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**Permanent Underground:
Radical Sounds and Social Formations in 20th Century American
Musicking**

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**Permanent Underground:
Radical Sounds and Social Formations in 20th Century American
Musicking**

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Dissertation

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father, Gary and Linda Cline. Without their generous hearts, tolerant ears, and (occasionally) open pocketbooks, I would have never made it this far, in any endeavor. A second, related dedication goes out to my siblings, Nicholas and Elizabeth. We all get the help we need when we need it most, don't we?

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**Permanent Underground:
Radical Sounds and Social Formations in 20th Century American
Musicking**

John F. Cline, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Supervisor: Mark C. Smith

Musical labor entered a new phase of alienation following the advent of recording technology in the late 19th century. Whereas prior to recording musicians had a relatively direct relationship with their audience—the sum of the two groups constituting “musicking”—sound reproduction created a spatial and temporal dislocation between them. Most narratives of American popular music trace out a particular genre formation, and relate it to the culture from whence it emerged. By contrast, this dissertation begins from the point where musicking began to disengage from commodification, both at the level of social formation and of the creation of sound itself. Drawing on anthropologist Pierre Clastres’ notion of “Anti-State” modes of organization and cultural critic Ivan Illich’s concept of “conviviality,” or a human-centered rather than mass production-oriented use of tools—in this case musical instruments both handmade and modified—each chapter of this project tackles a different dimension of the quest for autonomous musicking, or a “permanent underground.” Chapter 1 examines the organizational principles that have run in parallel to the bureaucratic, capitalist manifestation of a “music industry” in the 20th century. Beginning with a critique of either/or fallacy of the opposition posited between “modernism” and “nostalgia,” the reminder of the chapter

demonstrates the reconciliation between these two aesthetic and political positions; topics include the seizure of public space by itinerant blues musicians in the rural-industrial prewar South, the self-released recordings of gospel artists after WWII, the formation of experimental jazz collectives in the 1960s, and the relationship between psychedelic music and cults/communes in the 1960s. Chapter 2 critiques the function of genre in musicking as means to a reproducible sonic commodity, and argues for “noise” as an aesthetic intervention that disrupts the saleable nature of music—a political act in itself. Chapter 3 suggests several strategies for achieving “noise.” These include the repurposing of industrial machines as musical instruments, the incorporation of foreign musical traditions, and the use of collage as a formal principle. The final chapter profiles six collectives that have emerged since the late 1960s that adhere to the aesthetic and political values established throughout this dissertation.

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Introduction: Between the Bookshelf and the Turntable

This dissertation is an exercise in what might be called “experimental sociomusicology.” The term “sociomusicology” is not in wide circulation, but I arrived at its use via my own dissatisfaction with the appropriateness of “ethnomusicology” as a descriptor, as well as attempts at fitting my work into more conventional music history categories. According to Charles Keil (himself a dissatisfied ethnomusicologist), sociomusicology is a,

paleologism for wording how musicking, socializing, and a certain kind of utopian aspiring or imagining all fit together. The most basic sociomusicological idea is that interacting sounds constitute the abstraction “music” in the same way that interacting people constitute the abstraction “society”; we can learn a lot by the close comparison of interacting sounds and interacting people in specific times, places, and contexts that we can’t learn by transcribing music, transcribing interviews, and interpreting these texts in terms of each other.¹

The goal of the sociomusicology practiced in this dissertation is to both provide a historical account of radical alternatives to liberal capitalist forms of social organization and genre-bound types of music making as they played out across the United States in the 20th century—the era of recorded sound—and to offer a blueprint for further manifestations of this same impulse, from whatever corner they might come. These alternative forms have tended to exist “underground,” that is, out of sight for nearly everyone but the participants which includes both musicians and their small but devoted

¹ Charles Keil, “Applied Sociomusicology and Performance Studies,” *Ethnomusicology* 42, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 303.

followers. However, as I demonstrate in the chapters that follow, for complex reasons the conditions necessary for the existence of an underground stabilized around the end of the 1960s, hence its “permanence.”

At the analytic end of that two-part goal, one acknowledged attraction of “sociomusicology” as a concept has to do with Keil’s attention to “musicking,” a substitution of an active verb for the noun music, the origins of which are addressed below. Similarly, “a certain kind of utopian aspiring or imagining” strikes me as appropriate to my thesis, though I would dispute the word “utopian,” since one of my goals in this dissertation is to demonstrate the already existing history of alternative forms of musicking in American culture—which is a bit different from the “nowhere” of utopia. To accomplish this goal, I have turned to “experimental” means, which I define as novel methodological approaches to the study of emergent forms of musicking; the four primary concepts of my methodology are addressed below in this Introduction. The resulting synthesis of these ideas might best be described as an “experimental sociomusicology.”

One of the other appeals of the more basic form of sociomusicology is its implicit invocation of Theodor Adorno’s “Introduction to the Sociology of Music.”² Although I rarely concur with Adorno’s conclusions in his various studies of music, I do appreciate his tendency to value qualitative characteristics over quantitative ones—a somewhat unusual position within sociology as practiced in the United States. At the same time, I have been strongly influenced by the ideas behind “cantometrics,” a field initiated by

² Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Continuum, 1988).

Alan Lomax in the 1960s that sought to classify all of the music of the world's peoples—much of which Lomax had collected himself—into structural typologies, which he and his collaborators then cross-referenced with the Human Relations Area Files, a massive database of ethnographies containing information about the organization of hundreds of particular societies based on approximately seven hundred different cultural traits.³ The project grew out of Lomax's belief that recording technology had rendered traditional musicological analysis, dependent on written transcription, obsolete, and that “music was a simple communication technique which could give information about the emotional shape of a number of extremely important social psychological patterns in a given society.”⁴

Although Lomax's project was never completed due to a lack of funds, the relationships that he and his colleagues found between song-form and social organization were strong enough to remain striking to later researchers. Steven Feld, a frequent collaborator of Charles Keil, wrote in 1984 about cantometrics that “It is my hope that a comparative sociomusicology will develop along these lines, elaborating not correlations of song structures and social structures, but coherences of sound structures and social structures.”⁵ The “correlations” that Feld points out in the quoted passage are the primary reason why Gage Averill concluded that the system was too mechanically deterministic in his introduction to Lomax's writings about cantometrics in *Alan Lomax: Selected*

³ John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 345.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Steven Feld, “Sound Structure as Social Structure,” *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 28, no. 3, September 1984, 383–409.

Writings 1934-1997.⁶ In his assessment, Lomax's devotion to quantitative techniques were an overreach, going too far past his initial inspiration in the work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, who had noted the way vocal stress was an "indicator" of sexual mores—which was perhaps more a "coherence" than a "correlation," to use Feld's distinction.

If there is a crucial insight to be gleaned from Lomax's "cantometrics" it's that too often analysis of popular music tends to locate its analyses primarily in sociology *or* aesthetics. Music becomes either one of several accessories to social organization or an abstracted object of study, rather than coherent aspects of a whole. My experimental sociomusicology disavows the overly quantitative aspects of cantometrics in order to study the coherences between the insights provided by sociology/anthropology and aesthetics at critical moments and sites of transformation vis-à-vis music. In this, my work bears some resemblance to Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* insofar as Attali contends in that text that transformations of the social are prefigured by transformations in music's organizing principles at particular moments in time; though often vague and abstract, Attali breaks music down into three defined epochs and assigns them a name reflecting what he believes to be the dominant traits of their respective modes of production: Sacrificing (all music until the European Renaissance in the 16th century), Representing (the period of written music, lasting from the Renaissance to around 1900), and Repeating (the ongoing period of mechanical reproduction of sound).

⁶ Gage Averill, "Introduction, Cantometrics and Cultural Equity: The Academic Years," in Ronald Cohen, ed., *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934-1997* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 230–44.

Attali also hypothesizes a fourth epoch, which he calls “Composing” that I deal with in depth in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.⁷

There are many objections to Attali’s thesis. At present, I want to address just one, as well as note the place where I am in general agreement with *Noise*. The most clear-cut objection to Attali’s book is that it is so absolutely biased toward the history of European high culture that it’s hard to dissociate the arguments from utter chauvinism. Leaving aside the existence of un-transcribed musical traditions up to the present day (including those in Attali’s own Europe) it also ignores the fact that transcription occurred earlier than 1500 C.E. (e.g., in India). Still, supposing that his thesis could be modified for non-European cultures, one incontrovertible fact remains: mechanical recording of sound was a profound upheaval that affected the musical production of every corner of the globe. For now, the focus is on the way in which mechanical reproduction of sound created conditions of alienated labor—in the classical Marxist sense—in ways that were never before possible, even in the earlier period of written transcription or “sheet music.”

The alienation of musical labor occurred most basically because mechanical reproduction allowed a performance by a musician—their labor—to occur at any remove of distance or time from the musicians themselves. The composer and music theorist R. Murray Schaefer termed this new relationship between musician and listener

⁷ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

“schizophonia.”⁸ The relationship in question is dependent on music being transformed into a commodity. Commodification is different from exchange per se; at every point in history, musicians engaged in some form of exchange for their labors, whether court minstrels or village entertainers. And, in some ways, these exchanges *do* resemble fully developed capitalism: compensation based on time expended (Marx’s “labor theory of value”) and the ability to accumulate wealth (initially true for composers whose work was published for the use in performance by others, later in the 19th century increasingly true of virtuosic performers like Franz Liszt as well). But what distinguishes these examples from recorded music is “reification.” While it’s possible—and in some instances worthwhile—to treat musical sound as material, here I want to concede that music is abstract in comparison to other art forms, like architecture, painting, or sculpture. The written score is material object, of course, but whether performed by a parlor pianist or Liszt himself, compared to the score musical, musical sounds are abstract. With mechanical recordings, sound becomes much more concretely physical: the holes in the player piano roll, the grooves on a record, the positive and negative charges on the tape, and the 1s and 0s of digital files stored on a CD or hard drive. The reification of sound made possible by technology created the conditions of alienated labor, which made music into a potentially capitalist enterprise.

Although music-as-commodity has never been a particularly stable means of profit-making, from Tin Pan Alley to iTunes, musicians themselves only occasionally benefitted from this turn of events, a fact excruciatingly clear in the history of American

⁸ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993).

popular music from the biographies of countless black composers and performers—among other sources. Record label owners and their compatriots in the jukebox, radio, record retail, and now online distribution networks have typically taken the lion’s share of the profits, occasionally through fraudulent claims of authorship. Moreover—and this requires a hard critical self-evaluation—the reification of sound as physical object inadvertently created a secondary market of collectors, whose expenditures don’t even benefit label owners, let alone musicians. (Out of shame, I’ll refrain from disclosing the dollar amount I myself have spent on a single, “rare” recording.) Despite my own personal fetishization and the occasional flight of fancy to a utopia where recordings are obsolete and only person-to-person musical exchange exists, the genie of mechanical recording is not going back into the bottle. Which means that the problem of alienated labor will persist.

I agree with Attali’s proposition that the advent of mechanical sound reproduction was a revolutionary paradigm shift in music, it also must be acknowledged that not only was the shift not totalizing—I live in Austin, TX, “Live Music Capital of the World,” after all—but that counter-practices to this form of musical labor have a history nearly as long as that of recording itself, even (or perhaps especially) among recording artists. Thus I take seriously Attali’s contention that an alternate form of production is not only possible, but, in my analysis, that it has its own complex history. The use of experimental sociomusicology is to chart both the emergence of new forms of cultural production—and concurrently new types of social relations—with new forms of music, through disparate examples across both geographical space and historical time, not to

mention class, race, and gender lines. What connects these threads is the underlying impulse to “de-alienate” music labor, regardless of whether the practitioners analyzed were likely to formulate an understanding of their own activities using that specific term. The beginning of this analysis corresponds roughly with the beginning of the recorded era, but skews toward the period between the late 1960s and early 1990s. The emphasis is a result of my conclusion that this time frame encompasses the advent of the most fully developed counter-practices in music: the arrival of what I call a “permanent underground.” This permanent underground was not then and is still not a divorce from exchange per se any more than in the pre-recorded era. But it *does* represent a stabilized form of alternative commerce to capitalist—that is, “mainstream”—music production.

In order to practice experimental sociomusicology with respect to the permanent underground that emerged between the 1960s and 1990s, I have drawn on concepts developed by a diverse group of writers who were making active arguments during this same period; their appropriateness (and appropriation) has been a happy historical correlation, and was not my original intent. In particular, I cite Ivan Illich’s “conviviality,” Christopher Small’s “musicking,” Nancy Fraser’s “counterpublic,” and Pierre Clastres’ “Anti-State” as especially relevant. For better or worse, I must acknowledge that my experimental sociomusicology cannot rely on the massed data at Alan Lomax’s disposal, and consequently I have no pretenses toward a “scientific” analysis of the material presented herein. (Not least of all because the original project proved itself a failure.) The motivation for my arguments is ultimately about presenting a history of the possible that has been effaced in more conventional popular music

histories; to this end, I have ample substantiation. And perhaps contrary to my *mea culpa* as a record collector, I am happy to admit that this work was composed between the turntable and the bookshelf, using sources acquired from the cutout bin and the auction. If anything, the lack of traditional archiving of much of my primary material speaks to me of its vitality. Furthermore, in the construction of a history of convivial musicking and Anti-State counterpublics I have had occasion to invent or modify several additional concepts in order to explicate the practices of the people I have come to think of as “post-industrial Maroons” and “musical guerillas.” The remainder of the Introduction is devoted to explicating the four fundamental concepts in the methodology used throughout this dissertation.

THEORETICAL MODELS

Ivan Illich, a radical former Catholic priest, was a prolific social critic in the 1970s and 1980s. Originally trained to be a scholar within the Vatican, Illich instead first took up residence as a parish priest in a working class Puerto Rican neighborhood in New York before relocating Mexico where he coordinated the efforts of left-wing Catholic missionaries in the Americas, most of whom followed some form of “Liberation Theology” in advocating more equitable economic conditions and greater social justice. With the Reagan and Bush successes in putting down democratic uprisings in Latin America in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, Liberation Theology fell out of favor, both with the general public and with the Vatican—whose anti-communist Pope John Paul II had never cared for it to begin with. Combined with his advancing age, this caused his work

to fall out of fashion in recent years. But, as Chase Madar in *The American Conservative* (of all places) suggests, “the work of Ivan Illich deserves a happier afterlife, for he was a remarkably penetrating social critic, a secular heresiarch whose marrow-deep analyses of contemporary institutions—healthcare, education, transport, and economic development—remain pertinent.”⁹ For my purposes, the most valuable concept to be extracted from Illich’s work is the idea of “conviviality.” He describes it thus:

I choose the term “conviviality” to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. I believe that, in any society, as conviviality is reduced below a certain level, no amount of industrial productivity can effectively satisfy the needs it creates among society's members.¹⁰

Conviviality, in *Tools for Conviviality* and elsewhere in Illich’s work, does not have a specific application to music or musical analysis. But even from the above passage it is easy to make leaps to digital technologies—Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI), the various ways in which PCs and the Internet have radically altered the production and distribution of music since the 1980s, etc. If anything, MIDI and more recent examples like Pro-Tools have heightened standardization: of musical labor, of organizing form, and of sound. Although these technologies have had something of an egalitarian effect—they’re relatively cheap—they have also brought to its most elaborate

⁹ Chase Madar, “The People’s Priest,” *The American Conservative*, February 1, 2010, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/article/2010/feb/01/00024/>.

¹⁰ Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 11.

point the problem whereby conventions of orchestration define the structure and sound of music; for example, the familiar guitars-bass-drums configuration of rock music can be understood as resulting in relatively similar music as a consequence of standardized ways of playing (a limited range of acceptable chords) on mass-produced instruments. Similarly, older examples of electronic music produced on homemade synthesizers or “hacked” consumer electronics often exhibit a much wider sonic palette than that found in “contemporary” electronic dance music which mimics with a remarkable degree of verisimilitude the peculiarities of analog synthesizers from the 1980s using standardized filters or effects incorporated into digital software. The relationship between mass-produced instruments and the conventionalization of musical form is not inevitable, of course, as the “prepared” piano of Henry Cowell or the staunchly anti-conventional playing of Jad and David Fair attests. (The latter is discussed at some length in the second chapter.) Moreover, digital technologies employed at the distribution level do not, in Illich’s world, necessarily represent an alternative to the big business of pop. It’s hard not to think of MySpace, iTunes, and countless fleeting file-sharing services when Illich writes,

The pooling of stores of information, the building of a knowledge stock, the attempt to overwhelm present problems by the production of more science is the ultimate attempt to solve a crisis by escalation.¹¹

In other words, the incredible proliferation of the production of popular music and the explosion of avenues of distribution isn’t necessarily an occasion of unqualified

¹¹ Ibid., 9.

praise; simply having *more* music available for download doesn't constitute a radical break with the industrial homogeneity of pop's past. After all, most of the channels of distribution are still owned by large corporate enterprises like Apple or Google, and a million musicians aspiring to "break through" to the world of commercial success via a viral video or the hype of the blogosphere produces more pseudo- A&R men or talent scouts than it changes the fundamental social relations accompanying the production and consumption of music.

Although earlier in this Introduction I discussed music as "abstract" in the sense that sound had a limited materiality until the ability to translate it into concrete physical form—as sheet music or recording—became possible, Christopher Small argues that, in a more fundamental sense, music isn't abstract at all, since it is a result of particular human activities and relationships. Although not explicitly a Marxist, the New Zealand-born musicologist's arguments works like *Music, Education, Society*, *Music of the Common Tongue*, and *Musicking* are amenable to Marx's assertion in *Capital* that the products of labor (under capitalism, the commodity) are the result of social relations, and that it is only in forgetting or obscuring this core fact that fetishization is possible.¹² Small further parallels the Marx of the *Grundrisse* in that he refuses to cordon off consumption and production as separate.¹³ Starting with his first book, *Music, Society, Education*, Small

¹² Christopher Small, *Music, Society, Education* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1996); Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in African American Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1999); Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1998); Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992).

¹³ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993).

introduces the concept of “musicking” which unites playing music (labor and production) with listening (consumption) as two inseparable aspects of the same sphere. In his last book, entitled, appropriately enough, *Musicking*, he further explains that,

Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing “music” is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely. This habit of thinking in abstractions, of taking from an action what appears to be an essence and of giving that essence a name, is probably as old as language; it is useful in the conceptualizing of our world but it has its dangers. It is very easy to come to think of the abstraction as more real than the reality it represents, to think, for example, of those abstractions which we call love, hate, good and evil as having an existence apart from acts of loving, hating, or performing good and evil deeds and even to think of them as being in some way more real than the acts themselves, a kin of universal or ideal lying behind and suffusing the actions. This is the trap of reification, and it has been a besetting fault of Western thinking ever since Plato, who was one of its earliest perpetrators.¹⁴

For Small, the most important questions that emanate from an understanding of music as an activity rather than a thing are ethical ones. Despite his seminal place his work holds in the practice of popular music studies—it is impossible to imagine the “New Musicology” of Susan McClary and Robert Walser et al. without it—Small’s most sustained critical engagements were with what is best described as the “classical music industry.”¹⁵ Small’s work has been central to a paradigmatic shift in that field; as music critic Robert Christgau noted, “What caused the clamor was that Small had examined classical music from the inside and found it wanting—humanly wanting as opposed to

¹⁴ Small, *Musicking*, 2.

¹⁵ Small, *Music, Society, Education*.

aesthetically wanting, to exploit a distinction he has little use for.”¹⁶ In *Music of the Common Tongue*, Small’s second book, he finds much to praise, by contrast, in the music of the African diaspora.¹⁷ *Music, Society, Education* draws a great deal of its ethical conception from Ivan Illich, appropriate enough for my purposes here. The foreground of ethics is of central importance to my project. Like Robert Walser’s *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* or Susan McClary in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, & Sexuality*, I am interested in interrogating popular music’s relationship to forms of social organization at the ethical level—not merely the weak cultural “politics” that mars too much popular music studies.¹⁸

The distinction owes itself to two specific, if interrelated, legacies. On the one hand, the avoidance of certain kinds of judgment is a direct result of popular music studies’ complex relationship to Theodor Adorno. Adorno was hardly shy when it came to making ethical judgments, but his ethical judgments in relation to the study of popular music come very close to negating its study entirely. In order to take popular music seriously, academics—popular press writers are a slightly different matter—have to buck off some of Adorno’s judgments; critiquing the “culture industry” is one thing, but dismissal of vernacular forms (an Adorno pastime) is verboten.¹⁹ Along these lines,

¹⁶ Robert Christgau, “Thinking About Musicking: Christopher Small”, n.d., <http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/rock/small-00.php>.

¹⁷ Small, *Music of the Common Tongue*.

¹⁸ Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1993); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

¹⁹ For further discussion of this issue, see: Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

some of the most widely utilized models for the study of popular music come from the “Birmingham School” of cultural studies.

The “Birmingham School” refers to both the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (with its associated faculty and students, from 1964 to 2002) *and* to a generalizable set of methodological and ideological practices that have emanated from that institution’s influence. The idea of “cultural studies” as a discipline arose among postwar British Marxists who were invested in combatting the aesthetic hierarchies constructed by figures like Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, and F.R. Leavis that invariably valorized “high culture” at the expense of working-class forms of culture.²⁰ This initial shift away from high culture towards a “people’s culture” can be seen in the early work of Richard Hoggart (the Centre’s first director), Raymond Williams, and E.P. Thompson—though the latter two were never directly connected to the Centre. Although their opposition to the Arnold/Eliot/Leavis position was shared, these three foundational figures in cultural studies were often at odds with each other as well: Thompson’s seminal *The Making of the English Working Class* was conceived, in part, as a rebuke to Raymond Williams’ *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*; Thompson believed Williams espoused the English bourgeois literary tradition far too much for a “true” Marxist.²¹ Furthermore, given the role that the Centre played in

²⁰ For a general history of this movement, see: Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1997).

²¹ E.P. Thompson, “The Long Revolution (Part I),” *The New Left Review*, June 1961, <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=1463>; E.P. Thompson, “The Long Revolution (Part II),” *The New Left Review*, August 1961, <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=1464>; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*

legitimizing the study of popular culture, it is curious that Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* is in fact a condemnation of "mass" (i.e. commercially-produced) culture along similar lines to Adorno's critique of the "culture industry," even if the two were otherwise ideologically at odds: Adorno famously championed the high bourgeois art of figures like Beethoven and feared that an emphasis on the *volk* would—or did—lead to National Socialism, much the opposite of Hoggart's somewhat romantic notion of the persistence of pre-industrial, localized English community culture that only began to "drift" when leisure, too, was industrialized, like labor before it.²²

The opposition to mass culture among postwar British Marxists, however, began to dissipate with the publication of *The Popular Arts* by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel in 1964. In that book, Hall and Whannel attempted to take mass culture seriously—including rock'n'roll—not leastways because it was *the* culture of the younger members of the British working class.²³ When Hall became the director of the Centre in 1968, this ideological shift became widespread among an emerging group of scholars, eclipsing the positions of Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson. In many respects, the attention paid to mass culture in England starting with Hall and Whannel parallels some of the changes that had taken place in American Studies a few years earlier, with F.O. Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance* representing the Hoggart/Williams/Thompson generation and

(New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Raymond Williams, *Long Revolution* (Calgary: Broadview Press, 2001).

²² Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

²³ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965).

Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* closer to Hall and Whannel.²⁴ The essential difference between American Studies and cultural studies (or the "Birmingham School") came about through the introduction in Britain of the theories of what Perry Anderson called "Western Marxism," e.g. the ideas of Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and the various members of the Frankfurt School (including, of course, Theodor Adorno), as well as the structuralist/post-structuralist linguistics-based theories then current in France, e.g. those proposed by Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, etc.²⁵ In his "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'," Stuart Hall suggested that the primary value of studying popular culture—implicitly by using ideas derived from the figures above—was in describing the ways that the "people" negotiated their own uses and meanings from the "mass culture" available to them (to use the terms common to his predecessors).²⁶ Hall's students at Birmingham would take this insight to its logical conclusion; in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige argued that the presentation of the self using re-purposed objects of mass culture as adornment (thus inverting their usual meaning) was a means of "resisting" the "hegemony" of the "dominant culture," with the first idea derived from linguistic theory—especially Roland Barthes—and the latter three from Gramsci.²⁷ Although it is important to note that the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was concerned primarily with

²⁴ F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁵ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (New York: Verso, 1976); Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain*.

²⁶ Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'," in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1981), 227-40.

²⁷ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

contemporary sociological questions and not historiographic ones, its influence has permeated both spheres of discourse. Simon Frith's journalistic coverage of the UK rave scene functions as a kind of popular sociology, and Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front* utilizes the same general principles in a historical context.²⁸

Unlike their predecessors in the 1950s and '60s, both the sociological and historical forms of cultural studies post-Hall (i.e. Simon Frith) tend to defer or avoid entirely *a priori* ethical judgments about "mass culture." In general, the position among adherents to the "Birmingham School" model is that a musical genre and/or a fan culture exists (*a posteriori*) and can be analyzed *qua* "resistance" or "opposition" to the "dominant culture" or "hegemony." To use an example I interrogate at length in Chapter 2 and a favorite of this model of cultural studies, "punk" exists as a music and related subculture. The relevant questions from this perspective are "How does punk music oppose values of mainstream pop? How do the style codes and behaviors of punk fans resist bourgeois hegemony?" These aren't easily dismissible concerns, of course, but the manner of their proposition is itself the fundamental problem. Asking them takes for granted an always-already existence of capitalist forms of social relations, which is why the resultant politics are so weak. Without something like the old Adorno/Hoggart condemnation of the "culture industry" or "mass culture," we are left with questions of "culture" only, absent the attendant critique of production.

²⁸ Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2011).

This mode of popular music studies reaches virtuosic skill in terms of deferment of judgment against “mass culture” in Birmingham-inheritor Simon Frith’s *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* because, unlike his predecessors, Frith can draw on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.²⁹ The English publication of Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* in 1987 had the singular effect of fragmenting “taste” into ever-more microscopic patterns of consumption.³⁰ As a result, whereas punk was valorized for its origins in the working class (a dubious assertion in itself) and African-American music heralded for its relationship to the political position of an ethnic minority (again, problematic, given its popularity across social groups since the 1920s), with *Distinction* it became possible to assert that virtually any musical genre or fan culture was “oppositional” to *something*, since it became less and less clear what precisely the “dominant culture” actually *was*. Consequently bubblegum pop could be analyzed as “resistant” to the values of ‘60s rock-as-art, and hip hop whose lyrics are concerned almost exclusively with the accumulation of wealth or criminality is “oppositional” to the historical exclusion of African Americans from the plunders of capitalism. Frith himself acknowledges that the concept of resistance is “slippery,” and wonders “where oppositional values come from, and how people come to believe, imaginatively, in something more than resistance.”³¹ He concludes that,

²⁹ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

³¹ Frith, *Performing Rites*, 20.

Culture as transformation, in other words, must challenge experience, must be difficult, must be *unpopular*. There are, in short, political as well as sociological and aesthetic reason for challenging populism. The problem is how to do this while appreciating the popular, taking it seriously on its own terms.³²

Frith goes on to suggest that it is “difficult” popular music that best accomplishes this goal, arguing that such music functions within “low art” the same way that Schoenberg’s music did for Adorno at the other end of the aesthetic hierarchy. Thus, if “high art” has a utopian potential for negating everyday life in capitalist world, then pop music should develop this potential as well, presumably by being the kind of “difficult” stuff preferred by rock critics.³³ But “difficult” suggests something unpleasant. In its stead, I prefer the concepts of “novel” and “experimental”—topics discussed in full in Chapter 3—because they are experientially relative, rather than the kind of relativism vis-à-vis a “dominant culture” that is evident in Frith’s Bourdieu-inspired political aesthetics. “Difficulty” should not be the issue per se; instead, the crucial matter is divesting one’s desire for easily reproducible sound structures; the music itself can be simple or “easy,” but it should never be the same twice. Without this kind of divestment, as listeners we are damned to a production/consumption cycle based only on commercially viable genres: music as commodity. This, however, cannot take place without a fundamental reorganization of musical production at the structural level. This reorganization is neither utopian nor limited to the imaginary, as they are described in Frith’s work, but instead, as I demonstrate in Chapter 1, the product of a long struggle for musicking autonomy that

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

occurred in parallel to the development of a commercial recording industry in the 20th century.

The valorization of musical autonomy is an *a priori* political judgment, a rejection of “mass culture,” the “culture industry” or “commercial pop,” whichever phrase you prefer. My assertion on this point is where Christopher Small’s conception of ethics is most useful. Small begins with a set of values, which it then applies to specific examples chosen for analysis. The result in Small’s work (and also in McClary and Walser, especially with regards to gender) is that some musical practices *fail* to meet the ethical qualifications that Small sets forth—including, in important ways, the musicking of the classical music industry, despite Small’s deep love of the tradition. Simon Frith might ask “Is Lady Gaga feminist?” But, following Small, Susan McClary asks “How does one compose a ‘feminist’ music? Who has composed ‘feminist’ music? Who has composed anti-‘feminist’ music, and what effect have both of these had?” The difference between the two rhetorical positions is very important. In the first, popularity—to whatever extent—is a sufficient justification for analysis, however feeble the conclusions in terms of political function. In the second, an ethical judgment of the musicking—the social relations—is paramount. Lady Gaga, a persona resulting from an individual’s relationship to corporate media and that media’s distribution of a related product to consumers via other corporately owned channels, cannot meet any ethical criteria except when those criteria are established by individuals deeply invested in the perpetuation of the institutions of the capitalist system—well-paid pop critics at major publications, for instance.

So, in some important ways, this dissertation is anti- “popular.” Derived in part from Illich and Small’s conception of ethics, my position has everything to do with the reality of the mechanics of popularity in terms of music. I agree with British cultural theorist and former Birmingham Center director Stuart Hall that “the popular” is intimately related to mass-production.³⁴ As such, regardless of its use as a space of hegemonic negotiation, popular music is by design meant to appeal to the greatest number of people possible, whether that group is gay white men or Chicano teenagers. (Adorno called this “pseudo-individuation.”)³⁵ Consequently, while I concur that attention deserves to be paid to the instances where codes or values *within* the system of popular music production are manipulated by performers and audiences, I also contend that greater attention should be given to the places where viable alternatives to that system have occurred. This focus is motivated by both a historical survey and personal experience: all too often, there is a sense of the tragic in relation to popular music. As a young punk rock fan, this tragic sense was manifested in debates about particular bands “selling out.” With a broader perspective, I suspect that the anger and sorrow evident in these debates was not so much a result of a band signing a more lucrative contract than in the recognition that we, as part of the musicking, were sold out, that our intensely individuated and yet collective experiences were ultimately a means of profit generation. Whether or not this tragic sense can be proven in some ethnographic or historiographic way is debatable, but the wreckage of pop past is filled with disappointments; Elvis’

³⁴ Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’,” in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1981), 227-40.

³⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Music and Culture* (New York: Verso Books, 1992).

induction into the Army, Madison Avenue's incorporation of psychedelic rock into car ads, David Bowie shedding his bisexual persona, and Johnny Rotten's query "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?" are only the most famous. Consequently, the types of examples offered in this dissertation are the ones where a particular set of ethics are integrated into all of the social relations entailed because I believe this to be the only sustainable way of avoiding the tragic sense I've described above. Most generally, these ethics involve the valorization of "personal freedom realized in personal interdependence," as Illich phrased it; like Christopher Small, I find their most persistent permutations in the musicking of African-Americans, though not, as is later demonstrated, the only ones.³⁶

An ethics, even one applied *a priori*, cannot exist in the abstract, and therefore I have turned to the concept of a "counterpublic," albeit with some trepidation. The concept of "counterpublic" emerged in the late 1980s in the work of American Political Science scholar Nancy Fraser as a rebuttal to the then-recent English translation of the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas' *The Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. In that text, Habermas contended that a "public sphere" of rational, critical discourse was necessary to the emergence of participatory democracy through both the physical spaces of bourgeois interaction (the tavern and the coffeehouse) and their accompanying mediation (newspapers, literary

³⁶ Small, *Music of the Common Tongue*.

works, etc.).³⁷ Habermas' arguments, while far-ranging, are not entirely different from those put forth by Gordon S. Wood (*The Radicalism of the American Revolution*) or Benedict Anderson (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*), insofar as both of the latter authors emphasize the role of widely distributed print media in the construction of nationalist identities—a key component in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere.³⁸ Still, Habermas' opus occupies a special place, both for scope—which surpasses both Wood and Anderson—and for its importance to the development of the field of media studies. Notably, Habermas' conclusions are relatively positive regarding the value of the bourgeois public sphere.

However, Nancy Fraser found them too accommodating to what, in U.S. historiography, we might call “consensus” history. In her essay “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” she states that, “I contend that in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public.”³⁹ Fraser goes on to illustrate the ways that Habermas' theory of the public sphere is based on specific forms of exclusion, concluding that,

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

³⁸ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

³⁹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

This argument gains additional support from revisionist historiography of the public sphere, up to and including that of very recent developments. This historiography records that members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.⁴⁰

While I find the notion of a “counterpublic” extremely useful, as I noted at the beginning of my discussion of this concept, I do so with a certain amount of apprehension. My wariness exists at several levels. The first is that a critique premised on “actually existing democracy” is perhaps too accommodating to the current political order—a liberal modification to the Thatcherite “best of all possible worlds” assertion or Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis.⁴¹ More specifically, I find Fraser’s reliance on a semi-essentialized political orientation troubling, whether class-based, racialized, or gender and sexuality-based. I certainly believe that politics is a matter of choice, not merely of identity; how else can one explain the Log Cabin Republicans? What is left of Fraser’s argument is then: “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”

For me, the most important part of Fraser’s argument is the notion of “parallel.” Fraser’s key examples substantiating this claim are the “variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

research centres, academic programmes, conferences, conventions, festivals and local meeting places” that constitute a feminist counterpublic.⁴² Assuming that other “discursive arenas” can be studied as real, material relations—and not simply as ethereal “discourse”—then the remaining key to my interpretation of Fraser is configuring “oppositional” as “contrary to” mainstream values (capitalist, heterosexist, white, etc.) rather than as a reactionary and dependent dialectical negation. Consequently, while a musicking counterpublic invested in conviviality may make strategic interventions against mainstream values, in my estimation it can also operate with, after Illich, an “autonomous,” parallel set of values; this is what I call the “permanent underground.”

Still, one of the characteristics distinguishing my permanent underground from Fraser’s “counterpublic” is the general impulse to create institutions. To give a concrete example, the development of “independent” labels like Sub Pop in the 1980s have ended up being less radical alternatives to the old-line music business than what economist Samuel Brittan has called “capitalism with a human face.”⁴³ The point of a permanent underground is that the conditions necessary for an underground are permanent, not that there are permanent institutions constituting the underground; the latter inevitably leads to the reproduction of a capitalist system of labor and consumption. In place of institutions, the “permanent underground” utilizes “assemblages” of persons and convivial tools, some quite fleeting and others that have lasted for several decades

⁴² Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 528.

⁴³ Samuel Brittan, *Capitalism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

already—as is the case of The Residents, discussed at the end of Chapter 1 and the similar groups profiled in Chapter 4.

In order to account for these characteristics, I have turned to the idea of “Anti-State” social formations found in Pierre Clastres' 1974 book, *Society Against the State*. Clastres began his unfortunately short career (he died in 1977 at 43) as an ethnographer, studying tribal cultures in South America; his research in this area can be found in the 1972 anthropological text, *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*.⁴⁴ Although Clastres' methodology was highly influenced by Levi-Strauss' attempt to objectively examine the “savage mind,” Clastres' fieldwork quickly led him to reject what he believed to be an underlying bias in both Levi-Strauss' work and most anthropology generally. This shift to what he described as “political anthropology” was first put forth in *Society Against the State*. The politics of Clastres' anthropology follow one radical premise: many of the so-called “primitive” societies are not, in fact, archaic forms of the type that resulted in Western European civilization (whose pinnacle is the State), but rather organizational forms whose principles impede—sometimes quite violently—the rise of authoritarian individuals and institutions that might lead to a State in the first place.⁴⁵ Or, as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari summarize Clastres' argument in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “Primitive, segmentary societies have often been defined as societies without a State, in

⁴⁴ Pierre Clastres, *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*, trans. Paul Auster (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*, trans. Robert Hurley and Abe Stein (New York: Zone, 1989).

other words, societies in which distinct organs of power do not appear.”⁴⁶ This definition is common to both Marxist and liberal capitalist historical-anthropological teleologies, both of which privilege the centrality of the State. Hence, Clastres’ “primitives” are Anti-State. To legitimate this argument, in *Society Against the State* Clastres’ draws from a wide variety of ethnographic studies, primarily of indigenous populations in the Americas. However, one of the difficulties that this text presents is that it offers no translation of Clastres’ anthropological observations of indigenous societies into a politically useful framework of analysis or program for political action in the industrialized world—despite its provocative title. Deleuze and Guattari attempt this process of translating Clastres’ thesis into these domains when they write that,

The prime interest in Pierre Clastres’ theories is that they break with this evolutionist postulate. Not only does he doubt that the State is the product of ascribable economic development, but he asks if it is not a potential concern of primitive societies to ward off or avert that monster which they supposedly do not understand.⁴⁷

Extending Clastres’ thesis, Deleuze and Guattari claim that even within the industrialized world, State and Anti-State societies exist in parallel: “The modern world can provide use today with particularly well developed images of these two directions: worldwide ecumenical machines, but also a neoprimitivism, a new tribal society as described by Marshall McLuhan.”⁴⁸ “Worldwide ecumenical machines” are Deleuze and Guattari’s idiosyncratic way of describing the various systems of global capitalism,

⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 357.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 360.

which they oppose to “neoprimitivism.” The study of emergent neoprimitivism is an example of Deleuze and Guattari call “nomadology.” They consider nomads an example of Anti-State social formation, a mindset that shows no deference to boundary lines:

It is in this sense that nomads have no points, paths, or land, even though they do by all appearances. If the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization *afterward* as with the migrant, or upon *something else* as with the sedentary (the sedentary’s relationship with the earth is mediatized by something else, a property regime, a State apparatus.)⁴⁹

This “deterritorialized” mindset is a very important one for understanding the musicking that I am investigating in this dissertation. Although not literally nomadic, the history of the “permanent underground” reveals a surprisingly widespread practice of free roaming quite across time and geography for sources of musical ideas, pulling insights from the European avant-garde as readily as from tribal West Africa; a similarly mutable relationship exists between “tradition” and the new (what I call “novelty” in Chapter 3). In *Nomadology: The War Machine*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to this as “psychic nomadism”; in Chapter 1, I explore the same phenomenon through the more common term “psychedelic.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, the musicking that results from such psychic nomadism cannot be reduced to its constituent sonic parts; this unique characteristic is what they call “assemblage.” Deleuze scholar Manuel DeLanda further explains this unique concept in his *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, stating that “Allowing the possibility of complex interactions between

⁴⁹ Ibid., 381.

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986).

component parts is crucial to define mechanisms of emergence, but this possibility disappears if the parts are fused together into a seamless web.”⁵¹ Analogous to “assemblage” theory, I explore the importance of “syncretism” in African-American music in Chapter 1, the resistance to genre formation in the permanent underground in Chapter 2, and the usefulness of “bricolage” in Chapter 3.

As I noted in an earlier paragraph, the individual examples of a convivial, musicking counterpublic are often fleeting, in addition to being “nomadic” or geographically slippery. Hakim Bey addresses this type of formation in his short essay “The Temporary Autonomous Zone” (TAZ). Bey arrived at his theory both through his reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas on “psychic nomadism” and through an eccentric study of what he calls “pirate utopias” in the 18th century Caribbean, including the Maroon communities that arose as a result of slave insurrections.⁵² This postulation shares some common features with the historical analyses of C.L.R. James, most directly in *The Black Jacobins* and *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*, though, in a broader sense, the “spontaneous organization” espoused by James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs (who together formed the “Johnson-Forest Tendency,” named after their pseudonyms, which eschewed the vanguardism of the Marxist/Leninist tradition in favor of more democratic,

⁵¹ Manuel DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 10.

⁵² Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

egalitarian, and borderline anarchist/autonomist principles) is also related.⁵³ In Chapter 1, I return to an exploration of the Caribbean as the crucial site in the formation of an anti-State modernity that was “rediscovered” in the mid-20th century.

The TAZ, according to Bey, is above all else a valuation of “insurrection” over “revolution.” Bey’s position is another in a long line of rejections of the State from the political left—the Paris Commune, the early Soviets, the Johnson-Forest Tendency, the Situationists, Autonomism, etc. (cf. Harry Cleaver).⁵⁴ Revolutions, according to Bey, are insurrections that have stabilized into equally if not more repressive regimes than the ones that preceded them. This position is similar to—if not derived from—Deleuze and Guattari, who themselves echo Emile Durkheim, as I explore in the first chapter. They note that,

There are always periods when the State as organism has problems with its own collective bodies, when these bodies, claiming certain privileges, are forced in spite of themselves to open onto something that exceeds them, a short revolutionary instant, an experimental surge.⁵⁵

Though it might seem a bit over the top to consider the ‘80s “indie” movement a “revolution” resulting in the “repressive regime” of Sub Pop et al.—it’s less of a stretch to argue that “indie” rock moved from anarchic to mini State capitalist principles—one of Bey’s key points is that the insurrection need not be very large:

⁵³ C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth, 2001); Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (New York: AntiThesis, 2000), 59–62.

⁵⁴ Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*.

⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 366–7.

The sixties-style “tribal gathering,” the forest conclave of eco-saboteurs, the idyllic Beltane of the neo-pagans, anarchist conferences, gay faery circles...Harlem rent parties of the twenties, nightclubs, banquets, old-time libertarian picnics—we should realize that these are already “liberated zones” of a sort, or at least potential TAZs. Whether open only to a few friends, like a dinner party, or to thousands of celebrants, like a Be-In, the party is always “open” because it is not “ordered”; it may be planned, but unless it “*happens*” it’s a failure. The element of spontaneity is crucial.⁵⁶

Bey cites alternative religions, music, and the Internet as frequently or potentially rich sites of insurrectionary TAZs, and I devote a significant amount of space to the importance of alternative religion in Chapter 1 and music throughout this dissertation, though the Internet only becomes a significant factor after the point where I end my analysis. However, despite the many affinities, there is one especially significant place where my work diverges from Bey’s. In the essay, Bey leaves little room for material objects: “The essence of the party: face-to-face, a group of humans synergize their efforts to realize mutual desires, whether for good food and cheer, dance, conversation, the arts of life...”⁵⁷ This is quite similar to Christopher Small, whom Robert Christgau rightly characterizes:

But like so many pop sympathizers with folk affinities—I think of Robert Palmer in *Rock & Roll: An Unruly History*, of Robert Cantwell in *Bluegrass Breakdown*, and especially of Charles Keil, who’s made a mission of teaching elementary schoolers and frat-rat klutzes to play the drums—he’s enamored of live performance and suspicious of recordings.⁵⁸

As I stated earlier in this introduction, the fact of recording cannot be ignored—despite the fact that I have relied on each of Christgau’s culprits at some point in this

⁵⁶ Bey, *T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Christgau, “Thinking About Musicking: Christopher Small.”

dissertation. Consequently, one way of conceptualizing the music history that I present here is as a series of insurrections emanating from the crisis brought on by the advent of recording at the beginning of the 20th century and reconfigured at mid-century as industrialization in the United States went into a waning period, and a politicized aesthetic valorizing musicking as direct human interaction emerged. Though I explore some ways of considering the role of the recording within this aesthetic in Chapter 1, suffice it for now to frame the issue as akin to the relationship between the Bob Dylan on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 and a Dylan record in a college dorm room the same year.

A NOTE ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS DISSERTATION

The experimental sociomusicology that I practice in this dissertation as part of my effort to analyze the permanent underground is a whole methodology, both constituted by the concepts of conviviality, musicking, counterpublic, and Anti-State, and something more than these parts separately: both a historical account and a political/aesthetic program. As a result, while I do not always refer explicitly to these ideas in this dissertation, they are never far from my thinking. The dissertation is divided into four chapters: “An Originary Narrative,” “A Body of Criticism,” “A Catalog of Atrocities,” and “A Map Towards the Present. Each of these contains several sections and subsections, each related to the main purpose of the chapter. Chapters have been arranged in a sequence that builds upon insights from the previous chapter or chapters,

with “A Map Towards the Present” functioning as both a series of examples of the permanent underground and a conclusion to the dissertation’s total argument.

Chapter 1, “An Originary Narrative,” examines the organizational principles that have run in parallel to the bureaucratic, capitalist manifestation of a “music industry” in the 20th century. Beginning with a critique of either/or fallacy of the opposition posited between “modernism” and “nostalgia,” the remainder of the chapter demonstrates the reconciliation between these two aesthetic and political positions; topics include the seizure of public space by itinerant blues musicians in the rural-industrial prewar South, the self-released recordings of gospel artists after WWII, the formation of experimental jazz collectives in the 1960s, and the relationship between psychedelic music and cults/communes in the 1960s. The final section of this chapter profiles The Residents, a musicking collective active since the early 1970s; this section is meant to demonstrate the emergence of a permanent underground at this historical juncture, and is similar to the profiles provided in Chapter 4. The overall purpose of this chapter is to highlight the development of ideas about alternative forms of social organization—the basis of any cultural production—via a genealogy that links disparate aspects of 20th century musicking through their related attempts at establishing autonomy from capitalist modes of musical labor and consumption.

Chapter 2 critiques the function of genre in musicking as means to a reproducible sonic commodity, and argues for “noise” as an aesthetic intervention that disrupts the saleable nature of music—a political act in itself. This goal is accomplished through three sections: “Unmaking Genre,” “First Rumbings: A Noise Canon,” and “Noise is All

the Rest.” “Unmaking Genre” begins with a deconstruction of genre as a valid platform for analysis, followed by a comparative reading of Lester Bangs and Ralph Ellison, extrapolating their respective thoughts about the social function of sound. Bangs is given special attention in this chapter because of his role as a champion of the kinds of music I describe as part of a permanent underground. The social function of sound is further explored through the significance of electricity and amplification, the construction of a non-Freudian subjectivity, and the physicality of collective sonic experiences. Section 2 highlights some of the loosely defined strategies for the production of “noise”—the opposite of genre—via a close examination of Bangs’ “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” with particular attention paid to topics like “outsider music” and “free jazz.” The final section of this chapter, “Noise is All the Rest,” more clearly defines “noise” in terms of specific psychoacoustic effects: pitch, loudness, timbre, rhythm, the “symphonic,” and the “spatial.” Both this group of concepts and the ones elucidated in “First Rumbblings” return to prominence in Chapter 4 as part of a toolbox of musical ideas utilized by the permanent underground.

Chapter 3, “A Catalog of Atrocities,” further examines the problem of nostalgia vs. modernism begun in Chapter 1, though in this chapter this issue is addressed as between their analogs “tradition” and “novelty,” the first and second sections, respectively. The section on “novelty” also suggests several further strategies for achieving “noise.” These strategies include the re-purposing of industrial machines as musical instruments, the incorporation of foreign musical traditions, and the use of collage as a formal principle; these, too, return as part of Chapter 4. This chapter ends

with an extended critique of Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Attali's 1979 text is an important reference point for the interrelation between social and sound organization, as noted earlier in this introduction. In this final section, the focus is turned more closely to what Attali considered a hypothetical concept, "Composing." I argue that "Composing" was already manifest via the musicking practices of the permanent underground.

In order to substantiate this claim, the final chapter's primary goal is accomplished through the profiles six collective formations that have emerged since the late 1960s: Phil Cohran and the Artistic Heritage Ensemble, The Los Angeles Free Music Society, Smegma, Destroy All Monsters, the various collaborative projects of Bill Laswell, and the Sun City Girls. These profiles are contrasted by the genre-bound conventions of "indie rock," the subject of the first section. "Indie rock" emerged concurrently with what I describe as the permanent underground, but has ultimately revealed itself to be more a smaller scale form of capitalist musical production than a revolutionary reorganization of musicking. Each of the groups that are profiled at length in this chapter adhere to the aesthetic and political values established throughout this dissertation—even if imperfectly—and they are discussed vis-à-vis the alternative modes of social organization described in Chapter 1 and through the sonic strategies enumerated in chapters 2 and 3. "A Map Towards the Present" ends with a short conclusion calling for the expansion of the musicking practices exemplified by The Residents and the six groups profiles in this chapter: an autonomous permanent underground, split from the commodification of music

Chapter 1: An Originary Narrative

INTRODUCTION

“Musical modes are nowhere altered without changes in the most important laws of the state.”

--Damon of Athens

“I think music is an instrument. It can create the initial thought patterns that can change the thinking of the people.”

--John Coltrane

This chapter is titled “An Originary Narrative” because it contains a counter-history of the development of popular music in the United States during the 20th century, a history that led to the development of the permanent underground. In response to the entrenched character of many aspects of the more conventional narrative, I introduce several “experimental” concepts. For instance, in the relatively brief discussion of pre-WWII blues, I assert that it is necessary to treat the musicking around seminal figures like Charley Patton as *industrial*. At first this might seem contradictory, since the most common adjectives affixed to Patton’s style are “country” or “rural,” when they’re not region-specific (e.g. “Delta”). But upon closer inspection, it strikes me that the musicking of Patton et al. is “rural-industrial” insofar as it was dependent on the development of particular industries in the South in the early 20th century. The existence of a paying audience—for music, food, and drink—extends directly from the income generated in the levee, logging, and turpentine camps, as well as the shift to wage labor vs. sharecropping in the agriculture industries. Post-WWII, it’s standard practice to refer

to the musicking of the migrant African-American population to the northern industrial cities as “urban blues,” implicitly connecting industrial wage labor to cultural practice; conceiving of earlier forms of musicking as industrial suggests that the transformation was not quite as radical as it seems.

Even if conceiving of pre-WWII blues as “industrial” may appear curious, given the typical association of that adjective with synthesizer-based music performed in England and the United States from the late 1970s forward (Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, Non, Foetus, etc.) I suspect that this is one of the less unusual assertions that I put forth in this chapter; as I’ll demonstrate, the ideas of “Voodoo-As-Theory” and the “cult” as a significant type of social formation, are, among others, integral to my arguments. Within the overall schema of my dissertation, this chapter is tasked with some “heavy lifting,” and in the interest of brevity, many complex topics are touched upon only briefly. In outline, however, there are four major parts that demonstrate the long history of the development of the permanent underground through alternative forms of musicking/social organization in the 20th century.

