perhaps not losing) market share dominates the operation of the format to the point where the late-capitalist ethic (including risk management) overrides the idea of having fun. While I am not suggesting that radio should be a trivial concern for its operating personnel, I wanted to get some insight into whether commercial radio, and especially rock and roll radio, could still be considered an "anything goes" environment. Radio stations which cater to the younger crowd make it a point in their advertising to suggest that the station represents "fun" and enjoyment, and that this off-the-cuff on-air attitude makes that station a good choice for an audience who want to be entertained. Is it the case then, that a radio scene dominated by a competitive rationality has taken this "edge" away and replaced it with a radio that is too afraid of chancing losses by potentially offending the listener, or more important, the advertiser?

Table 4: Competition

	Can you assess the competition in this market? Is it fierce or collegial?	Do you exchange information with other programmers / station managers?	Is the radio scene dominated by competitive rationality?
A/C	Fierce - more than Toronto but less than the U.S. Very competitive on FM. You have to program to ratings to get higher ratings.	There is some crosstalk but not usually within the same market. Positioning makes things difficult.	Yes especially at PD levels. It's an information war. Yes, especially in certain formats.
Oldies	Similar to other large Canadian cities. In our format having the highest ratings doesn't = the highest revenue.	Only out of market.	Yes - to do with positioning. You have to watch the numbers and be very aware of risk.
Classic Rock	From the business perspective - fierce. Contributed to a loss of professionalism - has hurt radio which doesn't take risks anymore.	To some degree but mostly out of market.	Yes, you study the competition. You have a game plan but you keep your eye on the market. Some lead - some follow. Leading gives you a jump on the competition but it's risky.
Pop	As competitive as other Cdn cities but nowhere near as competitive as the U.S. market.	Not in this market although you do share gossip on occasion (who moved where, got fired...).	Sometimes you lead and other times you follow. Marketing warfare - you have to watch your susceptibility to risk. It's easier to innovate when you're big.
Country	Very competitive especially in FM country. There's a good demographic here which we caught onto years ago.	Yes but not in this market.	Yes, means relying on your own research.

Programming directors were unequivocal in their assessment of commercial

radio today as very competitive. It was also highlighted that the level of competition

was nowhere near as high as that in the United States. This may be related to the

population numbers in the major markets and with government regulation, but I will

leave that assessment to others. In the Canadian sense, competition is still viewed as

severe, especially in the larger centres such as Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal.

Generally speaking, the PD's suggested that more listeners mean more competition, and

this again would point to C.R.T.C. regulations which limit the number of stations in a

major market based on factors such as population in the listening area.

Competition is not confined to a simple battle for the highest ratings numbers. It

is also vital that the radio station do well in terms of the competition for available

revenue. This means simply that there is stiff competition among stations, especially in

major markets such as Vancouver, to grab the lucrative target markets. For example,

the Adult Contemporary, Soft Rock and Oldies formats in particular, are catering more

and more to the demographic group of women aged 35 to 55 years-old. Inside this

large group, are smaller targets such as professional women 35 to 45 years-old[15]. The

targets can be extremely narrow depending on what niche the advertising market

deems to be valuable at any given point.

According to several programmers I spoke with, the level of competition has

indeed made radio over-sensitive to risk at the expense of innovation and "fun". None

of the programmers described radio as collegial or friendly in terms of rivalry, and it

appears that none of them speak with their counterparts in the same market, with the

possible exception of some light gossip about each other at the occasional conference.

The rivalry was described by one PD as "an information war", where marketing

techniques, plans for promotions, and predicted trends are treated as closely guarded

secrets. I would suggest that the relatively recent move by the C.R.T.C. to group the

rock, pop, and dance (and including adult contemporary) categories together has only

strengthened this situation.

Finally on this area, several programmers mentioned the analogy of a race,

where the competitors fight for the lead by strategic positioning. This means that the

station weighs a number of variables to decide whether it is better to lead or to let others

lead in the game of winning audience and revenue share. One programmer suggested

that risk plays a large part in the game, noting that innovators often open themselves up

to attack by other stations when they pull ahead of "the pack". In this sense, when one

station appears to have covered a particular niche market particularly well, or when it

is able to attract a lucrative advertising market; it is obvious that the attention of the

other stations will be focused on that success and formula will be copied. A Vancouver

example might be the success of the Pop station that caters to the young listener wanting

to hear more Alternative, Dance and Rap/Funk music. The other classic rock stations

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[15]These are examples for the purposes of explanation only. Each station or network has its own
profiling targets.

have taken notice of the Pop station's rise in ratings share (and likely advertising revenue) and are beginning to infuse more newer music from non-established artists into their formats. The Pop station now has to look over its shoulder so to speak, and may have to adjust its format to ensure that the competing stations don't pull away too much of it's market share.

Trends

When respondents addressed trends in radio, I was expecting to hear that certain styles of music were "hot" or that a particular format was gaining popularity. I did hear this from a number of programmers, but it was the additional information regarding the direction of radio, as produced by the increasing emphasis on economics, that was particularly intriguing. A number of the PD's in various formats stated in no uncertain terms that narrowcasting to appeal to niches in the market, economies of scale and technology, results in automated radio and research-oriented risk sensitivity.

This direction of radio is not viewed positively by those who manage it on a daily basis. I do not want to give the sense that the PD is altogether unhappy with the industry. I do suggest though that programmers, particularly in the more youth-oriented formats of Pop and Rock, have become disillusioned to a degree with the increasing trend of market-research-based rationality that limits the boundaries and possibilities of radio. I received the impression that radio programming is less fun and adventurous for these professionals than what it may have been twenty years ago, prior to the computer modeled format and the electronic database. One PD suggested that radio has become increasingly inhospitable to the entry-level prospective employee who wants to learn the ropes and work their way up to programming. The positions are too few and the level of expertise too great to allow for this scenario on a wide scale.

There also seemed to be a nostalgia for the programming style of trying new concepts by putting them on the air. With the increasing emphasis on risk management; the programmer now models his or her ideas on focus groups, and depends to a large degree on the results of the consultants' research. Formatting toward the research numbers seems to have taken some of the fun out of radio.

Table 5: Trends

	What are the current big trends in commercial radio from your viewpoint?	Where do you see Alternative music fitting in to the scheme of things in commercial radio?	What effect has music television had on commercial radio?
A/C	Narrowcasting, syndication, cost considerations (bad trend). More narrow formats (i.e., all 70's). Radio becoming more research-oriented.	Not for mass consumption. No one else can play it (too risky). Vancouver may be too small for Alternative. It's becoming mainstream.	The market is big enough for both. It provides indirect competition overall. Little effect on adult radio - not same audience.
Oldies	Watching and programming for cycles. Ad hoc radio. Narrowcasting and target marketing. Emphasis on research-based formats.	It's being brought into classic rock and pop formats but it's not big enough to get its own format. Don't really know anything about it.	None on this format. We don't cater to the teen crowd.
Classic Rock	Album-oriented rock. Syndication, cost cutting, voice tracking, blandness, lack of excitement.	Big hole in Vancouver market but no one will risk filling it. FM is making $$ here - no impetus. Risk alienation of audience by playing it too much. We play some but?	No huge effect.
Pop	Responding to the individualized market. Narrowcasting, subgrouping, niches. American economy of scale management.	Audience is 18-34 group. CHR goes to where trends are. It's trendy to fit it into the existing playlist.	None.
Country	Album-oriented formats, syndication. 70's retro is big.	It's hard to conceive of what it is anymore because a lot of it has been brought into the mainstream. Real alternative will always remain on the fringe.	Two very different formats so the effects have not been bad.

