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## The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of "Mechanical Music"

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### Introduction

Once upon a time, everyday people made music for themselves. Then along came the phonograph, and they stopped making music and started buying it instead. So the story goes of the commodification of music. And it is a story that has continued to be told for quite some time, seldom historicized or deconstructed. Writings in ethnomusicology, musicology, popular music studies, cultural studies, and other fields are replete with assumptions and assertions of music's commodity status, but there are very few treatments of the subject theoretically; the question has been scarcely tackled in the literature save for some suggestive but fragmentary pronouncements by Theodor Adorno that in my view have been unduly influential among scholars of music; and a few recent writings by less polemical authors such as Chanan (1994), Dowd (2002), Gramit (2002), Maisonneuve (2001), Straw (1999-2000; 2000), and Toynebee (2000), all of whom offer treatments of the subject, some of which are theoretical. But the literature lacks a thoroughgoing theoretical exploration of the subject, a lacuna that this article hopes to begin to rectify.

To be sure, few would deny that music in many cultures is a commodity—something that can be turned to commercial advantage, bought and sold. Music's commodity status, at least in the realm of popular music, is so common that it seems to be self-evident, even natural, though this is usually thought to be a bad thing; musicians can be accused of selling out. Explicitly or implicitly, writer after writer decries the commodification of music, music made expressly for the purpose of making money, not art, or heartfelt individual expression, or, simply, for a good groove. Many fan groups also recognize the commodification of music, often trying to rescue their particular music from this soulless fate by asserting that it is made for less commercial reasons.

In part because music's commodity status has been naturalized for decades in the so-called developed countries, formulating a theoretical understanding of music as a commodity is a complex and intricate problem, made all the more difficult because music and other cultural commodities are routinely produced, reproduced, and consumed in more than one way: as an object in the form of a score, as a recording (in an ever-growing number of formats), or as a performance. Music also plays an often-indispensable role in larger processes of commodifying and consuming, such as broadcasting, or providing ambience in coffee shops, malls, restaurants, or airports. Furthermore, music is not a commodity all the time, or always in the same way, instead undergoing constant periods of commodification and decommodification. Does the music contained on a CD sitting on the shelf in the record store remain the same commodity after it has been ripped from that CD and traded on the Internet? Is it the same commodity as the recording one has purchased in the hope of displaying one's familiarity with the hippest and coolest sounds?

Another obstacle to a theorization of the music-commodity is that the best set of tools for understanding it, which I will rely heavily on in the following, is deeply problematic with respect to the question of cultural commodities such as music. The argument that Karl Marx advances in *The Grundrisse* that the piano-maker is a productive worker but the pianist is not is well-known, at least for students of music (Marx 1971: 79, footnote 1; see Naumann and Heath 1976, Williams 1977, Chakrabarty 2000, and Gramit 2002 for discussions of this example), but doesn't go very far in advancing the question of the music-commodity. Explicating this position elsewhere, Marx writes that Milton's *Paradise Lost*, even when he sells it, is not a commodity but a product; it only becomes a commodity when it enters the system of capitalist exchange, when it can be used to generate surplus value (Marx 1990:1044). Likewise, therefore, a musician who sells her music is a merchant selling a product. A person may sell her music as a service, but that makes her a merchant, not someone producing surplus value in the capitalist system. If that musician joins forces with a capitalist entrepreneur to, say, sell tickets to concerts, then she is producing surplus value and is thus a productive worker in his framework. These types of services, says Marx, are of "microscopic significance" (Marx 1990:1043-44). Not, however, to musicians or listeners.

Marx's writings on the subject of the commodity in Chapter 1 of *Capital*, which have been more influential than any other single publication he wrote on the subject, are also limited by their implicit critique of Adam Smith's objectivist theory of commodities and money; Marx was not attempting to advance a dialectical and historical theory of the commodity in this portion of his oeuvre (p.c. Keith Hart, 12 March 2006; see also Hart 1982). One of the points that this paper will make is that the music-commodity has to be

understood as always in flux, always caught up in historical, cultural, and social forces; music does not sit around exuding commodity status—it has to be *commodified*, and in ways that are different than other commodities, such as, say, corn or iron (Marx's examples in Volume 1 of *Capital*). That is, it is important to think beyond Marx's objectivist conceptions of the commodity and articulate a theoretical sense of the commodity that is social, cultural, and historical. We cannot understand the general processes of commodification until we begin to dissect particular historical moments and practices in order to ascertain how specific ideologies and practices—institutional and otherwise—were formed, and continue to operate.