In the first, “Irreconcilable Differences,” I follow Pierre Clastres’ arguments in *Society Against the State* in assuming that there have always existed parallel State and anti-State social formations. The idea of the State is part of a European epistemology that permeates all aspects of theory and praxis for its adherents, which includes the political and cultural elites of the Western Hemisphere whose affinities lie with this epistemology, i.e. in the United States. This is one type of relationship to modernity. In this first part, I point out that this epistemology inevitably results in an either/or fallacy, pitting

modernism/progressivism/futurism against manifestations of “nostalgia.” A predominantly European (or quasi-European, in the case of Frederic Jameson) philosophical position, it has never held an absolute monopoly on thought, least of all in the United States. As John Szwed argues,

Americans have always been creole—and whether “creole” refers to food, speech, or race, it always means something made new, something emergent, not an import from Europe, Africa, Asia, whatever. Try it another way: America has been postmodern from the git-go, with everything on the table, history unfolding, putting it all up for grabs. It is a country in which mixture is king.¹

Szwed’s statement simultaneously occupies two distinct, if ultimately related historiographical frames. The first connects the United States to the rest of the Western Hemisphere via the concept of “creole.” Creolization in this regard is not simply the birth of ethnically European peoples outside of the nations of Europe, but a means of describing the blend of foreign and indigenous cultures that resulted from colonization and slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Szwed’s second frame echoes D.H. Lawrence’s point in *Studies in Classic American Literature* that the people of the Americas (Lawrence may have cared most about Hawthorne, but he was too astute to limit himself in “The Spirit of the Place” to Concord or even the U.S.) have often been driven by a reckless desire for masterless-ness, even if that desire was more intuitive and, perhaps, naïve than the political and aesthetic philosophers of 17th, 18th, and 19th century Europe would have had it.² Consequently, this part ends with a consideration of a broadly

¹ John Szwed, *Crossovers: Essays on Race, Music, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 174.

² D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Bristol, UK: Shearsman Books, 2011).

defined “African” philosophy and its relationship to the creole culture of the United States.

The second part, “Anthropop,” picks up where the discussion of “African” philosophy ends, and describes one aspect of the concrete, material history of creolization and its incorporation of “African” aesthetic and political values against the often dominant European ones in the U.S. While the creolization process can be assumed to have begun at the point of contact between European, African, and Native American in the New World, the first section in this part is concerned primarily with the “rediscovery” of Africa in African-American musicking via Haiti and Cuba in the 1930s and 1940s, whose political and aesthetic ramifications would prove important for the development of the permanent underground. This “Africanization” continued in the ‘50s and ‘60s through the global networking of figures like the dancer Katherine Dunham, as well as the migration of drummers from various African countries to the U.S. during the same period. Concurrently, as examined in the following section, anthropologists in Europe and the United States were delving into the fundamental social behaviors that led to musicking in its earliest forms; the shift in understanding of this history can be seen as through the contrast between Emile Durkheim’s concept of the Sacred the beginning of the 20th century and Weston La Barre’s studies of shamanism in the 1960s, reflecting a change in priorities from Euro-centrism to an epistemology that could conceptualize the complexities of a creole world.

In the final sections of “Anthropop,” I propose several models to understand these developments. The first, “Voodoo-as-Theory,” draws from the cosmology of Haitian

Vodou in order to explicate three modalities of musicking, both at the level of aesthetics and of social organization/politics. “The Spaces of Neo-HooDoo” examines how the three modalities manifested themselves in the rural-industrial spaces of the American South prior to WWII, in contrast to both the eras of plantation labor and of African village life; focusing on the juke joint, the one-man band, and the street corner guitar evangelist, the manifestations of “Neo-HooDoo” in these spaces was transported to the urban areas during the Great Migration—a topic I cover in Part 3 of this chapter, “Ancient to the Future.” The final section, “The Recording as Gris-Gris” addresses the problem of the recording as an alienated commodity, reading Marx’s idea of the “fetish” against the grain and interpolating Marx’s ideas with Ishmael Reed’s understanding of the function of “gris-gris,” a talisman employed throughout the Afro-diasporic world.

Part 3, “Ancient to the Future,” covers the three broadest categories of African-American music between WWII and the 1970s: gospel, R&B, and jazz. However, the purpose of this section is not to provide a historical sketch of these genres, which have been examined extensively in other sources. Rather, I extrapolate from each genre a key component necessary to the development of a permanent underground. For gospel, this entails understanding the way that congregations worked together to self-release recordings. These recordings, while individually obscure, are both among the most exemplary forms of the “recording as gris-gris” and the earliest examples of what, after punk, came to be known as “D.I.Y.” culture. In the case of R&B, the focus is on the ways that specific urban centers developed small-scale commercial music industries, and how these industries attempted to copy the model of what I call the “Major-Minors,” or

labels like Atlantic, Chess, and Motown. Conversely, the section on jazz is devoted to the collectives that were created in the 1960s as a means of escaping the commercial world of both the nightclubs and the record industry—including the “Major-Minors.” Groups like Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) were perhaps the first full manifestation of a permanent underground sensibility, taking key insights from the communal purpose of gospel and the entrepreneurial spirit of R&B and modifying them to suit the political and aesthetic goals of their members.

The fourth part of this chapter, “Mind Manifestations,” tracks the ways that white musicians in the 1960s adopted many of the tactics and aesthetics of African-American musicking. While the aesthetic debt owed by white rock artists to black forms like the blues is well-known, the purpose of this section is to emphasize how more fundamental principles of organization—akin to those of the gospel congregations and the AACM—were gradually synthesized by both luminaries of the underground like Captain Beefheart and obscure groups like the one that emerged from Father Yod’s cult/commune in Los Angeles in the late 1960s. At the other end, I look to the figures of Frank Zappa and Andy Warhol as both critics and practitioners of the model of “business-as-art.” To the extent that they were practitioners, they mirror the small-scale capitalism of the regional R&B labels and offered a corrective to the enthusiastic excesses of the cult/commune mode of musicking. Their criticisms, on the other hand, were an important deviation from the aspirational dimensions of musicking, in the same vein as the AACM’s disavowal of the music industry. Finally, I end the chapter with an extended critique of The Residents. Founded in 1970, my analysis concludes that the Residents were the first

white group to adhere to the organizational principles of the permanent underground. Their synthesis of the cultism of Beefheart and the corporatism of Zappa has proven a durable model, and the profiles in Chapter 4 are continuations of the kind of analysis I provide here with regards to The Residents.

PART 1: IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES, OR, TWO PHILOSOPHIES

“I Killed Jameson With My ...”

As I sit down to write this, the prevailing mood among many pop culture commentators and trend watchers is one of melancholy. Kurt Anderson wrote in *Vanity Fair* in early 2012 that,

Ironically, new technology has reinforced the nostalgic cultural gaze: now that we have instant universal access to every old image and recorded sound, the future has arrived and it's all about dreaming of the past. Our culture's primary M.O. now consists of promiscuously and sometimes compulsively reviving and rejiggering old forms. It's the rare “new” cultural artifact that doesn't seem a lot like a cover version of something we've seen or heard before. Which means the very idea of datedness has lost the power it possessed during most of our lifetimes.³

Simon Reynolds, a critic who's made a career out of chronicling “forward thinking” music from “post-punk” to the sounds of rave culture, recently wrote an entire book about the same thing: *Retromania*.⁴ In a way, Reynolds' and Anderson's position is a bit like a modern day *Minima Moralia*, except that instead of lamenting the loss of the

³ Kurt Anderson, “From Fashion to Housewares, Are We in a Decades-Long Design Rut?,” *Vanity Fair*, January 2012, <http://www.vanityfair.com/style/2012/01/prisoners-of-style-201201>.

⁴ Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2011).

“good life” (morally speaking) after fascism like Adorno, their melancholy stems from a profound dissatisfaction with the records and books that come *gratis* to them for review; it’s a loss of the sense of perpetual “newness” in relation to the objects of cultural production.⁵ This is a fairly recent position to take, whose origin is summarized by Svetlana Boym when she states that, “At the beginning of the twentieth century modernists and avant-gardists defined themselves by disavowing nostalgia for the past,” the absolutism of which distinguishes it from earlier—though still modern—European aesthetics.⁶ Understood in the broadest sense, we might consider the current manifestation of this as a form of nostalgia for modernism itself. Which is quite a bit different than nostalgia for “modernity,” that spatio-temporal realm that we are always-already occupying. “Modernism” in this regard is a synonym for “progressivism” or perhaps even “futurism.”

Reynolds’ and Anderson’s point of view, perhaps to their chagrin, is itself kind of “retro.” Within rock criticism, for instance, elegies for lost modernism are almost as old as the genre itself: witness Richard Meltzer’s “rock is dead” statements from 1968.⁷ Earlier, as Amiri Baraka pointed out in “Jazz and the White Critic,” there was a rift between the “Dixieland” (or “trad”) jazz fans and the modernist beboppers in the late 1940s.⁸ And even earlier than that, Adorno himself threw up his arms at the presence elements of traditional (and therefore retrograde) music in Stravinski’s work versus the

⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2010).

⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 31.

⁷ Opinions along these lines can be found throughout: Richard Meltzer, *A Whore Just Like The Rest: The Music Writings Of Richard Meltzer* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000).

⁸ Leroi Jones, *Black Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998).

perceived “hard” break with the past in Schoenberg’s 12-tone system, which is to say that lamenting modernism’s loss is about as old as modernism itself.⁹

But I think the issue here is more fundamental. Modernism’s vision of infinite progress is necessarily dependent on a concurrently strong nostalgic impulse, because they each require the other’s negation. This is a prime example of an either/or fallacy. Either you are devoted to creating a *sui generis* future via what Foucault called “the will to ‘heroize’ the present” and follow Ezra Pound’s dictum to “Make it New!,” or you are hopelessly nostalgic—forever romanticizing a past just beyond reach.¹⁰ Both are forms of “utopian” thinking, and depend on a convergence of spatial and temporal dislocation. Thomas More set his futuristic *Utopia* on a fictional island in the Atlantic at the beginning of European colonization of the Western Hemisphere as a form of critique of conditions in Tudor England, and a reasonable argument can be made that his 1516 text is a prototype for science fiction.¹¹ Not long after, Edmund Spenser would publish *The Faerie Queene*, inaugurating an intense fascination with a mythical English past that would hit a high point two centuries later with the Romantic poets and Sir Walter Scott’s novels.¹² (The recent popularity of the BBC miniseries *Downton Abbey* is evidence that this has not abated.) Consequently, even in the 16th century it was possible to see the beginnings of the antithetical positions of modernism and nostalgia, oppositions which

⁹ Adorno expressed this opinion throughout his career, and many examples can be found in: Theodor Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Ezra Pound, *Make It New: Essays* (New York: Faber & Faber, 1934).

¹¹ Thomas More, *Utopia (Third Edition)*, ed. George M. Logan, trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

¹² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche and C. Patrick O’Donnell (New York: Penguin Classics, 1979).

would only gain more traction in the nation State-building 19th century. Utopian thinking, whether nostalgic or modernist, is by its own internal logic not “creolized” in the way that John Szwed uses the term. Utopia is the desire of exiles. It’s Brighton Beach’s Little Odessa—a favorite topic of Svetlana Boym—not Jimmy Cagney’s Hell’s Kitchen in *Taxi!* (1931), where even the Irish kids on Delancy Street know a little Yiddish.¹³ (More abstractly, perhaps, it’s T.S. Eliot in St. Louis dreaming of Europe, and not C.L.R. James bouncing from Tunapuna to Brixton to Detroit and Ellis Island to Ghana and then back to Brixton.¹⁴) Hakim Bey’s use of the term “utopia” to describe pirate enclaves seems misplaced in this regard, both because the phenomena he describes is thoroughly creole and because, unlike the nostalgic’s imaginary, lost “home” *they actually existed*.¹⁵

Svetlana Boym, perhaps the most thorough going of contemporary theorists of nostalgia, writes very explicitly as a Russian exile in the United States. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, she traces the history of nostalgia from a medical condition afflicting Swiss soldiers serving abroad in the 17th century to the present situation facing exiles like herself. Boym notes that American doctors “proudly declared that the young nation remained healthy and didn’t succumb to the nostalgic vice until the American Civil War,” adding that “the most susceptible to nostalgia were solders from the rural districts, particularly farmers, while merchants, mechanics, boatmen and train conductors from the

¹³ Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema; 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 180.

¹⁴ Paul Buhle, *C.L.R. James: The Artist as Revolutionary* (New York: Verso, 1997).

¹⁵ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

same area or from the city were more likely to resist the sickness.”¹⁶ She also states that for those suffering from nostalgia, “Gastronomic and auditory nostalgia were of particular importance,” concluding that “The music of home, whether a rustic cantilena or a pop song, is the permanent accompaniment of nostalgia—its ineffable charm that makes the nostalgic teary-eyed and tongue-tied and often cloud critical recollection on the subject.”¹⁷

Nostalgia is also one of the recurrent concerns in Frederic Jameson’s *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In the chapter “Nostalgia for the Present,” Jameson presents a critique of the work of writer Philip K. Dick, concluding favorably that he “used science fiction to see his present as (past) history.”¹⁸ Jameson thinks that nostalgic texts (movies, in particular) register their “historicist deficiency” by becoming lost through “mesmerized fascination in lavish images of specific generational pasts.”¹⁹ Earlier in the book, he refers to “The insensible colonization of the present by the nostalgia mode.”²⁰ Jameson believes that this mode was inaugurated by George Lucas’ *American Graffiti* (1973), whose “oldies” laden soundtrack suggests an parallel with Reynolds’ and Anderson’s qualms about the recycling of the pop past, and with Boym’s association between the strongest form of nostalgia and sonic experience.

¹⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1990), 296.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 20.

However, the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre pointed a way out of the problem of nostalgia, displacing Marxism's temporal influence for a spatial one:

It is no longer a matter of the space of this or the space of that: rather, it is space in its totality or global aspect that needs not only to be subjected to analytic scrutiny (a procedure which is liable to furnish merely an infinite series of fragments and cross-sections subordinate to the analytic project), but also to be *engendered* by and within theoretical understanding. Theory *reproduces* the generative process—by means of a concatenation of concepts, to be sure, but in a very strong sense of the word: from within, not just from without (descriptively), and globally—that is, moving continually back and forth between past and present. The historical and its consequences, the 'diachronic', the 'etymology' of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place and thereby changed it—all of this becomes inscribed in space. The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a *present* space, given an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality. Thus production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas.²¹

According to Jameson, "Lefebvre's emphasis on space did more than correct a (modernist) imbalance; it also acknowledged the increasing share, in our life experience fully as much as in late capitalism itself, of the new globality of the system."²² Jameson's parenthetical is revealing, however, in that it creates a (perhaps unintentional) caveat: Jameson's "modernism" is Euro-centric, and therefore only the Euro-centric world is imbalanced. He continues:

In effect, Lefebvre called for a new kind of spatial imagination capable of confronting the past in a new way and reading its less tangible secrets off the template of its spatial structures—body, cosmos, city, as all those marked the more intangible organizations of cultural and libidinal economies and linguistic forms. The proposal demands an imagination of radical difference, the projection

²¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 37.

²² Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 365.

of our own spatial organizations into the well-nigh science fictional and exotic forms of alien modes of production.²³

Actually Existing Alternatives

Contrary to Frederic Jameson's conclusions in *Postmodernism*, Svetlana Boym does not consider the reconciliation of past and present "science fictional," arguing instead that such an epistemology can already be found in what she terms the "off-modern." For Boym, "Off-modern art and lifestyle explores the hybrids of past and present."²⁴ She continues,

Instead of being antimodern or antipostmodern, it seems more important to revisit this unfinished critical project of modernity, based on an alternative understanding of temporality, not as a teleology of progress or transcendence but as a superimposition and coexistence of heterogeneous times.²⁵

Among her list of "off-modern" artists, Boym includes Walter Benjamin, Igor Stravinsky, Milan Kundera, Vladimir Nabokov, Julio Cortazar, noting that, "Many off-modernist artists and writers come from places where art, while not marketable, continued to play an important social role and where modernity developed in counterpoint to that of Western Europe and the United States, from Rio de Janeiro to Prague."²⁶ Boym's acknowledgement of South America as a place where "off-modern" sensibilities developed recalls the peculiar intertwining of the Paraguay-born Comte de Lautreamont and Surrealism. In the second of his 1870 *Poesies* (which is an ode to

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 30.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

plagiarism, a topic that gains importance in the third and fourth chapters) Lautreamont writes, “Each time I read Shakespeare, it seems to me that I cut to shreds the brain of a jaguar.”²⁷ During the height of European Surrealism in the 1920s, the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade published his “Manifesto Antropófago,” or “Cannibal Manifesto.” This manifesto echoes Lautreamont in its third line, “Tupi or not tupi that is the question.”²⁸ The Tupi were an indigenous tribe noted by the Portuguese for their ritualized cannibalism of captured enemies. (Pierre Clastres’ ethnography, *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*—the basis for many of his arguments in *Society Against the State*—is devoted to a subset of the Tupi people.²⁹) Andrade’s invocation of cannibalism was meant as a rebuff to the kind of primitivism *au curreant* in European artistic circles. Because the Brazilians were both native (Other) and European, they were more powerful than either, able to symbolically consume whatever came across their path and assume its power. In other words, Caliban defeats Prospero. Andrade’s reference to indigenous tribes makes clear his belief that “cannibal” culture (which is another way of saying “creole”) is much older than what Svetlana Boym calls the “off-modern.”

Although the Native influence is undoubtedly important in the long history of creolization in the Western Hemisphere, I tend to agree with Christopher Small’s conclusions in *Music of the Common Tongue* regarding the prevalence of musical inputs in the Americas, that, where it wasn’t violently repressed, the strongest of the

²⁷ Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror and the Complete Works of the Comte De Lautréamont*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (New York: Exact Change, 2004), 234.

²⁸ Oswald de Andrade, “Cannibal Manifesto”, n.d., <http://feastofhateandfear.com/archives/andrade.html>.

²⁹ Pierre Clastres, *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*, trans. Paul Auster (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

European/African/Native inputs was probably the African. Small considers this feat a result of generalized African philosophy, stating that, “Two characteristics of African social life strike one again and again in commentaries.”³⁰ According to Small, “The first is an absence of separation between aspects of life which Europeans are inclined to keep apart: the political, the economic, the religious and the aesthetic.”³¹ This is a radically different epistemology than even the one Boym associates with the “off-modern,” and certainly than the Euro-centric one espoused by Frederic Jameson; in Part 2 of this chapter, I return to this issue of blurred boundaries via the work of the American anthropologist Weston La Barre. Small’s other point, however, is much more complex:

The second characteristic of Africans is adaptability, and the ability to choose eclectically from a variety of sources and to profit from the potential richness of a number of perspectives simultaneously. This can be seen in the way in which Africans seem able at one and the same time, and without visible strain, to hold, for example, both polytheistic ‘pagan’ beliefs and practices and those of either Christianity or Islam, to be at the same time ‘traditional’ and ‘Europeanized’ in their daily lives, in ways which often puzzle and even infuriate Europeans; the latter can deal with contradiction only by denying or eliminating one side of it—hence the rejection or even persecution of deviants, both sacred and secular, which has been such a persistent and bloody feature of European history—while Africans seem to be able to live happily with both sides. One might say that while the European lives in a world of ‘either/or’, the African’s is a world of ‘both/and’.³²

There is some danger in Small’s (and my) tendency to lump all of these characteristics under the umbrella “African,” first because it’s a false homogenization of diverse culture groups dispersed across an enormous geographic area. But the second

³⁰ Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in African American Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1999), 20.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 22–3.

objection that occurs—that this is a “natural” “African” philosophical attitude—is already addressed between the lines in Small’s writing. Rather than “natural,” which would imply an un-changing state from time immemorial, Small indicates that the adaptability is manifested between polytheism and its relationship to Islam and Christianity. We can assume that polytheism denotes traditional African beliefs, as diverse as those might be. But “Islam” and “Christianity” denote specific historical encounters in Western Africa: the Arab Empire and the European colonization. If “creolization” is the result of an encounter between two or more cultures, then West Africa had been undergoing creolization since the first Muslim traders arrived in what is now Mali in the 11th century. In this sense, the Africans that were sold as slaves to European traders and shipped to the New World were at least as modern than their captors; Europe’s medieval isolation was only ended by the arrival of the Moors on the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century. However, the difference between the two can be found in the fact that Europe experienced violent upheavals at each point of transformation (for example, the Spanish Inquisition and the wars around the Protestant Reformation) whereas such events cannot be readily found in the history of Western Africa during the same period except where a monotheistic State (typically Islamic) dominated—hence its general adaptability by comparison.

The African slaves brought this adaptability to the New World, though it should be noted that “adaptability” does not imply passivity or submission to foreign influence. The 18th century figure Dutty Boukman is emblematic in this regard. Boukman’s name suggests a creolized pronunciation of the English words “book” and “man,” which for a

slave in an 18th century English colony probably meant he was a Muslim and possessed a Koran.³³ Sold to a French plantation owner in Saint Domingue, Boukman presided over a ceremony at Bois Caiman in 1791 as *houngan* (priest). Boukman's ritual slaughter of a pig inaugurated the Petwo branch of Vodou cosmology; more importantly, it set in motion the events that would culminate in the independence of Haiti from the French in 1804.³⁴ In *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Susan Buck-Morss sees this revolution as exerting an even more profound influence on Hegel—the philosopher of the State—than even the French Revolution.³⁵ Buck-Morss, like Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, interprets the societies of the New World as the cauldrons from which first emerged the modern nation-state: the U.S., Haiti, Gran Colombia, Mexico, etc.³⁶ But whereas Anderson emphasized the old Spanish definition of “creole” (Europeans born in the Western Hemisphere) as the engines of this change, when we look to Dutty Boukman we can see an alternate form of “creole” history in the Americas—one that, as Pierre Clastres argued, has existed parallel to the State; whereas the leaders that followed Boukman like Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines endeavored to build a

³³ Sylviane Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 153.

³⁴ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 96.

³⁵ Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

³⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

State in Haiti, Boukman's own fellow Jamaicans in Accompong have yet to give up their radically democratic form of tribal governance.³⁷

PART 2: ANTHROPOP: SURVIVALS, TRANSMISSIONS, AND TRANSMUTATIONS

The Return of the Oppressed

As quoted in Nat Hentoff's liner notes to the 1957 album *The Clown*, Charles Mingus says of his composition "Haitian Fight Song" that,

Haitian Fight Song, to begin with, could just as well be called Afro-American Fight Song. It has a folk spirit, the kind of folk music I've always heard anyway. It has some of the old Church feeling too. I was raised a Methodist but there was a Holiness church on the corner, and some of the feeling of their music, which was wilder, got into our music.

The impetus behind Mingus' "Haitian Fight Song" could best be described as the search for what, on a later album, he'd call "Blues and Roots." However, on the album immediately prior to *The Clown*, 1956's *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, Mingus had reached back even further back. In the liner notes, Mingus writes of the title track that,

This composition is actually a jazz tone poem because it depicts musically my conception of the modern counterpart of the first man to stand erect – how proud he was, considering himself the "first" to ascend from all fours, pounding his chest and preaching his superiority over the animals still in a prone position. Overcome with self-esteem, he goes out to rule the world, if not the universe, but both his own failure to realize the inevitable emancipation of those he sought to enslave, and his greed in attempting to stand on a false security, deny him not only the right of ever being a man, but finally destroy him completely. Basically the composition can be divided into four movements: (1) evolution, (2) superiority-complex, (3) decline, and (4) destruction.³⁸

³⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins*; Mavis Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988).

³⁸ Charles Mingus, liner notes, *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (Atlantic, 2009).

The origin of Mingus' concern for the "upright monkey man" (the literal translation of P.E. and a signifyin' image for a black bassist) can probably be traced to the popularity of works by British archaeologist L.S.B. Leakey in the years around the creation of Mingus' album.³⁹ Like Sun Ra's interest in Egyptology, Mingus' fascination with the origins of humans can be interpreted as a means of asserting the primacy of Africa in the history of world culture. At the same time, the movement of "Pithecanthropus Erectus" suggests pessimism with the direction that human culture was taking in the 1950s, as direct knowledge of racial oppression at home was combined with awareness of colonial repression in Africa in the media. Leakey's double role as both a discoverer of the African origins of humanity and an agent of colonialism—he assisted the British in their fight against the Mau Mau in Kenya and published several popular books about this fact—were things about which Charles Mingus was doubtlessly aware.⁴⁰ In fact, the Mau Mau uprising, if not Leakey's contribution to it, were so well known in the black community of the 1950s that on the 1959 Folkways album *Street and Gangland Rhythms*, which documented the improvised drumming and proto-rap of 11- and 12-year old African-American boys in New York City, one of them can be heard rhyming "Hey baby, you know I got my Mau Mau machete ready!"⁴¹

So if Mingus' search for "roots" on *Pithecanthropus Erectus* took him back to the dawn of humanity has a specific historical context, then it's reasonable to assume that

³⁹ For example: L. S. B Leakey, *Adam's Ancestors: The Evolution of Man and His Culture*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

⁴⁰ For example: L. S. B. Leakey, *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu* (London: Methuen & Co., 1952).

⁴¹ Author's transcription.

there's one for "Haitian Fight Song" as well. And indeed, there is. Starting in the 1920s, a process that I'll tentatively call "Africanization" took place in many sectors of African-American cultural life. Tentative both because the "Africa" desired by figures like Marcus Garvey was only slightly less imaginary than the white colonial one, and because the cultural/intellectual path to Africa often manifested as reverse-route of the one travelled by the slaves to North America, e.g. through the Caribbean; Garvey was from Jamaica, and important Harlem Renaissance figures like the writer Claude McKay were also West Indian. Although other West Indian countries and citizens played a role, this process was most directly facilitated by contact with and reimagining of two specific countries: Haiti and Cuba.

In the case of Cuba, its importance to the musicking of African-Americans came about through the direct contact with Afro-Cuban drummers in New York City in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s. As John Storm Roberts points out in his book, *The Latin Tinge*, this facet has generally been downplayed in the history of bebop, with chroniclers like Scott DeVeaux failing to mention *once* seminal figures in the bebop/Afro-Cuban jazz matrix like the drummer Machito, a frequent Dizzy Gillespie collaborator.⁴² This is most likely due to the combination of political and aesthetic priorities that emerge from a book like DeVeaux's *Bebop: A Social and Musical History* or the chapter on the same subject in Bernard Gendron's *Between Montmartre and the*

⁴² John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde.⁴³ In sum, these writers assert that the end goal of musicians like Gillespie and Charlie Parker was the establishment of a jazz form that could be considered a kind of “high art,” and that individual freedom and respect would result. I don’t necessarily dispute this conclusion in total, but I think that the exclusion of the Afro-Cuban element from the narrative has made bebop more readily assimilable to the individualistic values that one finds in the work of Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch, and Ken Burns’ *Jazz* documentary.⁴⁴ It seems perfectly reasonable that artists like Parker and Gillespie could aspire to both individual freedom and identification with a collective—the latter quality being associated with their Cuban compatriots, whose music was understood as having a more direct tie to Africa than jazz through its origins in the slave drumming rituals that gave birth to Vodou’s cousin, Santeria.⁴⁵

Although contact between Haiti and the United States was quite limited during the 19th century for fear that slave insurrection might spread to the mainland (they did anyway), the U.S. Marine occupation there between 1915 and 1934 provided heretofore unprecedented access and commerce between the two nations.⁴⁶ Some of this resulted in absurdly racist documents like William Seabrook’s 1929 book, *The Magic Island*, itself

⁴³ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ Albert Murray, *Stomping The Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989); Stanley Crouch, *Considering Genius: Writings on Jazz* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2007); *Jazz : A Film By Ken Burns* (PBS, 2004).

⁴⁵ Roberts, *The Latin Tinge*, 264.

⁴⁶ For the best discussion of this history, see: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

the genesis of many zombie films.⁴⁷ On the other hand, contact with Haiti also sparked interest among leftist authors, who looked to its revolutionary past for inspiration. Though not all of these texts painted an entirely heroic picture of the Haitian Revolution, they include Eugene O'Neill's 1920 play *The Emperor Jones*, Guy Endore's novel *Babouk* (1934), and C.L.R. James' 1936 play and subsequent historical study, *The Black Jacobins* (1938).⁴⁸ Although it is unknown whether Charles Mingus read *The Black Jacobins*, James' work would have a profound effect on the 1960s Black Arts and Black Power movements—who also owed a debt to Mingus—according to James Edward Smethurst's book, *The Black Arts Movement*.⁴⁹

By the postwar period, direct contact with Africa was increased through the travel of intellectuals and musicians (cf. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* and Penny von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World*).⁵⁰ More indirect contact came through the sudden availability in the 1950s of traditional African music via ethnographic field recordings released by labels like Folkways and Lyricord, as well as the arrival in the U.S. of drummers like Guy Warren from Ghana and Babatunde Olatunji from Nigeria—both of whom would regularly collaborate with jazz artists in the U.S. The net result of all of these forms of contact led to an explosion of what Norman C. Weinstein calls

⁴⁷ W. B. Seabrook, *Magic Island* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003).

⁴⁸ Eugene O'Neill, *Anna Christie*, *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape* (New York: Vintage, 1995); Guy Endore, *Babouk: Voices of Resistance* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991); James, *The Black Jacobins*.

⁴⁹ James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 20.

⁵⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

“imaginings of Africa in jazz.”⁵¹ By the 1960s, according to Benjamin Looker, black musicians were seeking to do more than make sonic allusions to Africa in their music:

Arguing that ethics and aesthetics were artificially separated in Western culture, Black Arts theorists claimed that a legitimate black art should reunite the moral and aesthetic sensibilities in order to promote black people’s struggles against oppression.⁵²

Although she is curiously absent from Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, one of the most exemplary formulators and practitioners of a diasporic aesthetic was the dancer, choreographer, ethnographer, and political activist Katherine Dunham. Born in Chicago to an African-American father and a French-Canadian/Native American mother—quite literally creole—Dunham was a student of anthropologist Melville Herskovits, and Herskovits helped arrange her earliest research trips to the Caribbean to study Haitian Vodou.⁵³ Dunham used the knowledge she gained as an actor-participant in Vodou ceremonies in her creative work, performing pan-Africanist dance around the world starting in the 1940s and releasing several recordings under her name of drummers from Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil in the 1950s—many of whom she brought to the U.S. to play, with Charles Mingus, among others.⁵⁴ In 1967, she set up the Performing Arts Training Center (PATC) in East St. Louis. According to Benjamin Looker,

⁵¹ Norman C. Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2004).

⁵² Benjamin Looker, *Point From Which Creation Begins: The Black Artists’ Group of St. Louis* (St. Louis, MO: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2004), 38.

⁵³ For more on Dunham, see: Joyce Aschenbrenner, *Katherine Dunham: Dancing a Life* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ For example: *Katherine Dunham Presents The Singing Gods: Drum Rhythms Of Haiti, Cuba, Brazil* (Audio-Fidelity, 1954).

Moved by her developing pan-Africanist commitments, Dunham tried to establish some sort of exchange among her three homes in Senegal, Haiti, and East St. Louis. And at the PATC, she drew on her vast experience studying black religious ceremonies in the Caribbean and West Africa, envisioning ritual as a source of stability and social bonding while also an impetus toward political solidarity and action. Her interest in Haitian cultural lore led her to incorporate similar “folk traditions”—pillars of leadership, local heroes, and ritual events—into performances that dramatized neighborhood characters and experiences.⁵⁵

Dunham’s efforts would have a significant impact on the development of St. Louis’ Black Artists’ Group, who alongside Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians were among the key musicking collectives to emerge in the 1960s (discussed at greater length below), and each of which represent the first full manifestations of the permanent underground.

The Outsiders Who Came In

At the same time that African-American musicians and writers were rediscovering dormant—but never extinct—philosophical approaches to history, politics and culture via “imaginings of Africa,” the insights provided by concurrent research in the established field of anthropology and a developing one in ethnomusicology cannot be overlooked. It is not entirely unfair to characterize the genesis of anthropology as a measuring device that allowed its earliest practitioners (Sir Richard Burton, Edward Tylor) a means of legitimating the same telos refuted by Pierre Clastres in *Society Against the State*: an evolutionist paradigm which posited from a colonialist’s perspective a belief in the State

⁵⁵ Looker, *Point from Which Creation Begins*, 50.

as final stage,⁵⁶ amenable as much to the Marx who praised the bourgeoisie's overthrow of aristocracy as a necessary step towards proletarian emancipation⁵⁷ or Leon Trotsky's notion of "uneven development" as to neoliberal conceptions.⁵⁸ This is despite the very different end goals implicit in the respective political positions. For anthropology, the first important break is associated with Franz Boas, whose assertion that each culture be considered on its own terms revolutionized the field; this principle was further elaborated in the work of his many students.⁵⁹ At the same time, if we allow that ethnomusicology is at one level a branch of anthropology, I have to agree with Bruno Nettl statement that,

Ethnomusicology as understood in Western culture is in fact a Western phenomenon. It is practiced by members of non-Western societies, but only to the extent that it occurs in the Westernized sectors of these cultures, the result of Western-derived educational training.⁶⁰

I think Nettl actually means a particular kind of Euro-American thinking when he says "Western." That kind of understanding of "Western" cannot account for all the varieties of thought that exist within the U.S. or even in the less "Western" portions of Europe; again, the dancer-anthropologist Katherine Dunham comes to mind, as does the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok, as contradicting examples. In the section "Voodoo-As-Theory" below, I'll be detailing one possible way out of the problem that Nettl is

⁵⁶ Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*, trans. Robert Hurley and Abe Stein (New York: Zone, 1989).

⁵⁷ Robert Blaisdell et al., *The Communist Manifesto and Other Revolutionary Writings: Marx, Marat, Paine, Mao Tse-Tung, Gandhi and Others*, Boston vols., Dover Thrift. (Dover Publications, 2003).

⁵⁸ Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (Atlanta, GA: Pathfinder Press, 1980).

⁵⁹ For Boas' own views, see: Franz Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (Boston: Dover Publications, 1987).

⁶⁰ Bruno Nettl, *Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 25.

confronting: an approach to conceptualizing musicking in creolized terms, irreconcilable with the epistemology that Nettl is implicating. (Or with the one espoused by Frederic Jameson in the preceding section.) At the same time, I don't want to dismiss all of the "Western" anthropology or ethnomusicology out of hand; indeed, there are profound shifts that occurred within that field, especially in the United States, wherein scholars began to slough off Old World thinking for a creole philosophy that should, ideally, have been their starting point in the first place. This shift can be traced through changes in the anthropology of the "sacred" that begins with Emile Durkheim and extends through Mircea Eliade to Weston La Barre. Overall, a general impulse can be discerned whereby the inevitable end result of a capitalist and/or socialist State is negated through awareness of what Clastres' described as the parallel existence of anti-State forms of organization. Deleuze and Guattari identified these formations through their "nomadology," but the term can be misleading: the examples I provide in this chapter are "nomadic" only insofar as they contain non-hierarchical tendencies.⁶¹ These tendencies may manifest in literal nomadism (itinerant musicians) or a more metaphoric one—a carving out of alternative domains within what David Harvey has called the "spaces of global capital," accomplished through a reorientation inseparable from musicking.⁶²

Wholly Seen

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶² David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (New York: Verso, 2006).

There is no generally agreed upon theory of the origins of music in human cultures. Indeed, the very existence of the field of “zoomusicology” indicates that music’s origins may not be exclusively human at all. Although there is not enough space in this dissertation to thoroughly explicate the myriad theories in this discourse, they include the loosely Darwinian explanations of “motherese,” territorial demarcation, and sexual selection. In recent years, Australian ethnomusicologist Joseph Jordania has suggested that the origins of music are indeed developmental, in ways that cannot be accounted for by basic biological imperatives, yet are evolutionary in that singing was essential for the creation of complex communal societies. Jordania indicates that this may have served as a means of defense against predators through “battle trance,” induced through rhythmic repetition and necessary to the formation of a collective identity.⁶³ Both the unbroken history of the martial use of music and the continued use of synchronizing “work songs” lend credence to the theory. There’s also a sense in which Charles Mingus’ compositional technique of “collective improvisation” returns to very literal “first principles” as a means of fending off colonialist lions like Leakey.

Similar methods have long been observed in shamanistic practices to induce altered states of consciousness for themselves and others involved in the musicking. It is often assumed by scholars working on the origins of music that it is related to the advent of religion, regardless of their other disagreements. “Religious music” should be used with caution here, however, as the modern European-derived idea of music as a particular

⁶³ Joseph Jordania, *Why Do People Sing? Music in Human Evolution*, ed. Alexander Jordania (Hillside, UK: Logos, 2011).

kind of devotional practice is dependent upon a concurrent bifurcation with “secular” music. This binary is indicative of the powerful sway that dualism holds in the philosophical tendencies that emanating from most of the European tradition. It also complements the binarism that I described earlier in this chapter regarding modernism’s relationship with nostalgia. This is not entirely surprising, given the similar—if not related—historical origin points of modernism and anthropology. However, as I will demonstrate through a comparative reading of Emile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, and Weston La Barre, the divisions in this field were eased to the point of near-elimination as practices and theories within the anthropology of religion progressed through the 20th century.

The basic split can be traced back to the work of Durkheim, whose *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* posited on the one hand the “sacred,” and on the other the “profane.” In practice, these are associated with the idea of “totem” and “taboo,” respectively. (Sigmund Freud took up these ideas in a book published a year after Durkheim’s; I will leave it to someone else to explicate how problematic the twinning of Native American and South Pacific islander concepts is in every instance.⁶⁴) Durkheim’s understanding of the relationship between the Sacred and the Profane is complex:

Men have never thought that their duties towards religious forces might be reduced to a simple abstinence from all commerce; they have always believed that

⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

they upheld positive and bilateral relations with them, whose regulation and organization is the function of a group of ritual practices.⁶⁵

For Durkheim, the Sacred and the Profane are interrelated because they emerge from the relationships between people and an essential need for order. However, Durkheim's conception of "order" is predicated on the division cited above. In important respects, Mircea Eliade repeats this dichotomy in his work a half century later.⁶⁶ They both reveal a bias, at two interconnected levels: the Judeo-Christian background of the authors, and—especially in Durkheim's case—the way that initial bias effected choices made regarding ethnographic examples and the substantiation of general theories. Studies of Australian aborigines, most probably James George Frazer's, were Durkheim's preferred source at least in part because they superficially mirror Euro-Christian values. For example, when Durkheim refers to "commerce" in the passage cited above, it is nearly impossible to not make the leap to:

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves (Matthew 21:12)

However, the American anthropologist Weston La Barre proffered an alternative to the Durkheim-Eliade position. In a short paper summarizing the conclusions of his 1970 book *Ghost Dance: The Origins of Religion*, La Barre argues that,⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 366.

⁶⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1987).

⁶⁷ The full argument can be found in: Weston La Barre, *Ghost Dance: Origins of Religion* (Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1972).

In the study of ancient religion I believe the role of the shaman as a showman has been somewhat neglected. Paleo-Siberian shamans were out-and-out entertainers of their people, with ventriloquism, tent shaking and the bird calls of their supernatural helpers. Ancient Persian mages and magicians were still entertaining mountebanks in Roman times. Roman tricksters or joculars evolved both into "jugglers" and the jongleur singers of late medieval times. The early American medicine shows always had an Indian entertainer and advertiser of the miraculous snake oil sold there. The serious rain dances of the Hopi Indians had to have their "Mud Clowns" or *koiyemshé* to entertain the people and behavior in the Falseface Society longhouse rituals of the Iroquois Indians was often sheer slapstick.⁶⁸

For La Barre, the separation between commerce (which does not necessarily imply "capitalism") and religion is a false one, and by highlighting the not-so-sacred elements of religious practice—including, significantly, the musical component—the idealism of Sacred and Profane are rendered moot. Still, not all of the conclusions reached by Durkheim and Eliade can be so summarily dismissed. Importantly, they were among the earliest to attempt a theorization of the function of the "altered states of consciousness" mentioned earlier.⁶⁹ In particular, it is interesting where Durkheim takes up what William James called "automatisms" (spontaneous religious expressions) in Lecture XIX from *The Varieties of Religious Experience* through Durkheim's concept of "effervescence":⁷⁰

There are periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become much more frequent and active. Men look for each other and assemble together more than ever. That general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. Now this greater activity results in a general stimulation of individual forces. Men see

⁶⁸ Weston La Barre, "Shamanic Origins of Religion and Medicine," *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs*, Vol. 11 (1-2) Jan-Jun (1979).

⁶⁹ For an exceptionally wide-ranging account, see: Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁷⁰ William James, *William James: The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (New York: Library of America, 2009).

more and differently now than in normal times. Changes are not merely of shades and degrees; men become different. The passions moving them are of such an intensity that they cannot be satisfied except by violent and unrestrained actions, actions of superhuman heroism or of bloody barbarism.⁷¹

Durkheim's description of such moments of intensification is reminiscent of the behaviors that emerged during the "Second Great Awakening" in early 19th century U.S. history, and I rearticulate his "effervescence" as "conniption" in the next chapter. As further evidence of the commonality between my own position and Durkheim's observations, he goes on:

When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. [...] And as such active passions so free from all control could not fail to burst out, on every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries, veritable howls, and deafening noises of every sort, which aid in intensifying still more the state of mind which they manifest. [...] They produce such a violent super-excitation of the whole physical and mental life that it cannot be supported very long: the actor taking the principal part finally falls exhausted on the ground.⁷²

Additionally, Durkheim notes within the passage that he believes these events to be the origins of music, and explicitly connects them to what might be described, after Mikhail Bakhtin, as "carnival": the upheaval of normal social values and the temporary lifting of behavioral restrictions, a topic that I take up in the next section.⁷³ Durkheim's understanding of the political ramifications of what he is describing are also echoed by Deleuze and Guattari:

⁷¹ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 241.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 246–8.

⁷³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

There are always periods when the State as organism has problems with its own collective bodies, when these bodies, claiming certain privileges, are forced in spite of themselves to open onto something that exceeds them, a short revolutionary instant, an experimental surge.⁷⁴

This is the moment of Dutty Boukman, of drums and Revolution.

Voodoo-As-Theory

Expanding on this last insight, I propose that there are crucial insights to be gained from Haitian Vodou, and that these insights can be modified for purposes beyond the purview of actual practitioners of this religion. I arrived at this position independently, through a simultaneous reading of anthropological studies of Haiti and work more directly related to this project, and I find support for this theoretical move in the work of Melville Herskovits, Ishmael Reed, Paul Veyne, Charles Keil, and Karl Marx. One of the primary attractions of Vodou as a form of knowledge is its irrevocably creole nature; it is neither strictly African, nor without European influences, but an essentially New World epistemology. That said, I offer no pretense that my reading of Vodou is ultimately amenable to the beliefs of Haitian practitioners. Consider it a “creative misreading.”

The Diasporic Consciousness

The articulation of a creole epistemology begins with another “creative misreading,” namely Melville Herskovits’ transformation of the idea of “syncretism”

⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 366–7.

throughout his work. “Syncretism” had originally been relegated to the realm of theology and the history of religion. However, as Herskovits defined it,

The very use of the term “syncretism” helped to sharpen my analyses, and led me to a more precise formulation of problem and of theory. As I continued the study of the accumulating data from Afroamerican field research, it became clear that this formulation had implications for the understanding of certain processes that had been overlooked in the study of cultural dynamics in this and other world regions. For, considered in the light of the theory of culture-change, it seemed to me that the syncretizing process really lay at one pole of a continuum that stretched from situations where items from two or more cultures in contact had been fully merged to those situations where there was the unchanged retention of pre-existing ones.⁷⁵

Herskovits’ insights, best summarized in *The Myth of the Negro Past*, had a profound impact on the development of African-American Studies. His foundational premise, gleaned through years of fieldwork in the Americas and Africa, was that, despite the horrors of slavery, substantial elements of various African cultures had survived. As the above passage indicates, these survivals happened in various ways, from what might loosely be described as an almost chemical or molecular level of change to simple aggregation. Herskovits’ work stands in sharp contrast to that of E. Franklin Frazier, who argued in works like *Black Bourgeoisie* that African survivals—even fundamentally altered ones—were not the norm for 20th century African-American culture.⁷⁶ It should be noted, however, both that most of Frazier’s subjects came from the same kinds of backgrounds as the young Leroi Jones that I discuss at the beginning of Part 3 and that, unlike Herskovits, very little of Frazier’s work considers examples from outside of the

⁷⁵ Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of The Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), xxxvi.

⁷⁶ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Book That Brought the Shock of Self-Revelation to Middle-Class Blacks in America* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

United States. This fact has important ramifications when we consider again that the “rediscovery of Africa” occurred via a reverse-route through the Caribbean.

Despite Herskovits’ contribution to a reappraisal of the African dimensions to creole American life, his place in the historiography of African-American Studies has become somewhat tenuous. For example, although he is cited as an authority at several points in Henry Louis Gates’ *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates eschews Herskovits’ emphasis on syncretism for a narrowly purist interpretation of African-American culture.⁷⁷ This is purist because there is little room for European or white American input in his literary world, narrow because, despite the well-known diversity of African peoples who ended up in the New World, Gates’ theory is limited to a concept lifted from the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin. In Paul Gilroy’s massively influential *The Black Atlantic*, Herskovits warrants no mention at all.⁷⁸ Herskovits being a dead white academic in a post-Civil Rights era may have something to do with this, as demonstrated by Fred Wei-Han Ho’s reading of him “‘Jazz,’ Kreolization & Revolutionary Music”:

Spelled with a ‘k,’ ‘kreolization’ is a concept advanced by Ms. Dorothy Desir-Davis, to be distinguished from ‘creolization’ of M. Herskovitz et al., pertaining to the intermixing in the Caribbean. Kreolization is from the perspective of cultural and social cross-fertilization, a process that leads to the formation of entirely new identities and cultures, and, often in the case of oppressed-oppressor relations, it is selectively appropriated by dominant social groups into the dominant identity and culture, but politicized and deracinated.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷⁸ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

⁷⁹ Fred Wei-Han Ho, “‘Jazz,’ Kreolization, and Revolutionary Music,” in Ron Sakolsky and Fred Wei-Han Ho, eds., *Sounding Off!: Music As Subversion/Resistance/Revolution* (New York: Autonomedia, 1996).

“Creolization” does not actually appear in *The Myth of the Negro Past*, despite Wei-Han Ho’s claims, and based on a comparison between Herskovits’ actual statements regarding “syncretism” and Wei-Han Ho’s “kreolization,” it’s clear that the epistemological difference between them are rather less great than the latter author suggests. However, it is worth considering that, despite the inherently political nature of studying Afro-diasporic culture during the period that Herskovits worked, his own political beliefs, and the usefulness of his studies to others—like Katherine Dunham—Melville Herskovits’ syncretism is primarily an analytic construct, not a politically activist one. Nevertheless, employing Herskovits’ “syncretism” with the political force suggested by Wei-Han Ho’s “kreolization” gives us the best of both worlds.

The Will To Believe

Despite, as Benjamin Looker suggests, one of the goals of the Black Arts Movement being the closing of the artificial gap separating ethics and aesthetics, the importation of religious (e.g. ethical) concepts into what are generally understood as secular spheres—like the study of blues and jazz—demands careful consideration. This was less of a problem for Melville Herskovits’ use of syncretism, since that concept was already a tool of analysis rather than belief. Henry Louis Gates’ use of the trickster Esu Elegba in *The Signifying Monkey* is more problematic.⁸⁰ Although “signifying” is a widely used and understood feature of vernacular African-American culture, it’s far less likely that the Yoruba deity Legba has been a point of reference in the United States;

⁸⁰ Jr, *The Signifying Monkey*.

Haiti, where Papa Legba is a major lwa, is another story. The use of Voodoo-As-Theory demands that we address the disjunction between belief and practice at the outset.

One means of accomplishing this goal is found in the work of French archaeologist Paul Veyne. In his book *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, he introduces the concept of a “constitutive imagination.” According to Veyne, the constitutive imagination is,

Not an individual creative gift; it is a kind of objective spirit in which individuals are socialized. It forms the sides of each bowl, which are imaginary or arbitrary, for a thousand different boundaries have been and will continue to be created through the ages. It is not transhistorical but interhistorical. All this eliminates any way of making a profound distinction between cultural works that are intended to be true and the pure products of the imagination.⁸¹

The answer to Veyne’s title query can be summarized as “Yes, but not in the way we usually mean ‘believe.’” For example, we might consider the continuous presence of “superstition” among sailors. While there are probably very few Navy personnel or merchant sailors who “believe” in Poseidon, for Veyne Poseidon is merely the refinement of the observations of A) things we do not understand, and B) things that are beyond our control. From Greek philosophers to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, human knowledge has reduced A) a great deal, but, as it should be clear from events like the ones chronicled in Sebastian Junger’s *A Perfect Storm*, this has not led to the absolute abolition of the problems associated with B).⁸² The nature of belief in Veyne’s reading of Greek culture is that it was not, in fact, antagonistic toward science or

⁸¹ Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?: An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988), 108.

⁸² Sebastian Junger, *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007).

the expansion of human knowledge, but instead involved a deference toward and respect of a multiplicity of forces that exceed the individual or collective's ability to control them. According to Veyne,

The authenticity of our beliefs is not measured according to the truth of their object. Again we must understand the reason, which is a simple one: it is we who fabricate our truths, and it is not "reality" that makes us believe. For "reality" is the child of the constitutive imagination of our tribe. If it were otherwise, the quasi-totality of universal culture would be inexplicable—mythologies, doctrines, pharmacopoeias, false and spurious sciences. As long as we speak of the truth, we will understand nothing of culture and will never manage to attain the same perspective on our culture as we have on past centuries, when people spoke of gods and myths.⁸³

To return to Henry Louis Gates, the "truth" of *The Signifying Monkey*, according to the framework established by Paul Veyne, is actually less about the identification with the signifying practice with Legba than with the implicit belief in what Legba represents in vernacular Africa-American practice. Naming Legba, like naming Poseidon, is a refinement and clarification of already-existing belief practices. In Ishmael Reed's 1968 "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," he too attempts to conjure into being a coherent image of an African-American cultural impulse. He culls his "Neo-HooDoo" from a variety of examples—blues artists to Haitian Vodou—summarizing that,

Neo-HooDoo is not a church for ego-tripping—it takes its "organization" from Haitian VooDoo of which Milo Rigaud wrote:

Unlike other established religions, there is no hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, or a pope in VooDoo. Each oum'phor is a law unto itself, following

⁸³ Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, 113.

*the traditions of VooDoo but modifying and changing the ceremonies and rituals in various ways. Secrets of VooDoo.*⁸⁴

Voodoo-As-Theory shares many of Reed's conclusions regarding "Neo-HooDoo." However, like Herskovits' syncretism, Voodoo-As-Theory's usefulness is primarily analytic, whereas—appropriately for a manifesto—"Neo-HooDoo" is a call-to-arms akin to "kreolization."