It was in discussing Alternative music that "risk" appeared more frequently and with more precision than on any other issue or question. Here, many PD's, especially those whose formats feature the "hits of the 60's, 70's, 80's and today", assessed Alternative music as a risk option. This type of music is simply too removed from their main diet of programming which fits the mix of stability, familiarity, comfort and unobtrusiveness. Alternative music then, would be seen as an element which might offend or surprise the listener and might cause them to jump to the competitor- away from their advertiser's message. That Adult Contemporary avoids Alternative is not a surprise, anymore than the fact that they avoid punk, rap, ska reggae or heavy metal.

The musical styles are too different for the tight mix referred to above as "stability". What is a little more interesting is how the formats of Classic Rock and Pop deal with Alternative.

Classic Rock and Pop have divided what used to be the rock and roll and top 40 formats. Currently, classic rock plays a mix weighted heavily toward rock and roll hits and standards from the 1960's through to the 1980's, with special emphasis on music with an "edge" or a rougher, more aggressive feel to it. Pop, in comparison plays a mix of rock, dance, some rap, some Alternative, and some of what has come to be known as "light rock". Both formats represented a "mix" programming style - one tilted toward "gold" and the other stressing "new".

Programmers from both types of format suggested that they would like to play more Alternative but that the risk factor becomes evident in the danger of being too broad. FM commercial radio is making money in comparison to its counterparts on the AM band. Playing more Alternative music would mean stretching the format and increasing the risk of alienating the listening group, thereby threatening the source of current revenue. Whether or not this would actually occur is not the issue. It is the risk assessment that is central. The trend, as we have seen, is to narrow the format, not broaden it. While many of the programmers I interviewed could see a hole in the market that could be filled; they also saw that filling the hole would court the risk of losing their present market share. This, in a nutshell, is the business of "doing radio" in the 1990's.

It might be the case that younger people looking for more Alternative music are turning on their television sets rather than their radios. As stated in the opening chapter, Much Music and Musique Plus provide a larger dose of Alternative (as well as heavy metal, soul, and country) than any of the Classic Rock or Pop radio stations in

Vancouver, and their market is youth. When I queried the PD's on the issue of losing audience to music television, they did not seem to feel that Much Music represents "much" of a threat. Again, this is somewhat obvious in the case of the A/C and Oldies formats, as the target markets are quite different. The stations who programme toward the younger groups suggested that the media formats (visual vs. audio) were so different that they do not lose listeners. This may be so, but I wonder whether younger people use the radio in the same way as they might have before the MTV generation.

Economics, Influence and Risk

Is radio primarily a business cleverly disguised as an entertainment medium? Again, this type of question will elicit a different response depending on one's position in relation to the source. Although many programme directors were open and straightforward in criticizing certain features of modern commercial radio, I did not come away from any of the interviews with the impression that radio has turned into a giant cash grab for the corporations at the expense of a nostalgic notion of radio in its glory days. Radio programmers in all formats like what they do and many of them have a positive view of the industry.

I did get the impression, however, that there is some lament, especially from the programmers whose formats are directed primarily at the younger listener, that today's commercial radio does not have the same energy, spontaneity, and fun that it did when they were just starting in the business. I would suggest that a good deal of this may have to do with the growth of the information revolution and its effects (particularly as mediated by technology) on their positions. Yet information access and control is directed primarily at increasing, either by direct or indirect means, the revenue of the station. It is the influence of factors which increase revenue and decrease risk that have

helped to change commercial radio and contribute to what some of the programmers

suggested is a lack of vitality.

Table 6: Economics, Influence and Risk - A

	Where do the record industry reps fit into the programmer's role?	Are you involved in advertising programmes at your station? If so, in what way?	How closely do the programming and marketing dept's work?	Can you give an example of how economics might determine a format consideration?	Do economic considerations limit the dimensions of the format?
A/C	Do not determine what gets played. Used for information purposes. They introduce new product.	Yes, more so in recent years. PD may be marketing director at the same time. This is a trend.	Often the merging of two departments. One and the same in terms of goals. I.e., need a leading-edge strategy.	Promos, sampling. There are realities. Ratings come first.	Absence of funding - head office more aware of risk always needing more research. $$ limits caliber of talent you can hire.
Oldies	No influence in this format.	Yes, same position. Work together to develop strategy.	Very close although PD is ultimately responsible for new directions.	Marketing and programming are the same thing here.	More $$ = more ways to hype format. More $$ = more audience.
Classic Rock	They push new stuff but we only pay attention if it will fit our sound.	Get involved with TV and advertising campaigns designed to reach target market.	Very closely. They have always worked together although the marketing agenda has become much more aggressive.	More $$ = more audience.	Revenue limits purchasing. $$ comes first and fun is second.
Pop	Very weak influence. For info purposes only.	Yes all the time.	Very closely. PD has become a marketing manager.	N/A	More $$ = more audience.
Country	They don't have an impact on what gets played. Info only.	Very involved, this has become more important over time.	Very closely.	N/A	More $$ means more access to advertising to get your message out.

At one time, record industry representatives were a fixture in the radio station

environment, particularly the rock and roll and pop formats. The scandals of "payola"

in Europe, the United States and Canada are well known, and the practice of "paying"

for records to be played on a regular basis was at one point, very wide-spread. Payola

as a practice is long gone as is the record company's influence in getting records played,

but it was not the scandals that produced the current situation. There are several

variables involved in the decreasing involvement and influence of record

representatives, but the most important have been the trend toward "gold" and the

access to information of the programmer.

Record company representatives are responsible for promoting one product. Programmers are responsible for juggling a large number and range of products. According to my respondents, the representative is given the same influential weight as many of the other sources to which the programmer can draw. This has changed to the extent that it is often the case that the programmer has much of the same information that the representative is using to promote his or her product. Private research, computer on-line access sources, an increasing number of trade magazines, and network information links such as company news bulletins all provide the PD with up-to-date data. The representative often has additional sources which may be added to the programmer's information repertoire, but the key aspect here is that it is an additional rather than primary data source, and it is treated as such. One must remember also that as in the case with listener requests, the programmer will play it only if it already fits the "sound" of the format, and thus the representative is merely reinforcing the decisions already made in choosing a playlist. It also merits brief mention that as more radio stations have changed their formats to incorporate more "hits of yesterday"; the record company representatives have less opportunity to push the "sounds of today and tomorrow".