The main goal of this article is to argue that whatever the music-commodity is, it is utterly dependent on the circumstances surrounding its commodification, which are largely driven by its means of reproduction, themselves commodities. The production and dissemination of music involves a wide range of technological artifacts: violins, pianos, tin whistles, radios, CD players, mp3 players, and so forth. Each of these technologies exists as a separate commodity—yet inextricably intertwined with the musical commodities they contribute to producing. Ultimately, the commodity status of each depends on the other: music could not exist as a commodity without the technologies involved with its making and transmission; nor would those technologies serve much purpose without the music they purvey.

The processes by which music is constituted as a commodity are therefore particularly clear when new music reproduction technologies are introduced. This paper will focus on the development of player pianos in the U.S.—the first mass-produced technology that allowed music to be made by individuals with no musical training or experience—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to develop a detailed theoretical analysis of music as a commodity within a particular historical context. The introduction of the player piano near the end of the nineteenth-century was at the vanguard of a broad transformation of the ways that music was made and experienced, helping to constitute it as a commodity in the sense we know it in today's market. This did not happen overnight. First, with the various writings that sprang up around the new technology, people were reassured that they were still making music themselves; later, however, a reified "music" was proffered as a way of selling the instrument to consumers, who were given to believe that this was better than making music themselves.

I will use a variety of approaches to this issue, most importantly, the Marxian concept of reification, a term that describes a relationship between people that has been transformed into a thing. Despite its objectivist origins, Marx's concept is useful in understanding the processes in a historical moment when most music was transitioning from something made for oneself or heard made by others to something that was bought and sold. Examining

a particular music technology in a particular historical moment and the ways that this technology became a commodity constitutes not only a case study for this paper, but a primary theoretical point about the necessity of understanding the music-commodity as caught up on historical, social, and cultural processes.

Admittedly, even this period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is difficult to characterize, as there was a substantial sheet music industry by the mid-nineteenth century in the U.S. that one could consider to have been industrially produced, as well as the mass production of musical instruments.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the production of music had not only become industrialized, but Taylorized (in the sense of Frederick Winslow Taylor's principles of "scientific management" that were extremely influential) and Fordized, with a new, rationalized industrial bureaucracy to commodify music, from record labels' marketing tactics to Tin Pan Alley song pluggers to the use of modern advertising techniques to sell player pianos and rolls, phonographs and recordings.

This period of the industrialization of music marks the rise of what we can properly call popular culture as Stuart Hall has influentially argued, in the period of roughly 1880–1930 (Hall 1981; see also Leach 1993, Lears 1983 and McGovern 1998 and 2006). It is no accident that scholars of consumption usually identify the same span of time as the period when American culture became a consumer society in ways that are still familiar today; and it is no coincidence that this era also witnessed the rise of the modern advertising industry (Fox 1984; Lears 1994). Although all of these developments are closely intertwined, I will pay particular attention to the advertising of player pianos in what follows, for as many have argued, advertising plays a powerful role in shaping and sometimes assigning meanings to goods and services (see Jhally 1990).

Focusing on this era and the player piano technology, will, I hope, help clear away some of the accretion of clutter that has hindered a clear understanding of music as a commodity, and will also help provide a more historically and culturally specific discussion of the question of music as a commodity, out of which more general theoretical points can be made. This, I hope, will go some way toward obviating the Adornian legacy of employing a mode of grand theorizing that pays little attention to—or even disdains—what people were actually doing in a particular place and time.

### The Player Piano as Transition

Even though the phonograph appeared around the same time as the player piano, this seemingly less sophisticated technology provides a better site to address the question of the commodification of music. For one thing, since the original player piano was a machine that attached to a piano, it

had an easier time of becoming a part of everyday life since as many as half of all American homes already contained pianos by the mid-1920s (Walsh 1927:112). The phonograph, on the other hand, was slow to catch on; there was some debate about its use, even whether or not it should be used for music; and its poor fidelity prevented it from becoming popular until well into the twentieth century (see Katz 2004). There was no question about the use of the player piano—its function was reasonably self-evident.