Tricyclic Modalities

In Haitian Vodou, there are three primary families of lwa or spirits: Rada, Petwo, and Gwede. Each of these families of spirits has a specific domain over which they preside, though within their individual realms they can manifest creative and destructive forces. According to Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, "The Rada gods are the 'good' gods and are said to have originated in Dahomey," and they are both the "highest" order and the most peaceful.⁸⁵ Alfred Metreaux notes that "The majority of aboriginal spirits, whose Creole name suggests a more or less recent accession to the Voodoo pantheon, are regarded as *petro*," adding that, "The word *petro* inescapably conjures up visions of implacable force, of roughness and even ferocity—qualities that are not *a priori* associations of the word *rada*. Epithets such as 'unyielding' 'bitter' and even 'salty' are applied to the *petro* while the *rada* are 'gentle.'"⁸⁶ The Gwede, according to Miles Rigaud, are "the loas of death and cemeteries."⁸⁷ In Maya Deren's study, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, the

⁸⁴ Ishmael Reed, *New and Collected Poems 1964-2007* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2007).

⁸⁵ Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 116.

⁸⁶ Alfred Metreaux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 88.

⁸⁷ Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, trans. Robert Cross (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2001), 59.

Gwede are also associated with the erotic: “As Lord of Eroticism, he embarrasses men with his lascivious sensual gestures; but as God of the Grave he terrifies them with the evidence of the absolutely insensate: he will not blink even when the most fiery liquid is sprayed into his eyes, and only Ghede can swallow his own drink—a crude rum steeped in twenty-one of the hottest spices known.”⁸⁸ Deren’s reduction of the Gwede family to the singular pronoun is more a literary function than an ethnographic one, but it is worth considering that the most recognizable of the Gwede lwa is Baron Samedi, Lord of Saturday Night.

Although there are literally limitless incarnations within the three lwa families (and within a few minor families that I haven’t mentioned), what attracts me to the cosmology of Haitian Vodou is that it takes the often-described Saturday night/Sunday morning dialectic of African-American life (Rada/Gwede) and adds a third dimension: the militancy of Petwo, whose first rite was performed by Dutty Boukman at Bois Caiman. The grouping of these constitutively imagined spirits into families also allows for a shorthanding of the impulses behind the parts of human life that the lwa oversee; “Rada” is a much simpler way of describing Sunday morning-type politics and aesthetics, as is “Gwede” for the raucous Carnival of Saturday night. When the autonomous domains of the Haitian Vodou’s Rada/Petwo/Gwede are abstracted into concepts—into Voodoo-As-Theory—they become specific modalities accessible as needed by individual artists. For example, we might describe Charles Mingus’ “Haitian Fight Song” (of course) as operating in a Petwo mode, John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme* as Rada, and most all of Howlin’ Wolf’s work as Gwede. Wolf is instructive in this regard, as the

⁸⁸ Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1983), 104.

contrast between say, “Built for Comfort” or “Back Door Man” and “Evil” or “Killing Floor” reveal the way that Lord Saturday Night manifests as both creation and destruction, sex and the cemetery. Similarly, the Petwo mode contains both revolutionary potential and the dangers of fascistic repression—Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier was fond of utilizing Petwo imagery—and Rada can either pray for peace or “blow fire” of righteousness.

The tricyclic modalities of Voodoo are especially useful for describing the musicking of the creole Americas. This is first because the Western European classical tradition has typically excluded music you can “get down” to, and even in cases where it took up the lascivious music of the peasantry—as with the waltz—it formalized its performance to the point where the music was almost de-eroticized. Second, the European political and aesthetic philosophers and artists whose work most closely parallels the Petwo concept have been almost constitutionally incapable of conceding any importance to what I’d call the Rada domain. This is especially true in the case of Georges Bataille, who coined the phrase “literature of evil” to describe the work of writers like the Marquis de Sade and Charles Baudelaire, and whose singular philosophical obsession was “transgression,” and its associates violence, sacrifice, and excess.⁸⁹ It is difficult to imagine Bataille or other radically transgressive artists also

⁸⁹ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 2001); Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1986).

engaging in what Charles Keil has called “the Saturday-night and Sunday-morning pattern.”⁹⁰

Ecclesiastical Entrepreneurs

The kind of belief practice constituted by Voodoo-As-Theory is not merely abstraction. Like Vodou’s *houngans* and *mambos* (priests and priestesses), actual people perform the rites I’ve described as Rada, Petwo, and Gwede; as Ishmael Reed asserted, “Neo-HooDoo believes that every man is an artist and every artist a priest.”⁹¹ In *Urban Blues*, Charles Keil reached similar conclusions regarding the role of blues artists like Muddy Waters in 1960s Chicago. He writes that,

The role of the blues artist holds particular interest for the anthropologist in at least two respects. In spite of the fact that blues singing is ostensibly a secular, even profane, form of expression, the role is intimately related to sacred roles in the Negro community. Second, the role is all-encompassing in nature, either assimilating or overshadowing all other roles an adult male may normally be expected to fulfill. [...] As professions, blues singing and preaching seem to be closely linked in both the rural and small-town setting and in the urban ghettos...Participation in the musical life of the church and intimate knowledge of and passionate living within the Negro reality provide the mold and the raw materials for blues lyrics and sermons. This observation is further strengthened by the not uncommon occurrence of the same person’s fulfilling both roles at different phases of his life. The pattern remains essentially unbroken when the rural Negro migrates to the urban centers.⁹²

Later in the book, Keil addresses why blues performers switch professions to preaching:

⁹⁰ Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 164.

⁹¹ Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 27.

⁹² Keil, *Urban Blues*, 143–4.

There is a firm economic foundation to this transitional pattern. It is possible to get rich quick in the blues or rhythm-and-blues field...Nevertheless, there invariably comes a point when the financial returns no longer compensate for the tremendous amount of time and energy spent in singing the blues, and the smaller (perhaps) but steadier income of the collection plate looks very appealing.⁹³

The intermingling of the economic and the spiritual here recalls Weston La Barre's conclusions cited earlier. It also points to the original definitions of "entrepreneur," which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, are "The director or manager of a public musical institution," and "One who 'gets up' entertainments, *esp.* musical performances." In Haitian Vodou, the *houngan* or *mambo* is tasked with assembling drummers, singers, etc. La Barre also implores us to remember the "shaman as showman." For Charles Keil, the blurring between these roles had only increased in modernity, noting that "Although the artist in tribal society may also be primarily a public servant, the extreme specialization characteristic of the blues role is nowhere attainable to the same degree in the pre-industrial world."⁹⁴ He later concludes that,

The word "ritual" seems more appropriate than "performance" when the audience is committed rather than appreciative. And from this, it follows, perhaps, that blues singing is more of a belief role than a creative role—more priestly than artistic. [...] Bluesmen and preachers both provide models and orientations; both give public expression to deeply felt private emotions; both promote catharsis—the bluesman through dance, the preacher through trance; both increase feeling of solidarity, boost morale, strengthen the consensus.⁹⁵

Although the preacher frequently occupies a dedicated space for their rituals, this is not always the case, evidenced by the preponderance of streetcorner guitar evangelists

⁹³ Ibid., 148.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 155.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 164.

in the American South prior to WWII. Furthermore, if we expand the definition of the priestly function, as Charles Keil does, to include the ostensibly secular bluesman, what kind of spaces do the entrepreneurial performers of the Saturday night ritual occupy?

The Spaces of New-HooDoo

To reiterate Charles Keil's point above, "the blues role is nowhere attainable to the same degree in the pre-industrial world." Since blues emerged in the 20th century, it's reasonable to assume that Keil is suggesting that even the pre-WWII rural South was, in certain respects, an industrialized space. In his book *Early Downhome Blues*, Jeff Todd Titon develops this notion slightly further, writing, "Though downhome blues is associated with Black Belt farm culture, it is important to realize that the downhome style developed elsewhere."⁹⁶ Titon suggests that these places include the wage labor camps associated with logging (along with the associated turpentine industry), levee building, and railroad construction, noting that "companies often provided a building where the men could drink, gamble, and make love to women imported for the purpose."⁹⁷ Titon's insights are useful, but do not go far enough in describing the extent to which the blues ritual is a specific result of the rural-industrial world of the pre-war South.

More exactly, the emphasis on "Black Belt farm culture" masks the extent to which wage labor as opposed to sharecropping made possible a variety of entrepreneurial musicking during the period. For instance, although Muddy Waters worked driving a

⁹⁶ Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 290.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 293.

tractor on Stovall's Plantation, in the early 1940s—prior to his move to Chicago—Waters also ran a juke joint to supplement his income, which suggests that his farm laboring neighbors had at least a little cash on hand.⁹⁸ Even though juke joints, as Zora Neale Hurston reports throughout *Of Mules and Men*, were typically isolated, roadside spaces, they served as a Saturday night focal point for the African-American community in the surrounding area, much like the local church did the following day.⁹⁹ In “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” Hurston also describes such establishments as “houses of ill-fame,” a fitting description for a Gwede ritual space.¹⁰⁰ In *Jookin': The Rise of African American Social Dance Formations*, Katrina Hazzard-Gordon reaches similar conclusions in her discussion of the origins of the “slow drag,” a juke joint dance style.¹⁰¹

The idea that spaces of ritual draw together people who are otherwise physically dispersed recalls Durkheim's suggestions about the origin of music in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. It also suggests that, alongside the rural juke, the largest nearby town (usually the county seat) should also be taken into consideration in this regard. This is one of the reasons that small cities like Clarksdale, Mississippi figure so prominently in Delta Blues history; even more than the rural juke joints, these urban spaces provided great entrepreneurial opportunities for both local and itinerant musicians, given their role as destinations for farmers coming to market, young people searching for

⁹⁸ Robert Gordon, *Can't Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2003), 6.

⁹⁹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 185–201 and 220–9.

¹⁰⁰ Cheryl A. Wall, ed., “Sweat”: *Written by Zora Neale Hurston* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 58.

¹⁰¹ Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 76–93.

work, or anybody looking for a good time. However, as Paul Oliver demonstrates in his book *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* and Karl Miller explores in *Segregating Sound*, defining the musicking of the rural-industrial South solely through “blues” is both misleading and historically inaccurate.¹⁰² Small Southern cities like Clarksdale played host to all manner of musicians, and even the performers who’ve become canonized in the pantheon of blues guitar greats reveal themselves, upon further examination, to have had a substantially more diverse performance repertoire than their recorded legacy would suggest. While it’s difficult to find examples of anything that might be described as Petwo during this period—revolutionary militancy being so dangerous a proposition that it was infrequently invoked until the 1960s—Oliver’s dual title figures of the “Songster” and the “Saint” indicate that the Gwede and Rada forms were evident in the practices of medicine shows, one-man bands, tent revivals, and streetcorner guitarists, evangelical or otherwise.

Although there were doubtlessly many dedicated spaces for both “secular” and “sacred” entertainments in these towns, what interests me most are the ways in which streetcorners in the white-dominated South could operate as both conventional public space and as Temporary Autonomous Zones where African-American counterpublics could form. For example, many blind guitar evangelists like Blind Willie Johnson performed on the street for spare change. And yet, as Samuel Charters reports in the liner notes to *The Complete Blind Willie Johnson*, Johnson was arrested for incitement of a riot

¹⁰² Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010).

when he performed “If I Had My Way I’d Tear the Building Down,” which is nominally about Samson and Delilah, in front of the New Orleans Customs House. This is Rada as righteous fire, an insurrectionary moment bordering on Petwo.¹⁰³

Another interesting example is the one-man band. It’s easy to regard the strange looking musical contraptions of artists like Jesse Hill, Doctor Ross, or Joe Hill Louis as humorous anachronisms. At the same time, the one-man band seems to me a unique form of convivial musicking, both impossible to imagine without the materials available in the industrial era, and at the same time recalling Weston La Barre’s jongleurs or medieval pipe and taborers. Though underrepresented on record compared to their solo guitar colleagues, these shamans and showmen depended on their ability to read a crowd, to, as Charles Keil put it, “increase feeling of solidarity, boost morale, strengthen the consensus,” whether that collective need was carnivalesque humor or spiritual uplift. Writing about Abner Jay, a one-man band who called himself the “last great Southern black minstrel show,” David Keenan states, “Anthony Braxton described Jay as an ‘American master’ and his banjo, guitar and harmonica playing is every bit as idiosyncratic and unmediated by the tyranny of ‘correct’ technique as Braxton’s own. And the tongues given voice to here [on Jay’s recordings] are drawn from deep within the murk of centuries.”¹⁰⁴

The Recording as “Gris-Gris”

¹⁰³ Samuel Charters, liner notes, *Complete Recordings of Blind Willie Johnson* (Sony, 1993).

¹⁰⁴ David Keenan, “Great Lost Recording,” *The Wire* (October 2003).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “fetish” ultimately derives from the Latin *facticius*, whose modern equivalent is “factitious,” meaning art or artificial. In other words, human-made. However, “fetish” doesn’t begin to take on its modern definitions in English until the 17th century, probably from a Portuguese term that developed out of encounters with the religious practices of West African peoples. The earliest English usages all have to do with Africans,. The term still did not come into widespread use until after 1760, when Charles de Brosses—*Encyclopédiste* and Voltaire nemesis—published “Le Culte des Dieux Fétiches.” After de Brosses, the word was disseminated widely through Europe, becoming “fetish” in English and *fetisch* in German, gradually developing the more familiar anthropological connotations it still carries today. By the end of the 18th century, as Nathan Rotenstreich notes in his essay “Hypostasis and Fetishmaking: Kant’s Concepts and their Transformation,” the word was being used by as eminent an intellectual as Immanuel Kant, who then bequeathed it within the German philosophy of religion to G.W.F. Hegel.¹⁰⁵

One of Karl Marx’s earliest uses of the term “fetish” can be found *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, during the period when he was developing the position on Hegelian thought that would result in his first break with that tradition in *The German Ideology*.¹⁰⁶ In the *Manuscripts*, Marx’s usage coincides more or less with the

¹⁰⁵ Nathan Rotenstreich, “Hypostasis and Fetishmaking, Kant’s Concepts and their Transformations,” *Kant-Studien* 71:1 (1980), 60-77.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975), 342–4; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Including Theses on Feuerbach* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998).

religious sense of “fetish” in Kant and Hegel.¹⁰⁷ By the 1860 publication of *Capital*, a profound transformation had occurred. Few writers have spent much time discussing the origin of the term “fetish” in Marx’s work, but there are two especially useful sources: Nathan Rotenstreich’s essay on Kant’s “fetish” and its transformation by Hegel and Marx, and Kelton Sutherland’s examination of “fetish” in “Marx in Jargon.” Of the two, only Sutherland’s essay is primarily devoted to Marx, and he overlooks the relationship to Kant and Hegel in “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret” in favor of understanding it as a *detournement* of de Brosses.¹⁰⁸ I’m not particularly interested here in parsing out all the details of difference between Kant, Hegel, and Marx on the matter of “fetish” since Rotenstreich already covers that territory, but Sutherland’s highlighting of Marx’s tendency to *detourne* or re-purpose other writer’s work is suggestive of an alternative way of reading “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret.”

For one thing, it asks the reader to consider the possibility that this section of *Capital* is in some sense a stand-alone text. It is certainly true that all of *Volume I* is built on successive demonstrations of principles indispensable to Marx’s overall theory of capitalism. But it’s hard not to get the sense that “Fetishism” is out of place. Sutherland’s suggestion that it is a decidedly unfaithful recreation of de Brosses’ extraordinarily racist Enlightenment tract helps in understanding not only the possibility that Marx is cutting down Kant and Hegel’s respective theories of religion, but that Marx was also denying any hierarchical difference between the “primitive” religious beliefs of

¹⁰⁷ Rotenstreich, “Hypostasis and Fetishmaking,” 14-18.

¹⁰⁸ Keston Sutherland, “Marx in Jargon,” *World Picture I* (Spring 2008), 11-12.

native Africans and the relationship to reality structured by the commodity system for “modern” Europeans. Furthermore, given Marx’s great love of etymology, the *facticius*/fetish pun opens up a theoretical space whereby the obfuscation of the social relations of production in capitalism is absolutely dependent on the labor of an Other conveniently displaced from visibility or intelligibility in the European (and American) market. To take Sutherland’s reasoning one step further, isn’t this exactly what the invocation of the bourgeois political economists’ love of Robinson Crusoe scenarios are doing?¹⁰⁹ Is it possible that David Ricardo had already willfully forgotten the Muslim Barbary Coast pirates (echoes of Hakim Bey), slave trading, indigenous Caribbean peoples, and “Man Friday” of DeFoe’s novel in favor of an Enlightenment era, *Classics Illustrated*-style fantasy of the lone castaway? And even if Marx’s treatment of colonialism and slavery is ultimately unsatisfying, how could this not have occurred to him while composing his opus in the British Library’s Reading Room, surrounded by the ethnographic loot of the Empire?

At the same time, it’s worth stepping back to consider that what the Portuguese had named “fetishes,” the Africans would have more likely called “juju” or “gris-gris.”¹¹⁰ Gris-gris are small bags containing talismans, which in the American South are known by both that name—primarily in Louisiana—and as “mojo hands” and “nation sacks”

¹⁰⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), 169.

¹¹⁰ Theresa Chung, “Gri-gri,” in *The Element Encyclopedia of the Psychic World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 265.

elsewhere.¹¹¹ Gris-gris actually originated in Islamic West African cultures, where they frequently contain small scraps of paper with verses from the Koran.¹¹² Since it's doubtful that such polytheistic objects were totally acceptable to the Arab Muslim orthodoxy, the gris-gris is another example of Christopher Small's observation African adaptability. However, the Islamic connection is still interesting for two reasons.

First, it allows us to consider the origins of DeFoe's novel, which is understood by literary historians as owing a significant debt to the Iberian-born Muslim Ibn Tufayl's 12th century philosophical novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*.¹¹³ Tufayl's novel has had an illustrious career as a genesis point for the "Western" philosophy of the Enlightenment period, widely acknowledged as an important source for both John Locke's "tabula rasa" and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "noble savage," owing to its translation into European languages in the 17th century. In Dominique Urvoy's "The Rationality of Everyday Life: An Andalusian Tradition? (Apropos of Hayy's First Experiences)" the author speculates what Karl Marx's thoughts on the Arabic novel might have been (it's unlikely he was familiar), considering Marx's well-known antagonism toward John Locke.¹¹⁴

Second, as Gerhard Kubik demonstrates in *Africa and the Blues*, the solitary guitarist of the rural South—the ones most likely to mention "mojo hands" in their

¹¹¹ Blake Touchstone, "Voodoo in New Orleans," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 13, no. 4 (October 1, 1972): 371–386.

¹¹² Robert E. Handloff, "Prayers, Amulets, and Charms: Health and Social Control," *African Studies Review* 25, no. 2/3 (June 1, 1982): 185–194.

¹¹³ Ibn Tufayl, *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹¹⁴ Dominique Urvoy, "The Rationality of Everyday Life: An Andalusian Tradition? (Apropos of Hayy's First Experiences)," in *The World of Ibn Tufayl: Interdisciplinary Studies on Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad, ed., *The World of Ibn Tufayl: Interdisciplinary Studies on Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* (Boston: Brill Academic, 1997), 38–51.

lyrics—came into being around the turn of the last century in Mississippi, most probably because, unlike earlier forms of the plantation economy, this period saw an increase in solitary forms of labor like plowing behind a horse. The earlier forms of slave and freedmen plantation labor pragmatically privileged the kind of call-and-response group singing that can be readily found in Yoruba culture. Solitary work lent itself to the solo singing and, eventually, instrumental accompaniment that was prominent in the Islamic cattle herding cultures of the old Malian Empire.¹¹⁵ Kubik argues that the proportions of Yoruba or Mandinka slaves in a given geographic area is ultimately irrelevant; even in the case of a majority Mandinka slave population, Yoruba forms of musicking would have dominated because they better fit the form of social organization (i.e. labor) at the time, and Mandinka styles would have lain dormant until they became relevant in the 20th century.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, we might also consider that *Robinson Crusoe* involves a second and third theft, alongside the one from Ibn Tufayl. First, there was the theft of the story of Alexander Selkirk—the real life inspiration for Robinson—by his rescuer Captain Woodes Rogers, detailed in the seaman’s 1712 account, *A Cruising Voyage Round the World*.¹¹⁷ This was followed by the theft of Woodes Rogers’ narrative by DeFoe himself. In Ishmael Reed’s 1976 novel *Flight to Canada*, he addresses a similar kind of theft perpetrated by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*:

¹¹⁵ Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 96–104.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Woodes Rogers, *A Cruising Voyage Round the World: The Adventures of an English Privateer* (Santa Barbara, CA: The Narrative Press, 2004).

She'd read Josiah Henson's book. That Harriet was alert. The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave. Seventy-seven pages long. It was short, but it was his. It was all he had. His story. A man's story is his gris-gris, you know. Taking his story is like taking his gris-gris. That thing that is himself.¹¹⁸

In the sense that Reed defines gris-gris, it's easy to see parallels between both the way that agents of the music industry stole the work of early blues artists both through their abysmal record of direct payment, as well as what Marx would describe as the alienation that occurs between musicking and the commodification of the recorded object of the same. A third level of theft also occurred via the work of artists like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and Eric Clapton years later, who extended the exploitation of blues artists by failing to pay royalties to them or their descendants. Still, even Ishmael Reed could see that this particular theft had a potential for positive effect:

Neo-HooDoos Little Richard and Chuck Berry nearly succeeded in converting the Beatles. When the Beatles said they were more popular than Christ they seemed astonished at the resulting outcry. This is because although they could feebly through amplification and technological sham "mimic" (As if Little Richard and Chuck Berry were Loa [Spirits] practicing ventriloquism on their "Horses") the Beatles failed to realize that they were conjuring the music and ritual (although imitation) of a Forgotten Faith, a traditional enemy of Christianity which Christianity the Cop Religion has had to drive underground each time they meet.¹¹⁹

This "forgotten faith" that Reed describes can be understood as akin to the social relations that remain inscribed in the "fetishized" commodity. This is because the recording, alienated though it might be, is both commodity and something more. The recording as gris-gris can also serve as a reminder of the interconnection between

¹¹⁸ Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* (New York: Scribner, 1998), 8.

¹¹⁹ Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 29.

members of a community. As I demonstrate in the section on gospel music below, this facet is especially apparent in the example of self-produced recording of congregational choirs. These types of records were not intended to garner a profit—the major aspect of commodification—but were, like Catholic prayer cards, a sonic reminder between Sunday services of one’s identification with the group. Although D.I.Y. gospel recordings are perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon, the apocryphal stories of purchases of early country and blues records in the South by people who didn’t even own a phonograph (alluded to in the film *O Brother Where Art Thou?*), Muddy Waters’ demand of a copy of Alan Lomax’s 1941 field recording for play on the singer’s own juke joint’s jukebox, and the more widely dispersed network of tape trading and mail order of that was common among the ‘70s and ‘80s underground are all solid evidence in their own right.

PART 3: ANCIENT TO THE FUTURE: BLACK MUSIC IN THE POSTWAR PERIOD

Taking a standard rhetoric stance regarding the relationship between black and white music and their audiences in the United States, Nelson George writes in *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*:

The black audience’s consumerism and restlessness burns out and abandons musical styles, whereas white Americans, in the European tradition of supporting forms and styles for the sake of tradition, seem to hold styles dear long after they have ceased to evolve. The most fanatical students of blues history have all been white. These well-intentioned scholars pick through old recordings, interview obscure guitarists, and tramp through the Mississippi Delta with the determination

of Egyptologists ... Blacks create and move on. Whites document and then recycle.¹²⁰

George's critique echoes Amiri Baraka's "Jazz and the White Critic," and his targeting of certain educated middle class white male consumer is not without merit. (Guilty as charged.) However, there are some serious problems with his argument. His assertion that "Blacks create and move on" is sounds like a re-hashing of the Frazier position in the Herskovits/Frazier debate for the post-Civil Rights era, using the unacknowledged benefit from information provided by "fanatical students of blues history" to construct his history. Furthermore, George misses the syncretism among musician-collectors like John Fahey or Captain Beefheart when he reduces their musicking to a process of document-and-recycle. But he does nail the fact that black artists have a different kind of "archive" in mind when they invoke traditions while at the same time extending them, which he describes as "in the tradition, yet singular from it."¹²¹ However, even Amiri Baraka himself acknowledged the more widespread role of syncretism in American music in the 1999 Introduction to his 1963 book *Blues People* when he writes,

But for all the syncretic re-presentation and continuation of African mores and beliefs, even under the hideous wrap of chattel slavery [...], there is one thing that I have learned, since the original writing of *Blues People*, that I feel must be a new critical emphasis not understood completely by me in the earlier text. That is, that the *Africanisms are not limited to Black people, but indeed, American Culture, itself, is shaped by and includes a great many Africanisms. So that*

¹²⁰ Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 108.

¹²¹ Ibid.

*American culture, in the real world, is a composite of African, European, and Native or Akwesasne cultures, history, and people.*¹²²

In this light, the much younger George is trying to re-occupy the Baraka's youthful position, at least at the level at which he expresses alarm at the "dilution" of commercial African-American music. Even in the '60s, Baraka warned against pitting New Orleans musicians like Bunk Johnson (a favorite of the white "trad" or "Dixieland" audience) against Charlie Parker, and while Baraka has shown a clear preference for the avant-garde in his writing, this has never led him to put down "crossovers" like Nat King Cole or Motown.¹²³ In this, George is remarkably similar to that of Simon Reynolds. Unlike George, Baraka never made a living from mainstream publications like *Billboard* or *Playboy*, where one's aesthetics are inevitably affected by the constant arrival of new product deemed sufficiently viable in terms of sales to warrant a review commission from the editors. In this occupation, George is also well positioned to critique the music industry as an exploitive (and often racist) enterprise; here his general sentiments match with Baraka's.

However, one of the other important, generational divides between Nelson George and Amiri Baraka exists in their relationship to African-American musical tradition as part of the educated middle class. Although a "campus hipster" at Howard University in the '50s, where he was aware of Dizzie Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and Miles Davis, it took the intervention of the poet Sterling Brown—

¹²² Leroi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), xi.

¹²³ Leroi Jones, "Jazz and the White Critic," 11-20.

Baraka's English 212 instructor—to convince him “that the music *was* our history.”¹²⁴

Baraka reminisces on his ignorance of the gutbucket past, stating:

I imagine this must have incited Sterling to grasp us [Baraka and future jazz writer A.B. Spellman] lovingly and metaphorically by the scruffs of our necks and invite us to his crib! And man, there in a center room was a wall, which wrapped completely around our unknowing, of all the music from the spasm bands and arwhoolies and hollers, through Bessie and Jelly Roll and Louis and Duke, you know? And we watched ourselves from that vantage point of the albums staring haughtily at us, with that “tch tch” sound such revelations are often armed with.¹²⁵

Such knowledge was a transformation for Baraka, a rare encounter that became much less rare after the publication of his own *Blues People*—a book I suspect is on Nelson George's shelf. If George is in some sense the offspring of Baraka, the elder writer was the rebellious son of W.E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier, whose “Talented Tenth” and “Black Bourgeoisie” *Black Music* in some ways rebuffs.¹²⁶ Despite being the editor for the black bourgeois organ *Ebony*, Lerone Bennett reached similar conclusions in the '60s, writing that,

From the womb of this non-Puritan, nonmachine, nonexploitative tradition have come insights, values and attitudes that have changed the face of America. The tradition is very definitely nonmachine, but it is not anti-machine; it simply recognizes that machines are generative power and not soul, instruments and not ends.¹²⁷

Bennett's statement is about as clear an expression of conviviality as I've heard, and constitutes yet another assertion that African-Americans have been the most

¹²⁴ Jones, *Blues People*, viii.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Booker T. Washington et al., *The Negro Problem: Views of Leading African American Citizens at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: CreateSpace, 2010).

¹²⁷ Lerone Bennett, *The Negro Mood, and Other Essays* (New York: Ballantine, 1965), 53.

consistent source of this musicking impulse. The significance of Baraka's and Bennett's turn was to call into question the economically aspirational aspects of black music entrepreneurship; Bennett and Baraka were unique in being among the earliest intellectuals to take this stance. In the three sections that follow, I track postwar African-American musicking's quest for greater social and economic autonomy—not just from white America, but from the ideology of the capitalist State. This quest was manifested in the three major generic forms of African-American music: gospel, blues/R&B, and jazz. The distinction between the three in terms of aesthetics can be misleading (they each drew from the others), but there are enough significant differences in the business structures through which they were channeled to justify the splitting. Although this history is not linear one from less freedom to more freedom—as demonstrated by significant role that hustlers played in R&B—this general albeit underground impulse was again prophetic, according to Scott Saul, insofar as, “Mingus had urged jazz musicians to pool their resources and create their own guilds, and now they were doing so in cities across the country.”¹²⁸ Mingus' own efforts in this regard (he founded Debut Records with Max Roach in 1952) were unsustainable because, while he was a great organizer of collectives of musicians, his acumen in other spheres of musicking was rather less developed.¹²⁹ Nevertheless,

He had injected jazz with a dynamic dose of soul—equal parts virtuosity and gospel fire—and now young listeners were taking up the music of Aretha

¹²⁸ Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 321.

¹²⁹ Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 46.

Franklin, James Brown, and Stevie Wonder, much of which was propelled by Mingus-like bass riffs. Lastly, with his abiding interest in mysticism and charismatic power, Mingus had brought a new range of apocalyptic moods to jazz, and now the white members of the counterculture were thinking apocalyptically as a matter of principle, testing the foundations of their world through explorations in music, and drugs and through their involvement in the politics of the New Left.¹³⁰

Saul says “apocalyptic,” but it’s worth remembering what that word really means: Revelation.

Gospel: Who’s that Riding

As I noted in the “Voodoo-As-Theory” section, streetcorner guitar evangelists like Blind Willie Johnson were an important part of prewar African-American musicking. Jerma A. Jackson focuses on a similarly “entrepreneurial” dimension of postwar gospel music in *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age*, using Sister Rosetta Tharpe as a transitional figure to explain the increasing commercialization of religious music in the period.¹³¹ Tharpe was a “guitar evangelist,” but her career went far beyond the streetcorner to lucrative radio and recording contracts.¹³² In using Tharpe as a transitional figure, Jackson repeats the emphasis on what Alan Young has called the “first-tier” of postwar African-American gospel, and that Mike McGonigal identifies as the “astounding quartet and solo vocalist sounds made during the music’s Golden

¹³⁰ Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t*, 321.

¹³¹ Jerma A. Jackson, *Singing in My Soul: Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 77–102.

¹³² Gayle Wald, *Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Untold Story of Rock-and-Roll Trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

Age.”¹³³ Although gospel music has received considerably less attention than blues or R&B—owing perhaps to the preferences of Nelson George’s “fanatical students”—this historiographical prioritization dominates the literature on the subject, from Jackson’s work to Robert Darden’s recent *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music*.¹³⁴

However, a parallel, underground and unfortunately under-documented history exists of what Alan Young calls the “second-tier.” As he describes it in *Woke Me Up This Morning*, the relationship between the two has little to do with the fervency of belief or even the dedication to musicking:

The community-based nature of gospel also shows in the two-tier recording industry which operates in the genre. On top are the name acts, signed to established labels and receiving national promotion. Local performers cannot aspire to this, but they can still make records or tapes (since the demise of the vinyl LP, few can afford compact discs). They do this by financing the project themselves, hiring the recording studio and engineer, and then paying to have the tapes or records manufactured and packaged. [...] Usually, the artists will pay for a few hundred copies that they will sell themselves and through local outlets.¹³⁵

Because of the limited number of copies of any given “second-tier” gospel record, the history of this type of musicking has proven somewhat elusive. However, on the albums *Fire in My Bones: Raw, Rare & Otherworldly African-American Gospel, 1944-2007* and *This May Be My Last Time Singing: Raw African-American Gospel on 45RPM, 1957-1982*, compiler Mike McGonigal reveals an often unseen world that follows “into

¹³³ Alan Young, *Woke Me Up This Morning: Black Gospel Singers and the Gospel Life* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), xxxv; Various Artists, *Fire in My Bones: Raw, Rare & Otherworldly African-American Gospel, 1944-2007* (Tompkins Square, 2009).

¹³⁴ Robert Darden, *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

¹³⁵ Young, *Woke Me Up This Morning*, xxxv.

later years the street corner evangelist and ‘sanctified blues’ traditions of the ‘20s and ‘30s found in such important collections as Chris Strachwitz’s *Negro Religious Music* series, Paul Oliver’s *Saints and Sinners* and John Fahey’s *American Primitive Vol. 1: Raw Pre-War Gospel*.¹³⁶ McGonigal also notes that he is “fascinated by the vernacular tracks, notably the solo-guitar-plus-vocals numbers and the a capella songs. Stylistically, those recordings refer to sounds many decades old.”¹³⁷ The older sounds that McGonigal identifies can perhaps best be associated with famous prewar performers like Blind Willie Johnson and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, respectively. In the postwar period, this solo/collective spectrum can be expressed in the “first-tier” as between, say, Mahalia Jackson and The Soul Stirrers (featuring future R&B star Sam Cooke). In the postwar underground, “second-tier” gospel world, we can see this in the continuation of the guitar evangelists that McGonigal documents, as well as what Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records described as “singing preachers and their congregations.”¹³⁸ Regarding the latter, Strachwitz’s notes that particularly important was the “preacher’s ability to sing, for song and holy dance were crucial elements of the ecstatic, fervid form of worship favored by the slaves.”¹³⁹ Recalling Charles Keil’s description of the blues role, Strachwitz continues:

The preacher had to be a song leader, a man gifted in the creation of the emotional contagion vital to the conduct of worship in these primitive religious gatherings.

¹³⁶ McGonigal, *Fire in My Bones*.

¹³⁷ Mike McGonigal, liner notes, *This May Be My Last Time Singing: Raw African-American Gospel on 45RPM, 1957-1982* (Tompkins Square, 2011).

¹³⁸ Chris Strachwitz, liner notes, *Negro Religious Music Volume 3: Singing Preachers and Their Congregations* (Blues Classics, 1968).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

The ‘sermon’ moved fluidly from speech to song to dance to moaning and back again; the gifted preacher was the originator and director of that ecstatic spark, leader of that fiery, dynamic service.¹⁴⁰

In addition, according to Alan Young, we must consider that “To view gospel purely as a style of music is to miss the point of its existence.”¹⁴¹ For Young, in addition to the importance of shared belief,

A key component of the genre is entertainment. Gospel music is firmly based in religion, but it is composed and/or arranged with performance in mind, and a conscious professionalism exists in the performances of all artists, from local groups who sing only within their community to those who make their living from their music.¹⁴²

Weston La Barre’s “shaman as showman” returns yet again. Entertainers, yes, but with a message: “The reason for its [gospel’s] continued well-being is that this message appeals to the African-American churchgoers who attend the performances and buy the records.”¹⁴³ Many of those “second-tier” records, according to McGonigal, were “paid for by a church congregation or the artists themselves.”¹⁴⁴ In contrast to the field recordings of similar types of musicking released by Folkways et al, these recording,

[W]ere presented as commercial artifacts within the local gospel community. And whether they were successful in the marketplace or not, that difference is huge. I chose to source this compilation entirely from 45s because of their democratic/DIY nature; almost anyone could raise enough money to release a 7” single.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Young, *Woke Me Up This Morning*, xvi.

¹⁴² Ibid., xx.

¹⁴³ Ibid., xvi.

¹⁴⁴ McGonigal, *This May Be My Last Time Singing*.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Almost anyone, but this kind of cultural production was made much easier by the availability of collective effort in the form of the congregation, a group devoted to the importance of both spreading a certain set of beliefs (in this case, variations on Christianity) and to the practice of strengthening the interpersonal bonds within the already-existing community of believers—both goals aided by the production of the recorded object. This is the “recording as gris-gris.” Hence, these kinds of gospel records, obscure as they might be, were important models, both for the free jazz collectives who emerged from the same areas and for the white “cult” artists who took their cues from the jazz collectives.

R & B: City Sounds

Major-Minors

Although the origins of R&B after WWII are complex, there are some basic conditions that provide a context for what, about a decade later, would become known as “rock’n’roll.” First, there was a massive influx of African-Americans into mostly Northern cities, following the promise of better pay in wartime industries and escaping the more volatile segregation in the South. WWII also had the unintended consequence of shrinking down the size of musical groups from the large swing and territory bands of the ‘30s and to the smaller combos of the late ‘40s, and completely disrupting the major label recording industry, which had already been hit hard by the Depression. Both of these can be traced to the demands of rationing: less gasoline and fewer tires to transport large bands, and a halt to new recordings, except those intended for the armed services,

for the duration of the war. The Great Migration brought a greater density to the spaces of black life, and although many characteristics of the prewar rural-industrial blues ritual could be found in the musicking of artists like the Delta-born Muddy Waters in Chicago, the geo-social environment tended to privilege certain characteristics in order to align with the audience's desires: speed, volume, and noise. In addition to the urban clubs that catered to this audience, a number of what I call "Major-Minor" record labels stepped in to meet the demand that true majors like Columbia were unwilling or unable to fulfill. According to Charlie Gillett's *The Sound of the City*,

[M]ajor corporations with every financial advantage were out-manoeuvred by independent companies and labels who brought a new breed of artist into the pop mainstream—singers and musicians who wrote their own material, whose emotional and rhythmic styles drew heavily from black gospel and blues music. The corporations took more than ten years to recover their positions, through artists with similar autonomy and styles.¹⁴⁶

The Sound of the City is also careful to point out that, while this development was dispersed across the United States, the many manifestations of postwar R&B were each closely tied to a specific industrial city, many of which played home to a "Major-Minor" label that sought to take advantage of this new sociomusicological climate. According to Randy McNutt and Rick Kennedy's *Little Labels—Big Sound*, these include Chess, Atlantic, Sun, King, and Specialty, among others.¹⁴⁷ Translated into geographic terms, these labels tended to draw their artists from the pool of musicians in their respective cities: Chicago, New York, Memphis, Cincinnati, and Los Angeles. It should be noted

¹⁴⁶ Charlie Gillett, *The Sound Of The City: The Rise Of Rock And Roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), xviii.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Lee Kennedy and Randy McNult, *Little Labels-Big Sound: Small Record Companies and the Rise of American Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), xvii.

that Specialty and Atlantic, “Major-Minor” though they may be, were coastal operations, and attracted more artists from outside their region. The importance of these labels to the history of American popular music cannot be overstated, since they played home to Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf (Chess); Big Joe Turner and Aretha Franklin (Atlantic); Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis (Sun); Bill Doggett and James Brown (King); and John Lee Hooker and Little Richard (Specialty), to just name some of the most famous.

Mom and Pop and the Hustler on the Corner, Too

However, very little sustained study exists of postwar R&B outside of what I describe as the “Major-Minors” above. What does exist is mostly confined to the liner notes of record labels that have released reissues of obscure, regional R&B, soul, and funk. Of these, Simon Reynolds says “In terms of reverse-missionary zeal—bringing culture and the true musical faith to ignorant white folks—the undisputed world champion is Chicago’s Numero Group.”¹⁴⁸ Such critical sentiments aren’t atypical, but they are most definitely rooted in anxiety regarding the writer’s own collector/fetishist tendencies. Fair enough. Certainly, Numero Group itself hasn’t averted such criticisms by self-consciously invoking the “heritage” or “preservationist” aesthetic in packaging and liner notes pioneered by Folkways, Arhoolie, etc. But dwelling on the intentions of Numero Group is, to a certain extent, missing the point. To be sure, the profit-making motive of mining to the very last local/regional pocket of R&B in the United States is

¹⁴⁸ Reynolds, *Retromania*, 156.

problematic. And Reynolds is probably right to assume that the labels profiled in Numero releases were run by “the little guy who most likely once dreamed of being a big guy, the next Motown or Stax”—which hardly suggests an impulse to de-alienate musical labor.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, without this kind of mining, the picture of America’s musical life would be confined to greatest-hits packages, focusing on the “big guys” like Motown and Stax and obfuscating exactly the things that Numero specializes in “salvaging.” In this sense, Numero is a peculiar combination of business and archive—much like Folkways or Arhoolie—but as troubling as the archive is for its consolidation of information in a centralized location of power, the knowledge that can be gleaned from its storehouse doesn’t depend on either the label head’s intentions or the critic’s anxieties, even if it comes at a price. (\$14.99 a pop, last time I went to the record store.)

Another aspect of the Numero Group’s overall project that is missed by critics like Reynolds is that in important ways, the recordings they issue are about businesses more than about individual artists. In some respects, this is probably a matter of convenience; since hardly any of the performers on *any* of the label’s compilations possess name recognition geographic location, community, and the entrepreneurs who took advantage of both define the releases. This is a curious reversal of attitude compared to the widespread tendency among music historians to validate the significance of a Motown or a Chess along with the individual performers that put those labels on the historical map. Numero’s release strategy, for profit and hip cachet though it may be, mirrors what Nelson George emphasizes in *The Death of Rhythm & Blues*: the linkage

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 157.

between black radio, “the growth of independent labels, the development of retail outlets,” and the structure of record companies, because “that’s where the story lies.”¹⁵⁰

One of the few studies to take up George’s historiographical challenge is Suzanne E. Smith’s *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*, although it doesn’t use the same concepts I employ in this dissertation. She’s indebted to Raymond Williams’ idea of “cultural formation,” which he defined as “simultaneously artistic forms and social locations.”¹⁵¹ While there are some things to admire in this conception, it does not go far enough with regards to coherences between cultural production and social organization, remaining in the safer territory of using the social to provide a “context” for culture, in this case musicking. More specifically, she claims that,

Many writers, music fans, and scholars have argued that Detroit is *not* critical to understanding the Motown phenomenon. “Motown” could have happened anywhere, or at least in any city with a large and vital African American population—Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, or Cleveland. These arguments tend to emphasize individual ambition rather than community life, urban geography, economic structures, or race relations as factors in Motown’s rise to the top of popular music.¹⁵²

The main problem with Smith’s argument is that she invokes a quite specific set of values—that “the top of popular music” is the ultimate criteria of judgment—while at the same time revealing her own ignorance of the fact that in the cities she names (and many others she doesn’t) there resided record labels that directly attempted to compete with Motown, and that these individual ventures were doubtlessly just as affected by the

¹⁵⁰ George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, xiii.

¹⁵¹ Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 9.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

conditions she names. With regards to the kinds of material that Numero Group releases, perhaps this can be forgiven; the label didn't become active until 2005, and Smith's book was published in 2001. But this still can't account for other black-owned labels, including Vee-Jay (Gary, Indiana), Duke-Peacock (Houston), Curtom (Chicago), and SAR (Los Angeles), even if some of these depended on distribution deals with white-owned companies. Furthermore, it discounts the non-black-owned labels that had significant managerial control exerted by African-Americans, including Stax (Memphis) and Chess (Chicago).

However, while many entrepreneurial R&B labels were essentially family affairs—whether they became “Major-Minors” or stayed regionally obscure—there were others that unabashedly engaged in “gangster capitalism.” While this doesn't mean that Berry Gordy and his family didn't use Motown to exploit artists, there's certainly a qualitative difference between them and Don Robey of Duke/Peacock Records. A former professional gambler, Robey's Duke/Peacock is described by Francis Davis as, “[A] Houston-based blues and gospel label run like a plantation by a cigar-smoking, half-black, half-Jewish, one hundred percent sleezeball named Don Robey,” adding “As if claiming co-composer credit for most of his performers' songs wasn't bad enough, he also threatened them with bodily harm or death when they objected.”¹⁵³ In *Tell the Truth Until They Bleed: Coming Clean in the Dirty World of Blues*, Josh Alan Friedman

¹⁵³ Francis Davis, *The History Of The Blues: The Roots, The Music, The People* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2003), 194.

suggests, “Nobody would have written this when Robey was alive.”¹⁵⁴ Although Duke/Peacock was a Major-Minor (releasing Big Mama Thornton’s version of “Hound Dog,” among many others), the kind of behavior displayed by Robey could be found just as much the in world of the smaller labels. Tom Lunt, Rob Sevier, and Ken Shipley write in the liner notes to the Numero Group Release *Eccentric Soul: The Bandit Label* of its proprietor that,

[Arrow] Brown was drawn to the underground, fancying himself a rogue entrepreneur. Throughout the late 60s, his personal and professional business appears to have taken place largely outside the law. Yet, like [Iceberg] Slim, he had massive creative impulses to contend with. By the early 70s, Brown put together an oddball cast of family, friends, and girlfriends, all interchangeable, and created a musical commune: a band, a production company and a record label. Unable to completely divorce himself from his former life, he named this company Bandit.¹⁵⁵

Even if the Major-Minors and small regional labels offered a creative outlet for musicians with the possibility of financial reward, the experiences of the free jazz artists—many of them veterans of this rough and tumble world—would eventually lead them to follow Charles Mingus’ advice to “pool their resources and create their own guilds” in order to escape the cycle of exploitation.

Ridin’ the Circuit

Like the R&B recording industry of the postwar period, the business of live music was also a mixed bag of benefits and hardships for artists. Writing in *The Chitlin’ Circuit*

¹⁵⁴ Josh Alan Friedman, *Tell the Truth Until They Bleed* (New York: Hal Leonard Corp, 2008), 18.

¹⁵⁵ Tom Lunt, Rob Sevier, and Ken Shipley, liner notes, *Eccentric Soul: The Bandit Label* (Numero, 2005).

and the Road to Rock and Roll, Preston Lauterbach describes his first encounter with Sax Khari, a old-time promotions man and the impetus behind the book:

I had studied the background of the chitlin' circuit as best I could in preparation for meeting Sax, but found nothing definitive on its origins. I did, however, notice a trend in many of the books that mentioned the circuit. Artists were *relegated* to the chitlin' circuit. Working it was a *grind*. Even its title is depressing, derived from what black people call a hog's small intestine, the cuisine of relegation. The chitlin' circuit seemed an unpleasant place, located in our nation's bowels, and better left unexplored. Sax's stories about the inventor and beginning of the circuit, however, revealed people of vision and an industry of intricate, far-reaching design that struck me as anything but shameful.¹⁵⁶

The Chitlin' Circuit was a concerted effort to link up disconnected African-American communities. Similar to the way that prewar juke joints and street corners became spaces where the rural-industrial class of the South came together for the musical ritual, the Circuit connected the juke joint to other juke joints until a network of African-American musicking existed across the region. After listing a number of prominent Circuit performers in the '30s, '40s, and '50s (including luminaries like James Brown), Lauterbach concludes:

Their stories play out a cityscape that no longer exists. While the ghetto's contours reverberate through the music in ways that often defy notation, rock'n'roll simply could not have happened anyplace else. The streets of Indianapolis, Memphis, Houston, New Orleans, even Macon, Georgia, are as fundamentally crucial to this story as the people who walked them.¹⁵⁷

In the '60s, when the heyday of the Circuit had passed, it legacy could be found in the way that the free jazz musicians used the now largely abandoned urban spaces as sites

¹⁵⁶ Preston Lauterbach, *The Chitlin' Circuit: And the Road to Rock "n" Roll* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 9.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

of communal experience, crossing it with an organizational structure similar to the DIY of the gospel world. The free jazz collectives, however, would follow Ishmael Reed's dictum about Neo-HooDoo being "the music of James Brown, without the lyrics and ads for black capitalism" and leave the hustling of the R&B world behind.¹⁵⁸

Made to Order

One remaining dimension to the legacy of postwar R&B bears mentioning: the role of "custom labels." Many of the R&B labels of the postwar period offered a variation on the custom or made-to-order service. These set-ups offered the chance for anyone with a little bit of cash to walk into a studio and cut a 3 minute record of anything they chose, which the label would press as a one-off acetate; Elvis Presley's first recording was a birthday song for his mother, and before Elvis returned to the Sun studios to pick up his custom record, Sam Philips chanced upon it, which led him to audition the young singer for a more professional role at Philips' label.¹⁵⁹ Other small, regional labels engaged in similar practices. For example, after a series of failed attempts at breaking into the record business, Ed McCoy started the Big Mack label, headquartered in Detroit. The label was housed in a building owned by McCoy, and held its own eponymous recording studio. According to the liner notes the Numero release,

It started with an advertisement in the Detroit Free Press offering the chance for anyone to walk in off the street and cut a one take, one-off track for \$14.95. Soon

¹⁵⁸ Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 25.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1995), 63.

the McCoy Recording Company was flooded with both the ambitious and the ambiguous. One by one they would walk in, lay down their track, lay down their \$14.95, and walk out. At the end of the day the full tape was brought to Danny Dallas at Sound Patterns who would cut each individual track onto its own acetate 45. A few days later the artists would return to pick up their own, one-of-a-kind real-live record. In addition to being profitable, the \$14.95 demo gifted the label with the only talent pool it would ever know.¹⁶⁰

The Big Mack label was not the only business documented by Numero Group to rely on custom recordings. These also include the Boddie Recording Company of Cleveland¹⁶¹ and suburban Detroit's Double U Records. According to Sevier and Shipley's liner notes for the release *Local Customs: Downriver Revival* (downriver in relation to Detroit), the latter label had a unique philosophy regarding recording:

To his credit, Felton Williams maintained little or no criteria regarding who or what he'd record. Anyone who knocked on his door was given the chance to blow through a reel—often with dubious results. Double U was the downriver answer to New York City's avant-garde ESP-Disk: *The artist alone decided what you'd hear on their Double U disk.*¹⁶²

As I demonstrate in a later section, the reference to ESP-Disk is an interesting one in terms of the parallels between that label's importance to both free jazz and underground rock in the 1960s. More directly, Sevier and Shipley also note that Williams only came into contact with R&B late in life, after a lifetime spent within the confines of the church. This fact is significant with regards to D.I.Y. Although the financing and distribution for these records were controlled by the congregations themselves, until the advent of cassette technology even predominantly autonomous

¹⁶⁰ Tom Lunt, Rob Sevier, and Ken Shipley, liner notes, *Eccentric Soul: The Big Mack Label* (Numero, 2006).

¹⁶¹ Various Artists, *Local Customs-Burned at Boddie* (Numero, 2010).

¹⁶² Rob Sevier and Ken Shipley, liner notes, *Local Customs: Downriver Revival* (Numero, 2009).

forms of cultural production like the one occurring in the “second tier” of gospel had to rely on businesses like Double U for access to lathes and record presses. Consequently, the entrepreneurs behind the custom labels were both tapping into a niche market and helping to facilitate an alternative form of musicking—auditory apothecaries for the recording as gris-gris.

Jazz in the 60's: I Hear a New World

“Free jazz was the first attempt to express in economic terms the refusal of the cultural alienation inherent in repetition, to use music to build a new culture.”