While the record industry is attempting to promote its product, the programme directors are working to promote theirs- the format. I have mentioned at several points throughout this thesis that the concept of the audience has evolved much more directly to the concept of the target market. Programme directors today have a much clearer understanding of the listening group, especially in terms of the variables involved in the conception of that group as a product that the advertiser is buying. I am suggesting then, as the data reinforces that the programming and marketing departments are

remarkably similar in their goals and strategies. That is the creation of revenue and the minimization of loss.

Several programmers suggested that their role has taken on many of the duties of the traditional marketing director in recent years. It is often the case that the PD and the marketing director are the same person in the station, as so much of the responsibilities are now directed toward using the format to generate ad revenue. The programme director has the information at his or her disposal to promote the format as being ideally suited to a particular advertiser's product.

On the other side of the coin, the station must do its own advertising, and the format, which includes personalities and promotional give-aways as well as music, is the prime tool used in the station's marketing of itself. Thus, the programmer is well situated in both aspects to provide resources for successful marketing. All of the programme directors interviewed expressed that they had become much more involved in marketing in the years since they began in the position.

In terms of the programme director's product - the format, marketing and economics has its own effect in that a larger budget allows the programmer more opportunity to hype the sound and the image of the station. Several subjects responded with the simple equation that more money equals more audience. Yet I am more interested in the economic agenda or rationality regarding format considerations than in the amount of financial resources available to the programmer. It did come out in the interviews (although this is one area where one has to read between the lines somewhat), that the cost-benefit analysis that has come to characterize commercial radio in a highly competitive overall market is one which weighs actions directly against the expected revenues along with the potential risks. It is becoming more evident that the hunch or gut feeling of the programmer must be contained within the

parameters of risk and must be substantiated by substantial research. As stated, changes in the format are never experimental, as the unknown quantity can be researched, modeled, focused and manipulated to the point where there is almost nothing unknown about it. In this sense, economics has had a very direct impact on the format, although the process has been developing over a number of years.

Table 7: Economics, Influence and Risk - B

	How well do you know your audience?	How do you get this information?	Has the increase in audience information helped or hindered radio?	How important are charts and record sales in determining your programming decisions?	How has this changed in your experience?
A/C	Very high level of knowledge and very sophisticated but could always use more data. Lots of consumer profiling.	Research consultants, private research firms, music research, audience research. Lots of $$ spent on getting precise info.	Both, i.e., advertisers like Alternative crowd but the money is in women 35+. This tends to ignore future markets. We are better informed.	Limited importance in A/C. Backs up what we already know - marginal to none. More important to fit the "sound".	It hasn't changed in this format.
Oldies	Well to very well. We know we have a good target market for advertisers.	Lots of research - mostly in-house. The tendency is to reject before taking the risk. "Go with what you know".	Helped. Allowed us to narrowcast and reach audience and build revenue.	Not important. Our listeners haven't been to a record store in 20 years.	No change here. - overall big change but not in this format.
Classic Rock	Very well - age, sex, buying patterns etc. We know where the market is and where it isn't.	Lots of research. Advertising agency research is also important	Both. Helped radio define its target groups but puts limitations on as well.	Not very critical for us. Serves to substantiate what we already know. Some importance.	Big change in the general sense.
Pop	Very well but we (this format) try to go more with "gut feeling". We actually listen to our audience - buck the trend.	Private, in-house and BBM research. Trades, record stores, TV, pop culture generally	Helped. Allowed us to narrow our sound and target our market.	Quite important.	It has changed with our move to this format.
Country	Very well - very sophisticated research.	Research, research, research	Helped.	Not very important.	N/A.

One significant development in the area of information access and control is the issue of the target market. Audience research is extremely advanced from where it was just twenty years ago. The listener has become a well-known entity much like the average consumer in the retail market. We must keep in mind that the advertiser is in a sense, purchasing the listener, so the implications for market research are apparent. The programme directors interviewed did indeed suggest that their knowledge of the

audience, or more correctly the target market, was very sophisticated. The target groups as mentioned here previously, may be very tightly defined, so the programmer has information which may suggest the characteristics of the target group such as age, sex, occupation, and consumer taste patterns, along with a host of other data deemed relevant to marketing ideology.

The amount of data is nearly matched by the number of methods employed for its retrieval. Suggested here in the interviews are consultants, private research firms (both local and national), in-house research, music research, audience research, telephone polling, shopping mall surveys, focus groups and purchased databases. Private research, as it is defined in this particular sense, was obviously the most popular answer among the respondents. I did find it interesting, however, that only one programme director specifically mentioned other "free" sources of information such as trade magazines, record store sales, television and popular culture. One might suggest with some measure of caution, that perhaps the PD in modern commercial radio is too busy studying the numbers to look at the bigger picture. Again though, with the amount of information available and required for examination, it is hardly surprising.

Generally, the programme directors felt that the increase in information technology and practice has helped rather than hindered radio. While a few suggested that the resources now employed have enabled programmers to understand the needs and wants of the audience, most were more likely to characterize the advances in information science as enabling a more definitive profile of the target. In this way, they seem to be of a mind that more information has helped radio become better in a business sense. A few dissenting voices were heard, suggesting that narrowing and focusing on the target has shielded PD's from future markets and the expansion of the present ones. This is especially relevant when one considers the impetus behind all of

this research in the first place - revenue. One is tempted to ask, Is radio better for this development of the target market?, or rather, Is the *business* of radio better?

The last two questions of the interview concerned record store sales and Top 40 charts in terms of influence on formats. I wanted to get a sense of the importance of links between what the consumer purchases directly and what the radio station produces, to see if this relationship has changed over time. According to the subjects, it has. With a couple of exceptions, the programme directors stated that record sales and charts factored little in their formatting decisions, and none affirmed that it had any priority over private research. In one case, it was noted that as the station moved toward bringing in new music, record sales and charts gained relevance for the programmer. In another case where the format did not include new music (i.e., in the last 5 years), the programmer referred to his audience not being in a record store in 20 years! In this type of format (Oldies), and to a large extent all of Adult Contemporary; the business of radio is not the business of selling records.

Non-Commercial Radio - Interviews and Background Information

While the focus of my research centres around formatting decisions in commercial radio contrasts in non-commercial radio are important for an understanding of how differently the agents in these two types of organizations undertake and understand their respective roles.

I did not structure the questions to the non-commercial radio interviewees in the same manner as with the commercial programmers, primarily due to the fact that many of the issues of economics and ratings are less or not at all applicable. More focused questions were centered around issues of audience knowledge, funding, format decisions, and overall characterizations of radio in Vancouver and in Canada. The

differences between the CBC's structure and that of Co-op radio also necessitated that these questions be framed in different ways.