The earliest player pianos, which date to the mid-nineteenth century, were freestanding devices that attached to existing pianos with "fingers" that "played" the keys of the piano, responding to the machine's "reading" of music encoded in perforations on a paper roll; one contemporary commentator described these machines as having "the exuberant spirits of a machine-gun" (Whiting 1918/1919:831). Later, the external playing mechanism was integrated into the piano cabinet itself.

Subsequent instruments featured devices that could affect playback by the player pianist: tempo lever, accenting apparatus, sustaining pedal lever, and usually, a softening button as well (White 1910:49). Player piano rolls could contain wavy lines to instruct player pianists about musical matters, especially tempo. These lines were made in the factory and reproduced on the roll. The player pianist followed it with a pointer by moving the tempo lever to alter the tempo as a "real" musician might (see White 1910:75). These pianos gave rise to an ultimately short-lived industry of how-to guides, player piano teachers, and other modes of instruction that I will examine below. The final phase of development of player pianos was marked in the mid-teens by the "reproducing" piano, which played rolls that had been "recorded" by musicians, preserving the nuances of a live performance, and many famous pianists and composers availed themselves of the opportunity to make rolls for these instruments.

It is important to wonder how player piano manufacturers made their instrument a widely desirable technology and avoided having it seen as merely a faddish gimmick. This question addresses one of the main theoretical points of this paper—that music had to be converted into a commodity—and will illustrate the central importance of advertising in shaping public opinion and this music technology. At first, the player piano was something of a gimmick. Entrepreneurs popularized the machine in the same way that moving pictures, phonographs, and radios were popularized in their early histories, as machines in which one inserted a nickel to hear a little music, a practice that served to introduce the instrument to the public (see Bowers 1966). Player piano sales were indeed unremarkable after its immediate introduction. Early advertisements for the instrument tended to tout its mechanical qualities, instead of articulating a broader vision for the role of the player piano in the increasingly modern, consumer-oriented, technological world.

The player piano did become seen as something desirable to own in the

early part of the last century, thanks in no small measure to the young but fast-growing advertising industry, which played an instrumental role in popularizing the instrument and defining and shaping sign-values for it beyond its immediate utility. In 1902 the Aeolian Organ and Music Company of New York City placed a landmark four-page advertisement in select magazines for their machine, the Pianola (see Figure 1). The ad employed two colors, unheard of for advertisements of pianos or player pianos in this era (see Bates 1896 for a telling critique of piano advertising from the standpoint of the advertising industry).

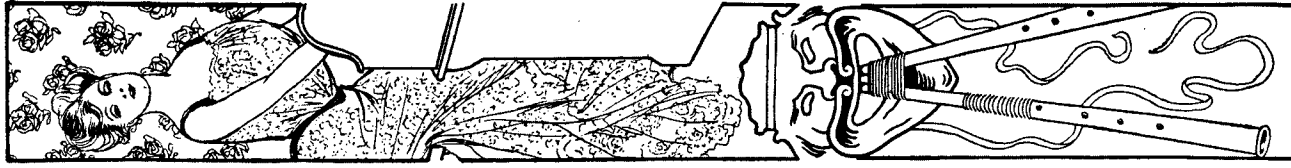
This and later advertisements contributed powerfully to the appeal of the player piano, so much so that sales skyrocketed in the first couple of decades in the century. The breakthrough year was 1905 when four manufacturers, including Aeolian, standardized the perforation of rolls so that they could be played on different brands of machine. Sales rose from roughly 2,180 instruments in 1905 to 95,000 by the end of the decade ("1900-1909: Talking Machines and Player Pianos Transform the Industry" 1990: 52). U. S. Census data collected between 1909 and 1919 reveal that player piano sales in this period overtook conventional pianos, comprising just over half of all piano sales; sales of piano rolls went from about \$200,000 to over \$3.1 million in this period. (Sales dropped slightly by the 1921 Census of Manufactures [Department of Commerce 1924]).