--Jacques Attali

Except for the very short-lived example of Black Patti—which lasted for less than all of 1927—there were no black-owned jazz labels until Charles Mingus and Max Roach founded Debut Records in 1952, itself lasting only little more than a year.¹⁶³ Unlike R&B, which boasted at least two black-owned Major-Minors (Duke/Peacock and Vee-Jay) in the 1950s, the remainder of decade did not see many artists in the field taking up Mingus’ challenge. Although historians like Scott DeVeaux see bebop (and presumably its fifties offshoot, hard bop) as a quest for individual freedom, the drive to communal immersion was also strong for some jazz artists of the ‘40s and ‘50s. This translated well into performance collaborations, but at the level of business organization its relative absence is curious. One possible explanation may be that while small, black-owned R&B labels could survive by marketing to individual listeners and jukebox operators in the African-American community, first on 78s then on 45rpm singles, as jazz shifted to the

¹⁶³ Kennedy and McNult, *Little Labels -Big Sound*, 32.

longer LP format after its introduction in 1952, a greater proportion of the jazz market was geared toward white listeners. The causes and effects of this formatting preference by the jazz labels created a paradox: on the one hand, the 40+ minute LP allowed greater space for bebop and hard bop musicians to express their individual artistry, and on the other, the comparative cost of an LP vs. a 45rpm single meant that jazz increasingly became accessible to the more affluent—which, in practical terms, meant white people. As Amiri Baraka’s recollections of his ‘50s jazz fandom demonstrate, this wasn’t universally true, but in light of the world described by Frank Kofsky in *Black Music, White Business*, Baraka’s argument in “Jazz and the White Critic” begins to look like but one target among many in a whole system—record companies, booking agencies, festivals, nightclubs, magazines, and the audiences they serve—dominated by whites, for whites.¹⁶⁴

This is not to say that these outlets didn’t open the door for some remarkable music (many were Major-Minors in their own right, and run by avowed fans) but that there was an important measure of external aesthetic control exerted. As Ashley Kahn states in *The House That Trane Built: The Story of Impulse Records*, this control had reached such a level of refinement that, “At the midpoint of the sixties most jazz record labels were identifiable by a consistent character and style,” before he sketches the range of labels that extended from the major Columbia to the semi-custom ESP-Disk.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Frank Kofsky, *Black Music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz* (Atlanta, GA: Pathfinder Press, 1998).

¹⁶⁵ Ashley Kahn, *The House That Trane Built: The Story of Impulse Records* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 3.

According to Kahn, Impulse, the '60s home for jazz pioneer John Coltrane's recordings, "initially stood out from the other labels of the day by covering a vast and variegated overview of the music, from swing to the extreme experimental edge of sixties jazz. [...]" By the seventies, "it seemed as though Impulse became the label characterized by the angry black tenor man," according to producer Ed Michel.¹⁶⁶ This was not entirely different from the ESP-Disk roster, which often released the first albums by artists who later ended up on Impulse. Kahn is not especially critical about Impulse, understandable given that his purpose is highlighting the "Coltrane-Impulse symbiosis," and not the more radically autonomous "world of artist-owned labels."¹⁶⁷ However, Kahn does find a relevant quote regarding the latter from producer Bob Thiele, a driving force behind Impulse. Thiele stated in 1971 that,

The whole record industry is ambivalent to start with, because it's dealing in a commodity on a profit level, and yet it's dealing with art, which is not a commodity, and which is not produced for the purpose of making a profit. I don't know how it can be reconciled, short of a revolution.¹⁶⁸

What's odd about Thiele's statement is that the "revolution" he's calling for had already happened, with the mid-'60s founding of the various Black Arts Movement jazz collectives and, even earlier, the self-released recordings of Sun Ra; Thiele had even helped repackage some of the latter for national distribution by Impulse.¹⁶⁹ Still, even if artist-owned labels became more common in the '60s, this was not a goal of every jazz

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 209.

artist—even the collectives—which meant that despite an increased awareness of the alienating effects of the music business in general and, considering the value placed on improvisation, recording specifically, artists frequently maintained a relationship to one or another record labels, however ambivalent. Still, in different ways and to varying degrees, each pursued what John Litweiler called “The Freedom Principle.”¹⁷⁰ Litweiler’s book of the same name, alongside A.B. Spellman’s *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, Valerie Wilmer’s *As Serious as Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz*, and numerous biographies of individual artists provide an extensive accounting of the history of free jazz.¹⁷¹ My purpose in this section is not to summarize that history or profile those artists. Rather, by picking three examples (Sun Ra, the AACM, and the BAG) I highlight the most extensive manifestations of the “Freedom Principle” in terms of the political organization of musicking. The examples selected, while exemplary in their own right, also serve a secondary purpose: to connect to other portions of this dissertation. The first occurrence of these connections comes through the influence that Sun Ra had on the white “cult” musicians explored in Part 4 of this chapter. The AACM reappears in Chapter 4 in the profile of Phil Cohran, a founding member of the Chicago group who went on to start his own Artistic Heritage Ensemble and conduct community musicking and political outreach programs in his home city outside the AACM. The importance of the BAG—particularly its members Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and Hamiet Bluiett—returns to the fore in the late ‘70s New York “loft jazz” scene, discussed

¹⁷⁰ John Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990).

¹⁷¹ A.B. Spellman, *Four Lives in the Bebop Business* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985); Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life: The Story of the New Jazz* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2000).

at length in Chapter 4's profile of Bill Laswell, a frequent collaborator of the three saxophonists.

The Influence of the Inimitable

After Charles Mingus, perhaps the greatest influence on the organization of musicking in the '60s among free jazz artists was Sun Ra. In terms of sound, the honor would most likely go to Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman, and John Coltrane. Sometimes dismissed as a novelty act or a madman, Sun Ra had an inordinately long career as a musician. Born Herman Poole Blount in Birmingham, Alabama in 1914 (though he would later claim to be from Saturn), the future Sun Ra was named by his mother in honor of "Black Herman," a black vaudeville magician and occult author and an important character in Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo*.¹⁷² After an adolescence spent reading esoteric books in the Birmingham's black Mason Lodge, Sun Ra began his professional musical career in Birmingham in 1934, interrupted by imprisonment for refusing to submit to the draft during WWII.¹⁷³ After the war, like many African-Americans, Sun Ra went north, to Chicago. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he found steady work in R&B, playing as a pianist on Wynonie Harris records and in the very Gwede world of urban juke joints cum strip clubs, an experience referenced in his 1974 film, *Space is the Place*.¹⁷⁴ Paralleling Charles Mingus' fascination with early hominids,

¹⁷² John F. Szwed, *Space Is The Place: The Lives And Times Of Sun Ra* (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 4; Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

¹⁷³ Szwed, *Space Is The Place*, 22, 24–5, 40–47.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 51; John Coney, *Sun Ra - Space Is The Place* (Plexifilm, 2003).

in Chicago Sun Ra delved into books about Ancient Egypt, continuing his esoteric reading with books like George G.M. James' *Stolen Legacy*, which argued that Greek philosophy was stolen from the Egyptians who were, contrary to modern appearances, black Africans.¹⁷⁵ In 1952, he organized his first band as leader; rarely would he return to the role of sideman again. Over that time period, Sun Ra's music covered a vast sonic terrain, from the big band swing of his youth to post-bop to free jazz to unclassifiable experimental music, along with the occasional Tin Pan Alley standard and the music from Walt Disney cartoons. Rather than this being the result of a long career following a relatively linear set of musical trends, sometimes this wild stylistic vacillation occurred *on the same album*. The onstage garb of his ensemble, the Arkestra, matched this disconcert for past/present distinctions: an assemblage of Ancient Egyptian and Science Fiction, homemade on the cheap.

Build Your Own Pyramid

Sun Ra and the Arkestra's tendency to D.I.Y. went beyond costuming. One of the very few jazz artists to follow Mingus' lead, Sun Ra co-founded his own label in 1956, El Saturn Research. The label's cofounder, Alton Abraham, was not a member of the Arkestra or even a musician, which might explain why El Saturn and variations of it persisted until Ra's death; like Mingus and Roach, Sun Ra was not a spectacular businessman. But he was an "entrepreneur" in the original sense, and—directly inspired

¹⁷⁵ Szwed, *Space Is The Place*, 71; George G. M. James, *Stolen Legacy: The Egyptian Origins of Western Philosophy* (New York: CreateSpace, 2010).

by the nearby, black-owned Vee-Jay—he and Abraham registered their new enterprise with the Musicians Union.¹⁷⁶ According to John Szwed’s *Space is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra*,

Ownership of his own record company seemed a necessity for Sonny because “I didn’t want to go through all the starving in the attic and all that foolishness...I wanted to bypass that particular trauma they put on artists today.” But the idea of any musician, black or white, being able to produce and sell his own records was so daring, so unprecedented, as to be heroic in the music business.¹⁷⁷

El Saturn’s business model was unusual, too. Unlike even a Major-Minor, according to Szwed, “El Saturn Records purchased no advertising, gave out no promotional copies for review, and had no distribution channels except mail order, hand delivery to record shops, and, in the southern tradition, sales from the bandstand after performances.”¹⁷⁸ He later observes, “Since the Arkestra was wary of conventional record business practices...everything was done by hand, face to face, cash on the barrelhead.”¹⁷⁹ More “recording as gris-gris.” These practices continued after the Arkestra left Chicago in 1961, first for New York and then to Philadelphia. Abraham stayed behind in Chicago, however, incorporating with the State of Illinois in 1967 as Ihnfinity, Inc. (which oversaw El Saturn Records) as a for-profit enterprise. Although Abraham believed that the for-profit paperwork would arouse less scrutiny, the state government dissolved the corporation in 1972; it was reincorporated as a non-profit in 1974, remaining under that distinction until Sun Ra’s death. In both cases, the application form stated that the purpose of this entrepreneurial venture as to perform works of a “humanitarian” and “spiritual” nature—akin to Ivan Illich’s stated goals in his

¹⁷⁶ Szwed, *Space Is The Place*, 152.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 170.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 273.

writings of the same period.¹⁸⁰ Still, Sun Ra fell back on occasion to more conventional record businesses to distribute his albums; aside from two LPs expressly recorded for ESP-Disk, ABC/Impulse licensed much of the Saturn catalog, in addition to drafting a contract pertaining to new recordings.¹⁸¹ Even this contract, however, did not prohibit Sun Ra and the Arkestra from releasing further albums on El Saturn.

Sun Worshippers

If a black, artist-owned record label was unusual in the '50s and '60s, the way that Sun Ra organized the bodies in his corporation was unheard of. Although there are many R&B and jazz bandleaders known for their charismatic and often authoritarian leadership style—Duke Ellington, Mingus, Miles Davis, and James Brown come to mind—Sun Ra quite literally had *followers*. Like Ishmael Reed, Ra was hostile to Christianity (the “Cop Religion”), and, to a lesser extent, Islam. (Sun Ra joked that the Nation of Islam’s founder, Elijah Muhammad was a distant relative, since he was born Elijah Poole; both the Arkestra and the Nation of Islam grew up on the Chicago’s Southside.¹⁸²) However, Sun Ra was not adverse to taking on the preacher’s role, even if the robes were Egyptian, believing that freedom could only be found through intense discipline. In Randall Grass’ *Great Spirits: Portraits of Life-Changing World Music Artists*, he quotes at some length statements made by John Gilmore, a longtime saxophonist in the Arkestra. Grass concludes that,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 241–2.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 333.

¹⁸² Ibid., 4.

Gilmore's discourse sounds very much like that of a convert, one who has had a mystical epiphany or found a guru. It is the sort of talk that adds fuel to the argument of those who say Sun Ra was a cult leader. The fact that several musicians, including Gilmore, lived communally...only reinforced this line of thinking.¹⁸³

Although cohabitation by necessity would not be unusual for a musician with an unstable income, the choice to word the practice of Gilmore and others in the Arkestra "communal living" suggests that there was something at least as much principled as pragmatic about the choice. The cult dimensions to the musicking of the Arkestra extended beyond their boarding habits to performance as well. According to Ekkehard Jost,

The roots of this show lie rather in the origins of Afro-American music: the rites of the voodoo cult, a blend of magic, music and dance; and the vaudeville shows of itinerant troupes of actors and musicians, where there was room for gaudily tinsel costumes and the stunts of supple acrobats, as well as for the emotional depths of blues sung by a Ma Rainey or a Bessie Smith.¹⁸⁴

Alongside the model of El Saturn Records, the cult-like organization and ritualistic performance style of the Arkestra would have wide-reaching impact in the jazz world of the 1960s. This was most immediately apparent in the founding of the AACM in Chicago in 1965, when the memory of Sun Ra's time in the city was still fresh among a younger crop of musicians. The AACM's flagship group, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, took a cue from the Egyptian/Science Fiction costuming of the Arkestra, translating it into the combination of trumpeter Lester Bowie's lab coat and the other

¹⁸³ Randall Grass, *Great Spirits: Portraits of Life-Changing World Music Artists* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 35.

¹⁸⁴ Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 191.

members' "African" clothing and body paint. Underground white artists in the '60s and '70s were paying attention, too; as I demonstrate in Part 4, Captain Beefheart modeled himself on Sun Ra, and The Residents were inspired by El Saturn in their own entrepreneurial ventures.

The Autonomy of Black Artistry

Although the restrictions placed on black musicking by the white-owned jazz business were the initial impetus behind the "Freedom Principle," the generation that followed in the wake of Mingus and Sun Ra's organizational innovations faced an entirely different problem: the withering away of jazz as means of making even a poor livelihood. At the same time that the youth audience was turning more towards Motown and psychedelic rock, what remained of adult audience who bought records and came to nightclubs voted with their wallets for less challenging music like the popular organ trios of the late 1960s. This change is reflected in the distance between two Blue Note albums, Eric Dolphy's 1964 *Out to Lunch* and Jimmy McGriff's 1968 *The Worm*; Dolphy's album features the sleek modernism of Francis Wolf's photographic cover, while McGriff's sports a sexy image of a young woman crawling through a meadow—which tells you a lot about what kind of mood most organ trio music was meant to create. However, according to Scott Saul,

[J]azz artists did not only suffer setbacks in the late 1960s. They joined jazz to a "soul" aesthetic in a way that was willfully open-minded, eclectic in its reclamation and reinvention of jazz history—a kind of fusion of postmodernism's playful skepticism and the Black Arts imperative to give the community a liberating

image of itself. In response to the disintegrating of music education networks in the inner city and the discouraging preferences of the music industry, they created jazz collectives that schooled a generation of younger players and offered grassroots performance alternatives.¹⁸⁵

Even though opportunities were more limited, like Mingus and Sun Ra these young players believed that “jazz artists deserved a fair return on their talent, and it was impossible for them to be sure they weren’t being fleeced if they did not control their own booking, record labels, or publishing companies.”¹⁸⁶ Inspired by the general sentiment of “Black Power!” and aligned with the larger Black Arts Movement, “In the mid-sixties, clusters of musicians across the United States banded together in community arts organizations, some of which only lasted a few months”—Temporary Autonomous Zones—“others of which have lasted as long as forty years (and counting).”¹⁸⁷ Saul identifies these collectives as including: “Los Angeles Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA), Pittsburgh’s Black Arts Cultural Center, Detroit’s Strata, St. Louis’s Black Artists Group, Chicago’s AACM, and New York’s Jazz Composer’s guild, Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BARTS), and the Collective Black Artists.”¹⁸⁸ Of these eight, I focus on two: the BAG and the AACM.

Double Nickels Up the Line

Earlier in this section, I stated that the primary reason why the BAG and the AACM were chosen as examples was that they connected to other areas of this dissertation. However, one of the other reasons that they are useful as case studies is that

¹⁸⁵ Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain’t*, 304.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 316.

the two groups were themselves connected. Not only was the BAG (founded in 1968), according to Benjamin Looker, “inspired” by the AACM (founded in 1965), they also shared a member; BAG co-founder Lester Bowie was also a founding member of flagship AACM group The Art Ensemble of Chicago.¹⁸⁹ The St. Louis-born Bowie had actually moved to Chicago in 1966, following his soul singer wife, Fontella Bass (“Rescue Me”) as her musical director when she relocated closer to her record label, Chess; the two cities are separated by only 300 miles along the then-new Interstate 55.

The BAG

Despite lasting only a short time (1968-1972) compared to the AACM (“forty years (and counting)”), St. Louis’ Black Artists’ Group was unique among the 1960s collectives in that it organized not just musicians, but also actors, playwrights, poets, etc. In fact, the inaugural event for the BAG was a performance of Jean Genet’s play, *The Blacks*, evidence of their commitment “to a collaborative interweaving of its members’ diverse artistic mediums.”¹⁹⁰ In this, they had taken further inspiration from Katherine Dunham’s PATC, across the river. Dunham’s pan-African perspective was combined with a pronounced concern for the local. According the Benjamin Looker, many of the artists that formed the core of the BAG had either attended the same St. Louis high school, or the historically black Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri.¹⁹¹ Looker also observes that, “Jazz educator David Baker has emphasized the significance

¹⁸⁹ Looker, *Point from Which Creation Begins*, xxi; George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009), 134–5.

¹⁹⁰ Looker, *Point from Which Creation Begins*, xxi.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 18.

of ‘enlightened high school band leaders’ who have historically nurtured young talents in African American communities around the country [...],” an opportunity seized upon by musicians BAG musicians like Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and Hamiet Bluiett.¹⁹² Faced with the general problem of de-industrialization—which hit St. Louis and East St. Louis especially hard—and the specific issue of the defunding of arts programs in public schools, the BAG would forge their own, against the unofficial policies of “benign neglect.” According to Looker, “Born of artistic frustrations and aspirations, the fledgling group had taken flight, and the founders quickly moved to craft an agenda that would fit their own needs as artists as well as the needs of the community at large.”¹⁹³ Although this initially manifested as “experimentally minded musicians” meeting to rehearse in the “unlikely locations” of abandoned warehouses and the like made possible by the same processes of de-industrialization in order to “assert direct control over their creative activities,” the emphasis soon moved outward.¹⁹⁴ Like other Black Arts Movement groups, the BAG “rejected Romantic and post-Romantic notions of the individual artist working isolation or estrangement from his social context. Instead, they stressed art’s functional roles, urging that it be created in a communitarian and socially engaged stance.”¹⁹⁵

The activities associated with this role included both free public performances and private musical instruction for youths who would not otherwise benefit from “enlightened

¹⁹² Ibid., 8.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 15, 48.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 66.

high school band leaders.” This set of programs was similar to both Dunham’s PATC and the Young Disciples organization in East St. Louis—whose recorded output is documented on a Numero Group release—all of which used musical and other artistic training as a means of combating the increased gang violence that resulted from the dissolution of basic social services.¹⁹⁶ At the same time, “For many of the cultural nationalist organizations of the late 1960s, the idea of corporate or government funding chafed against funding chafed against founding principles,” choosing instead, like gospel congregations, to rely on the collective efforts of the community into which they were integrated to remain sustainable.¹⁹⁷ In this, they were again similar to the AACM, which “refused to seek outside backing, feeling that grants from external institutions carried the danger of introducing controls on their aesthetic and social mission and would reinforce the paternalism they sought to eradicate.”¹⁹⁸

Unlike the situation confronting the AACM, however, St. Louis did not possess much of a recording industry, whereas the Chicago musicians benefitted from this proximity both indirectly (Lester Bowie’s work at Chess for his wife) and directly (Delmark Records, otherwise a blues label, created a special AACM series to release the first recordings by members of the collective)—however ambivalent their improvising Windy City brethren felt about this situation. Finding these avenues closed, BAG member Julius Hemphill founded Mbari Records in the tradition of El Saturn, releasing just two albums—his own *Dogon A.D.* and a collaboration with poet K. Curtis Lyle titled

¹⁹⁶ Rob Sevier and Ken Shipley, liner notes, *Eccentric Soul: Young Disciples* (Numero, 2008).

¹⁹⁷ Looker, *Point from Which Creation Begins*, 58.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

The Collected Poems of Blind Lemon Jefferson—before the end of the BAG; a similar fate befell Universal Justice Records, started by Charles “Bobo” Shaw and James Marshalls to release recordings by The Human Arts Ensemble.¹⁹⁹ Looker writes that the label started with “small runs of five hundred copies per album,” and “advertised in *Down Beat* magazine and began filling orders from around the United States, Japan and Europe.”²⁰⁰ Although the scale of this operation was miniscule compared to the reach of the major labels, the gris-gris of these recordings helped connect locally-conscious BAG to the broader Black Arts Movement, both in the U.S., and “from London’s Caribbean Artists Movement to Toronto’s Black Theatre Canada, organizations throughout what Paul Gilroy calls the ‘black Atlantic’,” each marching “to a similar rhythm.”²⁰¹ After the demise of the BAG, this local-and-global mentality would be reflected in the audacity of Hemphill, Lake, Bluiett, and David Murray (a veteran of Horace Tapscott’s Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra) naming their group the “World Saxophone Quartet.”

The AACM: Ancient to the Future

The musicians Muhal Richard Abrams, Jodie Christian, Steve McCall, and Philip Cohran officially founded the AACM in 1965, but its roots go back further.²⁰² Cohran, discussed at greater length in Chapter 4, was a member of Sun Ra’s Arkestra between

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 164–5.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 164.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 39.

²⁰² Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle*, 173.

1958 and 1961, when the group left for New York and Cohran chose to stay behind.²⁰³ While in the Arkestra, Cohran had played trumpet on the albums *Interstellar Low Ways*, *Holiday for Soul Dance*, *Fate in a Pleasant Mood*, and *Angels and Demons at Play*, in addition to his convivial, homemade, and amplified mbira, which he called the “Frankiphone,” after his mother. Abrams had been performing professionally since the mid-1950s, although his efforts in 1962 shifted to the Experimental Band, which, in addition to featuring Christian and McCall, also fostered the talent of younger artists like Roscoe Mitchell, later of the Art Ensemble of Chicago; Cohran would do likewise in a number of ways.²⁰⁴ Like the BAG’s efforts in the face of de-industrialization and “benign neglect,” George Lewis asserts that, “The AACM is part of a long tradition of organizational efforts in which African American musicians took leadership roles,” some of which I’ve highlighted earlier in this chapter.²⁰⁵ Keeping with the Mingus/Sun Ra legacy, Lewis notes that, “the collective developed strategies for individual and collective self-production and promotion that both reframed the artist/business relationship and challenged racialized limitations on venues and infrastructure.”²⁰⁶

Lewis contrasts this set of priorities with the “accounts of the development of black musical forms” that “draw upon the trope of the singular heroic figure, leaving out the dynamics of networking in articulating notions of cultural and aesthetic formation,” Lewis explicitly connects this position to Ken Burns’ *Jazz* documentary, and, implicitly,

²⁰³ Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 57.

²⁰⁴ Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle*, 173.

²⁰⁵ Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, x.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

to its most prominent talking heads: Wynton Marsalis, Stanley Crouch, and Gary Giddins—the last being a probable Amiri Baraka target, if Giddins were a generation older.²⁰⁷ By contrast, for Lewis, “The AACM provides a successful example of collective working-class self-help and self-determination; encouragement of difference in viewpoint, aesthetics, ideology, spirituality, and methodologies; and the promulgation of new cooperative, rather than competitive, relationships between artists.”²⁰⁸ Lewis, himself an AACM member, goes on to explain how his conceptualization of the collective’s history at the time of the book’s writing was aided by an encounter with Sidney Mintz’s *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*. In that text, which is largely devoted to an attempt at reconciling the Frazier/Herskovits debate, the authors’ interests are not in “the many individual acts of heroism and resistance which occurred during this period [the earliest days of New World slavery] than of certain simple but significant *cooperative* efforts which, in retrospect, may be viewed as the true beginnings of African-American culture and society.”²⁰⁹

The AACM’s connection to the past and present outlook is reflected in their motto: “Great Black Music, Ancient to the Future.” The “ancient” elements might be more a matter of re-imagining than ethnographic exactitude—the “little instruments” of the Art Ensemble and their fondness for body paintings come to mind—but like Ekkehard Jost’s assessment of Sun Ra, they too have roots in “the rites of the voodoo

²⁰⁷ Ibid., x.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., x–xi.

²⁰⁹ Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 43.

cult, a blend of magic, music and dance.” At the same time, the twin saxophonists Roscoe Mitchell and Joseph Jarman rank among the most innovative of the post-Coltrane and Coleman reed players, and any discussion of trumpeter Lester Bowie should place him in the same league as Armstrong, Gillespie, and Davis; “Odwalla,” from the Art Ensemble’s 1974 album *Bap-Tizum*, recorded live at the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival, is ample demonstration of the group’s synthesis between tradition and the new. Other members of the AACM also work within the ancient/future dialectic of their motto. As Ronald Radano demonstrates in *New Musical Figurations*, saxophonist Anthony Braxton’s work perhaps belongs as much or more to the postwar avant-garde of John Cage and La Monte Young as to the blues of Chicago, and Henry Threadgill’s 1983 album *Just the Facts and Pass the Bucket*, among other works, reimagines the sound and function of New Orleans jazz for a new era.²¹⁰

Alongside the AACM’s integration into the long history of African-American musicking traditions, George Lewis cites their development of “new and influential ideas about timbre, sound, collectivity, extended technique and instrumentation,” including “invented acoustic instruments” like the Frankiphone as evidence of their future-orientation.²¹¹ I discuss each of these—and several others—in a more general way in Chapters 2 and 3, since innovation in these areas form some of the “traditions” of the permanent underground as it is broadly conceived. Lewis acknowledges an awareness of this type of alternative musicking world when he laments that,

²¹⁰ Ronald M. Radano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton’s Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994).

²¹¹ Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, ix.

While most studies that extensively reference the AACM appear to be confined to an examination of the group's influence within an entity putatively identified as the "world of jazz," the musical influence of the AACM has extended across borders of genre, race, geography, and musical practice, and must be confronted in any nonracialized account of experimental music. To the extent that 'world of jazz' discourses cordon off musicians from interpenetration with other musical art worlds, they cannot account for either the breakdown of genre definitions or the mobility of practice and method that informs the present-day musical landscape.²¹²

While this "breakdown of genre definitions" and the "mobility of practice and method" are examined in this dissertation predominantly within the confines of the U.S. borders, their implications are more far ranging. As Ekkehard Jost suggests,

The psychological and ideological reasons for absorbing creative principles that are chronologically and geographically far apart—and some of them are indeed very remote from jazz—and for reaching back to traditional forms of Afro-American music may differ greatly from individual to individual. The politically accentuated reminiscences in the music of the Art Ensemble, Don Cherry's efforts toward "musical world peace," and Sun Ra's mysticism dressed in the costumes of a utopian minstrel show, all represent levels of consciousness that can by no means be reduced to the equation "free jazz=Black Power."²¹³

Jost identifies this moment of transformation as a result of a "change in consciousness" among African-Americans in the '60s that resulted from an awareness of "the significance of the "non-American world."²¹⁴ As I've shown throughout this chapter, that conclusion depends in part on how you define "American"; like Mingus and the Mau Mau, however, the world outside of the Western Hemisphere—especially Africa—plays a part, too, in the in development of the permanent underground of which perhaps Sun Ra, the BAG, and the AACM were the first real examples. Although

²¹² Ibid., x.

²¹³ Jost, *Free Jazz*, 199.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

addressing his conclusions only to the AACM, George Lewis speaks to the overall significance of this political/aesthetic contribution when he writes, “As a socially constituted scene, the AACM embodied the trope of individuality within the aggregate, both at the level of music-making, and at the level of the political organization of the collective,” continuing, “thereby providing a potential symbol” for a “new, utopian kind of sociopolitical system.”²¹⁵ This sociopolitical system of alternative forms of musicking, as I’ve demonstrated, was the result of a long history, from Bois Caiman to the Southside, and finally to the rest of the globe.

PART 4: MIND MANIFESTATION: SOME LEGACIES OF THE 1960’S

Although Robert Duncan’s 1984 book, *The Noise: Notes From as Rock ‘n’ Roll Era*, is otherwise devoted to a retread of the same mainstream ‘60s/‘70s pop touchstones as every other book or *Rolling Stone* best-of list, it’s significant that he begins his story with an extended examination of Margaret Mead’s study of the Manus of Papua New Guinea. As a result of the arrival of American soldiers during WWII, the Manus experienced a profound upheaval in their society, pitting traditional ways against a new, syncretized culture that resulted from the importation U.S. goods—a “cargo cult,” as it were. Mead translated the name given by the Manus to this transformation as the “Noise.” Duncan describes his narrative of comparable changes in the U.S. itself during the 1960s as the “American Noise.” Though he isn’t direct about what cargos “washed up” to induce such a transformation, he gives a clue when he writes “‘Womp-baba-loo-

²¹⁵ Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, xii.

bomp-a-lomp-bam-boom...’ said Little Richard, and to a lot of young Americans that about said it all.”²¹⁶ In the sections that follow, I will argue that the “cargo” was in fact the powerful strain of anti-hierarchical, de-alienating imperative, already most evident in Africa-American culture—what Ishmael Reed called “Neo-HooDoo” and “Jes’ Grew.”²¹⁷ While love affairs between white youth and black music had erupted periodically since the 1840s, the narrative that I want to trace out here is not strictly about the adoption—or theft—of black style (language, music, fashion), but rather an internalization of core principles that had long lain dormant, even for many African-Americans.

When he was still known as Leroi Jones, Amiri Baraka, for instance, was introduced to older forms jazz and blues as a student at Howard University—not exactly the result of an unbroken cultural heritage.²¹⁸ Still, Baraka was highly critical of whites that posed as the final arbiters of black musical style, militantly demonstrated by his essay “Jazz and the White Critic.”²¹⁹ Baraka is often poignant, but he’s typically as subtle as a hammer. In “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” fellow writer James Baldwin uses a scalpel on the same problem when he writes that, “No one is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure at heart, for his purity, by definition, is unassailable.”²²⁰ Baldwin was specifically taking aim at Norman Mailer’s “The White Negro” essay, wherein the pugnacious self-promoter valorized the adoption of black style

²¹⁶ Marx, *Capital*.

²¹⁷ For the latter, see: Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*.

²¹⁸ Baraka’s admission to this fact can be found in the introduction of: Jones, *Blues People*.

²¹⁹ Jones, *Black Music*.

²²⁰ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 229.

as a bulwark against the more stultifying effects of American life.²²¹ But Baldwin's words are prescient as a general warning to those who rage at misfiling Charlie Parker in the "rock and roll section." For white musicians and fans, this kind of exacting approach to the music of African-Americans is painfully similar to knowledge-as-domination facet of anthropology: we can study *you*, even adopt *your* ways...but a black person with a carefully organized collection of country music records is almost as unthinkable from this perspective as an Aborigine standing in Piccadilly with a camera and a notebook. This is not only bigotry masking itself with Baldwin's "purity," but it also doesn't even hold up to scrutiny; innumerable black musicians, from Leadbelly and Gene Autry to Al Green and Hank Williams, have displayed knowledge of and pleasure at listening to music assumed to be for "whites only." The radical move is to embrace the fundamental *impurity*; that's the core principle—the will to syncretize.

For white Americans, this happened in stages. The rock 'n' roll of the 1950s is most remarkable for the raw enthusiasm it generated, an important precursor to the dissipation of segregation, cultural and physical. The vacillation between the solitary bedroom record changer and the collective frenzy of the dance is instructive as a pathway to new patterns of social organization, albeit mostly for teenagers. But teenagers grow up. In the early '60s, some of them had switched over to "grown up" music like the "folk" revivalism of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and the Kingston Trio. If ever there was an American popular music that was obsessed with purity, this is it. Even if there is much to admire in the politicization of culture that accompanied this movement—support for

²²¹ Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 337–58.

organized labor, for desegregation, etc.—there’s something overly dutiful about it—the reproduction of somebody else’s tradition. Christopher Small provides some insight into this when he writes,

The European folk musician thinks of him or herself not as a creator of songs, but as a transmitter. As Henry Glassie says, “the usual folk singer is no more creative than the usual performer of pop or art song; both share in the Western tradition of the performer as repeater, of the performer as distinct from the audience during performance so that the performance amounts to a presentation requiring authority. He is true to his source, taking pride in the fact that the song is being sung as it was when he learned it. With varying degrees of success he attempts to hold the song steady...The commonplace folk performers do not strive for change; they interact in a system of frequent repetition and reinforcement to prevent it.” This agrees with a comment by Cecil Sharp, that “the traditional singer regards it as a matter of honour to pass on the tradition as nearly as possible as he received it.” Small changes occur over time, owing to lapses of memory and misunderstandings, but both singer and audience have a strong sense of the identity of a song and feel their responsibility to it, to preserve as far as they can its integrity.²²²

Small goes on to note that commercial recordings of the ‘20s and ‘30s have further aided the stasis of Southern Appalachian singers—whom Sharp and others believed were still connected to older European forms of musicking—and I would add that those same recordings were instrumental in creating a static tradition among the first adherents to the “folk revival” between the late 1940s and early 1960s. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of bluegrass, a music that, like the blues described earlier in this chapter, was impossible without the industrialization of the white Appalachian workforce and concurrent contact with black musical styles. But however syncretic the origins of bluegrass may be in fact—and Robert Cantwell’s *Bluegrass Breakdown* is

²²² Small, *Music of the Common Tongue*, 42–3.

largely devoted to demonstrating this—it rapidly became normalized as “traditional” in practice, by both performers and audiences.²²³ Similar issues plague the whole history of country music, from the honky-tonk and Western Swing of East Texas to the partial assimilation of stylistically interracial rockabilly into the Nashville canon (e.g. Johnny Cash). In *Romancing the Folk*, Benjamin Filene describes this dynamic of ever-forward shifting consecration of a music as “roots,” “roots” being authentic, being “traditional.”²²⁴ For the “folk” revivalists, this was both the black and white music of the 1920s and 1930s. Less than a decade later it was the electric blues of the 1950s. By the early 1970s it was rock ‘n’ roll itself, at least in its early forms. This process has not desisted within the mainstream (witness “old school hip hop” and “‘77-style” punk), but some important developments occurred in the wake of the folk revival’s politicization of culture that helped make the permanent underground possible.

Some Preliminaries

Flight Path From Folksville

If the folk revival’s politicization of culture was its most lasting effect on popular music, its second most significant contribution was to foreground a relationship to popular music’s own past—of a primarily rural and working class variety, both black and white. The singer-guitarists or singer-banjoists of Washington Square in the New York

²²³ Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Champaign-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

²²⁴ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

City of the late 1950s and early 1960s, having memorized the songs on *The Anthology of American Folk Music*, believed themselves to be the sole preservers of a dying or dead culture, effaced by the age of mass media. The individual biographies of performers can complicate this generalization, of course. But if we accept that this sentiment in fact existed within the folk revival community, we can also acknowledge two critical points where the underlying logic is false. The first is the belief that the white urban folk singers were the lone preservers of otherwise forgotten traditions; Alan Lomax, upon returning from a decade-long exile in Europe, purposefully set out to disprove this in 1959 on his “Southern Journey,” wherein he collected numerous examples of the traditions presumed extinct in Lower Manhattan. His field recordings, later released commercially, revealed an in fact quite vibrant musical culture continued to exist in the rural South.²²⁵ The second example of faulty logic is the disavowal of recent commercial music, often summed up by the notorious Dylan-plugs-in-at-Newport story but in fact extending to white rock ‘n’ roll, country music, and pretty much any black performer that didn’t grow up on a plantation (i.e. Muddy Waters=good, doo-wop=bad). Except for possibly the Seeger children, most revivalists who came of age at this point came to rural blues and country via a teenage stopover in rock ‘n’ roll, as innumerable biographies of Bob Dylan point out about the patron saint himself. The zeal for “authenticity” was probably strongest for those with no geographic or cultural ties to any of these traditions, like Dylan. Conversely, as Alice Echols suggests out in her biography of Janis Joplin, folk revivalists in Texas had nothing to prove by claiming an orthodox allegiance to

²²⁵ John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 306–323.

Jimmie Rodgers, because—having grown up with Hank Williams—it was all Opry to them.²²⁶ Similarly the “shock” of rockabilly must have been much greater for Northern teenagers than Southerners, especially poor ones; combining elements from black and white traditions for someone like Carl Perkins, while still fraught, was based on a spatial and interpersonal intimacy that could be as close as your neighbor, but never much further than a walk to the other side of town. Unlike the folk revivalists, rockabillys didn’t foreground racial politics as part of their public personas—even if this was easy enough to read into.

Rockabilly might be syncretic, but accomplishing the same aesthetic-political move would be much more complicated in the urban North, where older black men who could teach you a few chords were harder to come by and it was less likely that whites and blacks were singing the same hymns on Sunday. Robert Palmer suggests in “Portrait of the Band as Young Hawks” that Bob Dylan *needed* the Band to transition out of work-shirt plaintiveness, that they gave him an “authentic” edge to his amplified folk-rock because their teeth were cut on same rowdy Southern circuit as the rockabillys, despite most of them being from Canada. Prior to getting the call from Dylan, they’d never even heard of him—folk singers not being especially popular in Arkansas—and only agreed, initially, because their burgeoning gig as Sonny Boy Williamson’s backup band was curtailed by the singer’s death.)²²⁷ So, in crucial ways, Dylan’s mythologized to death

²²⁶ Alice Echols, *Scars of Sweet Paradise: The Life and Times of Janis Joplin* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 50.

²²⁷ Robert Palmer, *Blues & Chaos: The Music Writing of Robert Palmer*, ed. Anthony DeCurtis (New York: Scribner, 2011), 205–214.

shift to amplification can be seen as an attempt to embrace an *impurity*, thus heeding James Baldwin's warning. But Bob Dylan isn't really a very poster boy for syncretism as a principle, if only because his aesthetic never changed much after *Highway 61 Revisited*.

Ironically, the exemplars of syncretism in the folk-rock era were a band that started their career making hits out of Dylan covers: the Byrds. In this regard, their real breakthrough came in 1966 with the single "Eight Miles High." Instead of the till-then typical combination of black blues and white country typical of rock 'n' roll, including their earlier "folk-rock" hit "Mr. Tambourine Man," the Byrds drew on elements of jazz and Hindustani classical music. About the song, Richie Unterberger writes,

McGuinn uncorked three mesmerizing solos that put Coltrane's fractured free jazz and Shankar's ragas on to the electric 12-string, with a fury and speed that perfectly complemented the song's flight metaphors. The harmonies were never more ghostly and uplifting than they were during the verses, evoking a mysterious land both seductive and menacing.²²⁸

The Byrds' guitarist Roger McGuinn's choice to draw from jazz and Hindustani classical music is significant for two reasons. The first is that while John Coltrane was an African-American musician, in the 1960s his music was on the cutting edge of modern jazz. To folk revival purists, reproducing African-American musical styles wasn't in itself problematic, but the preferred stylistic sources were older—spirituals, rural blues, very early jazz. Coltrane's music in the early- to mid-'60s, while undeniably rooted in blues, pushed out into avant-garde territory through its use of modes rather than chord progressions. McGuinn's purposeful use of a modality derived from Coltrane's "India"

²²⁸ Richie Unterberger, *Turn! Turn! Turn!: The '60s Folk-Rock Revolution* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2002), 229.

on 1963's *Impressions* is a sonic declaration of allegiance to the inventiveness of modern jazz and a clear break from the reproductive tendencies of the folk revival.

In addition, the choice of “India” was by no means accidental. According to Peter Lavezzoli's *The Dawn of Indian Music in the West*, the first introduction to Hindustani classical music for listeners in the United States was the 1955 LP *The Music of India: Morning and Evening Ragas* by Ali Akbar Khan. The release of this record had an incalculable effect on experimental music in the U.S., most directly through the influence it had on composer La Monte Young, who heard it on the radio.²²⁹ By the end of the 1950s, recordings of other Hindustani classical musicians would become available in the U.S., including those by Pandit Pran Nath and, most famously, Ravi Shankar. However, the genesis of this first album is worth dissecting.

The Music of India is framed by spoken introductions to each raga by virtuoso violinist Yehudi Menuhin. Menuhin, a Jewish Russian-American, had become interested in Hindustani classical music via his practice of yoga in the 1940s. By 1952, according to Lavezzoli, “Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru felt that the socially conscious Yehudi Menuhin would be the ideal artist to bridge East and West,” and the violinist made a tour of India, collaborating with master musicians wherever he went.²³⁰ Though Menuhin was not, unlike the State Department's Jazz Ambassadors, an official liaison of the U.S. government, his activities as a promoter of Hindustani classical music in the West can be

²²⁹ Peter Lavezzoli, *Dawn of Indian Music in the West* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 1.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

seen as a kind of inversion of that program.²³¹ With *The Music of India*, U.S. listeners didn't get a grand tour by raga masters, but they did get a window into a whole tradition that would have otherwise remained obscure. Although Lavezzoli does not mention this, it is worth considering Nehru's proposal and Menuhin's efforts—and the recordings that emanated from both—as a residual effect of the strengthening of political and economic relations, symbolized by the 1956 meeting between the Prime Minister and President Eisenhower. Increased trade between the two countries would inevitably bring both major commodities and the odd bits of culture.

While it's possible that a vogue for Hindustani classical music might've occurred in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s akin to the passing fad for “japanned” furniture and chiniserie at the turn of the century, the modal development in jazz enabled a syncretism with U.S. popular music that would not have otherwise been possible, since modes can more easily be combined with raga technique than chords can. Which, of course, was exactly what John Coltrane was doing with “India.” The Byrds' “Eight Miles High” extends the syncretizing process, the result being a “break away from folk-rock into folk-rock-psychedelia.”²³² The terms “psychedelia” or “psychedelic” is tossed around frequently with regards to the music of the 1960s, but the underlying implications of their use are infrequently examined. The word “psychedelic” emerged as a neologism in an exchange between British psychiatrist Humphrey Osmond and novelist Aldous Huxley in 1957, based on their mutual interest in hallucinogenic drugs. Combining the Greek

²³¹ For further information, see: Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²³² Unterberger, *Turn! Turn! Turn!*, 230.

words for “soul” (interpreted as “mind” in modern times) and “manifesting,” the synthesis of the two was meant to describe the ability of particular kinds of drugs to induce altered states of consciousness.²³³ But while the word origin is related to drugs, I think it’s a mistake to limit it as a musical adjective to either the 1960s or things that supposedly sound good while you’re tripping. After all, as researchers like Weston La Barre demonstrated in the same period, music has long been used to induce altered states of consciousness—with and without the aid of hallucinogenic substances.²³⁴

“Eight Miles High” poses an interesting question, then: what kind of mindset is it manifesting? According to Unterberger, the band composed the lyrics to the song as a response to the flight they took to England for a tour in 1965.²³⁵ The disorienting effect of this trip could be interpreted as a transformation in the band’s “psychogeography.” According to Guy Debord’s “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” psychogeography is “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.”²³⁶ Debord and the other Situationists were primarily concerned with the pedestrian experience, but “Eight Miles High” suggests something much more expansive. Capitalism made possible the transportation of individuals from one side of the globe to the other without any accompanying transition, terrestrial or marine. In 1965, air travel

²³³ Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), 419.

²³⁴ There’s also another, more universal dimension to psychedelic sound: psychoacoustic effects. These are taken up at length in the next chapter regarding pitch, loudness, timbre, and rhythm.

²³⁵ Richie Unterberger, *Eight Miles High: Folk-Rock’s Flight from Haight-Ashbury to Woodstock* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2003), 4.

²³⁶ Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” in Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau Of Public Secrets, 2007), 8.

that brought you to a foreign country within hours was quite shocking. The same international forces had also brought these foreign recordings to the Byrds' ears. The psychogeography of "Eight Miles High" then is that of the flows and disjunctions of global capital, the result being a collision of the very old (Hindustani classical) and the very modern (Coltrane's jazz, electric guitars): an audible, trans-historical sphere whose destination routes the composer's and listener's minds manifest through sound. Whereas earlier forms of syncretism were largely defined by geographic proximity—like that between blacks and whites in the South—the moment of "Eight Miles High" represents a massive transformation in what kinds of sonic assemblages were possible.

The Byrds were not necessarily the first to create music along these lines, but in many ways they're the most representative for rock music; the Beatles, for instance, owed a great deal of debt for their later developments to the same tour that brought the Americans to England in 1965. And the Byrds themselves continued in this vein, incorporating South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela into 1967's "So You Want to Be a Rock & Roll Star." Like Sun Ra, they even tried to travel sonically between the past and outer space, employing synthesizers on tracks like the ones recorded for 1968's *The Notorious Byrd Brothers*. About these, Unterberger notes that,

"Space Odyssey" was the Byrds' furthest-reaching electronic voyage, with a McGuinn-R.J. Hippard song that could have been mistaken for a sea shanty taken to 2001 by exotic synthesizer overwashes. No other Byrds track reached at once so far back to the past and so far into the future.²³⁷

²³⁷ Unterberger, *Eight Miles High*, 43.

In this light, their follow-up, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, seems like a regression to the old folk-purity dogmas. And even if the conservative roots-ification process has maintained a stronghold in the mainstream (e.g. the notion that psychedelic rock is “classic”) the implications of songs like “Eight Miles High” and “Space Odyssey” could not be completely excised. Global syncretism and futurist/traditional hybrids had already spread to other regions of the musicking social body.

I’m Primitive (That’s How I Live)

The other critical turn from the folk revival’s purism came in the form of garage rock. Many writers, from Lester Bangs and Dave Marsh in the ‘70s to Bernard Gendron in recent years, have framed garage rock primarily through the lens of punk; the garage rock compilation *Nuggets*, which started its life as mixtape that future Patti Smith Group guitarist Lenny Kaye compiled at Elektra head Jac Holzman’s request in 1972, is usually regarded as the watershed between one-off ‘60s Yardbirds clones and the anti-AOR of the Ramones et al. in the ‘70s. One particular aspect of garage rock is especially important: its self-conscious primitivism. Like the Byrds’ syncretism in “Eight Miles High,” another 1966 single suggest this feature: the Groupies plainly stated manifesto “Primitive.” It’s worth quoting the lyrics at length:

What I don’t know can never hurt me
I live a life that’s working for me
What I respect, you just can’t see
What you expect, I’ll never be

Primitive, that’s how I live

Primitive, I take what you give
Cause I love and I live primitive

The things I do, you'd never try
What I get free you got to buy
I'm proud of my life
But don't ask me why
Cause if I told you, I'd probably...²³⁸

The words to “Primitive” raise the specter of “primitivism” that has lurked in the background of popular music in the United States since the days of burnt cork. But unlike those earlier manifestations, where the “primitive” (or “savage” or “barbaric”) was explicitly associated the music of African-Americans—even when done nominally in praise, as with Mailer’s essay—the Groupies song suggests that primitivism is a choice. In his book *Sixties Rock*, Michael Hicks notes that in that decade, “groups began to take names that not only suggested commonness, transience, or alienation, but also criminality, primitivism, even bestiality—a kind of devolutionary chain of identities with which groups seemed eager to link themselves.”²³⁹ Aside from the importance of naming, Hicks also acknowledges that the primitivism of garage rock was accomplished through the sonics themselves: the guitarist’s fuzz tone, the vocalist’s yowl—Hicks suggests Sky Saxon of the Seeds as exemplar—as well as the drummer’s heavily stated, quasi-“tribal” beat. Although *Sixties Rock* does not devote any space to the public musicking of garage rock—it’s easy to assume that his perspective is entirely drawn from listening to 45s in private—it’s also worth considering anti-American Bandstand spaces

²³⁸ Author’s own transcription.

²³⁹ Michael Hicks, *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 119.

like Seattle's Spanish Castle, a '60s teenage rock club, as sites of self-conscious primitive ritual.²⁴⁰ For example, The Kingsmen played a 90-minute version of "Louie Louie" at a similar Pacific Northwest club the night before recording the song, an event that strikes me as sharing the long-form, repetitive, ecstatic-trance dimensions of something like the Sufi music of the Gnawa in Marrakesh or the Pan festivals of the polytheistic Berbers of Jajouka in the hills of Morocco.²⁴¹

But all of this begs the question: what do we mean when we say "primitive" in the first place? The guitarist John Fahey conceived of his own music as part of a self-selected aesthetic group he called "American Primitive," which included U.S. performers as diverse as the bluegrass of the Stanley Brothers and the free jazz of Albert Ayler, all of whose recording he reissued via his Revenant Records label. Fahey considered the "primitive" part of his equation in two ways. The first was derived from the art historical concept as applied to painters like Henri Rousseau: self-taught, untutored. However, when he applied "primitive" to certain forms of gospel and blues, Fahey also paired the term with "raw."²⁴² This perhaps inevitably suggests a connection to Claude Levi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked* and anthropology in general.²⁴³ It's important to be careful with "raw" and "primitive", as well as the word "savage" which occurs throughout Levi-Strauss' work. For example, Fahey's inclusion of jazz pianist Cecil Taylor in his pantheon is problematic if we assume "self-taught" and "untutored" to

²⁴⁰ Dave Marsh, *Louie Louie: The History and Mythology of the World's Most Famous Rock "n" Roll Song* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 69–70.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁴² John Fahey, *American Primitive Guitar* (New York: Grossman's Guitar Workshop, 2002), 3.

²⁴³ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologies, Volume I* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1983).

imply that his musicking is so individualized as to be disconnected from any prior tradition. It is less so if we consider Taylor's as a pragmatic (one might say "convivial") assemblage of useful techniques from a variety of sources—Henry Cowell, Thelonious Monk, etc.—that defies incorporation into the easy categories needed by the commercial music industry. Furthermore, primitive in this sense doesn't imply that the musicking is rudimentary, though it may suggest that "development" itself is not a linear or teleological process, an all-too-common assumption that manifests itself in the belief that "sophisticated" jazz is somehow an outgrowth of "simple" blues or even back to "field hollers"—to cite one unfortunately prevalent example.