Formatting Decisions - CBC Radio

The CBC has a structured formatting process, which is both national in direction and local in relative autonomy. On a regular basis, the directors of current affairs programming and executive producers from regions across the country meet to discuss policy. Once some kind of consensus is achieved, these executives carry back a policy to their local stations. This then provides a framework or direction for the programming, but there still appears to be a fair bit of autonomy exercised at the local level. Beyond the national feed, the local programming is the responsibility of the executive producer of current affairs, answerable only to the director of radio operations.

It was suggested to me that the mandate has been set nationally for the overall programming, but that the local executives are expected to know their regions well enough to provide coverage that uniquely meets the particular needs of that audience. It is for this reason that CBC participates in the BBM ratings, although as Eaman (1994) points out, the relationship has historically been a rather stormy one. The CBC uses these ratings in concert with its own research. Like commercial stations, the CBC places a great deal of emphasis and importance upon private or in-house research. While accountability is also an issue here as it is in commercial stations, it must be noted that the responsibility is toward meeting the needs of the listener and evaluating the direction of the format. Any research money spent is not weighed against potential profits, so the cost-benefit analysis takes on a different form.

As stated, the emphasis on research allows the CBC to investigate its audience to understand their degree of satisfaction with the programming. This also provides a good measure for determining the composition of that audience. It is no secret that CBC's "bread and butter" audience is an older (30+), upper educated and upper income collection of listeners. This group has remained fairly consistent over recent years and they are a much more responsive and active audience as compared to commercial stations, based on the amount of feedback which the local affiliate receives.

Recent internal policy meetings indicated that the CBC should be attempting to incorporate a younger audience. This appears to make sense based on the fact that their prime listening group is older, on average, than other radio stations. They must be able to reach out to this younger audience with programmes that meet their particular needs, or risk the "greying" and gradual reduction of their listener base[16]. I was told that this age concern is not as severe in Vancouver, because the research shows a younger audience here in comparison to other markets. It was hypothesized that the very popular talk radio station in the city (number 1 rated) draws a great deal of the older crowd leaving the CBC with a younger demographic.

As with the majority of programming executives, my contact at CBC was positive concerning his format and its possibilities for the future, although the proposed cutbacks in federal funding were a source of concern. In this sense, one might think that there might be more of an air of fatalism to the programming, in that there are no assurances of continued support, even where the on-air content has shown success. The reality is that proposed cutbacks have been a threat for much of the corporation's history, and so the planning and day-to-day operations are carried on largely without

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[16] I argue that CBC is concerned with the youth element of their audience even though demographers suggest this "greying" is where the broadcaster's attention should be focused. One must remember, however, that the uses of demographic data differ between commercial and non-commercial radio.

direct fear of proposed cuts to funding. It is this cognitive attitude away from immediate financial concerns and risks that allows the CBC to programme in the way that it does.

Risk management was stated to be much less of a factor at CBC because of the looser association to ratings and the lack of commercial revenues. The much broader mandate allows for more freedom. The CBC considers itself to be much more aggressive than the local commercial stations. I should note however, that risk still factors to some degree in programming, and reference could be made to the fact that the youth-targeted programmes air in the evening hours, as opposed to the higher profile daytime schedule. There are some comparisons to be made in this sense with the BBC and its attempt to target smaller audiences (see Barnard, 1989).

Co-operative and College Radio

Much like the CBC, co-op radio receives its revenues from non-commercial sources, and therefore the accountability arrow is less direct. Those who provide the funding are not receiving a direct tangible for their money; rather, they are contributing toward the success of the station in terms of assistance - not procurement. Revenues come from a number of sources, including memberships and donations, municipal grants (when available), sponsorships, fund-raising benefits, non-profit casinos and some merchandising.

Unlike CBC, there is no mandate in terms of a stated direction or sound of the station. The "format" is really not a format in the usual sense, as the programming is put together by individuals who have no financial stake and no investment interest in the overall goals of the station. The programming is a collective based on what is

available and offered. It is made up of ten different languages and numerous and perhaps conflicting perspectives. It is a collage of sorts.

This is not to suggest that there is no structure, but it does suggest that rather than a tight script of defined variables, the programming of co-op radio is a loose association of interests. There are no ratings, and the information about the audience is nowhere near the level of complexity of the commercial stations. It appears that the audience is comprised of a wide range of ages who are well educated and who want an alternative to commercial programming. Much like Alternative music then, co-op radio seems to define itself as "anything but the mainstream", and directs itself as such. More specifics cannot be offered on the audience because they are not known, and there is no great impetus to gather this information. A greater understanding of the audience most probably would not affect the programming anyway, so there isn't a "need to know".

Co-op radio views itself as different in that its philosophy is based more on what it does than what it should do. The emphasis is on pro-active programming, where the on-air content by its nature appeals to a large diverse group of interests. There are no common threads through the schedule other than meeting the needs of the community. While they hope to have a wide access and to provide a number of services to their listeners, there is no sustained pressure to determine and fill the audience's specific needs. This would be counter-productive, in that the basic philosophy is to have a broad range rather than a narrow script.

Risk is never factored into programming, and if anything, it is invited in a sense, in that each programme is quite different from the others around it in the schedule. If in fact co-op radio is clearly seen as an alternative to commercial radio, then it probably is the case that risk is required by many of its listeners. They want to be challenged and offered less of the same and more of what is different.

College radio is similar in many respects to co-op, in respect to funding pressures, lack of financial direction, neglect of ratings information, and the proactive direction toward having fun with the medium. While the audience is more of a known entity in that the programming is primarily directed at college and university students, it is the case here as well that definitive measurements and assessments are never made. The audience category is much more fictional for these type of stations, and that is a direct influence on the types of the programmes that are offered. In this sense, the two hour slot dedicated to folk and bluegrass music is directed toward listeners who may appreciate this type of music, but as for the knowledge about how many of them actually exist or what type of folk music they like best, this remains unknown.

Another aspect worthy of consideration is that the people who actually deliver the on-air content are more responsible for the sound of the station than those who have the title of "manager" or "programming director". It is impossible to call the diverse assortment of programmes that exist on college radio a "format" in the commercial sense, because that diversity prevents a common theme or direction beyond offering what is not found on commercial radio. Thus, one is much more likely to find greater amounts of Alternative music on college radio, but less likely to find Alternative "hits". In that vein, one would be less likely to find any kind of music repeated or cycled in the same manner as commercial radio, even though there may be a "chart" produced which lists the most popular songs of the week. As with co-op radio, popularity is a much looser concept which has a much greater association with what the listeners tell the station.

Satellite Programming Services and Networks

I was fortunate enough to have a source in the field of network programming who was able to provide me with a plethora of information regarding distance programming. This area of radio is gaining considerable importance, especially in light of the economic pressure to implement economies of scale. The satellite - network programming service provides advertisers with the ability to find a particular audience and to access that market in a highly focused manner. This excerpt from a brochure of one service tells the story...