The typical middle-class home with the piano-playing—or non-piano-playing—daughter was considered a perfect market for player pianos; young women were expected to acquire cultural capital in the form of musicking as part of "the cult of domesticity" in Victorian America (Roell 1989:13; see Solie 2004 for a discussion of girls playing pianos).<sup>2</sup> The piano for decades had been a primary marker of middle-class cultural capital, the symbol of perfect domesticity and family harmony (see Roell 1989); Arthur Loesser (1954] 1990) writes that the player piano gained popularity in American homes because so many of these homes housed pianos that were never, or badly, played. Along came an instrument that played itself and was relentlessly promoted. A Cleveland piano store asked in a 1905 advertisement, "How many thousands of American parlors contain that shining monument to a past girlhood—a silent piano. Do you wish to enjoy your piano?" (quoted by Loesser [1954] 1990:583).

Countless advertisements, photographs, and drawings depict women at the piano, sometimes alone, sometimes surrounded by happy families. One cartoon shows two mothers having tea in the parlor while a daughter pumps the player piano with the caption "Yes, My Daughter Has a Great Foot for Music" (reproduced in Roehl 1973:15). At the same time, however, the player piano's status as a machine, a new kind of technology, brought men into the picture, and they were also pictured with player pianos many times in this

Figure 1: Aeolian Pianola advertisement, 1902. *Munsey's Magazine*.

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE—ADVERTISING SECTION.



## M U S I C

The Pianola solves the problem of music in the home. Its production was the crowning achievement of musical activity in the century just closed.

Within the home, where there is a Pianola, music reigns supreme, and every member of the household may be a performer. The piano is available to all. In its rhythmic tones the busy man forgets his cares. The hostess finds relief from thoughts concerning entertainment for her guests; and happy young folks respond with feet or voice and in a dance or song find wholesome recreation underneath the family roof.

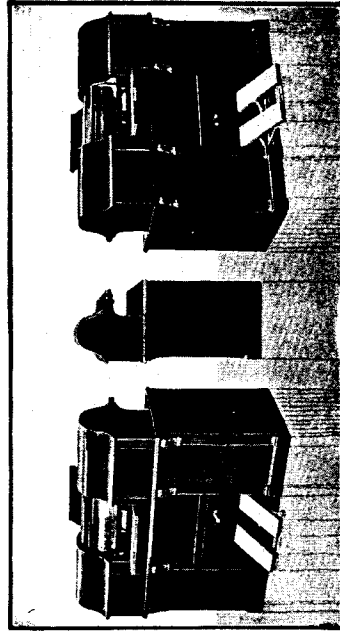
Of music man never tires. Every new example of the art awakens new emotions in his breast. One piece may lose its freshness, but with the next comes back, enhanced, the pleasure of the first.

The owner of a Pianola need never fear it may grow tiresome. The music for it has no limit. Its repertoire, enormous in extent, magnificent in variety, absolutely precludes such a possibility.

Eight thousand one hundred and thirty-one pieces at present, and new selections added monthly at the rate of two hundred and fifty, makes a collection such as the world has never heretofore seen brought together.

In view of this, how apparent it is that one can never tire of the Pianola.

The Pianola's self is not the question. The music it makes possible is the consideration, and every new selection renews again the novelty and freshness of the instrument.



era; some drawings show a group of men around the instrument; some show it as a high-class machine in the background being enjoyed by the man of the house.

In some arenas, the player piano came to be seen as a necessity. Robert Peary took one on his expedition to the North Pole in 1909 in his ship's stateroom, saying, "The Pianola is an essential part of our equipment. Men become lonely in the Frozen North, and they are elevated and their depression is dispelled by the wonderful music" (quoted by "1900-1909: Talking Machines and Player Pianos Transform the Industry" 1990:52). In that same era, the U.S. Navy supplied 128 warships with player pianos (ibid.:52).