Regarding the other dimension of Fahey's definition of "primitive," the idea of the "raw" in Levi-Strauss' work is contrasted by the "cooked." He addresses the distinction between the two in *The Savage Mind* when he writes that other anthropologists have tried to assign the topic of his title to,

[A] period of history—to the ages of fetishism and polytheism—while in this book it is neither the mind of savages nor that of primitive or archaic humanity, but rather mind in its untamed state as distinct from mind cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return.²⁴⁴

For Levi-Strauss, the "cooked" is that which is processed, "cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return." Which is to say that it's a generalizable state, not a designated stop on the cultural evolution express. Approached from this perspective, the primitive/raw/savage can operate as an ethos, even if Levi-Strauss (or his translator) isn't particularly careful in their selection of and/or distinction

²⁴⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1968), 219.

between the three terms. In addition, it's important to split the notion of domestication from the impulse to accumulate; as Pierre Clastres demonstrated in *Society Against the State*, refusal of an accumulative or capitalist economy does not necessitate the maintenance of or return to a hunter-gatherer society.²⁴⁵ In this, both Levi-Strauss and Clastres echo Marcel Mauss' 1923 anthropological text *The Gift*. In that book, Mauss examines how gift giving and reciprocity were integral to economies/cultures of places as diverse as the Pacific Northwest and Polynesia. For Mauss, a gift economy is the basis of a society that values the same things that were quoted from Ivan Illich in the Introduction: "individual freedom realized in mutual interdependence." According to Mary Douglas's Foreword to *The Gift*, "The theory of the gift is a theory of human solidarity."²⁴⁶ While his examples were drawn from ethnography, one of Mauss' overarching purposes was to use his analysis as a mirror to reflect the failings of his own society—we might extrapolate that the same could be said of all capitalist economies—a purpose made explicit when he writes that, "The theme of the gift, or freedom and obligation in the gift, or generosity and self-interest in giving, reappear in our own society like a resurrection of a dominant motif long forgotten."²⁴⁷ More recently, the themes of Mauss' and Clastres' work have been taken up by David Graeber, in his *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*:

²⁴⁵ Clastres, *Society Against the State*.

²⁴⁶ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), x.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

But Mauss and Clastres' argument suggests something even more radical. It suggests that counterpower, at least in the most elementary sense, actually exists where the states and markets are not even present; that in such cases, rather than being embodied in popular institutions which pose themselves against the power of lords, or kings, or plutocrats, they are embodied in institutions which ensure such types of person never come about. What it is "counter" to, then, is a potential, a latent aspect, or dialectical possibility if you prefer, within the society itself.²⁴⁸

I have no illusions that the Groupies were somehow disgruntled anthropology majors. At the same time, it's hard not to read lines like "Primitive, I take what you give" and "What I get free you got to buy" as resurrections—or perhaps "insurrections"—of long forgotten, alternative forms of valuation. The Groupies' "Primitive" can be contrasted, in this regard, with the far more famous lyrics of the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction." Whereas the Stones transpose Muddy Waters' sexual frustration into a narrative of consumer alienation (girls being just another object of consumption), it's unclear whether the person addressed in "Primitive" is a girl (plausible, and in keeping with much of garage rock's misogynistic hostility) or to the dominant values of American culture—perhaps as an implied rebuke to an abstract father/mother. In either case, the positive program set forth in "Primitive"—"I live a life that's working for me" and "I'm proud of my life"—are indicative that primitivism *as an ethos* is an essential part of the permanent underground.

The Artists Alone Decided What You Will Hear

²⁴⁸ David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 25.

The story of Bernard Stollman's New York-based ESP-Disk label adds a more concretely economic and social organization dimension to syncretic/primitivist transformations that I have described thus far. ESP-Disk was started originally to promote the constructed, international Esperanto language, which Lester Bangs described as an attempt at "promoting world peace by sort of manufacturing a Tower of Babel in Reverse."²⁴⁹ However, Stollman quickly transferred his energies to the recording and releasing of albums by underground rock and avant-garde jazz artists. Among the jazz releases included the first recordings as leaders of Albert Ayler and Pharoah Sanders, and Sun Ra, whose *Heliocentric Worlds* albums for ESP-Disk were perhaps even more important to his influence on underground musicians than his the self-released LPs or Impulse! material, if only for fact that they were more likely to be moved into the cutout bin. In this, Bangs noted of the label that, "Unchallenged as the most prototypically Underground record company in America, it stands to reason that they would have to sign the most ultra-Underground of Underground groups."²⁵⁰ For Bangs, this meant that even "out-there" and underground groups like the Mothers of Invention and the Velvet Underground would have sounded mainstream next to the other artists on ESP-Disk's roster. Among the rock bands, the foremost were the Fugs. Named after Norman Mailer's euphemism for "fuck" in his WWII novel *The Naked and the Dead*, the band was, at its core, comprised of two poets: Ed Sanders and Tuli Kupferberg. Although their first album had been released on Folkways/Broadside in 1965, it was reissued as the first

²⁴⁹ Lester Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: The Work of a Legendary Critic: Rock'N'Roll as Literature and Literature as Rock "N"Roll* (New York: Anchor, 1988), 83.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

rock release on ESP-Disk. The poetry backgrounds of Sanders and Kupferberg are apparent in the songification of pieces by William Blake and Algernon Charles Swinburne. (Incidentally, Kupferberg appears as a character in Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* "who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown" and Sanders was the proprietor of the Peace Eye Book Store and the publisher of *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*.)²⁵¹ Although the two poets were aided by more "professional" musicians like Ken Weaver, Steve Weber, and Peter Stampfel—the latter two also being the founders of the decidedly impure folk group The Holy Modal Rounders—the band appears in the cover photo holding a variety of alleyway junk as instruments, which is a good indicator of the sound of the album, even if (or perhaps because) it was produced by Harry Smith. The Fugs went on to produce one more official album for ESP-Disk and one "unofficial" one before ditching the label for a more financially lucrative contract with Warner/Reprise, where their albums became progressively more polished and less interesting.

The "unofficial" album, 1967's *Virgin Fugs* is perhaps the most significant of their ESP-Disk releases, if only for the fact that it engendered bad feelings between Sanders and Stollman that last to this day. "CIA Man," later covered by The Sun City Girls, is probably the other reason to treasure this record. The bad feelings were a result of Stollman releasing the album, which was comprised of unused material from their first two records, without consulting the group. This was not only a breach of trust between

²⁵¹ For more background, see: Ed Sanders, *Fug You: An Informal History of the Peace Eye Bookstore, the Fuck You Press, the Fugs, and Counterculture in the Lower East Side* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2011).

the artist and label owner; it was an incredible deviation from the label's motto: "The artists alone decide what you will hear on their ESP-Disk." In an interview with Richie Unterberger in *Unknown Legends of Rock'n'Roll*, Stollman describes the more typical arrangements at the label:

"ESP never had a staff producer," he remarks. "There *were* no producers. I never asked an artist whom he was going to use in his group, or the size of the group. They picked the time they wanted to go into the studio. They picked their own repertoire. There was no post-mixing of any kind. What you heard was what you got. I would call it an ideal environment for a serious musician." [...] "You must understand that ESP did not audition artists. The vast majority of artists neither brought me demo tapes, nor did they audition. I happily did not have to make these decisions. The artists themselves made these decisions for ESP. They nominated each other. They nominated people they had played with before, and would choose to play with again. It was a community of equals. I think that's why the label has a certain cohesiveness, or a certain level of expression. Because these people were a community."²⁵²

In many respects, Stollman's description of ESP-Disk depicts a business that was a cross between the "custom" R&B labels described previously and the independent, more commercial ones of the same period. Sanders' ire at Stollman is complicated by the fact that the profits from Fugs albums—which were surprisingly successful at the time—were used to finance the less profitable jazz material. Such business practices eventually sunk ESP-Disk; it was disbanded in bankruptcy in 1974. However, as Bangs noted, the label did manage to release some of the most "ultra-Underground" music of the era. Although a group like Pearls Before Swine could move like the Fugs onto a major label because of their relatively accessible style, it's hard to imagine anyone else taking on something with zero commercial potential like the Godz or Cromagnon, or *LIE: The Love*

²⁵² Richie Unterberger, *Unknown Legends of Rock "n" Roll* (New York: Backbeat Books, 1998), 230–31.

and Terror Cult, a collection of Charles Manson's music, let alone non-music releases like spoken word albums by William S. Burroughs and Timothy Leary, Tuli Kupferberg of the Fugs doing nothing but reading advertisements on the *No Deposit, No Return* LP, and the audio "newspaper" *The East Village Other*. The last cops an idea that had long existed in the politicized folk world, but was constructed using a more avant-garde collage style; it should also be noted that, in line with Kupferberg's "solo" album, Ishmael Reed contributed to *The East Village Other*—both the actual paper and the audio collage—prior to his writing "The Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," with its damnation of "ads for black capitalism."

The incredible freedom afforded ESP-Disk-affiliated artists, *Virgin Fugs* notwithstanding, has left a lasting impression on the musical underground; interest in ESP-Disk releases was spurred by Byron Coley articles in *Forced Exposure* in the 1980s, as well as public praise for the label by Sonic Youth guitarist Thurston Moore. In his essay "Do the Godz Speak Esperanto?," Lester Bangs attempted to summarize the effect the Godz had on him as a listener, but his underlying sentiments could stand in for the label's rock output as a whole:

They don't take up where the Fugs left off—nobody could do that—but they do sometimes approximate the nth devolution of the Fugs' yawp to the point of squatting dogmen around the cannibal fire. Other times they would remind me of you and me and New York City and the vast vacuous beauty of this crap culture we're fryin' in.²⁵³

He later adds:

²⁵³ Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, 85.

At their best, they made the craziest of the touted Crazies look like bluesjam diddlers, and few indeed have made it to their Cheshire outpost on the limb even yet. At least one thing's absolutely certain—after them, the planet will never whistle, hum, yodel or even sing in the shower quite the same again. They've turned us all to Godz yowling freer than we ever dreamed, and every yowl and squeak and whinny is a hymn of praise to their ancient eminence.²⁵⁴

Bangs' praise might be overblown—after all, even fewer people heard the Godz than the Velvet Underground—but then again, perhaps Bangs is speaking to the potential for upheaval that contact with the Godz has on the minds of listeners. As Bangs notes, similar results are unlikely to occur from listening to Eric Clapton.

Families of Freaks: The Cult of Social Formation

Despite its ubiquity on radio, it is somewhat surprising that there isn't a very extensive academic bibliography on '60s psychedelic rock, and what texts exist tend to focus on major stars (The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix). This may account for the lack of attention paid to what I believe is one of the defining features of the musicking of the era: the "cult" as a type of social organization. I am deliberately using "cult" in order to provoke both of its primary meanings. The first is derived from Howard P. Becker's typology of religious organization (ecclesia, denomination, sect, cult).²⁵⁵ Becker's definition of cult still has currency in sociology and anthropology, since it refers to small groups of believers who practice highly individuated forms of religion. In the sense that Becker uses his terms, Vodou is both a sect insofar as it maintains some continuity across

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 92.

²⁵⁵ Howard Paul Becker, *Man in Reciprocity: Introductory Lectures on Culture, Society and Personality* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1973).

Haiti, and a cult when examined at the level individual houngan and mambo (priests and priestesses) and their followers. The second definition is entirely pejorative: it comes directly from the opposition of some U.S. Christians to any non-Christian practices, though more liberal positions make allowances for other major world religions (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, in roughly descending order). Accusations of “cultism” are especially likely to be attributed to Afro-diasporic and Native American practices, though the strongest denunciations are reserved for charismatic religious leaders espousing a hodgepodge of “mystical” beliefs derived from multiple traditions and who assert a strongly messianic persona among their followers—including many who profess to be Christians.²⁵⁶ Though now more mainstreamed, Mormonism was a frequent target, and in the 20th century Scientology (L. Ron Hubbard), and the Peoples Temple (Jim Jones) have achieved well-deserved notoriety.²⁵⁷

Although jazz has its fair share of charismatic band leaders—Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and James Brown come to mind—perhaps none came closer to functioning as “cult” leaders more than Sun Ra, as discussed previously. Sun Ra’s charismatic centrality to the Arkestra’s shifting membership lends him an element of the rightly or wrongly pejorative aspect of “cult” that is absent from more egalitarian collectives like the AACM, whose organization is still within range of the sociological/anthropological definition of a “cult.” For psychedelic rock music, examples of both senses of cult were

²⁵⁶ Douglas E. Cowan, *Bearing False Witness?: An Introduction to the Christian Countercult* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

²⁵⁷ For further discussion of the differences between the two definitions, see: James T. Richardson, “Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative,” *Review of Religious Research* 34, no. 4 (June 1, 1993): 348–356.

evident in the 1960s. In this section, I will be exploring four sets of examples establishing the presence of this type of social formation: The Red Krayola, Captain Beefheart and The Magic Band, Charles Manson, and—most obscurely—the musical world of Father Yod, leader of the Source Family cult. It is my contention that the “cult” and the “factory” (discussed in the next section) are the two most important organizational models for the development of the permanent underground; in the last part of this chapter I discuss how the band The Residents were the first to synthesize both of these strands, consequently establishing a precedent for later permutations of the permanent underground.

Writing on the Wall: The Red Krayola

The Red Krayola (originally the Red Crayola, before the crayon people objected) was a rock band from Houston in the 1960s. Consisting at its core of Mayo Thompson, Frederick Barthelme, and Steve Cunningham, the group was part of the circle of Texas-based psychedelic musicians whose recordings were released on International Artists of Houston. Unlike label mates the 13th Floor Elevators, less of the Red Krayola’s music was directly rooted in blues forms. In Elevators’ songs like “You’re Gonna Miss Me” the song structure is still blues-based, with psychedelic elements like amplified jug blowing added for color. (Though modifying a jug in this way does strike me as a rebuke to the folk revival.) By contrast, the Red Krayola’s 1967 album *Parable of Arable Land* contains only six segments that can even be considered “songs,” blues-based or otherwise. These titled compositions are buttressed on either side by what the band

called “Free Form Freak-Out”; between pieces like “Hurricane Fighter Plane” and “Transparent Radiation” there are passages of chaotic noise.

These sections are of the most interest here. Partially, this is because they are pretty obviously improvised—and therefore musically unconventional. But more significant is *who* performs the “Free Form Freak-Outs.” The band was certainly involved, but so were a group that they referred to as “The Familiar Ugly,” made up of friends of Thompson, Barthelme, and Cunningham, including Roky Erickson of the 13th Floor Elevators. Although the names of all of The Familiar Ugly are not listed in the liner notes, presumably a few of them were fellow students at the University of St. Thomas, alongside fellow Texas freaks like Erickson.²⁵⁸

As anyone who has started a band or had friends or relatives who’ve started a band knows, most of the time the audience for the band’s first show is made up mostly of friends, girlfriends and boyfriends, and age-appropriate family. These are the only initial “fans” a band has, and sometimes they’re the only ones they ever have. But what’s interesting about the Red Krayola is that they took those core fans and made them into a part of the band. “Fan,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is derived from the Latin *fanaticus*, meaning an overly zealous follower of a particular religious temple. Though “fanatic” is generally used derogatorily, once the abbreviation “fan” found its way into the secular world via baseball enthusiasts in the 19th century, it shed many of its less pleasant connotations. But perhaps the religiosity at the core of “fan” is worth reconsidering. In the case of musicking, “fanaticism” has been transposed from temple to

²⁵⁸ Unterberger, *Unknown Legends of Rock “n” Roll*, 391.

baseball field to groups of musicians. The Familiar Ugly are a valuable case study in the breakdown in the boundary between the performer and the audience; it's not unreasonable to assume that they were among the *only* fans of the Red Krayola in the 1960s.

The "Free Form Freak-Outs" involving the Familiar Ugly invite provocative comparison to the Rara bands of Haitian Vodou, the "second line" of New Orleans Jazz, and the "little instruments" utilized by the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which I've discussed previously. The relationship between the Red Krayola and the Familiar Ugly is also quite similar to that between the even more obscure ESP-Disk band Cromagnon and their "Connecticut Tribe," who contributed to the 1969 album *Orgasm*. Both the Red Krayola and Cromagnon represent the most rudimentary forms of 1960s "cult" formation vis-à-vis musicking that I am pursuing in this section.

Give Me That Old Time Religion: Captain Beefheart

Unlike the Red Krayola or Cromagnon, it is much easier to frame Captain Beefheart and The Magic Band as literally a cult. This is true both in the sense that Beefheart (born Don Van Vliet) was a charismatic bandleader in the mold of Sun Ra, and insofar as their 1969 album *Trout Mask Replica* can be understood as *the* totemic object of future noise-freaks. (It counts John Peel, Matt Groening, David Lynch, and John Lydon/Johnny Rotten among its more famous devotees.) The prevalence of the latter is well-documented by rock historians, so I want to devote the space of this section to considering Captain Beefheart as a kind of "cult" leader. There is already some

precedence for this move. As Kevin Courrier observes in his book on *Trout Mask Replica*,

Beefheart's quest to find democratic freedom in his art found him becoming something of an authoritarian to do it. The path to *Trout Mask Replica* was not outlined by the quixotic zeal of a group breaking all the rules to find themselves. It was etched by one man's narrow will to achieve his own artistic liberation.²⁵⁹

In order to reach this goal, Beefheart first had to break down the musicians whom he picked to work with him on the album. For some of them, this wasn't an arduous task; guitarist Bill Harkleroad had been briefly involved in a cult called "The Brotherhood" immediately prior to his audition for the band.²⁶⁰ According to Courrier, "The first step in this new direction was to rename the members (as Zappa had once renamed him). Mark Boston became Rockette Morton, Jeff Cotton was christened Antennae Jimmy Semens, Victor Hayden was the Mascara Snake, John French inherited the obvious moniker Drumbo, and Bill Harkleroad became Zoot Horn Rollo."²⁶¹ The "power of naming" is an extremely important one, as anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss have demonstrated. In *The Savage Mind*, he states that,

On the one hand, proper names are derived from totems and depend on sacred and esoteric knowledge; but, on the other, they are connected with social personality and are the occasion of customs, rites, and prohibitions.²⁶²

In the case of Beefheart and the Magic Band, the "proper names" are the ones bestowed by the one formerly known as Don Van Vliet. Levi-Strauss contrasts this with

²⁵⁹ Kevin Courrier, *Captain Beefheart's Trout Mask Replica* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 50.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 68–9.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁶² Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 183.

“kinship names” (e.g. Bill Harkleroad), which are profane. The creation of a new, “proper” identity, as Levi-Strauss notes, is connected to particular patterns of organization and collective behaviors—new ones, in this case. To further this process,

Beefheart drove the musicians hard, making them play twelve to fourteen hours a day. He was ‘conditioning’ the band by keeping them talking for up to thirty-six hours straight. “When I first joined the group, Don was going to the library looking up books on how to control people, and literally how to brainwash these young kids,” Harkleroad recalled. “We’re talking sleep deprivation, food deprivation.”²⁶³

The preparations for *Trout Mask Replica* resemble another anthropological concept: liminality. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Victor Turner defined liminality as an individual’s in-between state with respect to society. The process begins with separation from that society, accompanied by rites like re-naming, followed by a liminal period when the individual has not yet been reincorporated into a new social world. Turner called the unsettled relations in the liminal state “communitas,” and speculated that such a state could in fact become permanent.²⁶⁴ Beefheart and the Magic band clearly demonstrate the separation/liminal stages in the lead-up to *Trout Mask Replica*. The question is whether the liminal element becomes sustained, communitas equaling permanent underground. Some answers might be found in the mutable characteristics of their music:

The musicians pitched risky musical questions into the equation. “If I play my own rhythmic pattern, will it still connect to what the bass player, the drummer,

²⁶³ Courier, *Captain Beefheart’s Trout Mask Replica*, 85.

²⁶⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 1995).

and the singer are doing?” each one asked. The record became a search, not for the whole, but rather a definition of its individual parts.²⁶⁵

Courier later adds that, “Despite the cultlike atmosphere, with a tyrant now in charge, the music the group played was itself strangely liberating.”²⁶⁶ The music of *Trout Mask Replica* is liberating precisely because it required discipline—something Sun Ra had made into a philosophy but is demonstrated by other bandleaders like Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and James Brown. On the album’s “Moonlight on Vermont,” the group reinterpret “Give Me That Old Time Religion” as an invocation to possession in an industrialized world, and Courier observes that “What we get to hear blows fire: an abstract gospel blues with an added touch inspired by avant-garde composer Steve Reich’s ‘Come out.’ In ‘Come Out,’ Reich had sampled, within his score, an evangelist’s fire and brimstone sermon.”²⁶⁷ Beefheart’s sermon, as I noted at the beginning of this section, was internalized by a lot of people who came to comprise the permanent underground in the 1970s—including The Residents. Kevin Courier acknowledges something similar when he writes that,

It’s that underground, though, where a laboratory of experimentation can flourish. Since the huge dollars and the mass audience don’t drive that world, lone dreamers [...] could endlessly perform their imaginary concerts. That underground made these distinct kinds of propulsive forces possible, in a way that they never could in rock and roll. The stage that Elvis Presley and the Beatles built, as big and as bold as it was, couldn’t break totally free from the huge business that ultimately needed to make money from its art.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Courier, *Captain Beefheart’s Trout Mask Replica*, 38.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 75–6.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 92–3.

While compelling, Courier's language here is either imprecise or overly idealistic. As noted earlier, Weston La Barre made a strong argument that the profane world of the music business and the sacred world of musicking *communitas* are not necessarily anathema: the distinction should be drawn between "money" and profit in excess of the musician's labor. The musicking of the permanent underground is not ultimately hermetic; why else would we talk about *Trout Mask Replica* but for the ways that it has resonated outward from its original cult of initiates?

Death Valley '69

As Catherine Yronwode argues in her *Hoodoo Herb and Root Magic: A Materia Magica of African-American Conjure*, the relationship between the more rural forms of blues and non-Christian religious practices are amply demonstrated by the lyrical references made to "mojo hands" and "hoodoo"; indeed, they are often used as primary sources by researchers in this field like Yronwode.²⁶⁹ While it's inaccurate—not to mention culturally offensive—to describe this relationship as one between a music and the occult, a separate white, European and American fascination with the occult has had a significant impact on the popular culture of the United States. To cite one widely acknowledged example, Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* is described as having been organized according to a system that Smith derived from his knowledge of the writings of British occultist Aleister Crowley; Smith even occasionally claimed that

²⁶⁹ Catherine Yronwode, *Hoodoo Herb and Root Magic: A Materia Magica of African-American Conjure* (Forestville, CA: Lucky Mojo Curio Company, 2002).

Crowley was his biological father. Smith's friend and fellow filmmaker Kenneth Anger was also expert in Crowley's brand of "magick," and this influenced the ideas behind of his films. It also drew British rock musicians like Jimmy Page and Mick Jagger into his orbit at one point; Page's interest in Crowley extends so far as to include the purchase of one of Crowley's former homes, a Scottish castle. During the 1960s, self-professed "Satanist" Anton LaVey was a well-known figure within the general weirdness of Los Angeles, if often mostly as a tabloid-novelty; interestingly, though, he self-released an album of spooky organ music and pontification titled *The Satanic Mass* in 1968.

The sinister heart of '60s occultism, however, is undoubtedly the figure of Charles Manson. Manson is an important figure in two respects. On the one hand, his "career" intersects with the music business in L.A. during the decade. On the other, he's been a consistent source of fascination for underground musicians in the years since his arrest and incarceration. In this section, I will be examining both dimensions of Manson.

The story of Charles Manson and his cult has been told many times, including in *The Family*, a book by Fugs member Ed Sanders. Sanders highlights Manson's personal ties to Los Angeles rock musicians Dennis Wilson and Terry Melcher and his bizarre fascination with the Beatles' "Helter Skelter, though he ignores the release of *LIE: The Love and Terror Cult*, a collection of Manson's own music on Sanders' old label, ESP-Disk.²⁷⁰

More interesting musically than Manson's warped folk-pop songs is Family member Bobby Beausoleil. In Andrew Hultkrans' book on the Love album *Forever*

²⁷⁰ Ed Sanders, *The Family* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002).

Changes, he uses Beausoleil to explore the deeper connections between the Manson cult and '60s rock. Beausoleil was an early member of Love, whose 1966 single "7 and 7 is" stands as an apocalyptic highlight of '60s garage rock.²⁷¹ Beausoleil also had a long-standing relationship to Kenneth Anger, appearing in the filmmaker's *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969) and *Lucifer Rising* (1972). More importantly, Beausoleil was the initial and—after a failed collaboration between Anger and Jimmy Page—final composer for the soundtrack to *Lucifer Rising*. Both the aborted first version of the soundtrack and the one that was eventually used (which Beausoleil recorded from prison) were issued in 2009 as *The Lucifer Rising Suite*. The band that Beausoleil employed for the first version was called the Orkustra, in homage to Sun Ra. Although their music wasn't released until much later, the band performed on the same San Francisco stages as the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Quicksilver Messenger Service in 1967.²⁷² Based on a comparison of the recordings Beausoleil made of the Orkustra and his better-known peers, what's striking is how much more free form and disorienting it is. Of course, it's also much more menacing than any version of "Dark Star." If Manson wasn't a sociopath, it's possible that he and Beausoleil could have constituted a kind of West Coast version of the Lou Reed-John Cale dynamic in the Velvet Underground.

As for the musical legacy of Manson himself, his quasi-celebrity in L.A. before the Tate-LaBianca murders and his subsequent use as a touchstone are based on the same appeal: the man radiated a "dark side" charisma and a promise of the pleasures of

²⁷¹ Andrew Hultkrans, *Forever Changes* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

²⁷² Liner notes, Bobby Beausoleil, *Lucifer Rising Suite*, 2011.

transgressing society's norms. Music biz veterans like Wilson and Melcher (the former a Beach Boy, the latter Doris Day's son) hoped that some of the Manson's outlaw authenticity rubbed off on them, much like Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs sought out associations with Neal Cassady and Herbert Huncke. After the murders, Manson's violent mystique only grew stronger. Expanding on the idea of voodoo-as-theory, it's instructive to consider Charles Manson as a kind of Petwo manifestation with primarily negative attributes. Since Petwo is the volatile spirit family, its aesthetic qualities veer between the revolutionary (positive) and the tyrannical (negative). This domain has a long genealogy in modern European and American culture, perhaps starting with that other by-product of the French Revolution, the Marquis de Sade. Sade, like Manson, has been a continual source of fascination for artists. Depending on how you interpret him, his life and writings are either the fullest expression of individual liberty (Georges Bataille's reading) or a blueprint of fascism (the angle Pier Paolo Pasolini took in his 1975 Sade adaptation *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*).

The central issue in all cases is the idea of "transgression" itself. According to Bataille, transgression is about crossing the societal rules prohibiting violence and waste.²⁷³ Within the musical underground, this impulse became especially popular in the '70s and '80s, invoked through lyrics, performance style/sound, and personal adornment. The more negative examples include paeans to decidedly un-psychedelic drugs like heroin and inhalants, songs about serial killers, physical assault against and between the

²⁷³ Bataille, *Eroticism*.

audience, painful levels of volume, and punk's widespread use of Nazi insignia. It's worth noting that the Nazis often flirted with the occult, and Haitian dictator/Petwo devotee Francois Duvalier was inordinately fond of military dress. Within this aesthetic, Manson becomes part of the canon of anti-social saints, alongside Ed Gein, Charlie Starkweather, and many, many others.

The relationship between the individual and the collective within this set of aesthetic/political values is more contradictory than complementary than it is with the more revolutionary wing of the Petwo-ideal. This problem is made explicit in theories of fascism like Willem Reich's, where individual powerlessness is displaced through subordination to the group.²⁷⁴ It's also quite apparent in Hunter Thompson's account of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club. Like Manson, the Hell's Angels were idealized as lone heroic outlaws by some sectors of the counterculture. But as Thompson discovered personally (and the rest of the rock world did after Altamont) their capacity for fascistic brutality could demonstrate itself quickly.²⁷⁵ Manson's image as a militantly individualistic transgressor of societal norms should be offset by his crimes—he's not exactly Pretty Boy Floyd or Jesse James, after all. But perhaps the thing that should give even more pause is his psychological manipulation of the Family. Unlike Beefheart's Magic Band, the end result wasn't liberating at all. Underground musicians who invoke Manson and his ilk do so at their peril; it's a slippery slope.

²⁷⁴ Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980).

²⁷⁵ Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels - The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

Father Knows Blessed

While Charles Manson has found a sizable niche in the annals of the history of American culture, most of the other cult and/or commune formations in the 1960s have received considerably less attention. While this doubtlessly has much to do with the publicity surrounding Manson and the heinousness of the crimes associated with him, it also obfuscates the fact that the Manson Family was not an isolated incident of the intersection of alternative forms of social organization and musicking. In fact, with a little digging it becomes apparent that an entire subgenre of “cult music” existed from the 1960s and 1970s.

When I say “cult music,” I don’t mean obscure performers with small but rabid followings. I mean music made by literal cults and communes that exist on record. Although almost all of these albums are exponentially more obscure than a “cult” artist like Captain Beefheart, their existence shouldn’t be so surprising when one considers the popularity of slightly more mainstream musical phenomena in the ‘60s and ‘70s. These include the surprisingly popular choral group Up With People—more cultish than was recognized or acknowledged at the time—as well as Christian crossovers like the Edwin Hawkins Singers’ 1967 “Oh Happy Day” and Norman Greenbaum’s 1969 “Spirit in the Sky.” It also includes the mind-boggling number of Christian-themed Broadway musicals including *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1969), *Godspell* (1971), and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), as well as the more pagan *Hair* (1967). Even former garage rockers The Electric Prunes got in on the trend with 1968’s *Mass in F*

Minor, whose “Kyrie Eleison” was made famous by the *Easy Rider* soundtrack.

Altogether, these could be considered as musical evidence of what Robert Fogel called a “Fourth Great Awakening.”²⁷⁶ However, some distinction should be drawn between the Christian groups and those based on globally hybrid theologies (in other words, New Age). Christian groups tended to align themselves more with the political right than the New Age groups, though exceptions can be found, and both shared some basic egalitarian principles. Furthermore, many of these groups were organized around a charismatic leader, which led to the frequent contradiction of egalitarian in principle, authoritarian in fact. Although the contradiction created by this organizational pattern is dealt with on a case-by-case basis below, the focus in this section is on the musicking of cults/communes themselves.

While the usage of “cult” is coherent both in terms the charismatic organization of these groups and the general post-WWII pejorative definition of the term, the anthropological/sociological definition of a small group of adherents to idiosyncratic beliefs applies to the cults/communes that released albums in the ‘60s and ‘70s. To give a brief survey, these groups include the Brotherhood of the Spirit/Renaissance Community’s *Spirit in the Flesh* (1971), the People’s Temple Choir’s *He’s Able* (1973), Children of God’s Family of Love’s *The Bible: A Rock Testament* (1977), and Jesus People USA’s Resurrection Band’s *Awaiting Your Reply* (1978), and multiple albums by The Farm’s eponymous band. A few of these were released on commercial labels; *Spirit*

²⁷⁶ Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2002).

in the Flesh came out on Metromedia, *The Bible: A Rock Testament* on Polydor, and a small Christian label produced the Resurrection Band's album. However, much like the congregational gospel recordings and Sun Ra's Arkestra, most of the music in this subgenre was only possible because of a collective effort in the community from whence the music came. As such, most of these records were self-released. However, the music made by the Source Family is the real stand out of this curious group, both in terms of sheer quantity and for its unconventional style.

The Source Family was an outgrowth of the beliefs of James Edward Baker, a WWII veteran, martial arts enthusiast, vegetarian, and follower of various Asian spiritual traditions at one point or another. In the late 1960s, he began calling himself Father Yod. He also opened a vegetarian restaurant on the Sunset Strip called The Source, which employed people who either were or would become his followers—all of whom eventually lived in a mansion in the hills above Hollywood and changed their names to X Aquarian (Isis, Electricity, etc.).²⁷⁷ In the early 1970s, Father Yod became interested in using the musical talents of his acolytes to further his message. According to Isis Aquarian's account of the group,

The story of the Family's music is a complicated one, with scores of musicians and many different band incarnations over a period of five years. A quick guess would place maybe 18 excellent musicians in the Source Family, with at least 15 more good ones, and no less than 50 wannabes.²⁷⁸

Adding:

²⁷⁷ Isis Aquarian and Electricity Aquarian, *The Source: The Untold Story of Father Yod, Ya Ho Wa 13, and The Source Family* (Port Townsend, WA: Process, 2007).

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

When the Family attracted several musicians of professional caliber who had been in the Hollywood music scene, that's when the true magic started.²⁷⁹

All told, The Source Family released nine albums of music between 1973 and 1975, when Father Yod died, all on their own Higher Key Records—although some sixty-five albums worth of additional material are believed to exist. Isis Aquarian notes that these were all recorded “in real time with no retakes.”²⁸⁰ The first four albums were attributed to Father Yod and the Spirit of '76, and the last five to Ya Ho Wha 13, after Father Yod's third identity/incarnation. Each is an example of what might be generally described as “psychedelic rock”: somewhat blues-based electric guitar, bass line melodies, and strong drum rhythms, though the material is often unconventionally structured (which might be psychedelic rock's own convention) and most of it is supplemented by Father Yod's own kettle drum, gong, and vocals. Of the last, Isis Aquarian states:

Father laid down the wisdom of the ages by channeling his words on the spot. Although Father rehearsed and sang a few songs early on, there were no written songs or prepared lyrics or melodies on Father's final albums. This was a totally spontaneous music recorded “In the Now,” through which the Word was spoken. Father's music was truly a life-changing experience for those who had the ears to hear.²⁸¹

Although not, like Isis Aquarian, a believer, music critic Byron Coley reached similar conclusions in his review of the 1998 box set of the group's music, *God and Hair*,

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 138.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 144.

which was prepared by Source Family member (though not a musical contributor, oddly) Sky Saxton/Sunlight Aquarian, formerly of the garage band the Seeds. Writing about the 1974 album *I'm Gonna Take You Home*, Coley concludes “On the best of them, Yahowa unleashes some post-tongue vocals that incorporate all the sounds of barnyard revolution while the guitarist destroys himself.”²⁸² Coley’s reference to a “post-tongue” recalls fellow rock critic Richard Meltzer’s exploration of the idea of an “unknown tongue” in his 1970 book, *The Aesthetics of Rock*. Meltzer, who begins his book with a three page transcription of every “lyric” to the Trashmen’s 1963 “Surfin’ Bird,” admits his fascination with the “unknown tongue” stemmed from reading a review of a Ray Charles performance in *Time* magazine, where the author states that “Southern gospel experts have said that he [Charles] speaks the unknown tongue.”²⁸³ Meltzer’s writing is difficult to parse. A one-time philosophy Ph.D. student at Yale, *The Aesthetics of Rock* is full of references to Western thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger. At the same time, while an undergraduate at SUNY Stony Brook, Meltzer had been a disciple of Allan Kaprow, inventor of the “happening” and all-around prankster. Consequently, *The Aesthetics of Rock* can be read as a serious treatise, an elaborate con job, or a little of both. In his own words, Meltzer suggest that,

Rock ‘n’ roll using the unknown tongue is music on all the ordered levels that music may attain. Possessing an invincible restlessness, it assumes an original ground from which one is to move to secondary an n-ary grounds, objectifiedly

²⁸² Byron Coley, “Yahowha ‘God and Hair’ (Japan, Captain Trip) Review,” *Blastitude*, August 2002, http://www.blastitude.com/13/ETERNITY/father_yod.htm.

²⁸³ Richard Meltzer, *The Aesthetics Of Rock* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 113.

undaunted by the displacement and often either more powerful ('turned on') or satisfied, that is objectified experientially enriched.²⁸⁴

And:

Schematized, the unknown tongue experience has precisely four components: 1) Change, abrupt movement, sudden transition structurally and experientially; 2) Musical awe; 3) Objectified awe, mere awe, "awe," awe at awe itself; 4) Taxonomic urgency; 3) and 4) might be grouped as linking the fusion and confusion of the structural and the valuational with objectivity variations in these elements.²⁸⁵

And finally,

In various musical contexts, the unknown tongue plays numerous roles by itself and in conjunction with an eclectic selective attention in structuring musical experience with a supply of focal points. In the context of repetition, novelty is a surprise. Given novelty and structural variety, repetition is surprising. Within a framework of mixed novelty and repetition, surprise is of mixed variety and expected surprise emerges, as well as frustration of such expectation.²⁸⁶

Beyond all the complex word play, Meltzer seems to be suggesting that by "unknown tongue" what he means is a deeply felt but ultimately indescribable experience in relation to music. Meltzer further theorizes a situation in which the "unknown tongue" might be experienced: by the newness of an auditory event for the listener, though he can't decide this quality is inherent in the music itself or only subjective. What's most odd about these passages in *The Aesthetics of Rock* is that, for all their philosophical posturing, Meltzer never once refers to the origin of the phrase "unknown tongue," the King James Bible. Although "unknown tongue" appears in the Book of Acts, the most

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 118.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 119.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 120.

extensively commentary comes from Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians. There, Paul states that "For he that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth *him*; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries" (14:2), adding a verse later that "He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church" (14:4).

Paul doesn't care much for the unknown tongue. Which makes a great deal of sense, as Paul was the first Christian theologian to privilege a hierarchical organization—a church—as opposed to the scattered enclaves of communal Christians that comprised the first believers.²⁸⁷ What Paul prefers are *followers*. Paul's letters are central to the liturgy of every major Christian denomination, Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox, though Christians of an anarchist bent are typically opposed to Paul's teachings.²⁸⁸ But, ironically, smaller, idiosyncratic groups of evangelical believers—we might gently call them "cults"—turn Paul's own words against him, valuing highly "speaking in tongues" as a form of religious ecstasy. Still, though Paul prefers prophecy to tongue, he hedges his bets: "If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most by three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret" (14:27).

What I find most interesting about these passages in Corinthians is the linkage between edifying oneself through tongue and the collective experience of tongue, albeit through an interpreter. The appeal to a personal and communal dynamic strikes me again

²⁸⁷ Of the countless studies on this topic, I prefer: Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁸⁸ For a discussion of these types of Christians (including Leo Tolstoy and Ammon Hennacy), see: Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2010). Also useful is: Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).

as reminiscent of Illich's "individual freedom realized in mutual interdependence."²⁸⁹

Though the charismatic/authoritarian aspect of communities like the Source Family is problematic, the religious or religious-like dimensions seem inextricable from egalitarian desires. In their 1947 book, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*, Paul and Percival Goodman shy away from this issue, focusing instead on a more secular understanding of the history of utopian experiments in the United States. Still, perhaps intuitively predicting the explosion of cults/communes in the 1960s and very clearly prefiguring Hakim Bey's concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone by more than half a century, they write:

Yet perhaps the very transitoriness of such intensely motivated intentional communities is part of their perfection. Disintegrating, they irradiate society with people who have been profoundly touched by the excitement of community life, who do not forget the advantages but try to realize them in new ways.²⁹⁰

The Goodman's assessment goes a long way towards refuting the conclusion that such communities are both naïve and doomed to total failure. Nevertheless, the idea that the participants in these communities "irradiate society" can't quite account for their disjointed history. Perhaps they recur as rumor or latent memory, suggested through a creative interpretation of a Biblical passage or a chance encounter with a book like *Communitas*.

The music of Father Yod and the Source Family was, until the release of *God and Hair*, accessible only to the most diehard of psychedelic rock collectors. Consequently,

²⁸⁹ As a Christian anarchist, Illich's opposition to Paul is unsurprising.

²⁹⁰ Percival Goodman and Paul Goodman, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 109.

it's disingenuous to assert that it directly inspired the communal musicking of a group like Smegma, discussed at length in Chapter 4. At the same time, recordings like these can function like Paul's epistles—an externalized form of the recording-as-gris-gris—reaching far-flung ears and influencing organizational patterns. In an article on 2009's *Magnificence in Memory*, a collection compiling some of the previously unreleased Source Family recording, Marc Masters highlights the connection between the '70s group and more recent underground artist Dave Nuss of the No Neck Blues Band. Nuss helped put together *Magnificence in Memory*, and Masters notes that as fan he “saw parallels between their creative process and the communal art of his own group,” a “true collective, with a core of dedicated members” who “rehearse, record and sometimes live” together in a collective space known as The Hint House.²⁹¹ The unknown tongue's message continues to resonate for those who care to listen.

Pop-as-Critique: Warhol and Zappa

Standing at the other end of the spectrum—or perhaps just the “countercultural” spectrum—from cult-formation is the idea of “pop” that was also current in the 1960s. I am not referring simply to “Pop Art,” the domain of Warhol, Lichtenstein, etc. The focus of this section is on something more specific and fundamental, the underlying principles of “pop.” Here, Warhol still looms large. However, it's not for his canvases derived from the logos of consumer products but rather for his audacity in naming his studio the

²⁹¹ Mark Masters, “'70s Commune Band YaHoWha 13 Opens the Fold with a Drag City Collection,” *Independent Weekly*, 2009, <http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/70s-commune-band-yahowha-13-opens-the-fold-with-a-drag-city-collection/Content?oid=1216637>.

“Factory” in the first place. In this respect, Warhol’s influence is akin to John Cage’s during the same period: less a matter of specific compositions or paintings than the conception of “pop-as-critique” or “aleatoric” (chance-based), respectively. These ideas had a profoundly mobilizing effect on the imaginations of the artists and musicians of the following generation.

For all its street trash/high glam romance and ample documentation, I have not been able to locate a source that devotes itself to a sustained interrogation of the idea of a “Factory” itself in Warhol’s work. There are plenty that discuss the films, photographs, performances, and, yes, the paintings that emerged from that space in the 1960s. And most acknowledge at some level that Warhol did not complete all—or sometimes any—of the physical labor necessary to produce the artworks associated with his name; “assistants” like Gerard Malanga and Billy Name are usually mentioned. Therefore, in this section I want to examine briefly the Factory as an idea unto itself, if not as an artwork even in the expanded sense that word took on in the ‘60s, then at least as a philosophical concept imperative to Warhol’s other work and, more importantly for this dissertation, another conceptual source for the alternative forms of social organization that arose through musicking in the 1970s.²⁹² Similarly, I will be looking at Frank Zappa as a pop impresario rather than a musician, a kind of West Coast equivalent to Warhol in New York.

²⁹² This comes closest: Steven Watson, *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties* (New York: Pantheon, 2003).

There are almost as many ways of interpreting Andy Warhol's work as there are individual pieces in his massive oeuvre. To some, he's a philosopher of mass media—Marshall McLuhan in a leather jacket.²⁹³ To others, a critic of consumerism and '50s conformity, soup cans equal tract homes equal gray flannel suits.²⁹⁴ There are also volumes devoted to specifically his “queerness,” his place as the last purveyor of true camp before the liberation movement bypassed his brand of closeted coyness.²⁹⁵ Douglas Crimp described this multi-vocal relationship to the artist as “The Warhol we need and the Warhol we deserve.”²⁹⁶ For my part, I prefer Andrew Warhola, the coal miner's son. If you were to set your sights on the New York art world, you would have to come from a place like Pittsburgh before you could truly appreciate the perverse humor of naming your studio “The Factory.”

That's just the entry point, however. The name alone is suggestive enough, but to get to the core contradiction inherent in Warhol's mode of production requires considering his work from two not-entirely-oppositional perspectives. On the one hand, Warhol's Factory operates as a critique. To be sure, his name is the one on the paintings but more as a brand like Ford or Coca-Cola than as a signature of individual endeavor.

²⁹³ Van M. Cagle, *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol* (London: Sage Publications, Inc, 1995).

²⁹⁴ For example: Juan A. Suarez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, and Superstars: Avant-Garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

²⁹⁵ Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz, eds., *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1996).

²⁹⁶ Douglas Crimp, “Getting the Warhol We Deserve: Cultural Studies and Queer Culture,” *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Studies*, 1999, http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue1/crimp/crimp.html.

He not only didn't make a secret out of the fact that others completed the work, he made that a part of the work itself, enlisting socialites and gutter personalities and even other artists in his grand project—including, of course, the Velvet Underground. This worked as an implicit attack on the myth of the artist as heroic individual, most directly against the Abstract Expressionists but stretching back at least to the Impressionists. The fact that assistants actually applied a substantial amount of the paint for many Old Masters wasn't considered much of an issue. After Warhol, it strikes me as enormously disingenuous that artists like Richard Serra and Donald Judd would claim sole authorship of works that they could not, in terms of either skill or physical effort, have completed themselves. In that sense, Warhol's Factory is an invitation to see the New York art world as an industry like any other, and the exhausting documentation that Warhol and his associates made during the production process a window akin to knowing the name of the individual who stamped out your fender at River Rouge.

The other side of Warhol is that he's a striver. Ben Watson, describing Frank Zappa's similar inclinations, notes that such an approach is "necessarily underpinned by a petit-bourgeois belief in cottage-industry economics."²⁹⁷ Warhol suggested something similar himself when he wrote that,

Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. During the hippie era people put down the idea of business—they'd say, "Money is bad," and

²⁹⁷ Ben Watson, *Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), xvi.

"Working is bad," but making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.²⁹⁸

As with most of his quotes, the meaning here depends on how much emphasis you put on the role of irony in Warhol's art/philosophy. For Warhol and for Zappa, it's very clear that "sincerity" is not particularly prized. This is in sharp contrast to the more cult-like forms of social organization and cultural production during the '60s, who, as should be clear from the discussion of Father Yod, sometimes bordered on naiveté.

Peddling on the Strip

Frank Zappa was a childhood friend of Don Van Vliet, which makes the contrasts between the former's Mothers of Invention and the Magic Band all the more interesting. Whereas Beefheart's library trips involved a mind control reading list, according to an interview with Zappa.

The Mothers' project was carefully planned some eighteen months before it actually got off the ground. I had been looking for the right people for a long time. I was in advertising before I got into—ha ha—show business, and I'd done a little motivational research. One of the laws of economics is that if there is a demand, somebody ought to supply that demand, and they'll get rich. I composed a composite, gap-filling product to plug most of the gaps between so-called serious music and so-called popular music.²⁹⁹

Zappa's ready-made product was quite a bit different than Beefheart's. Where Beefheart drew on surrealism, sea chanteys, the rawer forms of blues, and free jazz, Zappa prized erudite composers like Edgard Varese and both reveled in and mocked popular music conventions of the era. Zappa's take-downs of the Beatles on *We're Only*

²⁹⁸ Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* : (New York: Mariner Books, 1977), 92.

²⁹⁹ Pete Frame, "The No. 53, Earliest Days of Just Another Band from LA," in *ZigZag* (June 1975), 23.

In It For the Money still resonate, but his relationship to doo-wop on *Cruising with Ruben & the Jets* has aged less well, as successive generations of listeners often don't possess familiarity with the style, even though both albums were released in 1968. However, despite the considerable influence that Zappa's approach to music has had, it's not the primary concern here. Rather, I'm interested in how he used the Mothers of Invention as a launching pad—much like Warhol's Factory—for a multitude of projects. As Kevin Courrier notes,

Although Zappa was making huge progress as a composer, by the time of *Uncle Meat*, he was (like Beefheart) having contractual difficulties with his label. But unlike Don Van Vliet, Zappa was a businessman who thought of his work in terms of business. In December 1967, he discovered that Verve had made the mistake of not picking up the option on his contract with the label. So Zappa and Herb Cohen decided to use that as leverage to negotiate a deal to create a logo within the company. It was to be called—appropriately enough—Bizarre Productions.³⁰⁰

In addition to Bizarre, Zappa also acquired the rights to release albums under another sub-label of Verve: Straight. With respect to the former, Courrier goes on to quote from Zappa himself that, “‘We present musical and sociological material which the important record companies would probably not allow you to hear.’ He then added with caustic irony: ‘Just what the world needs...another record company.’”³⁰¹ Zappa's irony is “caustic,” but, as with Warhol, it's still at the forefront of his aesthetic. At the same time, Zappa used this opportunity to promote music that would normally have too limited commercial prospects to attract the interest of the record industry. For this, he turned to his friend Don Van Vliet, whose *Trout Mask Replica* was originally released on Straight,

³⁰⁰ Courrier, *Captain Beefheart's Trout Mask Replica*, 64.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

and to the denizens of Los Angeles' Sunset Strip—as fertile a ground as New York for weirdoes.

For Zappa the impresario, these included schizophrenic street singer Wild Man Fischer, deceased raconteurs and comics Lenny Bruce and Lord Buckley, the gender-bending Grand Guignol rock of Alice Cooper, and an all-groupie band The GTOs (Girls Together Outrageously)—a sleazy, female version of the Monkees that must've made noted creep Kim Fowley jealous. When Fowley put The Runaways together a few years later, he was probably thinking of the GTOs. Citing The GTOs *Permanent Damage* and *An Evening With Wild Man Fischer*, Courrier concludes that the Bizarre/Straight catalog was comprised of “works of oddball sociology as much as they were rock and roll records. Zappa set out to produce albums freely documenting unexplored folkloric aspects of American culture. He went after folks who were both frowned upon by cultural imprimaturs and rejected as outcasts considered not talented enough to be making records.”³⁰²

As with Warhol's Factory, there are two ways of assessing this “sociological” impulse. The first is that Frank Zappa was a particularly astute exploiter of markets, pitching the Mothers as a high/low reconciliation appealing to educated consumers who had grown up with rock and roll but who weren't interested in going all-in for classical or avant-garde music, while at the same time curating oddities to catch the ear of the freak-collector. The other interpretation is to follow Ben Watson's assertion that Zappa's project “is just as much a part of a protest against the divisions of capitalist society as the

³⁰² Ibid., 66.

music of Charlie Parker or Kurt Weill,”³⁰³ and conclude that, “Although he uses the rhetoric of the marketer, Zappa’s intentions to realize music exceeded mere money-making ‘cleverness’. He talks about a commercial niche but found a philosophical one.”³⁰⁴ The question is what this philosophical niche actually consists of. For all his avant-gardisms, Zappa’s default mode is what Michel Deville and Andrew Norris call a “self-recharging brand of social satire.”³⁰⁵ Considered as a satirist, it’s unfair to criticize Zappa for the dated-ness of his objects of ridicule. At the same time, it’s telling that the most intensive examination of Zappa’s work, Ben Watson’s *Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play*, takes its critical cues from the Frankfurt School of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer; like them, Zappa is only capable of critique, never embrace. His commensurable with Warhol love of irony with worked as a curative against the excesses of “hippie” earnestness in the ‘60s; I can only imagine the relief that *We’re Only in It for the Money* and *White Light/White Heat* provided to some of the people who answered “no” when asked “Are you going to San Francisco?” However, the various forms of media manipulation that Warhol and Zappa engaged in have proven to be too easily assimilated into the very worlds of advertising and commercial art that they sought out to maybe subvert. If the cult was too sincere and the factory too ironic as metaphors and models for viable modes of alternative social organization, it would take another generation to reconcile and synthesize the two into something sustainable.

³⁰³ Watson, *Frank Zappa*, xvi.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, xxix.

³⁰⁵ Michel Delville and Andrew Norris, *Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart and the Secret History of Maximalism* (London: Salt Publishing, 2005), 26.

Corporate Cultism: The Residents

The most compelling early case of the intertwining of the two most powerful organizing principles of underground rock in the 1960s—the cult and the factory—is embodied in the career of The Residents. Their formation is usually dated to 1970, making them one of the first in line of the types of collectives that I profile in Chapter 4. Furthermore, their California-by-way-of-Louisiana provenance provides an interesting synthesis of the split impulses between their Golden State forebears Beefheart and Zappa.