> Mass marketing, buying warm bodies by the pound, just doesn't cut it anymore. Your prime prospect is an individual with certain defining characteristics, not a member of an unidentified mass. Our high-profile, high production-value programming is designed to attract a specific demographic and psychographic which closely corresponds to your prospect profile, giving you a position of dominance and ownership within the program property (Sound Source Ltd., 1994 brochure).

Dallas Smythe's conception of advertisers buying audiences was never stated better. This type of service is an important tool for advertisers who wish to gain national exposure for their products and services, and yet focus in on a specific type of buyer.

For the radio stations, they gain access to highly polished programming which gives the impression that the local station is capable of the highest quality standards. Several of these programmes that are delivered via satellite transmission feature important, recognizable and expert names in the fields of business, medicine and news. The radio listener gets the impression that the station offering these programmes is cutting edge, in delivering information and music from important sources. Even the music programmes may feature the top disc jockeys and industry personalities such as Rick Dees or Casey Kasem, direct from the industry hot spots such as New York or Los Angeles.

More and more radio stations are using these types of independent services, and many are taking advantage of corporate network programming. The Chum network based in Toronto provides these types of links to its affiliates. What this does for the local station is take the programming decisions out of the hands of local operators to more effectively manage resources from a central location. This can take the form of programme segments such as a two hour "chart countdown" show, or it can be longer running voice tracking or tape delayed programming where the signal is broadcast via satellite and altered slightly for local relevance. A great deal of this programming is done in the evening or late at night, and it assists the station in cutting costs. Toward this end, the C.R.T.C., which is sensitive to the financial problems of many commercial radio stations, maintains a very light regulatory policy with regard to satellite broadcasting. It is suggested only that the content aired reflects the interests of local listeners.

Corporate and network satellite programming are trends that will only become more important in the future for commercial radio. The conservative bias of major market radio is naturally suited for more efficient, polished and well financed programming which makes local efforts at target marketing look amateurish. Syndication and higher profile network feeds are on their way and are a going concern in the American market. Almost all of the local commercial programmers I spoke with see the face of radio changing even more as these types of services become more prevalent. In the face of increasing competition and the fact that radio overall is losing money; the C.R.T.C. is not likely to begin tightly regulating network feeds.

Chapter 3 - Theory, Practice and Future Considerations

In this last section of the thesis, I want to put together the theoretical aspects of the first chapter with the research data covered in the second section, in order to analyze how format decisions in commercial radio can be conceptualized in the risk society. In a clear and concrete manner, I will demonstrate how risk rationality is manifest in both the style of formats and in the trend toward certain types of formats. After re-stating the main problem of the thesis argument, I will discuss how the research shows us that risk has become a dominant consideration in the identification, classification and assessment of audiences into segmented markets. I demonstrate next how such markets are prioritized based on value to the revenues of the station. I argue that the object of the station's marketing plan directly influences the format and I give examples of how this is achieved in Vancouver's radio scene. Beyond the formatting of one station, I suggest how risk rationality has become a template across the industry and helps to explain the "grand formatting" in commercial radio today.

The conceptual problem with which this thesis began - "How is it that one form of popular culture can be marginalized in one media and accepted and promoted by other entertainment media?"- can now be understood with reference to key arguments within risk management theory. I have shown that the marginalized culture, in this case Alternative music, is not primarily assessed on the grounds of whether or not it is good or bad music. It is elements prior to the music that must first be considered.

Alternative music is linked to a generation of younger adults under the age of 35, with the largest segment of that group being under the age of 25. At several points throughout this work, I have demonstrated that radio, like many other entertainment media, have become much more concerned with target markets. That is, the group

within the larger audience that is viewed as their best source of indirect revenue. This is based on the fact that the radio station's direct source of income, the advertiser, wants a large homogenous population (a target group) on which to focus his or her message. That advertiser (best viewed in this sense as a purchaser) will shop around and will spend his or her money on the station that best delivers the target group. As resources are scarce, and indeed it is the case that businesses are spending less on average on advertising, radio stations will take whatever steps are necessary to encourage continued sponsorship.

This is an aspect that I would like to highlight - the efforts on the part of commercial media to operate their business at a profit in the face of declining advertising revenues. It is here where risk in the formatting of radio is most evident, as a reliance on increasing amounts of research to narrow and further define the target market result in the programming of stations *away* from, rather than toward the mass audience. The research provides the radio station with information on which targets are risky, in that programming toward them brings about the possibility of losing the market that currently provides them with revenue.

The Homogenization of Styles

This is not to suggest, however, that commercial radio can afford to completely ignore Alternative music. This is not the case in theory or in practice. It does suggest though, that while Pop and Classic Rock stations see the benefit of adding to their audience, they recognize that directing the format toward this group invites the risk of alienating the present listening group - defined as wanting a constant cycle of established "hits". It is for this reason that music homogenization across broad styles occurs, resulting in a Pop station that plays *Stone Temple Pilots* and *Boys to Men* back-

to-back. It has been pointed out to me on several occasions that this is an extremely odd juxtaposition of music within a format, but it is a clear indication of a risk management strategy on the part of radio to stick to their "bread and butter" but yet to attempt to appeal to a niche observed to be under-served. As one programmer in this format suggested, it is obvious that Vancouver needs and wants an Alternative station, but the stations in this market (on FM)[17] are making money, so why should we risk the immediate revenue loss?

If FM radio stations in Vancouver are making money in contrast to the overall picture in Canada which saw private stations lose 20 percent of their profits in 1990 as compared to the previous year (C.R.T.C.,1991:16), then this might lead one to suggest that risk management might be one factor which distinguishes this market from others.

It would not be correct to suggest, however, that because radio stations in Vancouver are making money in contrast to other Canadian markets, that their aversion to risk is substantially different. I would posit that there is a formula of success that has been shown by some of the pioneering Adult Contemporary formats in Vancouver, and this has led the way for other stations to follow that model. As one programming director told me, "once a winning formula is found, it is copied and used until the next one comes along." Currently, the model of success is the highly competitive market of programming toward the 35 to 55 year-old listener, especially females. Several radio professionals informed me that while this group is currently well targeted and served, it is such a large and lucrative group that other target markets pale in comparison from a marketing perspective. Thus, there is not much impetus at the present time to go looking for (or courting) new markets.

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[17]The option is probably more open for an Alternative station to exist on AM radio, but most AM music radio is losing money because of the appeal of better sound quality of the FM band. Experience also suggests this is risky because of the failed efforts of Coast 1040, a Vancouver Alternative station which closed in 1993 due to a lack of advertising revenue. AM-1040 is now an A/C - easy listening station.