One popular magazine account from 1922 tells of a woman who, whenever she traveled, would "have the best player piano in town sent to her room. She is a regular fan" (Schauffler 1922:13). The author of this article, a music critic, became so enamored of the sound of his hotel neighbor that he purchased a player piano for himself, only to discover that it sounded "like a super-hurdy-gurdy" (ibid.:13). What to do? Take lessons. Player piano teachers proliferated in this era, along with published how-to guides. Schauffler's account also offers several examples of how people adapted their player pianos for various purposes: one person invented a device for picking out a counter-theme in the roll; some musicians learned to play a string or wind instrument while accompanying themselves on the player piano. Additionally, phonograph records were released that were intended to coordinate with player piano rolls of accompaniments so that people could accompany famous singers and soloists on recordings (Schauffler 1915).

### Ideologies

Advertisements and other publications helped shape public attitudes toward the player piano and I want to recount some of their themes, for they articulate many of the ideologies that were to become underlying cultural assumptions about purchasing music. Drawing on the earlier mode of piano advertising, player piano advertisements emphasized the social status offered by the player piano by depicting instruments in beautiful houses, with well-dressed people enjoying themselves. Everybody always looks happy; children always look well behaved. As Roell (1989) notes, advertisements took many tactics, including the health benefits, both physical and mental, that could accrue from owning a player piano.

Perhaps most prominent in the writings on the player piano is the theme of the "democratization" of music, a term in use in this period though it was usually employed in haphazard and uncritical ways that I will attempt to sort out (see also Gitelman 2004, Roell 1989, and Théberge 1997 on the subject of democratization and player pianos). The primary usage of

the concept concerned the democratization of access to music—anybody can have live music in the home, thanks to the player piano: "The Pianola solves the problem of music in the home," began Aeolian's landmark ad, later telling readers "the music of the world is free to all." Not entirely true, since this Pianola cost \$250 and had to be attached to a piano, and one had to purchase piano rolls. Some authors wrote of this democratization in striking terms, such as the influential music critic Deems Taylor, who said that "even an Alaskan, nowadays, can hear the masterpieces of piano literature played by great artists" (Taylor 1922). The well-known American music critic Gustav Kobbé echoed this enthusiasm in a book on the instrument that contains paeans to the player piano as an instrument of the democratization of good music: "What a leveler of distinctions, what a universal musical provider the pianola is!" he wrote breathlessly in 1907 (Kobbé 1907:6). The ideological position being enunciated is quite clear in writings such as these. The claim of democratization was common for many new music technologies—from player piano to phonograph to radio to personal computer—and was perhaps the most powerful ideology in support of the player piano.

Another form of the democratization ideology found in contemporary writings of the period concerned who can play the player piano; call this democratization of ability. Everybody can play it, one learns, even a child. No more time spent on practice, on the development of technique: "every member of the household may be a performer," says Aeolian's 1902 advertisement. Many ads for player pianos showed small children at the instrument, their feet dangling above the floor. An ad for the Simplex player piano reproduced a photograph of a child with the caption "Anybody can play anything" (reproduced in Roehl 1973:10). In many ads, Gulbransen player pianos were depicted with a baby paddling on one of the pedals that powered the machine before they were electrified (see Figure 2), which became one of the most famous trademarks in all of mechanical music along with Nipper, the Victor Talking Machine Company dog.

A Gulbransen advertisement in *Saturday Evening Post* from October 17, 1925 said, in the ad's largest font, "The Biggest Thrill in Music is playing it *Yourself*"; followed underneath by, "And now even untrained persons can do it. *You can play better by roll than many who play by band.* And you can play *ALL* pieces while they can play but a few" (reproduced in Roehl 1973:23, emphases and uppercase in original). What appears to be the deliberate ambiguity here between "play" as in play an instrument, and "play" as in play a mechanical instrument is particularly striking in this ad.<sup>3</sup>

This advertisement, and the pioneering Aeolian one, also employ an ideology of plenitude, what I'll call the democratization of availability: There is so much music available for the player piano, with more all the time,

Figure 2: Gulbransen Player Piano Advertisement, 1922. *Saturday Evening Post*, 16 September, 51.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

**The Truthful Trade-Mark of the Gulbransen**

A baby's hand on a pedal of the Gulbransen causes it to play. The trade-mark tells a truthful story.

It is the exclusive Gulbransen feature—the fine-craftmanship—the patented design—that make "easy to play" a fact.