The Residents present an interesting problem for a researcher. While there are two whole books written about them—at least one more than most bands—by design all information regarding the group is suspect.³⁰⁶ Campaigns of myth, fabrication, and disinformation have been part of their collective identity since the beginning. It's not even known for certain who the members actually are, as they never appear in public without elaborate costuming—most famously eyeball-head masks and tuxedos. This places them even further into the realm of the cult than the re-naming process discussed earlier in regard to The Magic Band and the Father Yod group. At the same time, The Residents have never espoused anything that could be described as theology or, according to available sources, engaged in mind-control techniques, unless you count advertising strategies. This might be attributable to their invocation of faceless corporations and nameless bureaucrats. Whatever their original intents were upon

³⁰⁶ This is the reason why I have avoided using the volume produced under the auspices of The Residents themselves: Uncle Willie, *Highly Opinionated Guide to the Residents 1972-1992* (San Francisco: Cryptic, 1993).

moving to California, according to Ian Shirley in *Meet the Residents: America's Most Eccentric Band!*:

...despite limited musical technique and recording apparatus, by this time they were taking their manufactured music seriously. Whatever disinformation was subsequently put out as a smokescreen in subsequent years, they were now actively pursuing a recording contract. The next tape, recorded in September 1970, was deemed good enough to send as a demo tape to Hal Halverstadt at Warner Brothers Records, complete with cover art, track listing and liner notes. In the past Halverstadt had worked with Captain Beefheart—someone they admired greatly—and in his position as Marketing Director they hoped that he would lend a sympathetic ear.³⁰⁷

Halverstadt inadvertently gave the then-unnamed group a moniker when he addressed his return to “The Residents.” His failure to sign is one indicator that the frantic attempt by record labels to keep up with youth trends in the ‘60s was at an end; with zeal, A&R men of the era had signed groups with very low commercial potential or allowed an intermediary like Frank Zappa to do so. It’s impossible to say whether the group would have employed the Warhol-like corporate aesthetic of their later work without Halverstadt’s decline, but it is apparent that his rejection of their demo led to the decision to self-release future recordings. By 1972, they had formed Ralph (as in “vomit”) Records in order to produce their *Santa Dog* double single, mailing copies to both Frank Zappa and Richard Nixon.³⁰⁸

This recording is peculiar, even in the bizarre discography of the band. For one thing, it was never sold: it was simply given away. I interpret this move, overseen at this

³⁰⁷ Ian Shirley, *Meet The Residents: America's Most Eccentric Band* (London: SAF Publishing Ltd, 2001), 25.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

point by the entity “Residents Uninc.” in two ways, neither exclusive. In the first, mailing the 7”s was an attempt at congregating a far-flung network of oddballs, to connect with a freak audience the way self-released gospel recordings reminded church members of their collectivity. This certainly seems possible with regards to Zappa. On the other hand, the decision to give a record away for free smacks of loss-leader promotion: come for the EP, stay for the host of multi-media projects the group had in the works. This included a never-completed film, about which Shirley notes,

Although *Vileness Fats* [the film] took up a lot of time and energy, The Residents still found time to make and record music in their home studio aptly nicknamed “El Ralph” in deference to one of their many influences; the fantastic iconoclastic Jazz/Free/Space music composer Sun Ra, who called his studios and record label El Saturn.³⁰⁹

The invocation of Sun Ra—another cult-oriented musician—is mentioned at several times through Shirley’s book, where he also lists Harry Partch, Perez Prado, and Krautrock, alongside the aforementioned Zappa and Beefheart, as significant influences on The Residents. What influence was drawn from each is worth parsing.

Partch’s significance to the Residents is apparent from their very first recordings, especially the track “Fire” on the *Santa Dog* EP (the release takes its name from the lyrics of this song). During the 1970s and occasionally thereafter, the Residents communicated their belief in two “theories.” They attributed these to a composer named “Nigel Senada” or “N. Senada.” In all likelihood, Senada never existed; the name suggests the Spanish-English puns *en se nada* (“in himself nothing”) and *ensenada* (“taught”). Shirley and

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 39–40.

others have suggested that N. Senada may be a pseudonym for Partch; whatever the provenance, the theories do bear some similarity to Partch's musical ideas. The first, "The Theory of Obscurity" maintains that an artist does their best work isolated from the public's view. This conforms to Partch's biography, since the composer was relatively old by the time his works were finally realized in performance. According to an article in *Wired*, a "spokesperson" for The Residents explains "By creating this blanket persona to shield them [...] they can avoid the petty ego concerns of 'How big is my name going to be in this type?' and 'How many times is my picture going to be on there this time?'"³¹⁰ This is in keeping with the anti-State impulses that I've been tracking throughout this chapter, although it's not a bad self-justification for lack of recognition. The second is "The Theory of Phonetic Organization."

This theory asserts that compositions begin with the physical properties of sounds themselves before they're organized into forms. Applied to vocals, the result is similar to Dada or sound poetry: "Santa Dog's a Jesus fetus/Santa Dog's a Jesus fetus/Santa Dog's a Jesus Fetus/Has no presence/In the future." (The surrealism here is also reminiscent of Beefheart.) Although Harry Partch was greatly invested in vocal music, he is best remembered for his homemade instruments. These instruments were constructed out of both salvaged materials and custom made ones. Partch also devised his own tuning system, based on a unique set of intervals.³¹¹ His approach to musicking is a clear

³¹⁰ Lynn Ginsburg, "Wired 3.09: Twin Peaks Meets SimCity," *Wired (Issue 3.09)*, September 1995, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.09/residents.html>.

³¹¹ Harry Partch, *Genesis Of A Music: An Account Of A Creative Work, Its Roots, And Its Fulfillments*, Second Edition (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979).

example of conviviality, and while The Residents have had continually evolving relationship to sound technologies, a direct Partch influence is most evident on “Six Things to a Cycle,” a piece from 1976’s *Fingerprince*.

The roles Frank Zappa and Faust are most clear on the “Satisfaction” single and *Third Reich ‘n Roll*, both from 1976, a fact that Ian Shirley attests to.³¹² Both the album and the single present an at best ambivalent relationship to rock and roll. The “Satisfaction” single is a cover of sorts of the Rolling Stones song of the same name. *Third Reich ‘n Roll* consists of two continuous sides of ‘60s cover-medleys, from sacred cows like “Hey Jude” to the bubble gum of “Yummy Yummy Yummy” by the Ohio Express to the notorious “Ballad of the Green Berets,” with a substantial number of *Nuggets*-associated garage band songs thrown in. The cover image is of *American Bandstand*’s Dick Clark in full Nazi regalia; side 1 is titled “Swastikas on Parade,” with side 2 named “Hitler was a Vegetarian.”

The importance of Faust comes partially through the samples of German versions of American rock tunes (e.g. “Let’s Twist Again”) and the general grinding, proto-industrial approach to the material. Similarly, “Satisfaction” takes the simmering violence and barely controllable sexual/consumer desire of the Stones and renders it inhuman and mechanical—a scream from inside the machine. The band Devo would add a level of polish to their probably Residents-inspired 1979 cover of the song that this version lacks, to its commercial advantage. The Zappa influence is evident in the love/hate satirization of the material. However, the German influence runs deeper.

³¹² Shirley, *Meet The Residents*, 46.

Zappa was a fairly gentle critic when it came to his pokes at popular music. The Residents' titles are evocation of John Heartfield's photomontages—an earlier visual parallel to Faust's audio collage—that viciously and defiantly attacked the Third Reich by turning its words and iconography against itself.³¹³ And, although Theodor Adorno saw a limited political use for collage in *Aesthetic Theory*,³¹⁴ there is some kinship between the philosopher's beliefs that fascistic tendencies lurked in the “pseudo-individual” heart of popular music; through the Heartfield/Faust collage matrix, The Residents foreground this interpretation on *Third Reich 'n Roll*. Perhaps there's less “love” than Zappa showed for doo-wop, but this album is the prototype for the denunciatory media pranksterism of '80s and '90s artists like John Oswald/Plunderphonics, Culturcide, and Negativland.

Perez Prado's effect on the Residents is less obvious, and, in my estimation, depends a great deal on understanding the Cuban musician's work in unflattering terms. Bluntly, it's ethnic music as kitsch. This is nowhere more apparent than 1979's *Eskimo*, which purports to be based on Inuit stories told in an Inuit language accompanied by various icy soundscapes and vaguely whale-ish noises. In many respects, this concept album is similar to the work of another German band, Can, whose “ethnological forgeries” were attempts at imaginary foreign music. *Eskimo* is also a forerunner of Canadian filmmaker and musician Michael Snow's *The Last LP: Unique Last Recordings of the Music of Ancient Cultures* from 1987; Snow famously deconstructed a Whitney

³¹³ Douglas Kahn, *John Heartfield: Art and Mass Media* (New York: Tanam Press, 1986).

³¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 202–5.

Houston track to the point where he could try to pass it off as “African.” *Eskimo* has the distinction of mocking “world music” before the marketing concept even existed, a joke that was probably only be grasped by avid listeners to discs from labels like Folkways and Nonesuch Explorer. Admittedly, Folkways got to the same territory long before The Residents, releasing Henry Jacobs’ pseudo-anthropological *Radio Programme No. 1: Henry Jacobs’ “Music and Folklore”* in 1955; similarly, John Fahey’s liner notes to his early albums lampoon the language and assumptions of blues scholars in the 1960s. *Eskimo* and *Third Reich ‘n Roll* are compelling polar exercises. It would not have occurred to Warhol or Zappa to go after the “authentic” music of indigenous peoples, and the pop songs of the latter album would have been anathema to the more extreme cult-ish wing of the counterculture; that one band managed to take on both is evidence that the lessons of the preceding generation of artists were not lost: even on their first full LP, 1974’s *Meet the Residents*, they deface an exact copy of the first Beatles album with frightening “tribal” mask drawings.

While The Residents continue to record and perform (including a variety of multimedia projects) the last release of what they’ve called “The Album Era” was, appropriately, 1980’s *The Commercial Album*. The record consists of forty one-minute songs, for which the group bought forty sixty-second ad slots on a San Francisco Top 40 radio station. This project culminated a decade-long experiment with what I’ve called in the title of this section “corporate cultism.” Beginning with Residents Uninc., they had moved on to a new umbrella entity known as The Cryptic Corporation in 1974. This “company” contained the already extant Ralph Records, as well as Poreknowgraphics,

their art department. Whether Ralph Records was initially a political move or simply a matter of necessity eventually became a moot point, especially when Ralph began to release recordings by other artists, including frequent collaborator Snakefinger, as well as younger Bay Area compatriots Tuxedomoon, Chrome, MX-80 Sound, and the aforementioned Negativland. Furthermore, in 1977 The Residents contributed a track to the *Blorp Essette* release by the Los Angeles Free Music Society collective (a group discussed extensively in Chapter 4), a move that is solid evidence that by the end of the 1970s the permanent underground was an ensconced network of like-minded iconoclasts.

CONCLUSION

Although the narrative that I have constructed in this chapter has been drawn from far-flung sources, the ultimate purpose has been to trace an *impulse* that runs through 20th century American popular music. This impulse has been, for the most part, underground—or at the very least obscured by other types of historical narrative. Historiographically, there is something slightly unsatisfying in the necessary reliance on influence and inspiration as connective tissue. However, such linkages are incalculably important in the reconstruction of cultural and political change. Put another way, as I alluded to in the section of the Introduction detailing Nancy Fraser’s concept of “counterpublic,” a historian like Gordon S. Wood can make a compelling case that the high degree of literacy in pre-Revolutionary America legitimates the thesis that political pamphlets were both widely distributed and integral to the formation of an opposition to British colonial rule. At the same time, even if one takes into account the probability that

such literature was shared between readers (amplifying its distribution), it cannot genuinely reconstruct the effect of a rousing oratory summarizing Thomas Paine inside of a full tavern.

The documented existence of certain kinds of recordings or types of social formation or spaces of congregation are primary evidence, and suggestive toward my conclusions in a manner similar to Wood's pamphlets. What we do know is that new forms of musicking emerged in the late 1960s, which can be related to concurrent changes in spatial organization and interpersonal relationships. Taking as axiom that something cannot come from nothing, there must exist some cause—or complex of causes. It's reasonable to assume that submerged cultural memory reemerges at moments of opportunity or necessity; how many outside of a history department could have recalled the English agrarian rebels the Diggers before the similarly anarchistic '60s San Francisco group assumed the moniker? What re-activated this idea? A college course? A used book? Participants of such groups are notoriously unreliable sources for clearing up these kinds of questions, but the fact remains: they happened.

Fortunately, tying ethnically and chronologically disparate elements together is less of an issue in the next chapter, "A Body of Criticism." There, I will be examining the uses and interpretations of some of the examples I have highlighted above (ESP-Disk, Captain Beefheart, etc.) via the work of rock critic Lester Bangs, who more than anyone found in the "cult cargo" of the 1960s ideas that provide insight into the way the very act of listening has changed, alongside the changes that occurred in musicking as social practice that I've outlined above.

Chapter 2: A Body of Criticism

INTRODUCTION

The sonic dimensions of American life have an enormous impact on how we have understood ourselves as individual subjects and collective entities existing at discrete moments in history. While there have been a multitude of moves to preserve something of the visible and tactile past in American history, the possibility of sounds' preservation is relatively recent. Even then, what documents we have tend to privilege music and speech over and above all other sonic events. Thus, certain quotidian sounds of American life—what R. Murray Schafer would call “keynotes”¹—are all but lost to us. We cannot know what the sound of an empty street illuminated with hissing gaslights *actually* sounded like, even though we may consult an Alfred Stieglitz photograph for its appearance. More significant, perhaps, than the loss of access to these sonic events and the failure to reproduce them for posterity is the lack of access to what contemporary listeners to sounds musical and otherwise might've *heard*; this essay starts from the premise, not unlike Michel Foucault's discussion of Velasquez's *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things*², that ears as well as eyes have changed, phenomenologically if not physically, over time. Or to frame it another way, we might consider the long resonation of Thoreau's famous description of the train cutting through the Massachusetts

¹ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 9-10.

² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 3-16.

wilderness not through the precise sonic qualities of the steam whistle itself, but as a harbinger to the author of the end of one kind of sonic environment and the beginning of another, requiring new ears.³

Then again, even Thoreau's irritation at the locomotive should be understood as part of an ultimately ambiguous relationship to the sounds of modernity; in his journal, he recorded this observation: "As I went under the new telegraph wire, I heard it vibrating like a harp high overhead. It was as the sound of a far-off, glorious life, a supernal life which came down to us and vibrated the latticework of this life of ours [...]."⁴ Thoreau's ambiguity highlights a central difficulty in sonic historiography; specifically, the question is whether we can really access the way people listened in the past. This is the same kind of problem that Ferdinand de Saussure identified in his debate between a diachronic and a synchronic linguistics.⁵ We have always listened synchronically, but there are ruptures in listening that alter habits within singular lifetimes (like, for instance, a person hearing an electric guitar for the first time) that retrospectively take on social-historical significance when they are concurrently experienced by a whole group of individual subjects. That significance can be tracked diachronically, e.g. the history of amplification; this concern is strongly tied to the past-present reconciliation that I outlined in the preceding chapter.

In order to explore this issue, the chapter that follows is divided into three major sections. The first, "Unmaking Genre," examines four key ideas. It begins with a critical

³ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 119-38.

⁴ This passage from Thoreau's journals can be found quoted in: Edward Waldo Emerson, *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend* (Boston: Dover, 1999), 39.

⁵ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1986).

assessment of the legacy of music critic Lester Bangs, who serves as a launching pad to the first major assertion, which is that the sonic is social and involves a complex process of subject formation. Chapter 1's conception of the social was primarily along organizational lines; here, I examine how it is constituted specifically through sound. This issue is examined through a comparison of Bangs and Ralph Ellison, who both situated their own listening bodies within descriptions of the surrounding auditory environments. Next, I explore how the body has become a technologized site where material conditions affect a subject's perception. The focus is on the history of electricity and its relationship to music from the 18th century to the near present. My third assertion is that the listening body affected by technological transformations is not a problem in search of a pathology, contrary to psychoanalytic theory. To justify this, there is a contrast between the vernacular idea of "conniption" and clinical hysteria—a refinement and extension of issues first addressed regarding Voodoo-As-Theory and the "unknown tongue" in Chapter 1. Fourth, the listening body enraptured in physical response to sound heralds new forms of social relations, like those described earlier in relation to gospel, jazz collectives, and "cult" rock music. This circumstance is affected both by the tension between "presence" and "representation" (resembling the idea of the recording as *gris-gris*), as well as a queering of those new relations against normative binary (male-female) or triangulated (mommy-daddy-me) formulations, which Deleuze and Guattari see as foundational to the ideology of the State, and explicitly critique the role of

psychoanalysis in perpetuating this ideology in their book, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.⁶

In the second major section, “First Rumbles: A Noise ‘Canon’,” I return to Bangs through his essay “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise” in order to elucidate some of the general fields of musicking used by the permanent underground. This is followed by the final major section, “Noise is All the Rest,” where I step back to provide a definition of “noise” itself, explored through the fundamental acoustic concepts of pitch, loudness, timbre, and rhythm. To these, I add the “symphonic,” or the interplay of different sound sources, and the “spatial,” the physical environment of musicking, with a special focus on the technologies of the audio-spatial. Both the noise “canon” and the list of acoustic properties are important in the overall scheme of this dissertation because they are used in combination to explain the musicking of the artists I profile in Chapter 4.

PART 1: UNMAKING GENRE

Critics in a Coalmine

“The critic has to educate the public; the artist has to educate the critic.”
--Oscar Wilde

The American writer Lester Bangs’ legacy as a music critic is a complex and contentious one. It’s hard to imagine another rock critic (or jazz critic, for that matter) popping up as a character in a Hollywood film, as Bangs did in Cameron Crowe’s *Almost Famous* (2000). And yet, as far as assessments go, it’s difficult to find one as succinct as

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

Steven Daly, David Kamp, and Bob Mack's Christgau-esque entry on him in their *Rock Snob's Dictionary*: "Dead rock critic canonized for his willfully obnoxious, amphetamine-streaked prose."⁷ That sentence contains reference to the two primary tropes of any Bangs-related discussion, namely his drug abuse and outlandish public persona *and* to the stylistic peculiarities of his written work. Despite claims to the contrary—Jim DeRogatis' 2000 biography of Bangs, *Let it Blurt*,⁸ being the most sustained—this and most biographical accounts of Bangs' life tend to focus heavily on anecdotes that emphasize the writer-as-rockstar, a *Hammer of the Gods* for rock music fanatics about one of their own.⁹ On the other side of the posthumous appraisals (Bangs died in 1982 from a drug overdose) lies Greil Marcus' estimation that *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, a collection of Bangs' music writing edited by Marcus and published in 1986, "demands from a reader a willingness to accept that the best writer in America could write almost nothing but record reviews."¹⁰ Marcus arrives at this statement by citing Bangs' self-comparison to contemporaries William Burroughs, Charles Bukowski, and Hunter S. Thompson.¹¹ Implicitly, the twinning of Bangs' own statements and Marcus' conclusions refers only to the material contained in the volume

⁷ David Kamp and Steven Daly, *The Rock Snob's Dictionary: An Essential Lexicon of Rockological Knowledge* (New York: Broadway, 2005), 8.

⁸ Jim DeRogatis, *Let It Blurt: The Life and Times of Lester Bangs, America's Greatest Rock Critic* (New York: Broadway, 2000).

⁹ The standard bearer for salacious band biographies: Stephen Davis, *Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

¹⁰ Lester Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: The Work of a Legendary Critic: Rock'N'Roll as Literature and Literature as Rock "N"Roll* (New York: Anchor, 1988).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, x.

as writing. In other words, it's an argument about the worth of Bangs' oeuvre in *stylistic* terms.

I don't disagree that these two points of entry into Bangs' work are valid and provide significant insight into an important and influential critic. But they do little to illuminate *why* Bangs is particularly important as a critic or necessarily very influential. In *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde*, Bernard Gendron attempts to establish what makes Bangs' work important. More exactly, he locates in Bangs' reviews and essays of the early 1970s an attempt to define the discursive boundaries of what would become known as "punk" and "new wave," among other labels, later in the decade. Gendron spends time discussing Bangs' work itself, and he also combines his discussion with analyses of fellow *Creem* magazine writer Dave Marsh and fanzine publisher Greg Shaw's *Who Put the Bomp?*.¹² What these writers shared was an interest in valorizing the forgotten 45 rpm singles of the mid-1960s—garage rock—as well as a strong desire to critically elevate such outré early 1970s acts as Lou Reed (and his earlier band, The Velvet Underground), The Stooges, the MC5, and The New York Dolls. This was accomplished within the still relatively new critical apparatus for rock music, which had sprung up in response to the widespread belief that, citing the most obvious examples, the lyrical complexity of Bob Dylan, the instrumental virtuosity of Jimi Hendrix, and the studio wizardry and songwriting techniques of the Beatles represented an increased sophistication within popular music;

¹² Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2002), 227–48.

these and the perception of a rapidly escalating musical sophistication among rock musicians generally was most certainly a major impetus behind the launching of *Crawdaddy!*¹³ and *Rolling Stone*¹⁴ magazines in 1966 and '67, respectively.

For Bernard Gendron and most probably the readership of popular music periodicals in the early 1970s, Lester Bangs and Dave Marsh at *Creem* and Greg Shaw's *Who Put the Bomp?* represented a serious counter-aesthetic to the "sensitive" singer-songwriters and the "progressive" rock groups hailed at their competitors' publications. In the raising up of groups like The Count Five and ? and the Mysterians, Bangs, Marsh, and Shaw were both reasserting the primacy of teenage experience as central to rock music's value—taken for granted in the 1950s, but abandoned between the rise of *American Bandstand* and the Monterrey Pop Festival, at least for music critics—as well as insisting that amateurish enthusiasm was a viable criterion for evaluation. (In the previous chapter I identified this as the "primitivist ethos.") The development of this strain of discourse surrounding rock music has a paradoxical legacy that still informs much criticism today; in "succeeding," e.g. in becoming more proficient as a vocalist or instrumentalist, the music "fails," or falls in esteem, because professionalism in this equation means a lack of "authenticity"; the corollary of this critical double-bind is that amateurish enthusiasm almost guarantees "novelty," because both the instruments and the act of singing are still somewhat unfamiliar to the musicians in question—akin to what

¹³ Paul Williams, *The Crawdaddy! Book: Writings (and Images) from the Magazine of Rock* (New York: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2002), 7–8.

¹⁴ Jann Wenner, *20 Years of Rolling Stone: What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been* (San Francisco: Friendly Press, 1987).

Richard Meltzer called the “unknown tongue.”¹⁵ Gendron also points out that the major players in the music scene that developed at Hilly Krystal’s CBGB-OMFUG bar in the Bowery (the “birthplace” of American punk rock) were profoundly influenced by these critics, and, indeed, many of them had tried their hand at writing criticism before becoming full-time performers.¹⁶

Gendron’s contribution to understanding the development of punk and new wave music in the United States is an invaluable one, because it inserts the development of a critical apparatus into the historical narrative, whereas writers like Legs McNeil have tried to claim that each musician at CBGB’s was carrying on a kind of individual crusade against FM radio.¹⁷ Furthermore, as the title of Gendron’s book would indicate, he also aids in parsing out the confused relationship between “art” and the disposable objects of consumer culture, perhaps best illustrated for these critics as the precarious position occupied by Andy Warhol-managed The Velvet Underground, who boasted a Syracuse-educated lyricist with a background in commercial hack songwriting (Lou Reed) and a conservatory-trained viola player who also had strong ties to the post-John Cage New York musical avant-garde (John Cale). Gendron further explores this kind of high/low cultural transversal in the last two chapters of his book, dedicated to “No Wave” and “At the Mudd Club,” references to both a short-lived musical movement that arose in the wake of the first wave of CBGB’s punk bands, and one of the key venues of the late

¹⁵ Richard Meltzer, *The Aesthetics Of Rock* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987).

¹⁶ Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, 249–74.

¹⁷ Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).

1970s/early 1980s Downtown scene, respectively.¹⁸ These chapters cover the same era as Chapter 4, though not the same subjects.

At this point, however, Gendron largely abandons his arguments about journalistic critical discourse as a component of pre-generic formation when he arrives at No Wave. Although he devotes some page space to the transition in coverage by *New York Rocker* from first wave punk to No Wave, this discussion is bound to the division between commercial prospects versus critical accolades, which Gendron rightly points out would deepen in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁹ One further reason for eschewing this earlier line of reasoning might be that it is far more difficult to locate stylistic similarities between the No Wave bands than it was for first wave punk, which at the very least all shared a kind of “stripped down” aesthetic and—more tenuously, especially for the Talking Heads and Television—an identifiable sonic relationship to early rock and roll; geographic proximity and “noisiness” are unstable grounds to build a set of applicable generic criteria, which is often all that connects various No Wave acts. In other words, a loosely shared sensibility born out of a similar social/material context is a more apt way of describing No Wave than genre or subgenre. However, the idea of shared “sensibility” is an accurate way of describing the commonalities within the permanent underground, which for white musicians began with The Residents in 1970; The Residents do not sound especially strange alongside No Wave bands like Mars or Teenage Jesus and the Jerks.

¹⁸ Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, 275–316.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 277.

Less generously, I would argue that Gendron underestimates the breadth of the sonic palette of his seminal critics—Shaw/Marsh/Bangs—particularly Lester Bangs, and that this leads him to overemphasize the development of genre as key to understanding the musical and cultural shifts of the 1970s.

Gendron's narrative from this point forward doesn't break any new ground, since it hews pretty closely to the conventional wisdom that as punk (or post-punk/No Wave) fell out of vogue in New York, it was also seeping into the provinces, where it would reemerge in the guise of "indie rock" at the end of the '80s and return to fashion with Nirvana's *Nevermind* in 1991. While it's unfair to dismiss out of hand the bands central to this now-familiar narrative (Black Flag, Sonic Youth, The Butthole Surfers, The Minutemen, etc.), one of the secondary purposes of this dissertation is to problematize that same story, which has been propagated by innumerable rock journalists/former college radio DJs—Michael Azzerad's *Our Band Could Be Your Life* being the emblematic text.²⁰ The fault to be found in the punk-indie rock-Nirvana arc is that it overemphasizes the importance of mainstream commercial success (most of the '80s "indie" rock bands had signed with a major label by 1991, if they were still together at that point) and heroizes the "petit-bourgeois belief in cottage industry economics"²¹ of labels like Sub Pop without sufficiently interrogating their capitalism-with-a-friendly face ideology; it's "indie," so it must be "good"; in Chapter 4, I profile musicians who

²⁰ Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002).

²¹ Ben Watson, *Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), xvi.

managed to opt out of the commercial music industry, searching of political and aesthetic autonomy via the practices I've described in Chapter 1, here, and in the following chapter.

In contrast to the conventional punk narrative, I suggest that what the permanent underground that arose in the 1970s represents—of which No Wave is a small part—is less short-lived and problematic genre formations than the emergence of musicking counterpublic whose listening habits were shaped by the simultaneous availability of global/local and past/present sound choices. Approaching the permanent underground from this perspective moves beyond the art/pop divide that provides the fundamental thesis to Gendron's book; as I described in Chapter 1, the alternative to this construction is a synthesis of the "cult" and the "factory." In *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, the fallibility of this approach is especially apparent in the treatment of what are generally considered the canonical "proto-punk" bands: The Stooges, The MC5, and The Velvet Underground. Gendron does not expend much space examining the relationship between these groups and other forms of music at the cultural margins. Consequently, the love for free jazz expressed by Iggy Pop, Fred "Sonic" Smith, and Wayne Kramer doesn't warrant much attention, and the complex relationship between the avant-garde composers La Monte Young and Tony Conrad and the Velvet Underground is only noted in passing. This is compounded by Gendron's treatment of Bangs' critical legacy, excising his published interest in electronic music and even his contribution to the discourse of another pre-generic formation, e.g. heavy metal. Lester Bangs' own relationship to free jazz is also given a cursory gloss.

In fact, Lester Bangs' relationship to the music of black America was extremely complex and contradictory. On the one hand, he defends "nigger disco shit" against naysayers in his private life, but he also spent relatively little time discussing it in his written work. To be fair, that phrase is taken from 1979's "The White Noise Supremacists," where he does confront the problem of racism—his own and the punk scene's generally—though the essay still doesn't expend any space to his own implicitly racialized musical hierarchy; he *says* that the music produced by African Americans is probably the most significant that has been produced in the United States, but he's not very specific about what music or musicians he's talking about.²² This is not entirely different from the rest of the rock music criticism trajectory; how many times is a black artist of the 1960s (besides perhaps Jimi Hendrix) discussed in the same context as Bob Dylan or the Beatles? On the other hand, even when Bangs *does* devote his critical faculties to black music—and specifically free jazz—he pretty consistently prioritizes its "noisiness" as abstracted from any particular political/cultural context. Hence his negative review of The Art Ensemble of Chicago, a group whose "free" style of playing is much more difficult for him to divorce from community-based politics and concerns with cultural heritage than, say, Albert Ayler's is, even though those same qualities are what make it a part of the permanent underground.²³

To return to Gendron, what he misses in the art/pop divide is not that the tensions between these cultural categories inform the production of popular (or "semi-popular," to

²² Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*.

²³ Lester Bangs, *Main Lines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, ed. John Morthland (New York: Anchor, 2003), 89–92.

use Robert Christgau's phrase)²⁴ culture in the 20th century, as indeed he demonstrates by reaching back to fin-de-siècle European cabarets. What he misses instead is that by the 1970s, the demographic that made up the market for this kind of material was quite cosmopolitan (or perhaps "creole") in its tastes, as evidenced by *Creem*'s reviews of both The Art Ensemble of Chicago *and* The Stooges, often with knowing allusions to Euro- and American avant-garde traditions tossed in.

If the primary modes of interpreting Bangs' critical legacy have been the "bozo" and the "beatnik," then Gendron's insistence that we see Bangs' work within a complex critical apparatus is a substantial revision. However, I propose that another valuable insight into both the writer's work and the kinds of cultural shifts that Gendron profiles can be gained by examining Lester Bangs as a solitary aesthetic theorist. This proposal comes with some trepidation, as the phrase "aesthetic theorist" would most likely be anathema to Bangs' own sensibilities. However, it does provide the opportunity to see Bangs' work as a sophisticated expression of aesthetic reasoning, which even Gendron's approach fails to do. This occurs in *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club* because, by placing Bangs within a critical apparatus, it's still possible to read him as a loudmouthed fanatic, albeit one who just so happened to champion the right cultural detritus.

The Philosopher Bangs

"...he was a nice guy"

--Nick Tosches

²⁴ Robert Christgau, *Any Old Way You Choose It, Updated Edition: Rock and Other Pop Music, 1967-1973* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 129.

Lester Bangs' "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise," completed near the end of his life and published in the fall of 1981 in *The Village Voice* is ostensibly either a record collector's boast ("You *think* you've heard the loudest/most abrasive record ever made, but listen to what I've got here...") or a kind of shopping guide. However, if you read beneath the rhetorical pose of Bangs' prose, what emerges is a fairly comprehensive understanding of the various categories of outré styles that have continued to dominate popular music counter-aesthetics well into the 21st century. The piece begins:

Christgau calls it "skronk." I have always opted for the more obvious "horrible noise." Guitars and human voices are primary vectors, though just about every other instrument has been employed over the years, as well as smashed crockery (e.g., first Pere Ubu album, "Sentimental Journey"), scraped garbage can lids and bongolated oil drums (early Stooges), not to mention phono cartridges, toothpicks, pipe cleaners, etc. (John Cage, *Variations II*). You probably can't stand it, but this stuff has its adherents (like me) and esthetic (if you want to call it that).²⁵

This paragraph precedes two further pages of justification for why Bangs believes a diverse but somehow related set of musicians and recordings are worthy of consideration, followed by a list of recordings in the vein his introduction describes. Although the list is interesting in itself, the essay constantly alludes to other recordings, both within the introduction (as can be seen in the paragraph quoted above) and within the individual entries in the list. Bangs continues:

Look at it this way: there are many here among us for whom the life force is best represented by the livid twitching of one tortured nerve, or even a full-scale

²⁵ Lester Bangs, "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise," in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Vintage, 1988), 301.

anxiety attack. I do not subscribe to this point of view 100%, but I understand it, have lived it. Thus the shriek, the caterwaul, the chainsaw gnarlgnashing, the yowl and the whiz that decapitates may be reheard by the adventurous or the emotionally damaged as mellifluous burst of unarguable affirmation [...].²⁶

What are we to make of this point? To begin with, it offers a completely contrary argument to ones that have been bandied about by Greil Marcus²⁷ and Jon Savage,²⁸ who both make a sort of Nietzschean claim that the power of punk music comes from its affirmation-through-negation, a refusal that in its very act confirms the existence of the refuser.²⁹ Despite the fact that Bangs deploys a litany of nouns in an attempt to name a sonic phenomenon that he makes no effort to disguise is abrasive, there is, frankly, no negation in Bangs' philosophy. To be fair, unlike Bangs, Marcus and Savage were writing specifically about British punk, although they tend to invoke rather dubious direct lines of connection between punk and the historical avant-garde.

Perhaps the key then is Bang's self-conscious echo of the Bob Dylan-penned "All Along the Watchtower," where the line of verse is resolved with "who think life is but a joke." This might connect Bangs' expression of belief to a historically specific period, between Vietnam and the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan—a period littered with examples of cultural anxiety and "full-scale panic attack[s]." Then again, the historical frame may be broader; we might interpret this expression to encompass the entirety of the 20th

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²⁸ Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001).

²⁹ Nietzsche own thoughts on this idea are appropriately contradictory. However, for an example closer to Bangs' line of reasoning, see aphorisms #1032 and #1033 in: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968) 532-3.

century with its wars and political upheavals. This would put Bangs in the same critical company as Luigi Russolo and the Italian Futurists, whose glorification of the sound of modernity in the form of the war machine's clang marked the beginning of serious discussion of "horrible noise" in modern art,³⁰ though it's unclear whether Bangs was familiar with Russolo's manifesto "The Art of Noises."³¹ Or as Bangs himself notes, maybe this argument isn't very historically bounded at all: "And one could, if so inclined, take it even further than that: in his essential book *The Tuning of the World*, under the heading "Sacred Noises and Secular Silence," composer R. Murray Schafer reports that during the Middle Ages to which we are all now returning 'a certain type of noise, which we may now call Sacred Noise, was not only absent from the list of proscribed sounds which societies from time to time drew up, but was, in fact, quite deliberately invoked as a break from the tedium of tranquility.'" (An observation that echoes several points made in Chapter 1, especially with regards to the Voodoo-As-Theory modes of Rada, Petwo, and Gwede.) The reference to being "so inclined" here might helpfully be understood as relating to several sonic trends in the 1970s. These include the ecological and biological underpinnings of composers like Schafer³² and Alvin Lucier³³,

³⁰ Victoria Ness Kirby's translation of the text of Luigi Russolo's manifesto can be found in the Appendix section of: Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 166-74.

³¹ A more thorough discussion of the relationship between popular music and the avant-garde can be found in Gendron's *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*. However, neither Gendron nor Bangs' biographer, Jim Derogatis, make any claims regarding Bangs' relationship to Futurism.

³² Schafer's arguments for an environmental approach to composition can be found in: "Part Four: Toward Acoustic Design" from *The Soundscape*, 205-260.

³³ Good examples of this element in Lucier's work can be found in the pieces *I am Sitting in a Room* and *Music for Solo Performer*, the latter of which involves the use of "massively amplified brain waves."

respectively, as well as the “primal scream” therapy developed by Arthur Janov³⁴ and popularized by both John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s versions of the *Plastic Ono Band* album. All of these invoke an a-historical perspective on human relationships to sound, though in varying degrees. Of course, even their a-historical tendencies are themselves bound up in their own moment of historical genesis.

So even Bangs admits his arguments can be fitted into contradictory historiographical boxes if the reader so chooses. However, as a nearly inevitable result of his rhetorical style, the specifics of this essay are fused with the particularities of Bangs’ occupation, location, and lifespan. Idiosyncratic as his criticism might be, the recurrent use of first-person subjective in his written work places him well within the “New Journalism” camp of his contemporaries Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese.³⁵ Furthermore, for all his legendary hedonism, one possible function of Bangs’ reference to his own particular drug intake prior to listening to the album he was reviewing was to provide a specific, embodied context to his experience of the music.³⁶ So it’s not surprisingly that following the historical/a-historical debates that fill up the first few paragraphs, Bangs returns to himself and the material world around him. Though he espouses what would today be called a “rockist” point of view, the following lines are illuminating:

I am firmly convinced that one reason for the popularity of rap music, like disco and punk before it, is that it’s so utterly annoying to those of us whose cup of

³⁴ Arthur Janov, *The Primal Scream* (New York: Dell, 1970).

³⁵ A contemporaneous explanation of the how and why of “New Journalism can be found in: Tom Wolfe, “The Birth of ‘The New Journalism:’ Eyewitness Report by Tom Wolfe,” *New York Magazine*, February 14, 1972, 44.

³⁶ For both a compilation and a (partial) rebuttal of these biographical anecdotes, see: Derogatis, *Let It Blurt*.

blare it isn't; more than once its fans have walked up to a doorless telephone booth I was occupying, set their mammoth radios down on the sidewalk five inches from my feet, and stood there smiling at me. They didn't want to use the phone, but I find it hard to begrudge them such gleeful rudeness; how could I, after walking all over the city with my also highly audible cassette player emitting free jazz, *Metal Machine Music*, PiL's "Theme," Miles Davis's "Rated X" and Iannis Xenakis's *Electro-Acoustic Music*, part of which the composer described as a sound painting of the bombing of Greece? So fair is fair, even given the difference in taste.³⁷

Although Bangs had made his reputation at *Creem* magazine in Detroit, by the time of the writing of "A Reasonable Guide," he had relocated to New York.³⁸ Thus, disco, punk and hip-hop are all recent, local audible phenomenon for him. Second, near the end of the passage, his list of what makes it onto his cassette dubs reveals fairly cosmopolitan listening habits. But perhaps most significantly, the anecdote regarding young hip hop fans with their "ghetto blasters" and Bangs' attitude about his own use of a portable audio device in a public space locates him squarely within an urban environment. Furthermore, in the understanding he reaches with the "gleeful," rude hip hop fans, there is a clear comprehension of the fact that the sonic is both a means of defining space and a method of controlling that space, which was first demonstrated in the anecdote about Blind Willie Johnson's arrest in the preceding chapter. Furthermore, although I talk about musicking as social formation in Chapter 1, this doesn't mean that the "primitivist ethos" is entirely peaceful, something that Pierre Clastres noted in *Society*

³⁷ Bangs, "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise," 302.

³⁸ DeRogatis, *Let it Blurt*, 130.

Against the State after observing that Anti-State formations carry out small-scale warfare in order to preclude the rise of authoritarian rule.³⁹

The Lester Bangs passage quoted above is also strongly reminiscent of Ralph Ellison's essay, "Living With Music." As Alexander Weheliye has noted recently in his book, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, this essay has received far less attention than most of Ellison's other criticism, perhaps because it isn't specifically about music at all.⁴⁰ Instead, the essay deals with Ellison's relationship to music as recorded sound, particularly in reference to recorded sound's potential to hold other urban "noise" (including undesired music) at bay while he is attempting to write, during his late 1940s residency in Harlem.⁴¹ Weheliye's treatment of this essay in the chapter entitled "Consuming Sonic Technologies" is best understood as complementing his reading of Ellison's *Invisible Man* in "I Am I Be," an earlier chapter. In that reading, Weheliye suggests that *Invisible Man* offers up a defining statement of what the author terms "Afro-Sonic Modernity," which can be described as a specific subset of—and irrevocably linked to—modernity more generally.⁴²

Like many recent authors concerned with sound, Weheliye is compelled to contrast the subordinate position of hearing to seeing in modern Western epistemology. Significantly, Weheliye does not offer a simple inversion: his reading of Ellison's protagonist highlights the well-lit room he resides in, as well as the sound(s) that

³⁹ Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*, trans. Robert Hurley and Abe Stein (New York: Zone, 1989).

⁴⁰ Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Afro-Sonic Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 112.

⁴¹ Ralph Ellison, "Living With Music," in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 187-98.

⁴² Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 19-45.

permeate that space.⁴³ (He links the visual to the sonic through their shared dependence on electricity; I will be returning to this idea later in this essay.) However, in dealing with *Invisible Man*, Weheliye takes great pains to rebuke certain writers on sound—primarily those who are working from a psychoanalytic perspective—for asserting that to listen is somehow a regressive form of subjectivity. In this formulation, the dispersal of the ego in the process of listening constitutes an “oceanic fantasy” that returns the subject to the “acoustic mirror” stage of identification with the mother’s voice, a point in development that predates even the scopic “mirror stage” of more traditional Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁴⁴ Weheliye counters that, for Ellison, listening is not a regressive act but represents an alternative construction of subject-hood—one that is both highly individualized and inevitably social and/or collective.⁴⁵

This is even more apparent in “Living With Music.” Like his protagonist in *Invisible Man*, Ellison’s first-person narrative voice is located primarily in a “private” space, namely his apartment. However, certain intrusions into Ellison’s privacy occur: noisy drunks singing or yelling near the window, a next door neighbor with a loud stereo, and an amateur singer upstairs whose practicing can be heard through the ceiling. Although Ellison is finally compelled to call the police to quiet the neighbor next door, the most significant passages of the essay deal with the singer. As the author himself admits, because she was also an “artist” (remember, Ellison was trying to write in peace)

⁴³ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, (New York: Vintage, 1995).

⁴⁴ Weheliye’s specific targets are: Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988). and David Schwarz, *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴⁵ Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 46-72.

he had a difficult time quelling her practicing. As a solution that takes a life of its own, Ellison acquires a rapidly expanding assortment of stereo equipment to drown out her voice. He combats her performances of specific pieces with professional recordings of the same tunes. Eventually, a kind of dialogue develops. She meets Ellison in person and compliments his taste; as a result, he restrains his aggressive sonic counter-attack. Consequently, Ellison's essay ends not on a reflection about private listening practices or even the use of sound to create a kind of privacy in public, but on a valorization of pluralistic listening and an acknowledgement of the sonic-as-social.⁴⁶

This digression through Ellison illustrates what I believe are the ramifications of Lester Bangs' far briefer comments on his understanding of sound—public and private—in an urban environment. However, because of fundamental changes in technology, Bangs is forced to contend with a sonic mobility that was impossible in Ellison's time, specifically the availability of portable audio devices—a condition that Weheliye also acknowledges as a contemporary issue—and how these transgress the public/private divide. Furthermore, Bangs also confronts the sonic-as-social in spaces beyond the domestic, as illustrated by the passage below:

Once I was eating lunch with two friends near St. Mark's Place, and a familiar sound started coming out of the jukebox. It took me a few seconds to recognize it, but that voice was unmistakable. "Hey, I said, "it's Lydia and the Jerks doing 'Orphans'!" One friend laughed: "Well folks, enjoy your meals!" But she hadn't noticed it till I'd brought it to her attention, and in context it didn't sound all *that* more yakkety than the Beatles' "Helter Skelter," which immediately preceded it.

⁴⁶ Ellison, "Living With Music," 198.

Then of course there is the whole question of Muzak and whether digestion is really improved by the theme from *Dr. Zhivago*.⁴⁷

What is fundamental to both Ellison and Bangs' treatment of "sonic modernity" is that the tension between the public and the private in the urban environment is negotiated through the agency of the listening and/or broadcasting subject. Both Bangs and Ellison create a kind of sonic perimeter around themselves through technological devices, even if Bangs' is more mobile.⁴⁸ However, both of these concurrently broadcasting/listening acts come into contact with other subjects, which delineates a social—and therefore public—spatial relationship. Furthermore, as they relate in their writing, both Bangs and Ellison as subjects are confronted with sounds (primarily musical) not of their own choosing, even if those sounds are occasionally within their stated range of taste. What's more, this complication doesn't stem only from variable access to the personal audio devices—as Ellison himself wryly notes—but also from their integration into the total production/consumption apparatus, up to and including the wall socket without which the record does not spin.

The Body Electric

"Singin' through you to me/
Thunderbolts caught easily/
Shouts the truth peacefully/
Eeeeeee-lec-tri-ci-teeeee!"

--Captain Beefheart

⁴⁷ Bangs, "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise," 302.

⁴⁸ The issue of sonic mobility is also traced by Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus in: *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

At the very beginning of “A Reasonable Guide,” Lester Bangs states that, for the musical phenomena he is describing, “Guitars and human voices are primary vectors [...]”⁴⁹ Perhaps he was taking for granted the fact that the guitars in question would be amplified. In any case, as I noted in the preceding section, it is necessary to consider electricity—the basis of most musical amplification—when discussing sonic-modernity.

Although many Americans were familiar with electronic devices by the beginning of the 20th century, either through public demonstrations at World’s Fairs or, if they lived in urban centers, through early use of electricity to run a city’s infrastructure⁵⁰, for most people the first electronic music that they were likely to hear was emitted either by a Hammond organ or an electric guitar. Both of these devices were developed in the 1930s,⁵¹ although there are earlier examples of electronic instruments; these include, most famously, the Telharmonium, the Theremin, and the Ondes Martenot, alongside many unique devices.⁵² However, the electrically amplified guitar isn’t, properly speaking, an electrical device. “Electrical” refers specifically to the production and distribution of electric power, whereas “electronic” indicates a device constructed to control the flow of electrons. In other words, electrical means the grid system that supplies power to users, and electronic denotes the machines those users operate. I make

⁴⁹ Bangs, “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” 301.

⁵⁰ A wide-ranging discussion of this facet of American history can be found in: John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).

⁵¹ The most thorough history of the electric guitar can be found in: Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵² Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: A History of a New Sound* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 43–76.

the distinction here for two reasons. One, it helps to establish the difference between parts of a total electrical system. And two, because after the development of commercial synthesizers in the 1960s, it has become the norm to refer to music made on these machines as “electronic,” in contrast—somewhat erroneously—with guitar-based music. Thus it’s apt to say that the entire post WWII period of American popular music has been one dominated by electronic music, self-consciously antagonistic movements like the “folk revival” notwithstanding.⁵³

Why then, has the electrically amplified guitar proven to be both durable and dominant as a sound source in American popular music? One useful explanation comes from the critic Robert Palmer in his essay, “The Church of the Sonic Guitar.” Palmer postulates that one reason for the ascendancy of the guitar in 20th century American popular music is that its method of tuning lends itself to Afro-American blues forms more readily than most instruments created for the “equal temperament” system that has dominated the music of the West since Bach; in other words, the guitar can be used convivially with less effort than many other instruments.⁵⁴

The ability to tune the still-acoustic guitar to non-tempered or microtonal frequencies, as Palmer notes, makes the execution of pitch-shifts much easier than on a piano, “flattened” rather than “flatted” tones at the 3rd, 5th, and 7th intervals particularly. Although it is possible to argue that all music developed within the United States has

⁵³ Although this aspect of the “folk revival” comes up in most histories of the movement, Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 183-232, provides the most thoroughgoing analysis of the antagonism towards amplification.

⁵⁴ Robert Palmer, “The Church of the Sonic Guitar,” in *Present Tense: Rock & Roll and Culture*, ed. Anthony DeCurtis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992) 15-16.

been intertwined with Afro-American musical practices—including the notorious case of blackface minstrelsy⁵⁵—the eventual dominance of formal conventions derived from these practices is primarily a 20th century cultural condition: our increased creolization.

After the introduction of amplification in the 1930s, the guitar's sonic palette was expanded in terms of timbre, particularly in the form of electronic feedback—a line of development we can trace from Muddy Waters to Jimi Hendrix over approximately twenty years. Of course, black guitarists weren't the only musicians in the United States to utilize the potentials of the new technologies associated with amplification. From the pop singles of Les Paul and Mary Ford to the Velvet Underground, white musicians were also heavily invested in this musical development.⁵⁶ However, black artists first explored many of the most radical usages of sonic technology. This returns us to—but does not quite resolve—the relationship between what Weheliye describes as “Sonic Afro-Modernity” in terms of Ellison, and what I have tried to describe as Lester Bangs’ “Sonic Modernity.” The relationship between these two descriptions of sounds and listening practices comes from the idea that they are “modern,” in the limited sense of being related to conditions contemporary the listener. Although the idea of “modernity” and originality/newness are hallmarks of white, Western epistemology, Weheliye’s insistence on the contingency of Ellison’s listening practice as “modern” is at least a partial rebuttal of previous writers on Afro-American music who have privileged “tradition” and

⁵⁵ Lott, *Love and Theft*.

⁵⁶ Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, 113-206.

linkages between a real or imagined African past and the sonic dimensions of the present, as addressed in Chapter 1.⁵⁷

In “The Church of the Sonic Guitar,” Palmer continues his convivialist argument by laying out what he believes were the basic conditions that led to the ascendancy of the electric guitar in American popular music, and then contrasts the sonic potential of this instrument to the post-Bach dominant mode of Western music: “But an electric guitar, properly tuned to resonate with everything from the [concert] hall’s acoustics to the underlying 60-cycle hum of the city’s electrical grid, is forming its massive sound textures from harmonic relationships that *already* exist in nature; compare this to the arbitrary ‘equal temperament’ system which causes decidedly unharmonious harmonic interference patterns and dissonances when certain tones are allowed to ring together.”⁵⁸ I think it’s worth highlighting Palmer’s use of the term “nature,” partially because there is a tendency to consider “nature” as the “natural” world of flora and fauna, and partially because the idea of “nature” is a concept always already constructed as other-than-human (or -culture, -civilization, -technology, etc.) Palmer does not distinguish between his examples, one of which is a “natural science” (acoustics) and the other wholly dependent on human intervention (the electrical grid). This is significant not because it equivocates between the two, but because it holds them in constant tension, since it presupposes human interaction in both cases. It’s also significant because Palmer is suggesting a position that, as Bruno Latour has identified, runs counter to the ontological suppositions

⁵⁷ This position is exemplified by: Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*.

⁵⁸ Palmer, “The Church of the Sonic Guitar,” 16.

of Western epistemology—namely, that human endeavors have alternately created new hybrid forms of nature/culture and policed the boundaries between nature and culture.⁵⁹

In the realm of 20th century music, this chiasmus of inclusion and disavowal has been contingent on the existence of an electrical system. If we extrapolate from Palmer’s example, we might say that the concert takes place in a hall lit by electrical bulbs and that the performance is most likely (if not always) presented through microphones, a form of mediation dependent on electricity. Conversely, to tune an instrument—in this case a guitar—to a 60 Hz frequency (the one used by all municipalities in the United States⁶⁰) is to tap into the same electrical grid that is utilized by the concert hall’s architecture. However, this is not to suggest a technologically determinist interpretation of sound in the 20th century, which would differ little in effect from the “domination” ascribed to arbitrary but privileged systems like equal temperament. Rather, it’s a means of focusing our attention on the fact that the recurrent variable is always people, and specifically people as bodies.

