

Weaponizing Classical Music: Crime Prevention and Symbolic Power in the Age of Repetition

The following research brief describes a study involving the use of music as a deterrent and repellant of unwanted loiterers and potential wrong-doers. This practice has seen popularity around government buildings, parks, recreation and performance centers, and retail spaces.

Background:

In any decision process, a surprising number of factors are at play. When we think back on something seemingly mundane such as what we chose to eat for breakfast this morning, we recall perhaps a handful of factors that we considered in our decision: Am I going to eat in or grab something from a restaurant. Do I want something sweet or something savory? How basic or fancy would I like to go? Off hand, we may be able to think of a dozen or so mini-decisions that culminated to the macro-decision of eating breakfast. However, there were in fact several hundred factors at play. The color of the room you were in, the height of the ceilings, what advisements you'd seen recently. The reason that we don't remember these factors and recall their influence on our decisions is because they occur subconsciously, but these factors are highly influential on our decision process (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983). Here, we look at controllable environmental factors of a retail space and how we can influence shoplifting behavior inexpensively and without alienating customers.

Findings:

- Government officials in a suburb of Sydney, Australia, ran a 6-month deterrent program meant to stop local youth from nighttime loitering. Barry Manilow music was broadcast through loud speakers located in a local car park every night between 9 pm and midnight on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.
 - The logic was to “use music that doesn’t appeal to these people (the youths)”
 - It was effective\
- Other similar studies have tested classical music, with equal success.

Elevation or Relocation?

- While effective, what was the effect of this music? Did the youth just relocate to disruot as different, Manilow-free parking lot?
- There exists a prevalent belief in our culture that classical music has the ability to enhance an individual.
 - Parents play classical music in their newborn’s cribs in the hope that it will tack a few IQ points on. Some may play classical music to older children or adults with the hope that it will culture them.
 - In this case, the children’s behavior was not altered, and their character not seemingly enhanced. They simply scattered and relocated.

Mechanisms:

- The music may have been territorial in nature, marking the lot as off limits, or perhaps establishing the illusion of the lot being a controlled area.
- The music may have deterred because it was unexpected. Studies show that music that does not match ambiance is off-putting, and may lead to lower satisfaction and raised weariness.
- The patrons may have simply disliked the music, in a mechanism similar to administering an electric shock or filling the space with an unpleasant odor.
- Classical music may prime the concept of morality, making the patrons feel uncomfortable and guilty.

Implications:

- Classical music and Barry Manilow seem to be effective deterrents of empty outdoor night time venues.
- The mechanism responsible for this effect remains generally unknown. Better understanding of this phenomenon is important in order to predict what situations and locations it will be effective in, as well as how it will effect honest customers