Naturally the results you obtain on the Gulbransen are far above the average. The instrument is flexible, responsive, simple. Even a novice, with the aid of Gulbransen Instruction Rolls—also an exclusive idea—quickly learns to play well.

When buying a Gulbransen, you are protected as to price. Mark this: no matter in what town or from what dealer you buy a Gulbransen the price paid will be \$700, \$800, \$950 or \$105; according to the size of the instrument. The price is marked in the back of every Gulbransen at the factory. Its price is established—its value unquestioned.

The baby trade-mark stands for real music, easily played. It appears on more player-pianos each year than any other trade-mark or name. It is the emblem of Gulbransen ideas, ability, experience and politics.

**Gulbransen-Dickinson Company, Chicago**  
 Canadian Distributors:  
 Mutual Merchandise Sales Company  
 75 Wellington Street, West, Toronto

**Nationally Priced**  
 Guaranteed in the Back

Write today. Chicago, Ill. Gulbransen Company  
**700 600 495 365**

The Gulbransen is a fine name brand. Get the truth! Mark it in the back of every Gulbransen.



# GULBRANSEN


## The Player-Piano

\*New Book of Gulbransen Music\* Free on Request. Check Coupon.

Check here if you do not own any piano or player-piano.

Check here if you want information about buying a Gulbransen player-piano, installed in your home and delivered in freight and mail to your home. Write name and address in margin and mail to Gulbransen, Dickinson Co., 332 West Chicago Street, Chicago, Ill.

Make these 3 TESTS of the Gulbransen:



One Finger Instruction Roll Test

One Baby Trade-Mark Test

One Child Playing Test

that it is now possible to have in one's home more music than even the best pianists could ever learn to play, a strategy used in the later Gulbransen ad just quoted. A 1909 advertisement for the Pianola emphasized the amount of music available—over 15,000 compositions—and says, "it is for the music it affords that so many thousands of people have purchased the PIANOLA or PIANOLA PIANO" ("The Pianola Piano" 1909, emphasis and uppercase in original). This ideology of plentitude, of the democratization of availability, was a particularly potent argument at the dawn of a new era of consumption.

Another prominent ideology that many early writings addressed concerned the role of the self in playing these new instruments. The construction of selfhood was a major preoccupation in American culture in this period as peoples' sense of personal autonomy was increasingly threatened by new bureaucratic corporate models, the growth of an interdependent market, the rise of mass culture, the movement from rural areas to urban, and other factors that I have examined elsewhere (Taylor 2007; see also Lears 1983). Much advertising copy tended to speak to preoccupations with the self that were being articulated in this era (see Lears 1983:4).

Time and again, advertisements and other publications about the player piano in the first wave of its popularity return to the question of the player's self-expression, assuring anxious readers that they were not surrendering their selfhood or individual musicality to a machine, but that, in fact, only they could make music; the machine merely contributed the technical means of playing. Claims of the importance of the human contribution constituted a powerful discourse to which distinguished critics and musicologists could be just as susceptible as advertising copywriters. For example, the well-known British critic Ernest Newman, who edited a popular magazine on the player piano for several years, wrote that

first-rate playing is not so much a matter of technique as of feeling; and no amount of teaching or of practicing can give the plain person that. All that the average young lady has done after five or ten years of hard work is to get her muscles into a certain state of flexibility and control. But if all she is to have as the result of all this labour is technique, surely she may as well trust to the piano-player for that. (Newman 1920:30)

For Newman, freedom from technique meant that music could be more tentatively listened to, but what was really introduced with the player piano was the rise of passive listening, marking the beginning of the transformation of the musical experience into an object of consumption.

Many advertisements and how-to guides invoke the human soul that players can bring to the player piano machine; it is not just agency that is being preserved, but the human soul itself. As Gustav Kobbé wrote, "I find a