Although it’s tempting to think of electricity as purely a phenomena discovered and harnessed through the abstract lens of natural science, a closer reading reveals that bodies have always been at the forefront of developments in the field of electricity. As David Bodanis relates in his book, *Electric Universe*, the discovery of a controllable source of electricity—as opposed to Benjamin Franklin’s more famous development of

⁵⁹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10-11.

⁶⁰ This fact is general knowledge, but it is also cited in Tony Conrad’s 1972 “60 Cycles” essay included as part of the liner notes to Rhys Chatham’s album *Die Donnergötter (The Thundergods)* (Table of the Elements, 2006) from an untraceable book named *Industrial Electricity*.

the lightning rod—was acted out on Allesandro Volta’s own body; by placing discs on either side of his tongue, one of zinc and the other of copper, Volta was led to construct the “voltaic pile” in 1800, the first battery.⁶¹ Volta’s discovery of a stable source of electric power was preceded by Luigi Galvani’s experiments in the 1780s whereby he demonstrated “bioelectricity” by using a charge to animate a dead frog’s legs.⁶² Such experimentation was not, of course, limited to parlor experiments or literary imaginations of writers like Edgar Allan Poe.⁶³ As Bodanis puts it, by the end of the century, “There were telephones and telegraphs and lightbulbs; roller coasters and fast street cars—and ever more electric motors powering them all.”⁶⁴ Each of these developments has human bodies at their center, whether by communication at distances the body cannot cross quickly (the telephone and the telegraph) or the desire to extend the day for work or leisure (the lightbulb) or the “need for speed,” either for labor (the streetcar) or pleasure (roller coasters). However, despite Galvani’s discoveries and Volta’s refinements, the development of a whole host of new scientific principles relating to electricity in the 19th century, and the creation of an infrastructure to deliver power to users, it wasn’t until the 1920s that the physiological relationship between the body and electricity via the synapses was properly understood, beginning with Otto Loewi’s experiments on, again,

⁶¹ David Bodanis, *Electric Universe: How Electricity Switched on the Modern World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 5.

⁶² Volta and Galvani had significant disagreement over their respective findings, a conflict that is explored in: Marcello Pera, *The Ambiguous Frog: The Galvani-Volta Controversy on Animal Electricity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁶³ Outside of American literature, Mary Shelley (England) and E.T.A. Hoffman (Germany) also pursued similar themes during roughly the same era.

⁶⁴ Bodanis, *Electric Universe*, 6.

frogs.⁶⁵ For the first time, bodies—human and otherwise—could be comprehended as operating on electro-magnetic principles.

So here we are in the 20th century. We have an expansive electrical infrastructure that permeates the geography and architecture of the spaces that we inhabit, and we have a mind numbing number of electronic devices that utilize the power supplied by the grid. We are also able to understand our own sensory information as electrical, via the impulses that arc from synapse to synapse until they reach our brains. We are both our own electrical system, and we interface with the grid through our usage of electronic devices. This grid and these devices are compromises between the capacity of the materials to carry power and the capabilities and limitations of our bodies to use that power. The 60 Hz frequency used by most power transfer systems in the United States, for instance, is a compromise between what a wire can carry, what a small electronic device can use safely, and what our eyes can perceive, since very much below 60 Hz, electric light exhibits a “flicker” to human eyes. This condition of existing on and off the grid is one that Ralph Ellison came of age in, that Lester Bangs was born into, and in which we find ourselves today, because the grid is the State—both literally and metaphorically. The question is, how do we hack it?

Although the “flicker” effect of electrical power is apparent to anyone who has experienced a “brown out” where the consistency and frequency of the electrical current being delivered to a household is unstable, it is perhaps less common to consider the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 212-16.

audible nature of electricity. Sitting in my apartment as I write this, I am aware of the hum of the compressor motor in my refrigerator in the next room, which operates at 60 Hz. And yet this is not the only electrical sound present in the room. The wires that run through the walls and connect to my light fixtures, stereo, television, clocks, and kitchen appliances all have electrons vibrating within them that are barely if at all perceptible to me. This is largely due to two factors: the volume (amplitude) and/or loudness (the perceived volume) is below what my ears are accustomed to detecting, and much of the electrical sound that permeates our lives is “tuned out” by our brains as irrelevant. Despite this, we live with this set of sounds almost every moment of our lives, aside from brief sojourns to spaces outside of the grid. To consider the sounds as a total gridwork, as the simultaneously sounding of the 60 Hz tone across the continent, is to be overwhelmed by what the composer Tony Conrad described as “the largest, most careful melody ever played.”⁶⁶

However, aside from the conceptualization that I’m talking about here, it’s still very difficult to consciously perceive this particular sound event. The exceptions to this occur where there are changes in the voltage of the current (though not its frequency). Such changes happen most obviously at transformers, the boxes that are attached to power poles and “step down” the voltage for domestic use. The composer La Monte Young has based a number of compositions on the tones he remembers having heard emitted from such transformers during his childhood in rural Idaho, including *The Melodic Version Of The Second Dream Of The High-Tension Line Stepdown*

⁶⁶ Tony Conrad, “60 Cycles.”

Transformer From The Four Dreams Of China.⁶⁷ A “step down” or a “step up” in voltage is also used to control volume in electronic musical devices, which brings us back to the electric guitar.

When an electric guitar is placed in close proximity to an amplifier, a feedback loop is created between the input signal (the guitar’s pickups) and the output signal (the amplifier box’s loudspeaker). The electrical current that is coursing through the system is set at 60 Hz, so if, like Robert Palmer suggests, you tune the guitar’s strings to the same frequency, then the feedback loop is effectively amplifying the audibility of the power source coming out of the wall, albeit in an altered form through the resonant frequencies of the (bodies) of the amplifier and guitar, and the acoustic properties of the space the sound is emanating from (the room). Even when a guitar is *not* tuned to 60 Hz, the amplification is producing tones that are inflected with that frequency. Although some technicians and musicians attempt to minimize the “noise” (in the electrical engineering sense of interference to a signal) that is a byproduct of this process, the polyphony of multiple guitar strings being sounded through a 60 Hz amplifier produces timbres (in the form of “tone color” and harmonic overtones) that are often desirable in popular music.

Perhaps this—admittedly cursory—scientific explanation is a bit of a cover for two related speculative questions. Have we, as subjects within an electrified environment, unconsciously assimilated the sound of the wall socket into our overall cognitive relationship to perceived sounds? Why do many of us respond so strongly to electronic sounds, including electric guitars? Or to combine the two questions, has a

⁶⁷ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23, 65.

lifetime of hearing (if not perceiving) the hum in the wall resulted in electronic feedback triggering the brain's pleasure centers? I'm not trying to make a universal claim for this possibility, as I'm well aware that even if we think of the postwar period as one of electronic music, there is a wide range of thresholds of pleasure pertaining to frequency, tone, and loudness; the more extreme ends of this spectrum, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, are the domain of the underground. Still, as a speculative point, I think there are merits to conceiving of our relationship to sound in this way. For one, it helps to elaborate the idea that embodied experience is the result of what Maurice Merleau-Ponty called the "intertwining" of subjectivities grounded in perception, which acknowledges both a social dimension and a historicity to phenomena.⁶⁸ This relates back to what, in a less philosophical mode, I was trying to convey via a comparison between Lester Bangs and Ralph Ellison.

It's also what I think Bangs was talking about when he referred to a nerve's "livid twitching" and the strange pleasures of a "full scale anxiety attack." Just as there is a difference between "volume" as an absolute quantity of air pressure, measurable in decibels, and "loudness" as a subjective experience of the intensity of that sound, so too does the general concept "amplification"—as opposed to the scientific explanation thereof—suggest an intensifying of the overall sonic experience. The question that remains is how we understand that experience: as desirable/undesirable, pleasurable/painful, rational/irrational, or cognitive/bodily—or perhaps as something

⁶⁸ This concept is recurrent in Merleau-Ponty's work. However, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (New York: Routledge, 2003), 247-71., originally published in *The Visible and the Invisible*, is its fullest expression.

anti-dualist and anti-Cartesian, a radical break from the binaries of identification that, as Weheliye noted, have structured our understanding of both sound and subjectivity via the lasting influence of psychoanalysis.

Gimme Shock Treatment

“Anointest my head with conductant. Do I get a crown of thorns?”

--Ken Kesey

In “A Reasonable Guide,” shortly after he calls into question the historicity of “noise,” Lester Bangs humorously (and inaccurately) invokes one of the favorite Chinese poets of his heroes, the Beats: “Or, as Han Shan did once advise one of his Zen acolytes at Kyoto in lieu of canewhipping the whelp, ‘If you’re feeling uptight and truly would prefer to sail into the mystic, just chuglug two quarts of coffee and throw on side one of the first Clash album (Eng. edition) at ten, full treble, no bass.’”⁶⁹ There are a couple of curious things going on in this passage. The first is an assertion, facetiously backed by an Eastern sage, that if one is experiencing anxiety, that the solution is not to calm down, but to intensify first by speeding up perception (caffeine), and second by listening to a very particular kind of noise/music. It’s particular because Bangs isn’t just admonishing his reader to listen to the English punk band the Clash, he’s specifying a very exact set of conditions for the listening experience itself.

⁶⁹ Bangs, “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” 301-2.

At least since James Jamerson's contributions at Motown in the 1960s, the electric bass guitar has been used to carry a major portion of the melody in American popular music. This is as true for the Beatles as it is for the Ramones. Instead of hearing Paul Simonon or DeeDee Ramone shout "1, 2, 3, 4!" and then launch into a stripped down, melodic bassline that anchors the song, Bangs is suggesting that we listen to nothing but the guitar parts—the treble—at the highest volume possible.

At such a volume, the dominant feature becomes the overtones produced in the sonic interplay between the guitar's strings and body, the amplifier, and the recording and playback devices. Under these conditions, concepts like genre aren't very useful because according to most definitions a genre (like "punk") denotes structural similarities between multiple example texts. Without an audible bassline to anchor a punk song, the structural similarities start to dissipate, leaving nothing but an approximate 4/4 rhythm and a maelstrom of guitar noise. Perhaps this is what the composer Rhys Chatham was hearing when he writes, regarding his formulation of his 1977 piece *Guitar Trio*, that,

Before 1975, I had been working as a minimalist composer/performer and owed my musical allegiances to my background as a classically trained musician. The music I made was deeply influenced by Maryanne Amacher, Tony Conrad, Charlemagne Palestine, Eliane Radigue, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young.

In 1975, composer/saxophonist Peter Gordon appeared on the NY scene from Los Angeles and started inserting rock influences into his notated music compositions with his Love of Life Orchestra. I was a member of this band, which is where I met Ernie Brooks, who was in the Modern Lovers. I had never been to a rock concert before this point, so Peter took me to CBGBs to see an early performance of the Ramones. I thought they were fantastic and realized that, as a minimalist, I might have more in common with this music than I originally thought.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Rhys Chatham, liner notes, *Two Gongs (1971)* (Table of the Elements, 2006).

Chatham is here self-identifying as a “minimalist” composer, which as most writers on the “Big Four” minimalists (Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass) have noted, is a designation that has more to do with a loosely shared sensibility than with any similarity of structure or technique.⁷¹ Moreover, Chatham confesses that prior to hearing the Ramones, he had never attended a rock concert before. From that information, we might also assume that he had not been an active listener to rock music in its recorded form, either. And yet, he identifies with some element of the Ramones performance he attends. One thing worth noting is that Chatham heard a very early performance of the band, and that the limited documentation available from this period of CBGBs comes from very rough homemade recordings of the Ramones and others produced as the soundtrack to the un-synchronized 1976 Amos Poe and Ivan Kral documentary, *Blank Generation*.⁷² Based on this evidence, it’s clear that the Ramones’ live sound in the early days was much less melodically precise than the pop/punk mixture they made famous, consisting of mostly a wall of guitar tones, with the vocals, bassline and drum parts much less audible. So perhaps the early Ramones live shows were a good deal more like Bangs’ recommendations for listening to the Clash than the sub-Berryisms that became their

⁷¹ The three standard histories of minimalism are: Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1983); Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*. However, a substantial revision to this narrative is offered by: Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (New York: Zone, 2011). Unfortunately, Joseph, like his predecessors, leaves out the contributions of female composers like Maryanne Amacher and Eliane Radigue from his story.

⁷² This information regarding the film comes from a conversation with Amos Poe after a screening at the Austin Museum of Art in 2006. For the film itself, see: *Blank Generation*, VHS, directed by Ivan Kral and Amos Poe (1976; New York: Poe Productions, 2001).

subsequent hallmark. This possibility makes Rhys Chatham's response to the band more comprehensible. Chatham's pre-CBGBs compositions, like his minimalist mentors, often focused on harmonic overtones, frequently by constructing "controlled accidents" in performance. These "accidents" resulted in the sounding of tones that were set in motion by the performer, but were also dependent on the "agency" of the materiality of the instrument and the subjective reception of the performer and audience. A good example of this is Chatham's 1971 piece, *Two Gongs*. At the end of the 1960s, Chatham had settled in New York and was "working with Morton Subotnick at his electronic music studio at New York University."⁷³ Chatham states:

I was working with the Buchla 100 Series modular electronic music system to make music whose melodic content rested primarily in the upper harmonic regions, using sine-wave generators, ring modulators and filters. I was also working as a harpsichord tuner for a rental company in New York called Bill's Music. One day, I was regulating one of Bill's harpsichords when I happened to notice a collection of rather large Chinese Gongs. I started experimenting with them and discovered, to my delight, that they sounded very much like my electronic music pieces.⁷⁴

The piece is performed by two musicians, who sound separate Chinese gongs within the parameters of a score that designates how frequently and with how much force each gong is to be sounded. This results in multiple attacks and decays, and tone shifts depending on where the mallet is struck on the gong, "thus allowing the evocative story told by their wild harmonics to unfold."⁷⁵ More descriptively, it sounds like a "music of

⁷³ Chatham, liner notes

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

the spheres,” if the spheres in question were planet-sized ball bearings grinding past each other; it also makes *Thus Spake Zarathustra* sound like a lullaby. One of the significances of this piece is that, although it is performed on acoustical instruments, its formation is the direct result of the sonic possibilities opened up by the introduction of electronics into the 20th century soundscape.

I’ve played this and other examples of “minimalism” for various friends and family, almost always in a sit-down-and-listen scenario, and I’ve gotten a wide range of responses. However, with pieces like *Two Gongs* or Tony Conrad’s 1964 *Four Violins* or even—in a more rock music vein—the Velvet Underground’s “Sister Ray,” negative responses to the music seem to dwell on its very durability. Minimalism is, at the very least, marked by a tendency towards repetition. A good deal of it is also characterized by compositions of great length. The latter distinguishes it from much rock music, but repetition is both a criticism and a characteristic of both genres.⁷⁶ Compositions of long duration that utilize repetition foreground their lack of melodic resolution—which can be contrasted to Susan McClary’s description of “classical” music like Beethoven’s 9th *Symphony* as ideologically intertwined with domination via “heroic” climaxes⁷⁷—in a way that is not as ignorable as, say, a three and a half minute pop single like “96 Tears.” Suffice it to say that an individual’s either positive or negative relationship to “classical” music specifically and “art” music generally—and jazz, to an extent—tends to privilege

⁷⁶ For further analysis of the role that repetition plays in American culture, and specifically American music, see: Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music and Cultural Practice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

⁷⁷ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 53-79.

intellectual cognition over any other sensory experience; hence, the response “I don’t understand X kind of music.” Alternately, the dismissal of “low” forms of music is usually predicated on the belief that there isn’t much to cognize. To listen to *Two Gongs* then is a decidedly anti-Hegelian, Anti-State experience, because the piece lacks any recognizable form of telos; it’s closer to what Deleuze described as the dis-identification of “difference” and “repetition.”⁷⁸ That is, in identifying with the “differences” that are heralded in “classical” music, we miss their underlying repetitive nature as we allow ourselves to be swept up in their “heroic” resolutions. Conversely, by asserting the “repetitiveness” of even the most mechanistic music (“96 Tears”/“Sister Ray”) we miss the “differences” that may or may not be empirically provable phenomena, but which are nonetheless perceivable as the sensing body moves through time.

If melodic resolution (or a “sonic telos”) is an illusory experience, then as listeners we are left in a state of perpetual but ever-changing tension. This tension might best be described as “anxiety.” I place the word “anxiety” in quotations because in most usages it connotes either a pathological state of being (like hysteria) or a historically bounded, widespread cultural relationship to a specific event that never actually occurs (like a nuclear holocaust). I’ll leave aside the latter usage because it isn’t especially useful to the present discussion (Were people nervous about the Bomb? Yes, probably...) and because this kind of analysis has tended to derive from wholesale application of psychological theories whose original conception was in relation to singular subjects, but was extrapolated to “explain” entire populations (e.g. Freud’s

⁷⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 1-27.

writings on religion, Wilhelm Reich on Fascism, David Riesman on ‘50s America, Christopher Lasch on ‘70s America, etc.).⁷⁹ Instead, I want to focus on the impulse to pathologize anxiety.

Specifically, what interests me here is the radical redefinition that Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet gave to “hysteria” at the beginning of the 20th century. Rather than assuming, as was common for most of the 19th century, that hysteria was a specifically female disorder—rooted as it is in the Greek word for uterus—and consequently one that could be treated by various physiological methods (notoriously, “water massages” and early examples of sexually stimulating mechanical vibrators).⁸⁰ Following the work of Jean-Martin Charcot, Freud and Janet were the first to postulate that hysteria was in fact a kind of “conversion disorder”—an excessive physical manifestation of internal stress and anxiety, most famously in Freud’s case study, *Dora: Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*.⁸¹ Although the term “somatoform” has been used broadly after Freud and Janet to describe a host of afflictions—including hysteria—since the publication of the DSM-III in 1980, the official terminology for this type of diagnoses in the United States

⁷⁹ The specific texts I am referring to are: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1969); Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980); David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 2001).

⁸⁰ For a recent reexamination of the role that the methods of one particular institution played in this history, with a heavy emphasis on the visual presentation of the self, see: Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

⁸¹ Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (New York: Touchstone, 1997). Less famous today, but significant to American psychologists at the turn of the century: Pierre Janet, *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria: Fifteen Lectures Given in the Medical School of Harvard University* (New York: Macmillan, 1907).

has been “conversion disorder.”⁸² However, the diagnosis of this “disorder” in the Western World has declined sharply since the 1920s, despite the fact that its applicability has been expanded to include male patients.⁸³ Nevertheless, certain key insights initiated by Freud and Janet persist in diagnostic criteria—“psychomotor agitation” being a symptom of externalized anxiety in a variety of mood disorders, according to contemporary psychological explanations.⁸⁴

The “rediscovery” of hysteria in the Western world during the 19th century coincides with what, after Michel Foucault, has been described as the “medicalization of the body.”⁸⁵ It also parallels the introduction into American vernacular English of the word “conniption” and the phrase “conniption fit,” an etymologically *sui generis* usage that the Oxford English Dictionary dates, in print, to 1833.⁸⁶ Although the dictionary defines conniption as synonymous with “hysteria,” it’s clear from the usage examples that unlike the latter word, conniption was always gender-neutral. Furthermore, the term

⁸² Discussion of the distinctions between the somatoform family of disorders, somatic disorder specifically, and conversion disorder/hysteria can be found in: Robert E. Hales and Stuart C. Yudofsky, *Essentials of Clinical Psychiatry* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2003), 424, 432.

⁸³ Andrew T. Scull, *Hysteria: The Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174-90.

⁸⁴ The most current American set of standards for diagnoses involving non-narcotic “psychomotor agitation” are found in the various sections on mood disorders (and not, significantly, in relation to somatoform disorders) in the DSM-IV-TR: American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (Text Revision)* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2000), 345-428.

⁸⁵ Foucault includes this historical process as part of his theory of “biopower,” which he defined as a series of institutional apparatuses designed to control individual human subjects in the modern era. Biopower is concisely explained in: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 137, 140.

⁸⁶ My own knowledge of this term does not originate with the OED. Growing up in central Illinois, the phrase was in common usage among older generations. My grandfather George Cline, whose own family had a direct and ongoing connection to the Stone-Campbell revival movement in Kentucky and migrated to Morgan County, IL after Barton W. Stone moved to Jacksonville, was particularly fond of using “conniption fit.”

connotes uncontrolled physical manifestations of anxiety as *both* anger *and* laughter. I'm dwelling on the term "conniption" because I believe it offers a contrasting explanation to Freud and Janet's redefinition of "hysteria" as a "conversion disorder" and the subsequent identification of "psychomotor agitation" as a symptom of anxiety in mood disorders. I do this for a number of reasons. First, because the usage of the term originates in the 1830s—a period not coincidentally marked by some of the first major technological upheavals of the modern era, the telegraph and the train.⁸⁷ Second, because the term "conniption" has never been specifically feminized. Third, because there is no pathological component to "conniption," as it resides solely in the domain of vernacular language. And finally, because "conniption" is by definition a temporary state of being, and therefore does not qualify as a "disorder."

Because of these factors, "conniption fit" as a concept provides a malleable platform from which to launch a critique of uncontrolled eruptions of emotional physicality at a variety of historical occurrences. These occurrences are discontinuous and irregular, like breakers in the ebb and flow of cultural transformation, but could be said to cluster around eras of substantial change in the realms of social organization, technology, and economics. For instance, the phrase "conniption fit" enters the American lexicon in the 1830s, which not only coincides with the Jacksonian period of social, economic, and technological change⁸⁸, but also correlates to the period of the

⁸⁷ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought?: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁸⁸ For a slightly earlier and somewhat opposed interpretation to the same era that covered by Howe's book, see: Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian American, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

“Second Great Awakening.” Although this religious revival contained many complex components, from the slave preacher Nat Turner’s revolt to the “plain folk” Cane Ridge Revival led by Barton W. Stone, one of the more significant and pervasive elements across the board was a kind of “ecstatic” religiosity, characterized by dancing, singing, and shouting—an “unknown tongue” writ large.⁸⁹ Indeed, at multiple junctures, a kind of physical expression of catharsis that verges on the un-controlled has been bound to religious revivalism, often of the poor or working class, with both white and African American examples.⁹⁰ By the twentieth century, many of these ruptures in socially controlled behavior were heavily secularized, though still frequently bound to music. The modernist American composer Charles Ives attempted to both nostalgically and radically tap into this impulse with his *Symphony No. 3*, which utilizes snippets of revivalist hymns. We might also think of the Charleston dance craze of the 1920s, or the jitterbug of the 1930s as the sublimation of the erratic ecstasy of a physical/emotional

⁸⁹ For information regarding Barton W. Stone, see: Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in the United States* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008). For general history of white American participants of the Second Great Awakening, see: Dickson D. Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1974); Annie J. Randall, “A Censorship of Forgetting: Origins and Origin Myths of ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’,” in *Music, Power, Politics*, 5-25 (New York: Routledge, 2004). For Nat Turner, see: Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents* (New York: Bedford, 1996). For general history of African American participants of the Second Great Awakening, see: Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁹⁰ Several writers have attempted to deal with the individual responses to religious ecstasy under these conditions; among the key texts dealing with this topic are: James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*; Marghanita Laski, *Ecstasy in Secular and Religious Experience* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1990). In the 20th century, a major example of the social impact of ecstatic religion has been the history of the Pentecostal movement. Although the worldwide adherence to Pentecostal doctrines transcends racial or ethnic categorization, the movement’s genesis was in the African American Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, a fact conceded by most historians on the subject. For instance, see: Margaret M. Poloma, *The Charismatic Movement: Is There a New Pentecost?* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 8.

response to music, especially music that breaks with traditional structures.⁹¹ These styles are of course rooted in African-American experience, and they dovetail with an Ellisonian “Afro-Modernity.”

Right on Stage

“I’m a street-walking cheetah with a heart full of napalm/
I’m the runaway son of the nuclear A-bomb”

--Iggy Pop

If, as I’ve claimed, the postwar period in the United States has been one musically dominated by both “Sonic Afro-Modernity” and by the use of electronic instruments, then the final component of the sonic experience of the contemporary era has been the wild expressions of emotional physicality as exhibited by both performers and audience. What, after all, is T-Bone Walker’s guitar theatrics, Illinois Jacquet’s bar-walking honks, Elvis Presley’s hip twitch, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis’ multiple-appendage flailings, Otis Redding’s confessional prostrations, Jimi Hendrix’s 6-string sacrifices, or Iggy Pop’s demonic possessions but a series of “fits” performed onstage for the benefit of an audience itself erupting into excesses of embodied passion? Isn’t this catharsis and not “disorder,” thrumming to an electrical current pulsing through wires, amplifiers, and microphones?

Perhaps, but it’s catharsis as temporary rupture rather than climactic resolution. Paroxysm’s conclusion isn’t the satisfaction of cognitive rationalization—it’s exhaustion.

⁹¹ For instance, see: Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 76–93.

(Emile Durkheim concluded the same more than a century ago, as quoted in Chapter 1.) Furthermore, as the stage is lowered, the proscenium is breached, and the sound source shifts from the uni-directionality of the acoustic “big band” to the omni-directional resonances of an amplified sound system, isn’t the passivity of the “spectacle” supplanted by a multiplicity of intersubjective relations, where listening is feeling, in both its emotional and visceral senses? (Which, as I noted, Alexander Weheliye considers an “alternative subjectivity” to the one proposed by psychoanalysis.) Or as Lester Bangs would have it, “The point of all of this, of course, is that hideous racket is *liberating*: to ‘go with the flow,’ as Jerry Brown put it in his book *Thoughts* (City Lights, 1975), is always a wiser course of action than planting oneself directly in the path of the Seventh Avenue express, itself best portrayed on record by “Sister Ray” and the first New York Dolls album.”⁹²

There is also something a little queer about the whole thing. And although I’m using “queer” to mean other than hetero-normative, I don’t think it’s an accident when, in his essay “Of Pop and Pies and Fun: A Program for Mass Liberation in the Form of a Stooges Review, or, Who’s the Fool” from 1970, Lester Bangs confesses that, “Well, I never grew out of liking noise, from Little Richard to Cecil Taylor to John Cage to the Stooges [...].”⁹³ The artists he mentions are, if not self-identified homosexuals, then to a person other-than-straight, e.g. “queer.” Eleven years later, this same general sentiment

⁹² Bangs, “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” 302.

⁹³ Lester Bangs, “Of Pop and Pies and Fun: A Program for Mass Liberation in the Form of a Stooges Review, or, Who’s the Fool?”, in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, ed. Greil Marcus, 41 (New York: Vintage, 1988).

seeps through his writing in “A Reasonable Guide,” where, as I just quoted, he specifically cites a song whose lyrics deal with transvestite/transsexual prostitution and a band famous for onstage cross-dressing. This is despite the fact that, particularly in his reviews of David Bowie, Bangs displayed an open homophobia during the same period.⁹⁴

Bangs’ conflicted relationship to homosexuality is especially apparent in his relationship to Lou Reed, author of “Sister Ray.” Although Bangs valorizes Reed’s Velvet Underground era lyrical evocations of the seedy sexual underbelly of Warhol’s Factory and the bohemian street culture that occupied both its center and periphery, he calls into question Reed’s sexualized performances and public persona during the 1970s, disavowing what he perceived to be the Bowie-esque chic affectation of bisexuality.⁹⁵ Of course, Reed has confided to interviewers and biographers that he received electro-shock therapy in his teens at the insistence of his parents for “homosexual tendencies.”⁹⁶ Or, as Todd Haynes would have it in his film *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), a lyrical re-imagining of the glam-rock era where Lou Reed and Iggy Pop are conflated in the character “Curt Wild,” “According to legend when Curt was thirteen he was caught by his mother in the family loo in the service of his older brother, then promptly shipped off for eighteen months of electric shock treatment. Doctors guaranteed the treatment would ‘fry the fairy

⁹⁴ Lester Bangs, “Head Comes Home to Roost,” in *The Bowie Companion*, ed. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman (New York: Da Capo, 1996), 130-32.

⁹⁵ See the “Slaying the Father” section of: Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, 165-202.

⁹⁶ Two sources for this widely circulated anecdote are: Victor Bockris, *Uptight: The Velvet Underground Story*, (London: Omnibus Press, 2002), 16; Peter Doggett, *Lou Reed: Growing up in Public* (London: Omnibus Press, 1995), 18.

clean out of him.’ But all it did was make him bonkers every time he heard electric guitar.”⁹⁷

I want to be careful not to draw equivalency between “homosexual” and “queer” here, though I think that the linkage between electronic music and rock performance and “queerness” is a poignant one. In a broadly metaphorical sense, I think that electronic sounds are “queer” in that electricity engages in a multiplicity of couplings in the grid system (crudely reduced in vernacular language to “AC/DC” being slang for bisexuality). This itself is perhaps analogous to Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of a “body without organs” wherein, as per their counter-reading of Freud’s interpretation of the schizophrenic Judge Schreber and the writings of another victim of electro-shock treatment, Antonin Artaud, the body under the conditions of modernity becomes a site of simultaneous machinic connections.⁹⁸ As a slightly less theoretical explanation, we might consider the sexual energy of a crowd directed at a single focal point (the onstage performer) within a rapidly disintegrating set of performance boundaries and enveloped in sound, or perhaps the sexual energy produced by the frenzy of bodies in motion, resulting not in the nice, clean, All-American couples dancing of *American Bandstand*, but a gender-ambivalent static charge of crowd-friction—the Gwede of the Saturday night ritual. That these performance conditions attracted the sexually marginalized seems rather obvious.

⁹⁷ This transcription of dialog is my own. For the film in question, see: *Velvet Goldmine*, DVD, directed by Todd Haynes (1998; Croydon, Surrey, UK: Miramax, 1998).

⁹⁸ Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 9-16.

Of course, all of these claims are dependent on a “live” performance. This is one of the reasons that Bangs contrasts the music that he valorizes (including *Nuggets*-style psychedelia) with *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and subsequent developments in studio-based “art rock.” This album and the “progressive rock” that followed in its wake trafficked in pretentious “classicisms” that threatened a return to the dominance of a rational cognition of sound.⁹⁹ (The image conjured up in imagining a listener to *Sgt. Pepper* or Pink Floyd is a solitary individual with headphones tethered to a hi-fi stereo, rather than a frenetic crowd, and the Beatles famously stopped performing live.) What differentiates Bangs’ construction of a counter-canon from what he calls “folk/*Sgt. Pepper* virus”¹⁰⁰ is that—in “Of Pop and Pies and Fun” he’s ultimately talking about the Stooges’ *Funhouse*—the document (in this case the LP record) implies the embodied presence of the performance, and vice versa. Despite many of the recordings Bangs cites being studio-based, there is an assumed verisimilitude between them and a given performance. Bangs’ counter-canon is also premised, I would argue, on certain music or certain musicians’ ability to create sonic situations where the “conniption” of ecstatic catharsis becomes possible.

This might explain Lester Bangs’ 1969 *Rolling Stone* review of the MC5’s live album, *Kick Out the Jams*—his first professional publication—and his subsequent retraction of his initial position regarding the band. Written while he still resided in his suburban California hometown, Bangs unfavorably compares the MC5 to bands that were

⁹⁹ Bangs, “Of Pop and Pies and Fun,” 41–44.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

already a part of his burgeoning counter-canon (? and the Mysterians, Blue Cheer, etc.) partially because he mistrusts the “hype” propagated by the very magazine he was writing for—which is clear from the written text—and partially, I think, because he’d never seen the band perform live.¹⁰¹ The absence of this type of sonic experience with regards to the MC5 is rectified when he moves to Detroit a year or so later. For Bangs, *Kick Out the Jams* began to take on gris-gris qualities at this point, which led him to formulate a rough version of the dialectic of verisimilitude outlined above, resulting in a revised appraisal of the band.¹⁰²

Because we cannot physically access the performances of either the body artists or the bands constituting Bangs’ counter-canon, we must rely on imaginative contextualizations of performance conditions and/or a kind of hierarchy of mediums as related to a simulation of presence in the extant documentation. Thus, conceptualizing the Spanish Castle nightclub in Seattle is important to understanding “Louie Louie,” but the filmed documents of the Velvet Underground and the Exploding Plastic Inevitable shows and the “Quine Tapes” of bootlegged live sets, the local Detroit television footage of the MC5 and the Stooges and recordings like *Kick Out the Jams* and *Metallic K.O.*, respectively, assume greater significance in this framework.

One final thing worth noting is that there is a relative absence of female artists in this account. This is not to say that there were or are no female participant-actors in these

¹⁰¹ Lester Bangs, “The MC5: Kick Out the Jams,” in *Mainlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, ed. John Morthland, 33-4 (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).

¹⁰² Lester Bangs, “James Taylor Marked for Death,” in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, ed. Greil Marcus, 56n-58n (New York: Vintage, 1988).

transformations, but that their visibility was extremely circumscribed until the 1970s, though both Amelia Jones and Lester Bangs are careful to cite precedents from the 1960s. (Bangs dealt with feminism a bit better than he did homosexuality.) This is also perhaps because the stakes were different for male artists who foregrounded their bodies as the site of performance experience, since opening up the male body as a visible entity to surveil, as a man-machine of sonic dissemination, as flesh to caress and wound, and as an irrational being engaged in emotional physicality was, in a sense, a “becoming-feminine” or a “queering,” whereas for female artists embodiment was a given, albeit in an objectified rather than subject-forming configuration. It should also be noted, however, that although both rock music and the art world have tended to reinforce male privilege—as with the majority of American culture—there are significant examples in which this isn’t entirely the case. For instance, even though men have led most ecstatic religious movements, female participants have shaped and driven the modes of expression within them in powerful ways. This is especially apparent from footage of Pentecostal services where the mostly female congregation is in the throes of physical and audible worship. Thus, it’s important to retain a context for the dynamics of power in any analysis of sonic experience, in keeping with other historiographic trends and imperatives.

PART 2: FIRST RUMBLINGS, OR, A NOISE “CANON”

“I need that record! I want it now now now...”

--Tweeds

Returning to Lester Bangs, at first glance the latter half of “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise” is, after all the provocative suggestions embedded in the introductory paragraphs, nothing more than a rock-crit cliché: a “top ten” list. The ten entries consist first of naming specific recordings by the Stooges, the Germs, DNA, Yoko Ono, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, Jad Fair, Lou Reed, Blue Cheer, and Mars, with the Folkways-released field recording *The Sounds of the Junkyard* tossed in for good measure. Each entry is followed by a short descriptive paragraph, most of which contain multiple references to additional recordings. As I noted earlier in this chapter, when coupled with the recordings Bangs cites in the introductory paragraphs, this amounts to a sizeable duration of listening time. However, after amassing the recordings mentioned in this essay, I have been able to identify some loose categories that Bangs invokes as part of his conception of “horrible noise.”

The first of these could be described as the constellation of *musique concrète*, “tape music,” and found sound/field recordings. *Musique concrète* is often used to refer specifically to the work of Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry in France after WWII, but here I’m combining it with “tape music” and found sound/field recordings because all of these subcategories of music were contingent on the existence of magnetic tape as a compositional tool. In the case of *musique concrète*, compositions consist of “acousmatic” sounds, or sounds that are heard but whose source isn’t visible, and may involve anything from typical musical instruments and vocalizations to virtually anything that produces a sonority and that can be recorded and deployed in the composition. As a

result, *musique concrète* isn't beholden to traditional Western musical definitions of melody, harmony, or rhythm.¹⁰³

Somewhat similarly, “tape music” describes the use of magnetic tape as a compositional tool, though in this case most of the sound sources come from early synthesizers or homemade tone generators. Splicing and overdubbing are necessary, because the effort needed to produce tones on these devices typically resulted in fairly simple sonic arrays, and post-production allowed for additive, layered complexity. This type of music is closely associated with the San Francisco Tape Music Center during the 1960s,¹⁰⁴ though earlier examples like Louis and Bebe Barron (who composed *The Forbidden Planet* score) exist.

Found sound/field recordings represent a conceptual challenge. On the one hand, they can be construed as straightforward documents of sonic events, and perhaps also a potential “building block” for *musique concrète*. On the other hand, it is possible to listen to a “found” recording or a field document as “musical” *in itself*, which is what Bangs implies in his description of *The Sounds of the Junkyard*. This type of recorded document is also sometimes defined as “phonography” in specialized circles; as Yitzchak Dumiel explains, “It is distinct from recording in general only to the extent that the capture of sound is privileged over its production. This bias reflects an attempt to discover rather than invent.”¹⁰⁵ The ethnomusicologist Steven Feld reached a similar

¹⁰³ Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music*, 77–112.

¹⁰⁴ David W. Bernstein, ed., *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ Yitzchak Dumiel, “What Is Phonography?,” *Phonography.org*, n.d., <http://phonography.org/whatis.htm>.

conclusion in his first book, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, regarding a “primitive” tribe in Papua New Guinea whose musicking is inextricable from environmental sound.¹⁰⁶

Within “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” the examples that Bangs cites that might fall into this loose grouping are Pere Ubu’s “Sentimental Journey,” John Cage’s “Variations II,” *The Sounds of the Junkyard*, Lou Reed’s *Metal Machine Music*, Iannis Xenakis’ *Electro-Acoustic Music*, and, perhaps, the very specific elements that Bangs describes in the early music of the Stooges—which is, so far as I can tell, undocumented by recordings of any type.

Although there are only three different references to what might be described as “outsider” music in “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” this category also constitutes an integral part of Bangs’ counter-canon. I would specifically cite Bang’s passing reference to Wild Man Fischer in the introduction, as well as the Jad Fair EP *The Zombies of Mora-Tau* and an allusion to the album *Half Gentlemen/Not Beasts* from Fair’s band Half Japanese, both released in 1980. Regarding Jad Fair’s solo EP, Bangs states that:

Jad Fair is a half of ½ Japanese, and with his brother David made a ½ J. *three-record set* that I still haven’t been able to listen to all the way through. A previous EP containing such highlights as “School of Love” was great, but this might be even better for the way Jad integrates atonal air-raid guitar with sub-Jonathan Richman white-burba-infantilismus vocals that as they natter tunelessly onward actually tell little stories (“And I said, ‘Dr. Frankenstein, you must die,’

¹⁰⁶ Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

and I shot him” and you hear the gun KABLOOIE!). This may be a whole new songwriting genre [...].¹⁰⁷

It has been noted that the lyrical subjects of Jad Fair and Half Japanese songs are of one of two types: “white-burba-infantilismus” love songs, and “monster songs” that focus on the campy “creature feature” and sci-fi staples of the ‘50s. The obsessive concentration on these topics is complemented by an idiosyncratic approach to musicianship; David Fair has written a description of how the brothers play guitar that is worth quoting in full for its expression ideas about convivial musicking:

I taught myself to play guitar. It's incredibly easy when you understand the science of it. The skinny strings play the high sounds, and the fat strings play the low sounds. If you put your finger on the string farther out by the tuning end it makes a lower sound. If you want to play fast, move your hand fast and if you want to play slower move your hand slower. That's all there is to it. You can learn the names of notes and how to make chords that other people use, but that's pretty limiting. Even if you took a few years and learned all the chords you'd still have a limited number of options. If you ignore the chords your options are infinite and you can master guitar playing in one day.

Traditionally, guitars have a fat string on the top and they get skinnier and skinnier as they go down. But the thing to remember is it's your guitar and you can put whatever you want on it. I like to put six different sized strings on it because that gives the most variety, but my brother used to put all of the same thickness on so he wouldn't have so much to worry about. Whatever string he hit had to be the right one because they were all the same.

Tuning the guitar is kind of a ridiculous notion. If you have to wind the tuning pegs to just a certain place, that implies that every other place would be wrong. But that's absurd. How could it be wrong? It's your guitar and you're the one playing it. It's completely up to you to decide how it should sound. In fact I don't tune by the sound at all. I wind the strings until they're all about the same tightness. I highly recommend electric guitars for a couple of reasons. First of all they don't depend on body resonating for the sound so it doesn't matter if you

¹⁰⁷ Bangs, “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” 303-4.

paint them. And also, if you put all the knobs on your amplifier on 10 you can get a much higher reaction to effort ratio with an electric guitar than you can with an acoustic. Just a tiny tap on the strings can rattle your windows, and when you slam the strings, with your amp on 10, you can strip the paint off the walls.

The first guitar I bought was a Silvertone. Later I bought a Fender Telecaster, but it really doesn't matter what kind you buy as long as the tuning pegs are on the end of the neck where they belong. A few years back someone came out with a guitar that tunes at the other end. I've never tried one. I guess they sound alright but they look ridiculous and I imagine you'd feel pretty foolish holding one. That would affect your playing. The idea isn't to feel foolish. The idea is to put a pick in one hand and a guitar in the other and with a tiny movement rule the world.¹⁰⁸

David Fair's disavowal of musical convention, like Wild Man Fischer's schizoid warblings, locate their music in what has come to be called "outsider music." Although the term "outsider music" did not exist when Bangs penned "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise," Bangs clearly intuited the existence of such music, and the term "outsider art" was then current. "Outsider art" is a phrase coined by Roger Cardinal in 1972 as a synonym for the French *art brut*, used by the artist Jean Dubuffet to describe the visual art of people residing in insane asylums, which he promoted.¹⁰⁹ (This critical move is deeply imbedded within pre-existing modernist impulses, where creativity is often linked to mental states that are out of the ordinary, frequently evoked by mental illness or drug use.) Since the 1970s, the definition of "outsider art" has been expanded to include more specific descriptors like "naïve," "folk," and "visionary" forms of artistic production, each of which locates the artist being described somewhere out of the mainstream of formal education and/or commodity culture. Each of these categorizations has been used to refer specifically to visual art.

¹⁰⁸ Half Japanese, *Half Japanese - Greatest Hits* (Safe House, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ Roger Cardinal, *Outsider Art* (Littlehampton, UK: Littlehampton Book Services Ltd, 1972).

Irwin Chusid claims to have coined the term “outsider music” in 1996, and his publication of *Songs in the Key of Z: The Curious World of Outsider Music* in 2000 represents the key text to the organization of the idea of “outsider” to refer to certain kinds of music, even if the author considers inclusion to be “nebulous.” However, it’s clear from Chusid’s examples in the book that, despite their not being an agreed-upon term for this kind of music before the mid-1990s, the music in question certainly existed—as did fans of particular performers or of the peculiar sensibilities that unite any set of examples. I would certainly include Lester Bangs in this group. Chusid does attempt to carve an explanation for why “outsider music” exists in the introduction to *Songs in the Key of Z*:

Outsider music sometimes develops naturally. In other cases, it could be the product of damaged DNA, psychotic seizures, or alien abduction. Perhaps medical malpractice, incarceration, or simple drug-fry triggers its evolution. Maybe shrapnel in the head. Possession by the devil—or submission to Jesus Christ. Chalk it up to communal upbringing or bad beer. There’s no universal formula.¹¹⁰

Irwin Chusid also repeatedly insists that, in addition to a lack of musical conventionality and a social marginalization, “outsider music” is characterized by general lack of self-awareness on the part of performers as well as a concurrent sincerity or earnestness, much like the cult music of Father Yod’s group. Consequently, he also includes Wild Man Fischer, but he leaves out Fischer’s initial patron Frank Zappa because, although his music exists outside of the mainstream, Zappa was unquestionably

¹¹⁰ Irwin Chusid, *Songs in the Key of Z: The Curious Universe of Outsider Music* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2000), x.

aware of his own musical and social context. The valorization of “outsider” musicians carries with it an inherent danger of exploitation, particularly when the artist in question is mentally unstable—a fact that Chusid is well aware of, although he’s less skillful in avoiding intentional fallacies or the tendency to eschew judgment, traits he shares with a lot of writing on “trash” cinema, another species of “outsider” media. Nonetheless, there is a kind of humor to much “outsider music,” not so much due to an artist’s variable “impairments,” but because of the startling novelty of the forms and content of the music itself. As a disruption in the sonic terrain of pop same-ness, it’s understandable why Lester Bangs would highlight it in his “Reasonable Guide.” It’s also the most extreme form of the “primitivist ethos” described in Chapter 1.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, Bangs had a complex and conflicted relationship to jazz, particularly its avant-garde wing. Still, it should be no surprise that examples of avant-garde jazz pop up in “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise.” Although there are no specific entries for a jazz musician or a particular recording, there are numerous references to individual musicians and their respective styles. Consequently, perhaps it’s most helpful to compare where Bangs places these musicians in relationship to where a more typical jazz historian would situate them.

Although the references to them are not sequential, it’s significant that Bangs highlights both Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman—two musicians that are often placed at opposite ends of the avant-garde spectrum of the 1960s. Bangs mentions Miles Davis and his composition “Rated X” in the same list as Iannis Xenakis, *Metal Machine Music*, and the second Public Image Limited album. These recordings collectively tend towards

a gratingly metallic techno-process, and are permeated by a suffocating sense of dread and paranoia. This is pretty much in keeping with the Miles Davis' aesthetic in the early 1970s. Conversely, Bangs describes the chaotic bluesiness of Ornette Coleman by stating "he played 'skronk' (the word sounds like something straight from his bell) if anybody did."¹¹¹ Davis and Coleman are usually contrasted in jazz history as the two key figures in divergent strains of '60s jazz, best explained as stemming from the "modal" playing on Davis' *Kind of Blue* and the "free" playing on Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, both from 1959. Loosely understood, these two documents eventually spawned the darkly moody jazz/rock electric "fusion" music of the late 1970s, and the increasingly raucous squalling sound of saxophones that dominated the other side of the avant-garde, respectively. Bangs doesn't spend much time discussing other "fusion" music, but he does cite Albert Ayler, whose ecstatic melodic repetitions and wide-open vibrato on the saxophone ironically created the rhythmic platform for his drummer, Sunny Murray, to experiment with percussion beyond a timekeeping function, and who Bangs also mentions.

Although not generally considered a "jazz" musician per se, it is worth highlighting that the specific track that Bangs mentions in his "Top Ten" list by the Stooges is chosen from their only album to feature a saxophonist, Steve Mackay. Bangs describes the track, "L.A. Blues," as follows:

After assaulting us for half an hour with six songs including the bulleted-boar tenor sax of Steve Mackay, the Ann Arbor visionaries let the whole thing explode

¹¹¹ Bangs, "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise," 303.

and melt all over itself in this arrhythmic 1970 offering, replete with igneous feedback blankets, Mackay blowing his brains out and disappearing forever, and the man called pop mewling, snarling, sighing, and licking his paws.¹¹²

What I hope is clear from this passage is the same general point that I tried to make earlier in this chapter regarding both Lester Bangs' and the "proto-punk" bands' relationship to avant-garde jazz. It's possible to speculate that Mackay's saxophone playing—alongside the MC5's covers of Sun Ra songs and Bangs' writings on jazz—provided an entry point for rock fans into the world of avant-garde jazz, as did Miles Davis' incorporation of rock and funk elements into his music after 1969. However, it's also necessary to assert that, in a lot of ways, this cultural transaction wasn't so much about an African-American musical style as access to another source of liberating noisiness.

Of course, as Fred Moten has pointed out, 1960s avant-garde jazz and its connection to Black Nationalist politics was an extremely masculine and heterosexual domain.¹¹³ Yet, in Lester Bangs' reference to Patty Waters' 1965 recording of "Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair" from her ESP-Disk album *Sings*, there is an acknowledge of a strong—if less visible—feminist component to the jazz avant-garde. Although Bangs does not cite her, it is worth noting that Abbey Lincoln had pioneered some of the same kinds of a-musical glossolalia techniques on the civil-rights oriented 1960 album, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, which the white Patty Waters used a few years later. Although these two musicians operated within the jazz idiom,

¹¹² Ibid., 302-3.

¹¹³ Fred Moten, *In The Break: The Aesthetics Of The Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Bangs' grouping in "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise" attempts to transcend this classification by constructing what might be called an aesthetics of feminist howling. He links Waters' recording to Yoko Ono's 1970 "Don't Worry Kyoko, Mummy's Only Looking for a Hand in the Snow" and again to the *Teenage Jesus and the Jerks* EP from 1980, featuring the vocals of No Waver Lydia Lunch, of which Bangs states, "nothing more deathly shrill has ever been recorded." This linkage effectively sketches a three-decade genealogy of assertive female wails, which itself complicates an increasing technologization of the body, as demonstrated in the preceding sections.

Although the references to "heavy metal" in "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise" consist of only one example (Blue Cheer's 1968 *Vincebus Eruptus*) it's important both because Bangs' contribution to the discourse on heavy metal is underrepresented in the critical literature on the subject, and because it disrupts the genre-centric readings that I critiqued earlier in Bernard Gendron's *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*. In this essay, Lester Bangs wonders "whether heavy metal and punk are essentially the same sound."¹¹⁴ This isn't an idle question. Although the earliest understanding of what constituted "heavy metal" veered between inclusion and exclusion of bands that are today considered un-metal (like Grand Funk Railroad), the basic formulation for both metal and its concurrent critical invention punk was that they were new, "whitened" strains of blues. In punk's case, the blues' chord progressions were simplified and sped up. In metal's, they were expanded—if not necessarily slowed down—and fattened with an exponential number of amplifiers until Muddy Waters' guitar rumble became Tony

¹¹⁴ Bangs, "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise," 304.

Iommi's wall of groaning sludge. The punk and metal intersected repeatedly in the years since, and much like the case of Rhys Chatham's impression of the Ramones, with the right set of ears certain strains of metal can sound less like an example of a genre and more like another noisy sensibility; for example, the early recordings of Metallica and most of Slayer's output.

The blurring of genre and subgenre distinctions is also key to Lester Bangs' presentation of what might typically be called "proto-punk," "punk," and "post-punk" in "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise." Nor is Bangs geographically discriminate, rarely if ever acknowledging the home locales of the performers he lists or drawing distinctions between, say, "New York Punk" and "British Punk." Instead, Bangs hits a few of the highlights from these conventional categories, whether in "proto-punk" (Velvet Underground, Stooges, New York Dolls, Pere Ubu), "punk" (Patti Smith, the Clash, the Germs), or "post-punk" (Public Image Limited, DNA, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, the Contortions, Mars). This is a curious position to take for someone who's been credited with the co- "invention" of punk.