The Risks of Stretching the Format

Another aspect that must be considered is how risk is played out in deciding the boundaries of the format. As I have stated, while it is the goal of the station to target the market that represents the best options for generating revenue, it is also the case that bigger is still better. Is it not the case then that stretching the format to include new listeners will make the station more attractive to advertisers, thereby increasing revenue? Two considerations are important here: 1) Some stations with lower ratings (bigger audiences) may have higher advertising rates than the top-rated stations because of their ability to better target a valuable demographic group; 2) A format that consists of continually recycling past chart successes with newer, yet similar, hit material, runs the risk of losing its market to other stations if it introduces too much non-established material at once. It was suggested to me in one of the interviews with a local programmer, that commercial radio is analogous to a long-distance race where the pace is set, and the competitors keep very close together for strategic reasons. Everybody wants to win, but more importantly, nobody wants to lose. It appears that in Vancouver's commercial radio scene, the pace has been set by formatting toward the 35 to 55 market.

This process of following the current and standard formula is what I refer to as "grand formatting", and my evidence suggests that this is the norm rather than the exception in Vancouver's radio scene. I offer the following which may help outline this point:

> Object = large group of homogenous listeners (targeted as best bet to increase revenues).

> Method = narrowcast toward niche.

> Format = large selection of homogenous music (targeted to meet the so-called "needs" of the above group). Steady diet of old with some new (although new must fit pattern of old).

> Result = other stations copy success model.

It is quite important to note that the "sound" of the format becomes a dominant variable once the direction has been chosen. In practice, this means that all future considerations of music, personality and talk must fit this "sound". Programmers often referred to the "sound" of the station when discussing requests or new music. In fact, anything not already managed and controlled by the programme director has to fit this categorization which is based, as stated, on research and also by the programmer's own "gut feeling". It is easy to see then, how some Alternative music which is judged to fit the sound of the station can be fit into a Pop format. By extension, it is also clear how very popular bands like *Sonic Youth, Hole* and *Rage Against the Machine* could not fit. It would appear that the majority of Alternative music does not "fit" the sound of radio in Vancouver to any significant degree.

This issue of blending in Alternative music with adult contemporary artists such as Madonna and the Go-Go's leads to another interesting point, that of created audiences. Borrowing from DeFleur's (1971) diagram of media following the money arrow, in which a "taste-differentiated audience of consumers" was traced back to the "production subsystem", Ettema and Whitney argue that the media can be said to be engaged in audience-making (1994:3-4). While not denying that information does

flow in both directions, they do assert an institutional conception whereby communication flows are subsumed "into a process by which the 'production subsystem actively constructs and carefully maintains a network of relationships with, among many others, that "taste-differentiated audience of consumers". And further, the...

> "...actual receivers are constituted -- or, perhaps, reconstituted -- not merely as audiences but as *institutionally effective audiences* that have social meaning and/or economic value within the system. These include *measured audiences* that are generated by research services, sold by media channels, and bought by advertisers. They include *specialized or segmented audiences* whose particular interests are anticipated -- or created -- and then met by content producers. And they include *hypothesized audiences* whose interest, convenience, and necessity are, presumably, protected by regulators" (ibid:5-6).

I did not see direct evidence of programme directors actively engaging in a process of changing or directing the Alternative-listening audience into the easy-listening crowd. I did, however, receive answers and comments to the effect that radio has created a new type of listener that is responding to what is offered.

This, I think, goes some way toward the explanation of listener choice in commercial radio and whether or not radio is meeting that need. Of course, it would be ideal if there were a comprehensive, independent study of this issue focusing on the Vancouver market, but to my knowledge this does not exist. I think that what such a survey might show is that of the available choices, the listeners are reasonably satisfied. I also believe that there is a fair degree of dissatisfaction with what is not offered and that the mixed format designed to pull in the younger demographic who want "what's new" with the older set who want "yesterday's hits", has failed to attract a younger group who have turned to alternative forms of entertainment. Such avenues as Much Music and Musique Plus[18], CD's, personal stereo's and local concerts have become the

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[18]It has been suggested (Lopes, 1992; Denisoff, 1986) that MTV-type television is narrowcast in itself, in that narrow formats are standardized here as well. I do not dispute this, but I do suggest that music television does provide an alternative in that its market is decidedly youth-targeted.

distribution points for the new, the non-established, and the non-mainstream. College and co-op radio may also be benefiting, although there are no ratings for which to prove this.

Commercial Radio and the Acceptance of Roles

Another aspect of this issue that became clear over the course of my interviews with commercial programmers, was that radio has come to accept its role in relation to both other entertainment media, and the busy schedules of our everyday lives. Perhaps it is also feasible that radio is targeting a market that has not already turned to other entertainment sources, suggesting that radio has come to grips with the fact that it is a background medium.

> Combining the timing and organizational properties of radio leads to the conclusion that radio time is subordinate to listener time, with radio facilitating and helping to establish temporal dimensions of a listener's everyday life. In the process, radio listening has become a routinized part of completing routine tasks in everyday life. Moreover, when these mundane activities become difficult if not impossible without the background provided by radio, then radio becomes an integral part of the flow of the event (Altheide and Snow, 1991:23-24).

Stephen Barnard, in his thorough analysis of music radio in Britain, argues that radio divides its conservative programming and newer, riskier programming by day and night. That is, the standardized cycle of hit songs, news and weather reports, and other established material to generate high ratings are found in a polished day's schedule, with more "off-the-wall" programming of new and alternative forms of music being found on the radio after 7 p.m. (Barnard, 1989:156-177). Ratings are universally higher for commercial radio in the daytime slot, especially during the hectic "drive-time" slots of early morning and late afternoon. It is much more likely then, as Barnard suggests, that whatever programming is considered risky, marginal though it might be, is to be heard later in the evening. By no means proof of this, it is interesting

to note that the "Alternative-only" and "dance-only" programmes on the local Pop station are scheduled Friday night at 11 p.m. and Saturday night at 8 p.m. respectively.

Demographics and Labeling

The issue of demographics is one area on which I have purposively not concentrated to this point. I have chosen to first lay down the more theoretical foundations of the thesis with the corresponding interview data to suggest how the argument could be applied. I now suggest that the issue of large demographic groups who carry labels such as baby-boomers and Generation X, is an area worthy of discussion, though somewhat limited in its value as my research indicates.

Generational groups are defined primarily by reference to a range of birth years, and are usually associated with large shifts in birth rates. The terms used to label large groups of people in this way, are often intended to be used as easy, convenient concepts and are not intended to be explicit boundaries to explain the totality of people's lives. They are concepts that have a certain use value, particularly for the popular media, who use convenient labels in place of complex definitions, largely because of format considerations. That is, a general term is used for the purposes of easy identification and explanation, to facilitate the telling of stories in a manner which will be comprehensible to the general public. Time and space considerations limit the amount of detailed information that can be given and received.