great feature of the so-called mechanical piano-player lies in what it allows you to do yourself. It provides you with technique, but, to use a colloquial phrase, 'you can still call your soul your own.' The technique, the substitute for that finger facility which only years of practice will give, is the pianola's; but the interpretation is *yours*' (Kobbé 1907:12, emphasis in original). "Your interpretation"—facilitated by the expressive controls on some pianos discussed above. D. Miller Wilson, author of a how-to guide, echoed Newman on the machine's technique, and wrote in the early 1920s that, "To give free play to the imagination, to allow the heart to be moved, to attain an ideal interpretation, and to bring out—coax out—the *melody which is echoed from the soul*, one must be freed from the mechanically difficult operation of fingering" (Wilson n.d.:55–6, emphasis in original). In a similar vein, Arthur Whiting, writing in the late teens, said that "the mechanical art meets one not only half way but all the way, for there are no preliminaries to its mastery and the soul becomes at once articulate" (Whiting 1918/1919:829).<sup>4</sup> Readers were assured that even though they were relying on a machine, the machine was simply a tool to help them express themselves better than they had ever been able to before.

### Reification

These discourses about the importance of the self, the soul, in player pianos eventually gave way to discourses about "The Music Itself"—this is what the residue of the player pianists' agency was put in service of. The seeds of such an approach can be found even in Aeolian's breakthrough 1902 ad, which represents the instrument as a self—an unusual stratagem—in order to set music aside as something else: "The Pianola's self is not the question," the ad reads; "the music it makes possible is the consideration . . ." The Pianola is content to let its "self" recede in favor of the geniuses and great works it brings into the home. And, it is content to allow its self to take a backseat to the human Pianola player, whose taste and expression still matter, even with a machine that makes music. The "selfhood" of the Pianola is acknowledged but minimized so that the agency of the composer and performer—recorded in piano rolls—and the agency of the human player can assume their rightful positions. As a 1901 article reassuringly had it, "The self-player is a player which you control yourself; the 'self' you furnish, the instrument does the rest" (Mathews 1901:187). This advertisement shifts focus away from the performer (whose few roles are meant to address the question of "expression") to the music itself, encoded, but not contained in any simple manner, in piano rolls. Owning great music, and knowing that more is always being manufactured as piano rolls, came to be seen as more important than making music oneself the old-fashioned way, since even the

greatest artists are unable to play all the music available. Music publishing companies had marketed "great music" before the player piano, but with the rise of the reproducing player piano, great music could be played by great musicians in the home, removing it further from the realm of an activity that one practiced for oneself.<sup>5</sup>

In part, this shift was driven by the public's knowledge of the technical aspects of the machines; it was no longer necessary to educate them about this, or speak of it in advertisements. The very success of the player piano meant that, after a time, proselytizers for the instrument did not have to rely so much on purveying information or technical data, but could concentrate on what the piano was for: the music itself. When the automobile was new, for another example, advertising filled an "educational" role, imparting facts and technical details. But then, according to the best known advertising man of his generation, Bruce Barton, writing in 1926, "there is no more need of advertising the details of automobiles to the American public than there is for advertising the multiplication table" (quoted by Fox 1984:109).

The player piano reached this same stage by the mid-1920s, and manufacturers began to shift their approach from selling instruments and pianistic technique to selling music, especially with the popularity of the "reproducing" piano, those that could "record" performances, usually of famous pianists and composers. No longer was technique required of the player pianist. By this period, player piano manufacturers understood very well that it was music they were selling: they did not see themselves as mere purveyors of hardware. In 1924, Marian Reed, Manager of the Ampico Library (a major manufacturer of reproducing pianos) wrote that player piano salesmen were too accustomed to selling pianos and confining their sales language to technical attributes of the machines, saying "It is being constantly reiterated and must always be remembered that in selling reproducing pianos, one sells first MUSIC" (Reed 1924, reproduced in Roehl 1973:188; uppercase in original). She continues: "Good music must be sold. The reproducing piano, by eliminating the distraction of a personality, is training the music lover to listen" (*ibid.*). Listen—not play.

With the arrival of the reproducing piano and the elimination of the "personality" playing the player piano, the conversion of music from music as something that people bought made themselves to a commodified and reified "music" that people bought was nearly complete (though the phonograph and radio had a considerable impact on this process as well). Writings about the reproducing piano were ultimately selling the idea that one could listen to music at home passively, demonstrated clearly in a 1920s color ad for the Artrio Angelus reproducing piano, that shows an elegantly dressed woman relaxing in a chair across the room from the player piano, instructing readers how to listen to music passively in the home with the caption "Lean Back