A term such as "baby-boomer" has obvious limits in what it can convey beyond its reference to a group of people primarily defined by birth year. While it is popular for the media to use the term to suggest inferences to lifestyle, consumer preferences, and numerous social categories, we know very well that these are no more than easy and open categorizations to facilitate understanding by linking a known variable (birth

year) to a host of inferred variables[19]. That is, just because I am 37 years-old and therefore included in the group "baby-boomers" does not mean that I conform to the lifestyle patterns of others similar in age to myself. Similarly, a 27 year-old member of so-called "Generation X" does not necessarily listen to Alternative music or wear grunge-type clothing.

However much these labels do not fit the individuals associated with them, it is trendy to speak of "Generation X" and "Baby-Busters" as listeners of non-established, Alternative, Dance, R&B, and Rap music, and "Baby-Boomers" as that group who enjoys soft favourites. People with good jobs and nice cars apparently listen to Adult Contemporary-type formats, and people without jobs supposedly listen to Alternative[20]. Obviously, there are some very broad generalizations here, excluding a great deal of diversity. It was also suggested to me by several radio programmers that these categorizations do not fit well with what they know of their audience. One programme director suggested he believed that half of the stockbrokers on the Vancouver exchange listened to Alternative music on a regular basis. This further points to the issue that the broad categorizations of occupation and social class may also have little to do with popularized preferences such as music tastes (Eaman, 1994).

What these grand typifications do accomplish is to give a particular perspective some semblance of legitimacy in arguing an "us vs. them" stance based on generational lines and easily conceptualized by using popular labels. This argument is often used in conspiracy theories of alternative press-type magazines who take the position that "*they don't want to hear *our* music*".

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[19] I do not suggest that media typologies exist outside of our everyday lives, for we use labels to generalize about others. I state only that the media provides a mass distribution point for generational labeling.
[20] A good discussion of the labeled differences between young and old in popular media and trendy social discourse is found in Howe and Strauss (1993), *13th Generation: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?*

I suggest three main arguments to modify this position. First, in regard to my previous statements regarding general typologies, "they" is a concept that has only valid meaning in reference to a specific group of people who are known to have a certain set of preferences. Vague generalizations used in media accounts of "baby-boomers" or "post-boomers" are too imprecise. Second, in respect to the arguments of audience-making, the terms "us" or "our" are suspect when referring to a listening group based on a generation-label. I argued that what is available will affect to a great degree what is considered good or bad, and thus it is the case that many young people prefer the music of their parent's generation. They do not have any need to hear Alternative music based on fact that it is a style created by their own generation. The homogenization of cultural styles may well produce new audiences who have been exposed to only what is available on commercial radio, and who do not see the juxtaposition of styles as such. Again, categorizations have limited value for the people in them, and they appear to be a greater concern for those who would put them in one box or another.

The third and last point, and perhaps the most important, is that radio is not programmed according to labels based on broad generational associations. If this were the case, we might well see more diversity in radio, based on the fact that groups such as "baby-boomers" comprise individuals of all listening tastes. My data indicate that modern commercial radio is dedicated to serving the needs of large homogenous, specific markets. These categories are constructed by researchers, marketers and programmers to meet *their* needs, not the needs of their listeners (Ettema and Whitney, 1994). It just so happens that at the present time, the target of choice of a great many advertisers, and by extension programmers, is the category of 35 to 55 year-old, middle to upper income, home-owning, office working listeners who use the radio as background to their routines at home, driving to work, and in the office. It is also the

case that there happens to be a huge number in this group and that they are perceived to have the financial clout to command attention in the marketplace.

It is also vital to note that radio and other broadcast media operate on the basis of sampling, profiling, inferencing and modeling. The audience is always somewhat of a fictional entity in that it is "known" only through techniques which are not designed to represent individuals per se; they are intended to be representative samples (ibid:156). Further, the methods used by radio professionals to "know" the audience have a particular bias toward the reasons for obtaining this information in the first place. Research material is gathered to find out how best to reach certain types of listeners and keep them from changing the channel, thereby increasing ratings and revenues. This will obviously affect the information they receive and use, suggesting that the scope of inquiry most likely excludes all information that is superficial to the main goal of the station - protecting the market share and the profit margin.

Alternative Music in Vancouver

In regard to how this affects Alternative music on commercial radio, it suggests that radio has become very protective, conservative and risk-oriented. Those markets that make money, such as FM in Vancouver, are likely to program toward what continues to represent profit and avoids loss. That is, a format which delivers a stable consistent sound which is targeted at listeners wanting to hear "favourites of yesterday and today". This group is valuable to radio for reasons of sheer size, but also for its value as high profile consumers. This "commodity model" (Webster and Phelan, 1994) of programming appears to be dominant in the industry, and I have suggested that this

goes part-and-parcel with an increasing trend for radio in this country at least, to react to the advertising marketplace.

What all of this comes down to is that in terms of effects, it can be argued that much of commercial radio in the Vancouver market is programming toward the audience that appears to want a mix of oldies and contemporary established hits. It is interesting to look at the stations who play primarily new music and compare them to the rest of the formats in the Vancouver listening area. Of 35 stations which can be received by cable, six stations advertise themselves as playing a majority of new music (source: Rogers Cable system listings: 02/95). Of these six, two are college radio stations in Vancouver, one is a local co-op station, one is located in Seattle, and one is a country station. That leaves one commercial Pop station in Vancouver, and it plays a mix of Alternative, Rap, Dance and R&B[21]. Even the new music played on commercial stations is very often already considered a "hit" in that it has appeared on a chart, so it is difficult to suggest that commercial radio is introducing a lot of genuinely non-established music to the public. Further, as Rothenbuhler cogently argues...

> [R]adio airplay precedes, rather than follows, massive public popularity. It is then impossible for radio to use "popularity" as a criterion for play, for it is not popular until after radio plays it... If radio broadcasters are simply responding to popularity, then their decisions need only be based on some indicator of popularity. The objectification of popularity is a "hit" list such as *Billboard's* "Hot-100." But the hit list is made up of some combination of measures of radio play and sales (Hesbacher, Downing & Berger, 1975), so that even "popularity" is not entirely dependent on the public's vote. To the extent that these or similar charts are sources of information for programming decisions (and they are), radio airplay in part determines radio airplay (Rothenbuhler, 1987:78-79).

It is also interesting to note that where the charts do differentiate between the top singles and the top albums (or CD's), we see a significant difference in how

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[21]The "album-oriented rock" stations, which play a steady mix of classic rock artists from the 1960's up to today, appear to be moving toward playing "hit" Alternative songs, but do not advertise themselves as playing new music per se.

Alternative music is represented. Album numbers are almost always higher for Alternative groups than singles, primarily because the singles category is not based on sales and the albums category is based on a combination of both. This attests to the point that record sales are a partial measure of the popularity of Alternative music, while radio airplay is a very weak measure. In this light, Rothenbuhler's suggestion of the circularity of the "popular" in commercial radio, highlights the marginalization of this particular form of music.

Conclusion

My goal in writing this thesis was to come to an understanding of how one form of entertainment culture could be "popular" in one or more pop culture media and not in another. I have used Alternative music and its lack of air-time in Vancouver's commercial radio scene as an example of this "unpopularity", while demonstrating that record sales, concerts, music television, and entertainment magazines all suggest that Alternative music is a going concern. I noted that I found this situation to be quite confusing, as I had perhaps naively perceived commercial radio to be directly responsible for popularizing music to then be enjoyed by the mass audience. I was also puzzled over the idea that radio supposedly plays what is popular, i.e., what the people want.

My investigation into the business of "doing radio" provided insight into the world of commercial radio as one which has become heavily dependent on research and research rationality. Needing a larger theoretical tool to make sense of this, I found that risk theory worked quite well in facilitating an understanding of commercial radio as becoming progressively more conservative. Risk management is a term which

denotes organizational policies constructed to identify and classify all kinds of variables into categorizations of positive and negative based on perceived danger.

I found that commercial radio has become dominated by an economic rationality which breaks the audience down into smaller sub-categories for the purposes of target marketing. Smaller niche markets are then identified, classified and assessed according to an unwritten scale ranging from low risk / high value to high risk / low value. The station's format is then constructed based on a programming mix directed toward that target market. Moreover, it is important to note that it is narrow in the sense that it purposely excludes a large part of the audience to focus on one segment.

My research from interviews, relevant literature and other background sources suggests that the impetus for this risk rationality within radio is based on a pressure to maintain existing revenues. I offered evidence that commercial radio in Canada has seen its revenues drop over the past several years, and thus it has become sensitive to maintaining its present position. The main source of revenue for a station is advertising, and radio must concentrate on serving the needs of its primary customers. In this sense, radio mirrors the trend in many business climates today, of focusing one segment of the larger market and providing services that others do not, as opposed to attempting to meet the diverse needs of the greater public.

I argue throughout the thesis that commercial radio cannot be accused of blindly ignoring the audience's needs, because of the sheer amount of research data that is gathered. Commercial radio stations attempt to gather as much information as possible in order to determine tastes and preferences as they relate to increasing market share and the avoidance of loss. I suggest, however, that this information gathering process is a particular type of knowledge system which evaluates according to economic criteria.

The process is "scientized" to the degree that "knowledge" of what the audience wants is influenced and bounded by the criteria of the knowledge system that gathers and assesses the data. In other words, the questions that are asked are intended to determine ultimately how the format can be better managed to increase revenues.

Far from suggesting anything diabolical, I have argued that radio exhibits the characteristics of many business enterprises in highly competitive markets, in that it must play by the same rules that govern the late capitalist enterprise - take whatever steps are necessary to not fail. In a competitive commercial environment such as Vancouver, recent experience has shown that winning formulas are produced by serving a particular niche for which advertisers are willing to pay. This appears to be a significant part of the downfall of Vancouver's only Alternative music station, Coast 1040; it served a niche that advertisers were not buying[22]. Coast 1040 dared to put its listener's needs before the demands of the primary market, and it paid the price.

I suggest that a good deal of radio research shows the Alternative niche as being under-served in Vancouver. But I also posit that risk rationality plays a significant part in the fact that this niche remains uncovered by a single directed format. As was pointed out to me in an interview, it is not worth the risk when FM radio in this market is making money, especially considering the general state of commercial radio. As for broadening an existing format to meet the Alternative niche, there is some evidence that this is taking place. The Classic Rock and Pop stations are inserting some "hit" Alternative songs into the playlist. Again, however, risk rationality suggests that formatting too much toward this segment of the audience will cost the station its larger and more lucrative base of listeners who would turn the channel. Risk is played out

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[22]I have heard many other suggestions for the demise of Coast 1040, from its position on the AM band to mismanagement by the operators. I do not pretend to give the definitive post-mortem, only to wryly note that 1040 AM is now an easy listening station.

here by assessing one larger market comprised of older, established consumers, against a smaller market of younger, hype-averse, media savvy listeners.

In taking a social-institutional approach, I was hoping to understand how these considerations are manifest in organizational decision-making processes, and in how the agents of these organizations perceive their roles in the station and to the industry. I wanted to understand how formats are constructed, and whether the processes of creating and maintaining them could be isolated to any degree, from the larger world of popular culture. Looking back, I now suggest that commercial radio is reactive in the sense that it follows certain research trends, but may be proactive in that it is re-creating audiences to fit its format.

Non-commercial radio meanwhile, continues along almost oblivious to the formatting trends of its commercial neighbours. There is no real competition between these two types of radio, at least in the sense that CBC would significantly alter its strategy to get the teen-age crowd. There never has been any real competition either, as formats and markets are so completely different. It is clear from my data though, that non-commercial radio is significantly less affected by risk rationality. It simply receives its audience, as opposed to an all-out war to compete for them. In the case of co-op and college radio formats, the audience is whomever is listening, and the programming is for their enjoyment. If they turn the channel, it's not likely that anyone is out of a job. For CBC, ratings are a concern, but only in the sense that it gives some indication that their strategy is sound or not. As in other non-commercial formats, CBC radio does not stand accountable to the immediate concerns of advertisers and the dangers of potential revenue loss. Fear comes only in the form of federal budgets.

In terms of future trends, it appears as though narrowcasting and niche markets will continue to be the dominant strategies for formatting commercial radio, as the

overall entertainment market can only get more competitive. This means that radio will continue to find itself under pressure from other entertainment options, both within and from outside the industry. The niche marketing patterns of today are not fads, they are indicative of more general progressive trends in broadcast media enterprises toward efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Peterson, 1994; Barnard, 1989).

Many of the professionals I interviewed suggested that digital radio will offer some hope for the markets that are under-served. It was suggested that more competition will be facilitated by a technology which is not confined by the limits of traditional broadcasting, and thus we will see many more stations in a market such as Vancouver. We have to view this new technology with some measure of caution however, particularly if it is perceived that more channels may equal more choice. Much more needs to be said regarding how the channels will be allocated, how they will be financed and whether or not the technology will permit true inter-activity.

For Alternative music specifically, there is some hope that advertisers will start paying more attention to the younger generations, effecting a change in formatting strategy in commercial radio. The recent pitch to this group through the "I am" television campaign by Molson Breweries Ltd., is one sign of this possibility. As for how demographics may affect this situation, it is generally accepted that the target markets currently courted by commercial radio, and popularly referred to as "baby-boomers", are going to be in the advertising media's profile "spotlight" for some time to come. They represent a market not only large in terms of total numbers, but also in terms of range. That is, the baby-boom was not a single high peak, but an extended period of abnormally high birth rates over a number of years.

The point is not so much that "baby-boomers" will control the entertainment spotlight, but rather that the perception of them as a great cohesive marketer's dream will most probably persist as they remain in the prime consuming range. This may well

continue to affect the audience of Alternative music fans, as they will be overshadowed

in format considerations, by the larger market demanding more of the "favourites of

yesterday and today.""

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