But it's also an understandable one when we start thinking about music less as a series discrete sonic texts affixed to narrow contexts than as a component of listening as subjective experience. In all probability, Lester Bangs decided to write an essay about one of his favorite topics, and then went to his record shelves to pick out which pieces of vinyl best fit his vision. The original release dates for these records span a substantial number of years, but because of technology, Bangs is able to access their sonic information in 1981 as if they were all "new." This is a good example of what I was

trying to describe near the beginning of this chapter as a simultaneous range of potential choices with regards to listening. In Chapter 1, I described a similar phenomenon in the Byrds' "Eight Miles High" as constituting a particular trans-historical, global psychogeography; "simultaneity" is a further conceptual refinement of the same issue. The idea of "simultaneity" is a heavily modified borrowing from Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, where McLuhan posits that modern technology has diminished the physical resistance of geographic space insofar as what happens in one part of the world can almost immediately be known in a distant region because of machine-systems like the telegraph, telephone, radio, television and the internet.¹¹⁵

My use of "simultaneity" can also be understood as a counter-reading of Jacques Attali's chapter "Repeating" in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* wherein the author identifies the 20th century—the era of mechanical reproduction of sound—as one of "repetition," not so much because he believes the last century's music to be repetitious, but because he argues that the reproduction of sound allows for a stockpiling of sonic information that exceeds the temporal limits of human use and, ultimately, life-span.¹¹⁶ This idea, which Attali introduced in 1979, shouldn't be far-fetched to anyone who's ever been privy to a hard drive full of mp3 files. And it's certainly true that the potential for stockpiling the "past" in its sonic form has intensified with the introduction of each new

¹¹⁵ Marshall McLuhan and Lewis H. Lapham, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994).

¹¹⁶ This issue recurs throughout: Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

playback system. But whereas Attali finds this historical circumstance a crippling example of ideological control, read through Bangs' perspective in "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise" it's possible to understand such access as potentially liberating. I think this is true for a couple of reasons. First, Attali is being too general. For someone of my age and background, the continued presence of "classic rock" on the radio, as film soundtrack, and as a "must-have" portion of a collection of recorded music parallels the hegemony baby boomers have on political and economic institutions. But on the other hand, listening to Albert Ayler blow "The Truth is Marching in" isn't exactly the same thing as *The Big Chill* soundtrack. There's also the fact that not *everything* is always simultaneously available to music listener-consumers; lots of pop music is, quite literally, disposed of, but then again some people are always digging out forgotten bits of disruptive noisiness.¹¹⁷ This last element is also related to my second point contra-Attali: what's salvaged out of the musical past can sometimes serve a pedagogical purpose—the fundamental argument of Chapter 1. We often learn by example, and perhaps in Bangs' case repeatedly insisting on the significance of one-off garage band thugs or anti-social hipsters like Lou Reed wasn't entirely about emulation of a pre-defined aesthetic ("punk") as a shout of "Listen! You too can make a huge goddamn racket!" It may not make you feel "good," but it might make you feel alive. Which is pretty much what Lester Bangs is getting at when he writes of the band Mars' 1980 EP that, "This is not

¹¹⁷ This issue was of primary concern to recently deceased popular music scholar and archivist David Sanjek, and my thoughts here are indebted to a conversation with him that took place when he came to the University of Texas to deliver a talk on this subject.

‘industrial¹¹⁸’ but *human* music, and so what if said humans sound like they’re in a bad way? You are too.”

It’s unsurprising that Lester Bangs devotes three of his ten entries in “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise” to the No Wave bands DNA, Teenage Jesus, and Mars in this context. First, because as a New Yorker at the point of its writing, these recordings and the bands that made them would have been fresh in his memory and he would have been able to witness the live performances that make possible the dialectic of verisimilitude. Second, the music in question was created in the same listening environment as Bangs’ writing. When he favorably compares DNA drummer Ikue Mori to Sunny Murray, it’s not necessarily a judgment made in abstraction; Ikue Mori may well of learned to play drums by listening to Murray, since sixties free jazz was popular with many No Wave musicians, as was Yoko Ono’s howling, which Bangs links to Lydia Lunch and her band Teenage Jesus. But even if neither is biographically accurate, what I’ve described as the process of unmaking genre is the opposite of one posited by *The Anxiety of Influence*.

In Harold Bloom’s construction, poets can become hamstrung by internal or external pressure—anxiety—to create work that is comparable or exceeds the poetry of their precursors.¹¹⁹ After Bakhtin, I would argue that this is because poetry is generally created in ossified genres. According to Bakhtin’s (dia)logic, epics, lyrics, elegies et al. are “more or less fixed pre-existing forms into which one can then pour artistic

¹¹⁸ Bangs, “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” 303.

¹¹⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

experience.”¹²⁰ Bakhtin contrasts this literary condition to that of the novel, which he considers an “unhardened” generic form. Throughout the essay “Epic and Novel,” Bakhtin provides examples of how the novel has incorporated new elements into the form—“novel” elements, to be exact—as a means of revitalization. (We might also think of it as literary creolization.) I’ve taken this sidelong glance into literary criticism for two reasons. First, to reiterate one more time a point that I’ve made again and again in this chapter: when we think about music in generic terms we lose a great deal of the potential of sonic experience. And second, Bakhtin’s ideas about “novelty” are pertinent to the next chapter. The hardening of genre is one reason why Birmingham-style dialectics of resistance and domination prove so disheartening over the long run; “punk” *could* have formed the basis of a counter-hegemonic discourse, but it was eventually ideologically co-opted as “new wave” and marketed by major labels.¹²¹ It’s even worse to consider, in these terms, latter-day manifestations of “punk” as mostly a niche-marketing category of records, clothing, and hair care products.¹²² Not to mention the fact that the codification of genre and a concurrent process of fanbase formation all-too-frequently results in exclusionary listening habits and antagonistic social beliefs; that kind of identification is inherently conservative and reactionary, which might partially explain punk’s flirtation with fascism, an example of the more destructive aspects of the Petwo aesthetic. But *sensibilities* are much more fluid and dynamic. No Wave, as I’ve claimed before, is

¹²⁰ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 3.

¹²¹ For example: Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1990).

¹²² And again: Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

primarily a sensibility and not a genre—one facet of the permanent underground. And it's especially important to refrain from considering it an offshoot or subgenre of "punk," even as a "post-" manifestation. If we read Lester Bangs' "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise" from the perspective I've been elaborating *and* take it seriously, then even "punk" proper can be listened to as a variation in the spectrum of noisy sensibilities, sensibilities which provide the potential for ecstatic fits of emotional physicality which connect us to others by extending ourselves and which attune us to grid even while our electrified bodies erupt from a sensory overload that shorts the usual social circuits, setting us free for a moment to which we can return.

PART 3: NOISE IS ALL THE REST

Towards a Definition of "Noise"

"Your ears will always lead you right, but you must know why."

--Anton Webern

Up to this point, I've scrupulously avoided providing a definition of what precisely "noise" is. This hasn't been an oversight, even if it's probably inevitable that the word itself and its numerous variants have popped up in discussion. Rather, what I've tried to do in the preceding pages of this chapter has been to illustrate first how a particular—if conventionally genre-centric—narrative of popular music history assumes one kind of listening, break that assumption down to a phenomenological, social alternative, and then begin reconstructing the act of listening along more specific lines; this process parallels the deconstruction of Euro-centric epistemology in Chapter 1 in order to construct my counter-narrative of musicking's organizational principles. To

accomplish the goal of this chapter, I've "ventriloquized" the writing of Lester Bangs a great deal; he may be a bozo, but he's not a dummy—his writing "talks" back. Even though my own perspective and Bangs' don't always agree, they intersect often enough in "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise" that I've been happy to rummage around and comment on his theories and analyses, as brief as they are, not leastways because Lester Bangs the writer is both an important commentator on the musicking of the 1970s and 1980s—the primary subject of the fourth chapter and a concern throughout this dissertation—and because Lester Bangs the person was a part of that same era. As a consequence of this intersection of perspectives and subjective preferences, the examples provided have tended to be "noisy" at a pretty basic level: they're music that's loud and obnoxious.

"Noise" as a concept, however, is richer and more complicated than that, and it's at this point that I part ways with Lester Bangs, whose critical elaboration on this idea doesn't go much further than what's available in the passages I've quoted. Although the quantity of available literature on the topic is relatively small and tends to repeat examples, the idea of "noise" is central to understanding the sonic dimensions of the 20th century because, regardless of whose definition of "noise" is being used, at a fundamental level "noise" forces us to consider the problem of "music" versus "non-music." As I'll demonstrate, the distinction is a lot less stable than it may seem. This problematic follows logically, I believe, from my attempts to demarcate a potential mode of listening that is in contrast to the often *a priori* arguments of historians of popular music. For instance, one could propose that, "All bands that played at CBGBs were punk bands/The

Talking Heads played at CBGBs/The Talking Heads are a punk band” and make a “true” argument without ever having to actually *listen* to the music in question; rooting the argument in listening would be to convert to *a posteriori* reasoning, as I’ve tried to do with the “embodied” perspective I described. My characterization here is obviously a simplification, but while I don’t want to suggest that scholars like Bernard Gendron actually don’t bother to listen to what they’re writing about, in some ways these types of arguments render listening moot—an all-too-common problem in music history and criticism. (I’m not sure I agree that the Talking Heads are punk band, but then again I don’t think the generic concept “punk” is very useful to begin with.) By framing the argument in embodied experience, I hope to have avoided that kind of pitfall, though I’ve probably opened myself up to several more. Nevertheless, a phenomenologically grounded approach does have the benefit of being capable of dealing with both the general and the specific.¹²³ As I noted above, “noise” as a concept opens up the question of “music” versus “non-music.” Considering the invocations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze, it’s not without some irony that I would suggest, still in a “logical” mode, that noise constitutes a “subjective parametric” of the sonic. I might also suggest that, almost homonymous, it’s also a kind of “perimeter” of experience—an individual *and* a social one.

This isn’t mere linguistic coyness. If we understand “parametric” as the measurement (or, really, relationship generally) between a variable that is fixed and independent, and the other coordinates that are expressed, with “fixed” being true only

¹²³ This is sometimes described as the problem of “qualia” in philosophy.

for the subject in a specific moment of perception, then we are talking about an orientation point for sonic experience. Furthermore, if we take “perimeter” to mean boundary in the terms of cognizable experience, understand that boundary to be “noise,” and then assume that the boundary line is the orientation point—the “subjective parameter”—then noise becomes absolutely necessary to understanding what it is to listen. Put more simply, consider some of the technical definitions of noise in the Oxford English Dictionary: “random or irregular fluctuations or disturbances which are not part of a signal,” or, “distortions or additions which interfere with the transfer of information.” Although these definitions refer to empirically verifiable characteristics of sound data, as I noted in relation to the electric guitar, these characteristics can be *subjectively* desirable or pleasurable. The positive reception of such “noise” is both historically and culturally bounded, and highly personal. Imagine, for instance, the “noisiest” thing that could possibly be heard sixty years ago in the United States. Is it “musical”? Or is it industrial? If we’re sticking mainly to sounds that at least a few people considered “musical,” then what are the differences in that boundary line I’ve described between someone in a nightclub on the South side of Chicago, someone living in Levittown, and someone at Black Mountain College? Or, phrased differently, between Muddy Waters, Doris Day, and John Cage?

The Varieties of Noise Experience

“I do not write experimental music. My experimenting is done before I write the music. Afterward it is the listener who must experiment.”

--Edgard Varese

The last reference to John Cage is hardly accidental. Cage's influence looms so large in writings on the concept "noise" and what might be called, variously, experimental/avant-garde/minimalist/post-minimalist music in the postwar U.S. that more than a few authors have name-checked him in their subtitles and almost all make reference to David Tudor's "performance" of his piece 4'33" in 1952 at Black Mountain College in North Carolina.¹²⁴ I draw attention to Tudor's performance because, notoriously, this piece involved him opening and closing a piano at three prescribed intervals (adding up to four minutes, thirty-three seconds) without sounding a tone on the keyboard. The previous year, Cage had visited Harvard University to use their anechoic chamber. Since the late 1940s, he had been interested in producing a work that consisted entirely of silence. However, after entering the chamber, Cage heard sounds in the supposedly soundproof room.¹²⁵ He stated, "I heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation."¹²⁶ This discovery led to 4'33". More exactly, Cage's realization that there was no such thing as absolute "silence" in terms of human perception allowed for him to conceive of a performance where, despite the audience expectations toward the pianist, the "performance" was actually composed of *any* other sound audible, something those in attendance would

¹²⁴ For example: Paul Hegarty, *Noise Music: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*; Salome Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

¹²⁵ Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 117.

¹²⁶ John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1961), 8.

presumably have been attentive towards, given the awkwardness. However, as Cage related years later in an interview with Richard Kostelanetz:

They missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began patterning the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out.¹²⁷

Still, despite the fact that music historians have identified several potential “precursors” to Cage’s “silent” piece, it has been consistently held up as a watershed moment in both composition and listening, not leastways because Cage consistently wrapped his explanation of the piece with references to Japanese Zen Buddhism and the Chinese *I Ching*—explanations that even to the non-spiritually minded emphasized the element of “chance” that drove this and other Cage compositions from the 1950s until his death some forty years later. (This is sometimes described as “aleatoric.”) Having elements of a “composition” left to chance was profoundly influential on the generation of composers that followed in Cage’s wake, particularly La Monte Young, who himself had an enormous impact on the musical culture of New York City starting in the 1960s and continuing with younger acolytes like Rhys Chatham in the 1970s. La Monte Young and his peers in the 1960s, particularly the Fluxus artists George Brecht and Yoko Ono, differed with Cage in their use of “chance” in some important ways, however.¹²⁸

John Cage was quite fond of the American Transcendentalist writers, especially Henry David Thoreau, whose chapter “Silence” in *Walden* provides some interesting

¹²⁷ Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1988), 70.

¹²⁸ For a more thorough discussion of Cage’s influence, see: Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*.

parallels to Cage's own work. However, Cage's own methods are probably closer to Thoreau's friend and mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, especially his essay "Nature." In that essay, Emerson constructs a narratorial voice—reinforced by specific images—that is essentially a disembodied eye surveying the entire "natural" world that falls under its gaze.¹²⁹ Cage's *4'33"* doesn't suggest a disembodiment. But it and Cage's subsequent ideological insistence on a particular kind of "chance" does mask the fact that neither was nearly as neutral or Zen-like as the author and the composer might've claimed. John Cage may have used the *I Ching*, but his was the hand that always threw the dice. This is quite different from something like La Monte Young's *X for Henry Flynt* (1960) where a loud sound is to be repeated *x* number of times.¹³⁰ In that case, the sound to be "played" and the duration of the piece are entirely up to the performer. This effectively creates a social relationship in the composition between composer, performer, and audience—not that these are discrete categories. By contrast, Cage mystifies—in several senses—the process of sound production as "natural" by obfuscating his own agency. Still, it should be acknowledged that without Cage's epistemological breakthrough in 1952, his predecessors would not have been likely to investigate new forms of art/social relations like the "Happening" of Allan Kaprow¹³¹ or the "event score" of the Fluxus artists, including La Monte Young.¹³² Both blur the line between music and performance art.

¹²⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, *Nature/Walking* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

¹³⁰ Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 11.

¹³¹ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life: Expanded Edition*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

¹³² Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, 95.

Nor would much of the musicking of the 1970s and 1980s underground be conceivable without them.

John Cage's major contribution to musicking can be boiled down to popularizing Edgard Varese's notion that music is nothing more nor less than "organized sound," even when determined by "chance." The idea of music as "organized sound" breaks free of some of the axiomatic criteria—which were nonetheless constantly under revision—that had permeated discourse about music at least since the 18th century.¹³³ There are several noteworthy complications with this idea. The first is embedded in Cage's genesis story regarding *4'33"*; he went to Harvard, he did an "experiment," and he created a work that was based on the results of that "experiment." While there were certainly composers who have worked more strictly along "scientific method" lines—at Bell Laboratories, the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, and elsewhere—the idea that music can be "experimental" is extremely problematic. This is due in part to the fact that the conclusions of compositional experiments are generally worked out prior to performance, like in the anechoic chamber. But it is also due to the fact that an "experimental" piece of music generally derives from a composer's personal epiphany, and that the work in question is a recreation (or manipulation, if you're less forgiving) of the conditions of that epiphany for the audience. In the case of Cage's *4'33"*, that aspect of the "experimental" work failed, according to his own admission—the audience didn't understand his "unknown tongue." In a way, despite the convention that a piece of music

¹³³ Richard Franko Goldman, "Varèse: *Ionisation*; *Density 21.5*; *Intégrales*; *Octandre*; *Hyperprism*; *Poème Electronique*. Instrumentalists, cond. Robert Craft. Columbia MS 6146 (stereo)," in "Reviews of Records," *Musical Quarterly* 47, no. 1. (January 1961), 133–34.

deemed “experimental” is a “finished” work, it’s also possible to think of them—perhaps more productively—as etudes or studies rather than opuses, since the discovery of different characteristics of music are discovered anew by listening and performing students through that category of works. This idea is itself reinforced by the postwar avant-garde’s tendency to compose pieces dealing with singular musical concepts.

The other complication that arises from the re-definition of music as “organized sound” is determining what is meant by both “sound” and “organized.” In the following short sections, I address the major characteristics of sound. In these sections, I will attempt to navigate both the historical/general and the perceptual/individual with reference to the claim I made earlier regarding “noise” as the subjective parametric and boundary line of listening habits. These acoustic properties are extremely important for understanding how the permanent underground used sound, and I interpolate the concepts detailed below with specific performers in Chapter 4; here, the focus is on their *potential* for noise.

Pitch

“And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleased”

--William Cowper

Pitch is the fundamental frequency of a sounded tone. According to most research, the range of audible frequencies perceptible by young, healthy humans is between 20 Hz and 20,000 Hz. Tones at frequencies below that register are referred to as “infrasound,” which can occasionally be perceived at a high volume but are more felt

than heard, and the ability to perceive frequencies in the upper register decreases with age. An 88-key piano tuned in equal temperament can produce tones that range from 27 Hz to approximately 4,200 Hz—approximately the same spectrum where the ability to distinguish between pitches is greatest. The piano’s range of frequencies also contains all standard Western acoustic instruments; this is one of the primary reasons why it has been used as what I’d call the “compositional console” since the 1700s. Each part of a complex musical composition in equal temperament can be tested on a piano prior to the arrangement of a whole piece. Individuals with “perfect pitch” (correctly termed “absolute pitch”) have the ability to recreate a tone without an external reference. This ability is culturally defined—Westerners more readily distinguish tones in equal temperament—though it is largely a matter of cognition and not of physiology: people with perfect pitch don’t have “better ears.”

The relationship between pitch and noise is strongly determined by technology, both in terms of machines—the ones that make the instruments and their components, and the instruments themselves—and more broadly defined forms of technology like alternate tuning systems.¹³⁴ Although not noise per se, instrument manufacturers in the 19th century caused “pitch inflation” within the equal temperament system. There have been various movements to standardize the frequency values of musical notes in equal temperament since, the tuning system itself does not rely on absolute pitch values but an equal series of ratios within an interval, which is an octave, generally. Because of the desire of virtuosos to produce “brighter” sounds in concert music as a means of

¹³⁴ J. Murray Barbour, *Tuning and Temperament: A Historical Survey* (Boston: Dover Publications, 2004).

distinguishing their performances, the value of notes shifted upward in frequency over several decades in Europe during the 19th century.¹³⁵ Despite the fact that the ability to perceive this shift was necessarily based on a very good auditory memory—and an example of the sonic conflict between the synchronic and the diachronic—it does reveal the in-objective nature of the dominant mode of musical composition in the Western world.

The noise potential of pitch comes in two different but related forms. The first is the production of tones outside of the piano's frequency range at the high or low end. The second is to utilize frequencies found within that range but not at intervals used by the equal temperament system. Prior to the era of electronic music, human perception of frequencies outside of the range of the piano was fairly rare; at the low range, infrasound occurs in relation to disastrous weather and geologic events, though some very large pipe organs can produce tones lower than 20 Hz.¹³⁶ There are no historical examples at the higher frequencies. Since the advent of electronic music, frequencies above and below the piano's range have become increasingly possible, though they tend to coincide with negative social relations.¹³⁷ For instance, there is a device marketed in the U.S. as "The Mosquito" which emits a continuous tone of 17,000 Hz at 108 decibels.¹³⁸ (An actual mosquito produces tones around 200 Hz.) This tone is inaudible to most people over the

¹³⁵ Physics Today, "Pitch Standards, Playback Speeds, and Metronome Marks", February 23, 2001, <http://blogs.physicstoday.org/thedayside/2011/02/pitch-standards-and-playback-speeds.html>.

¹³⁶ Gerry Vassilatos, "Deadly Sounds - Dr. Vladimir Gavreau," *Lost Science*, 1999, <http://www.hbci.com/~wenonah/history/gavreau.htm>.

¹³⁷ John Geirland, "The Sound of Silence," *Wired (Issue 14.12)*, December 2006, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.12/silence.html>.

¹³⁸ "Mosquito Security Devices | Compound Security Systems", n.d., <http://www.compoundsecurity.co.uk/security-information/mosquito-devices>.

age of 25, and the device is used to discourage loitering by young people. At the other end, the 2002 film *Irreversible* employs a tone in the 20-30 Hz range for its first thirty minutes, during which a murder and a rape scene take place. This tone, created by Thomas Bangalter of the French electronic music group Daft Punk is intentionally used to make viewers uncomfortable, a human physiological response to such frequencies.

Roughly within the conventional range of frequencies in the Western world but adhering to different rules are tuning systems that can be described as “microtonal,” and sometimes use a system called “just intonation.” Composers who have used these types of systems constitute a veritable “who’s who” of 20th century “experimental” music, including in the U.S. alone Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, Edgard Varese, Harry Partch, Alvin Lucier, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young, and outside the U.S. both Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez, among many others. In order to produce microtones, composers have radically retuned pianos, used electronic tone generators, appropriated instruments from other cultures, and constructed their own non-standardized instruments—all manner of making the tool suit the purpose, really.¹³⁹ Outside of the realm of “experimental” or “art” music, African-American music can be described as microtonal in terms of the use of “flattened” third, fifth, and seventh steps in the scale—the “blue notes”—that explain both the unconventional performance techniques of jazz pianists, and the gradual displacement of the piano in certain strains of jazz by brass and

¹³⁹ Barbour, *Tuning and Temperament*.

wind instruments.¹⁴⁰ The guitar in blues, jazz, and rock music has also been malleable in this regard, especially its electrified version, as Robert Palmer noted.¹⁴¹ In particular, the use of a glass or metal “slide” to shift the pitch is a common method of producing microtones on a guitar. Each of these is strikingly convivial.

Loudness

"...a great noise started up in my ears, a noise that was triple or rather quadruple, compounded of a low and muffled humming, a softer murmuring as though of running water, a piercing whistle..."

--Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Loudness is the perceived volume/amplitude of a sound as articulated through air pressure on the ear.¹⁴² Objectively, volume is expressed by the logarithmic decibel system. Most basically, this means that 10 dB is 10 times louder than 1 dB. The human threshold for volume is 120 dB, above which permanent hearing loss is immanent. Decibel levels below 120 but over 78 dB can also cause hearing damage if they are long-term but not continuous; for example, rock musicians frequently suffer from tinnitus.¹⁴³ The means to produce volumes at these levels did not exist prior to the modern era, even if rare natural phenomena like volcano eruption can produce sounds at this level. Although electronic amplification makes it possible to produce musical sound at a very high volume—hence the reverence for the “Marshall Stack”—the loudest sounds

¹⁴⁰ Tuning is discussed at numerous points in: Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008).

¹⁴¹ Palmer, “The Church of the Sonic Guitar.”

¹⁴² Institute of American National Standards, *American National Standard Acoustical Terminology* (Washington, D.C.: American National Standards Institute, 1995).

¹⁴³ “Dangerous Decibels”, n.d., <http://www.dangerousdecibels.org/>.

encountered by people are generally industrial. Since Luigi Russolo and the Italian Futurists were writing about the “Art of Noises” prior to widespread amplification in the 1930s, this might explain their valorization of the sounds of machines and weapons and their attempts to capitalize on the sonic potential of these by constructing homemade instruments, which they called “Intonarumori.”¹⁴⁴ Similarly, it also helps explain the usage of airplane propellers and sirens in Georges Antheil’s *Ballet Mecanique*—discussed at length in the next chapter. Shockwaves from explosions and the report from rifle fire are well above the level at which hearing can be damaged, as are jet engines. Even typical urban sounds like automobile traffic and construction (especially jackhammers) will damage hearing over the long run.¹⁴⁵

Loudness can be understood as type of noise in two contradictory ways. The first is more obvious: because volumes can be produced at what were once extraordinary levels, it has become possible to destroy part of the human body through sound alone. This is the unspoken truth behind the postwar musical cult of amplification, perhaps itself a peculiar kind of “death drive.”¹⁴⁶ Starting in the 1960s, larger and larger collections of amplifiers and loudspeakers were assembled in order to facilitate Petwo rituals of sonic violence. This is especially true of the louder strains of rock music, punk and heavy metal, but it is also true of Jamaican soundsystem culture, where the frequencies are so

¹⁴⁴ Kirby, *Futurist Performance*, 166-74.

¹⁴⁵ “Dangerous Decibels.”

¹⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

low as to be nearly geologic, and the singer “chants down Babylon.”¹⁴⁷ (It’s also no coincidence that Lester Bangs lists Blue Cheer in “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise”; according to legend, they were the loudest band in the world during their heyday.) In either case, the effect is a disruption of the human body’s usual sensory functions, even if for cathartic reasons. And in a way, that disruption becomes permanent with the onset of tinnitus, a condition that predates the age of electronic amplification and industrial noise (see the Rousseau epigraph) but whose modern affliction is a kind of interior brand on the bodies of the devoted.

Conversely, and somewhat paradoxically, quiet sounds have also become a form of noise. Because the obsession with amplification—a strongly but not totally masculine characteristic—has had such a wide ranging effect on musical habits, and perhaps because of widespread hearing damage, musical performers who insist on producing sounds at low decibels are disruptive to listening practice. This sonic device is used most frequently by female performers and sexual minorities and should not simply be equated with acoustic “folk” music, though that can be one type of example. Particularly, I would cite Nico’s performances with the Velvet Underground and her solo records, the female “punk” bands The Raincoats (U.K.) and Y Pants (U.S.), and some of cellist Arthur Russell’s work. Y Pants used children’s toy instruments (pianos, drums, ukuleles), and were an important part of the No Wave period, as was Arthur Russell. To understand how this sort of phenomena works, try imagining watching one of *The Godfather* films.

¹⁴⁷ For examples, see: Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*; Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 2007).

The dialog in those movies is mixed very low (and the characters often mumble) so that you have to almost physically *lean in* to hear what is going on. Kurt Cobain describes the psychoacoustic effect I'm identifying here best in his liner notes to a reissue of the first Raincoats album:

When I listen to The Raincoats I feel as if I'm a stowaway in an attic, violating and in the dark. Rather than listening to them I feel like I'm listening in on them. We're together in the same old house and I have to be completely still or they will hear me spying from above and, if I get caught - everything will be ruined because it's their thing.

They're playing their music for themselves. It's not as sacred as wire-tapping a Buddhist monk's telephone or something because if The Raincoats really did catch me, they would probably just ask me if I wanted some tea. I would comply, then they would finish playing their songs and I would say thank you very much for making me feel good.¹⁴⁸

Of course, “loud” and “soft” aren’t necessarily discrete modes of musical production, as evidenced by a trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s to deploy widely oscillating loud/soft dynamics, characteristic of the members of the Pixies, P.J. Harvey, and Kurt Cobain’s own band, Nirvana. Consequently, the noise capabilities of loudness are quite varied in practice.

Timbre

“Satan Oscillate My Metallic Sonatas”

--Anonymous

Timbre is a kind of catchall term in acoustics for a variety of subjective phenomena. At a basic level, it is constituted by a tone’s “quality” or “color,” which

¹⁴⁸ Kurt Cobain, liner notes, *The Raincoats* (Geffen, 1997).

allows for differentiation between instruments sounding the same pitch. In practical listening terms, the developed ability to distinguish timbre is why it is possible to pick out Miles Davis' trumpet from John Coltrane's tenor saxophone, and Coltrane from "Cannonball" Adderley's alto on *Kind of Blue*. In formal musicology, it's related to overtones, which are resonant frequencies above the fundamental frequency (pitch). Both of these are important areas of interest for psychoacoustics, a field devoted to the study of the subjective perception of sound.¹⁴⁹ The emphasis on subjectivity is significant, as timbre is—objectively, at least—the particular “defects” attributable to a source of tone generation. That is to say, timbre is the quality of a sound that extends beyond an absolute, precise pitch value. Some of these “defects” are in fact highly prized, even among adherents of pre-electronic music. For instance, violins and other string instruments made by Antonio Stradivari are thought to have a particular “tone color,” though the ability of listeners to discern this quality is probably out of proportion to their fame.

Despite timbre being an aspect of sound production that exists across all spectrums of style and form, in most conventional music a nuanced ear is needed to perceive anything unique about the tones being emitted by an instrument. However, radical techniques can be used to foreground timbral effects. This is where timbre becomes a form of noise. Like the microtonal composers' convivial use of pitch organization, there are many tool-to-fit-the-job applications of timbre. Methods for

¹⁴⁹ For a standard textbook on psychoacoustics, see: Brian C.J. Moore, ed., *Hearing* (Waltham, MA: Academic Press, 1995).

producing extreme timbres include a variety of “extended techniques” for brass, woodwind, string, and percussive instruments, unconventional vocalizations, and electronic tone generation. Extended instrumental techniques can have their own conventions (like plucking violin strings rather than bowing them) or they can be highly idiosyncratic, as with Link Wray slashing open the speaker cone to his guitar amplifier for “Rumble.” Examples of extended techniques can be cited for virtually any instrument, with Henry Cowell’s and John Cage’s “prepared pianos,” John Coltrane’s search for extra-hard saxophone reeds and unusual mouthpieces, Miles Davis’ employment of pick-up mics and wah-wah pedals on his trumpet, Sunny Murray’s use of knitting needles for drumsticks, and Jimmy Page’s bowing of his electric guitar being iconic examples. In vocalization, where timbre is a key to both speech and singing the constraints to expansion of techniques are primarily physiological. Falsettos, growls and grunts, glossolalia, screams that fragment pitch, culturally specific methods like “throat singing,” and, sometimes, just having a voice that isn’t very “good” are all types of timbral noise, as well as examples of what Roland Barthes called “the grain of the voice,” which he described as the presence of the singer’s body in the vocal sounds.¹⁵⁰

Electronic music is a special case. Music made by synthesizers that mimics acoustic instruments is often derided as “cheesy,” a conclusion that is based on the timbral dis-identification of the waveform patterns in the tone. In other words, they lack “defects.” On the other hand, early modular synthesizers like the unique devices created by Louis and Bebe Barron and Raymond Scott, as well as the commercial synths

¹⁵⁰ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

developed by Robert Moog and Donald Buchla, used oscillators, filters, amplifiers, and modulators to control electronic signals resulted in the production of tones that not only avoided mimesis as it is usually understood, but whose timbres were so startling new to human ears that for some time they were relegated to science fiction film soundtracks and commercial novelty recordings.¹⁵¹

Rhythm

“Work to the rhythm/
Live to the rhythm/
Love to the rhythm/
Slave to the rhythm”

--Grace Jones

Rhythm is the experience of time, or rather the perception of its experience.¹⁵² Rhythms can be described as “noise” insofar as their timbral qualities consist of elements outside of musical conventions (think of the Roland 303 basslines in the Acid House genre of dance music) or because the rhythms themselves are perceived as irregular. In each example, the perception of “normal” time is disrupted. In the first case, rhythms are perceived as “noise” because the demarcation of a tone as a singular point in time exceeds that point, seeping backwards into the past and bleeding over into the now-present, effects which by convention are described as “attack” and “decay” because musical time, understood as a temporal “unfolding,” is assumed to be linear and forward-

¹⁵¹ Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music*; Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco, *Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesizer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹⁵² Justin London, *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

moving. This may be true enough from the perspective of reading the written score or even “empirically” via a mechanical metric (like a playback device), but the perceiving subject experiences music as both presence and memory. A tone sounded a moment ago is remembered even as a new tone is sounded; listening can therefore concurrently constitute both a *noetic* and *noematic* process of consciousness—rooted in perception—since sounds are both immediately perceived, and perceived objects in contemplation.¹⁵³ This perceptual consciousness belies the empiricist insistence of time as a linear progression, and constitutes a form of what Henri Bergson called “duration.”¹⁵⁴ It’s also the sonic version of reconciliation of the past and present discussed in Chapter 1. This perceptual feature of sound is most audible in unconventional forms of music that employ an extended technique in performance or an electronically processed sound source in production that prolong the attack or decay of a tone, though, ironically, clipping off the “natural” attack and decay features of tone generation in post-production is similarly disruptive.

When the experience of a rhythm as “noise” can be accredited to a perceived irregularity (including approximately regular patterns foreign to the subject) we are dealing with two slightly different problems. In the first, the aversion to perceived irregularity in rhythm is one sign of a subsuming of consciousness to Euro-centric rationalism. This is one reason why jazz and other forms of African-American music

¹⁵³ My use of *noema* and *nous* is derived from: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁵⁴ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1921).

have been descriptively linked to barbarism, carnality, zoomorphism, and psycho/sociopathy, even by commentators ostensibly sympathetic to the music in question. This complex of descriptor concepts is symptomatic of the second problem announced by the perception of rhythmic irregularities: such a perception is an encounter with the “Other.” In many of these types of encounters, the Other can be conceived along cultural or racial/ethnic lines. The history of American popular music is littered with examples of this type, from the multitude of sonic clashes between African-American and Euro-American sensibilities to the cornucopia of “exotic” (read: non-American English speaking) styles that have provided much of the novelty to the popular music of the United States. The persistence of the derogatory types of analogies I listed above, combined with the popularity of music that asserts a particular kind of “blackness” or makes available to listeners foreign sounds, constitute a dialectic of desire and repulsion that’s at the heart of a relationship between self and Other. But the Other can also be conceived along more individuated lines, as in the rhythmic sensibility of Erik Satie or Thelonious Monk, who were both considered odd or unconventional, even among musicians of their same social background. In both cases, the perception of irregularity is a confrontation with a consciousness that is not our own, which may be articulated in either imagined collective attributes or along very personal lines. The “noise” of rhythms is therefore ultimately located in their disruption of the transmission of a universalized idealism or solipsism, spinning the dial across the spectrum to intersubjectivity and revealing *dasein* as a plurality of “becoming(s).”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

The “Symphonic”

“We recognize the worldwide existence of music, but all those things we acknowledge as musical facts are not necessarily categorized as thus by everybody.”

--Jean-Jacque Nattiez

Several years ago, I was working for a company that raised sunken barges and towboats on the river system of the United States. This particular company used a series of flat barges with cranes and A-frames attached to them. The A-frames had large cast iron block-and-tackle systems, with about five loops of 1 ½” wire rope constituting the tackle. The company also employed divers who used dry suits (picture *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*) to locate and rig the sunken barges and towboats for salvage. The divers were connected to the surface by a line around which was wrapped an intercom cable and an air hose, which were controlled by the support crew on a small “diving flat.” During the time that I was working there, we happened to be doing a job at almost precisely the junction where the Mississippi and the Ohio rivers meet. That area receives a heavy flow of commercial marine traffic. One day, while I was sitting on the diving flat managing the communication with the diver below, a storm began to blow. The wake from the passing towboats whose large diesel turbines were audible was amplified by the wind, causing the diving flat to bounce against a barge, resulting in a percussive effect a bit like a giant tympani. The wind also began to “sing” through the block-and-tackle, creating an impromptu Aeolian harp. All the while, the intercom was emitting static and I could hear the air pump cranking out its supply to the diver.

I tell this story because, for me, it constituted an epiphany on par with Cage’s in the anechoic chamber. As a precocious undergrad working a summer job, I was already

familiar with the story of *4'33"*, but having never experienced the piece in person, my understanding was primarily intellectual and rational: "Oh, so silence *doesn't* really exist." What I'd missed in my second-hand encounter wasn't that sounds are ever present, it was that the incidental sounds that Cage was trying to open up an audience's ears to can be perceived in relation to other, concurrent sounds. Now, I think that the sounds that I heard—not exactly "natural," but perhaps "environmental"—were effectively random. But within my range of hearing and ability to identify the audio sources, or "sound localization," I definitely perceived them as related phenomena.

The word that sprang to my mind while I perceived this sonic information was "symphonic." I didn't happen to have a dictionary at the time, so the idea that random noises were equivalent to orchestral music struck me as funny. But sitting down with the Oxford English Dictionary once I returned to land, I found a definition that roughly correlated to what had spontaneously occurred to me: "Harmony of sound, esp. of musical sounds," which still implies something too pretty for what I was hearing, but it's close enough. Generally speaking, harmony consists of "pleasant" sonic effects, of consonance of tone. But music—and here I'm going to be loose enough with that word to include random sounds heard as such by myself—also relies on dissonance to give a collection of sounds style and meaning, a relationship within a musical piece that is analogous to the way noise operates in terms of sound overall.

If you can recall the experience of listening to music as a child or have listened to children's music as an adult, one of the things that stands out is that it mostly lacks structural complexity or spatiality—it's all "up front." This isn't a criticism. I can recall

roughly when I began to pick out specific instruments in a piece of music, and that wasn't until I was well beyond the Raffi stage. The ability to isolate sonic elements comes before the ability to hear them in relation to each other. Those sonic elements are constituted by pitch, loudness, timbre, and rhythm, each of which can also be understood dialectically with noise, which in turn are experienced along historical-subjective lines. Nattiez thus gets it half right; the italicized emphasis on "we" assumes a concordance of opinion on the music/non-music criteria that, as I noted with Cage, is no longer stable *within* Western musical discourse, even if it never was with respect to other idioms.¹⁵⁶ The causes for this de-stabilization are various but ultimately come down to what Harold Rosenberg—who was talking mostly about painting, but it works for music as well—termed America's modern "tradition of the new."¹⁵⁷

The "Spatial"

"Space is the place! Space is the place!"

--Sun Ra

Harold Rosenberg's coinage of the phrase "the tradition of the new" was in relation to Abstract Expressionism, a primarily American style of visual art whose heyday was roughly between the late 1940s to the early 1960s. That period also coincides with span between the pre-history of Cage's *4'33"* and the advent of important followers like La Monte Young. It also parallels significant developments in sound

¹⁵⁶ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 61.

¹⁵⁷ Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition Of The New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994).

playback technology, especially the concept of “hi-fidelity,” stereo speaker systems, and very early examples of what today we’d call “surround sound.”

Although early stereo, or, more precisely, stereophonic technology dates back to 1881, when Clement Ader developed a stereo version of the telephone, most of the basic developments took place in the two decades prior to WWII.¹⁵⁸ Sound researchers at the EMI record label in Britain and Bell Laboratories in the United States made major strides in reproducing sound in two or more audio channels through paired speakers (stereo always works in multiples of two) in order to create the sensation of perceiving sound from multiple directions in the 1930s, with the hope that stereophonic sound was more akin to “natural” human hearing than the uni-directional reproductions of monophonic audio systems.¹⁵⁹ The first major use of this technology was in Walt Disney’s 1940 film, *Fantasia*.¹⁶⁰ Over the next two decades, early, consumer-based versions of stereo systems were marketed to specialized audiences, including perhaps Ralph Ellison.

Stereophonic sound was one element in a wider range of technology-based listening and consuming habits that emerged in the 1950s that are generally grouped under the heading “high fidelity” or “hi-fi.” Alongside stereophonic sounds, other elements fundamental to this grouping are reel-to-reel magnetic tape (which was first confiscated from Nazi Germany and allowed for advances in both recording and

¹⁵⁸ Scientific American, “The Telephone at the Paris Opera”, December 31, 1881, <http://earlyradiohistory.us/1881opr.htm>.

¹⁵⁹ “Sound Waves ‘Rock’ Carnegie Hall as ‘Enhanced Music’ is Played”, *The New York Times* (April 10, 1940), 25; Martin Shankleman, “Early Stereo Recordings Restored,” *Bbc News*, August 1, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/7537782.stm>.

¹⁶⁰ Andrew R. Boone, “Mickey Mouse Goes Classical,” *Popular Science* (January 1941), 65–67.

playback),¹⁶¹ 33 1/3 rpm Long Play (LP) microgroove vinyl records which had substantially better sound quality and playback length for prestige genres like classical music than shellac 78 rpm records,¹⁶² and improved amplifier designs (which could operate at higher wattages and with increased frequency precision).¹⁶³ Aside from these elements, microphone quality also rapidly improved during the postwar era, attributable in part to the confiscation of—again—German technologies like the Neumann CMV3 condenser mic.¹⁶⁴ All of these coalesced in the work of Emory Cook, a sound engineer and record label owner whose Cook Records catalog is now the property of the Smithsonian Institute’s Smithsonian-Folkways imprint. Cook’s label specialized in “live” stereo recordings of calypso—a novelty style to American audiences in the 1950s, and Cook’s recordings were especially important for allowing the performer to be documented in context, e.g. at Carnival—as well as various hi-fi “test records” that concurrently showed off the capabilities of the owner’s audio system as well as disseminating field recordings of environmental sounds, a facet of Cook’s legacy that links him directly to Folkways’ *The Sounds of the Junk Yard*, which is also now available through the Smithsonian.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Steven Schoenherr, “The History of Magnetic Recording”, November 5, 2002, <http://homepage.mac.com/oldtownman/recording/magnetic4.html>.

¹⁶² Martin Mayer, "Fifty Thousand Sides Ago: The First Days of the Lp," *High Fidelity Magazine* (January 1958).

¹⁶³ David Hafler and Herbert I. Keroes, “An Ultra-Linear Amplifier,” *Audio Engineering*, November 1951, <http://www.keith-snook.info/Articles-for-the-Web/Ultra-linear-Hafler%26Keroes/UL-H%26K-Nov1951.html>.

¹⁶⁴ George Petersen, “Neumann Celebrates 75 Years,” *Mix*, December 1, 2003, http://www.mixonline.com/mag/audio_neumann_celebrates_years_2/.

¹⁶⁵ Much of the information regarding Emory Cook is based on my private collection of Cook Records releases, but additional information can be found at: Smithsonian Institute, “Emory and Martha Cook

Somewhat similar to the very early desire to have a sound cinema by developers like Thomas Edison, “surround sound” was conceived of in the late 1930s, though in practice it wouldn’t find expression for another fifteen or so years. Initially, Disney had wanted to do a version of Rimsky Korsakov’s “Flight of the Bumblebee” where the perceptual effect would be of a bee flying around the theater as the sound shifted from channel to channel and speaker to speaker. Finding this impractical, they scrapped this section of *Fantasia* and settled for stereophonic sound in the rest of the film.¹⁶⁶ Surround sound differs from stereophonic sound primarily by the addition of a vertical dimension to sound reproduction. With a typical home stereo, speakers are arranged on what is essentially a flat horizontal plane. Surround sound includes speakers positioned above and below the audience. Karlheinz Stockhausen’s 1950s pieces *Gesang der Junglinge* and *Kontakte* (both performed at the state-owned WDR studios) are two important early examples of this reproduction technique, and I will be returning to the former in the next chapter with regards to its use of the human voice.

However, perhaps the two most significant uses of surround sound systems in terms of effects on later developments are the ones carried out in San Francisco and Brussels at the end of the 1950s. In Brussels, the architect Le Corbusier, the composer and architect Iannis Xenakis, and the composer Edgard Varese collaborated on the creation of the Philips Pavilion for Expo ‘58, commissioned by the Dutch Philips electronics company. The Pavilion boasted over 400 speakers inside of a special

Collection,” *Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage*, n.d., http://www.folklife.si.edu/archives_resources/collections/cook.aspx.

¹⁶⁶ Tomlinson Holman, *Surround Sound, Second Edition: Up and Running* (Waltham, MA: Focal Press, 2007), 4.

architecturally and acoustically designed space. Corbusier and co-architect Xenakis used the speakers for the first performance of Varese's seminal *Poeme Electronique* as well as an early composition of Xenakis'. The Pavilion also included two sculptural objects as well as ambient lighting and video projectors.¹⁶⁷ In San Francisco, Jordan Belson and Henry Jacobs created a series of what they called "Vortex: Experiments in Sound and Light" performances at the Morrison Planetarium. These concerts included both new electronic works (including those by Stockhausen) as well as "found" collages of electronic and acoustic audio samples by Jacobs, often involving what today might be called "world music." Belson contributed to visual projections and the overall lighting scheme. These performances ran from 1957 to 1959.¹⁶⁸

Although the Vortex shows in some ways pre-figure the now-clichéd planetarium presentations of rock music in the 1970s, both they and the Philips Pavilion can also be seen as forerunners to the "total environment" of slightly later performances at the San Francisco Tape Music Center, "psychedelic" style of rock music and light shows at the San Francisco ballrooms and Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground's Exploding Plastic Inevitable events in the late 1960s, and, eventually, the discos and nightclubs of the 1970s and early 1980s, including the Paradise Garage and the Mudd Club. (Parallels can also be found in Kaprow's Happenings and the Fluxus performances.) Despite the fact that the technological know-how and financial resources needed to produce surround sound and total sensory environments of the type exemplified by Vortex and the Philips

¹⁶⁷ Marc Treib, *Space Calculated in Seconds* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁸ Henry Jacobs, liner notes, *Vortex - Henry Jacobs, Gordon Longfellow, David Talcott, William Loughborough* (Folkways, 1959).

Pavilion exceeded the means of most rock performers during the late 1950s and early 1960s it's also possible to understand the exponential increase in volume of amplified guitars at teenage clubs as crude attempts at "enveloping" their audiences in auditory experiences in a similar way; this issue is explored further in the brief discussion of the band Earth in Chapter 4, where I examine Kingsmen bassist and Spanish Castle veteran Norm Sundholm's development of the Sunn amplifier and it's importance to one type of underground musicking. Altogether, both these technological changes and the epistemological shift opened up by Cage's 4'33" allowed for extraordinary "novel" ways of hearing by mid-century.

CONCLUSION

Qualia ad maiores

The past is always a difficult thing to access; this is certainly the case of the sonic past. However, the resurrection of auditory experience involves particularly vexing problems. Foremost, this is a matter of "presentism." The historiography of the sonic must confront multiple levels of presentist concern. The first is that, prior to the advent of recording technology around the turn of the last century, there are few if any documents as to what was heard by those then living. The closest approximations come from either the notated scores of musical compositions and the transcription of vernacular speech by writers, or the descriptive passages of quotidian listening like the prized portion of *Walden*. The situation improves somewhat in the 20th century, for which a large—though by no means complete—documentation of American musical life exists.

In addition, phonographers, for various original intents, have preserved small portions of vernacular speech and environmental sounds. However, neither side of the divide between the eras of recorded sound provides easy access to the actual experience of listening in those now distant presents.

The false solutions to these problems are much easier to state than the veritable ones. Unlike Thoreau, we actually already know what's coming behind that steam engine, and Robert Johnson makes a different sort of sense to listeners raised on Muddy Waters and the Rolling Stones than he could have to juke joint patrons. We can't, of course, *stop* knowing these things. But we can start from a different point. The first thing to do is to ignore, for a moment, the "mixtape" of recordings that have become the highlights of America's sonic past, and look at them as events without an inevitable text. Instead of listening for the anticipated train coming through the wilderness, we should try and find the fragments that were there whole before the whistle shattered them in our consciousness. What does a creaking wagon wheel and a clopping horse sound like on a road in Concord in 1847? Framed differently, this might mean listening to Detroit before listening to Motown. I don't necessarily mean, as was suggested by Suzanne Smith, that we start finding audible linkages between Fordism and Berry Gordy; rather, we should be looking for the acoustics of an AM radio inside a '59 Fairlane.

This approach is probably profoundly unsatisfying for those accustomed to archival verification, because a pretense of objectivity is both impossible and useless. But even if the conclusions produced are fundamentally speculative, it doesn't negate the archive; it might even mean the preservation of details and clues previously considered

irrelevant. After all, how many musicologists or cultural historians have gone looking for the Ford Motor Company's ad copy about stereo options? Or listened to "Money" bounce off the dashboard and stream out the window? Such an approach parallels, as I noted in the introduction, Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of a synchronic linguistics. Facing difficulties similar to the ones identified here, de Saussure writes:

Generally speaking, static linguistics is much more difficult than historical linguistics. Facts of evolution are more concrete, and stir the imagination more readily: connexions link sequences of terms which are easily grasped. It is simple, and often entertaining even, to follow through a series of linguistic changes.¹⁶⁹

Perhaps perversely, it's clear in *Course in General Linguistics* that de Saussure prefers the more difficult route. Attempting to break with the dominance of philology, the linguist was looking for a way to get at how speakers of a given language actually spoke, down to the very physical formation of syllables in the mouth. But de Saussure's preference for the synchronic wasn't simply a disdain for the "entertainment" of what music fans might recognize as a variation on "spot the influence." He seems to have preferred this method primarily because it didn't already exist. Furthermore, despite the dissemination of his ideas via "structuralists" like the early Roland Barthes, a synchronic approach to the sonic needn't be a-historical; after all, as stated previously, we *can't* stop knowing the outcome from our own present. Nor should we equate the sonic with language per se, similar to the disavowal of psychoanalysis as adequate to the experience thereof.

¹⁶⁹ de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 99.

Approaching the sonic past synchronically then provides two benefits. The first is that it retains and redeems materials from the past that might otherwise go wasted. More importantly, however, it returns us again to the present and presentist thought, but with new ears and new ideas to accompany them. In this double move, the voiding of the old presentism leaves us the space to listen to our own time, to form new subjectivities, and to transform the social—if only temporarily—in fits of exuberant son

Chapter 3: A Catalog of Atrocities

INTRODUCTION

In the two preceding chapters, I have addressed the issues of social formation and the practice of listening. The purpose of this chapter is to further refine the framework for understanding the sociomusicological strategies available to the permanent underground starting in the early 1970s. To accomplish this, I address four broad topics: the problem of tradition, the concept of “novelty,” five specific musicking tools that are used across the permanent underground, and the place of theorist Jacques Attali in the theory of the permanent underground. The first part, “In the Tradition...” tackles the role of musical traditions in the formation of the permanent underground. This topic is both essential to the arguments of this dissertation, and one of the most difficult to assess succinctly. Tradition’s central role to the arguments presented thus far extends back to the discussion of nostalgia/modernism in Chapter 1; the reconciliation between past and present musicking is vital to understanding the musicians I profile in the next chapter. However, the concept of tradition also presents two major obstacles. The first is that traditions are both too diverse and too voluntarily assumed in the 20th century to be contained by ethnomusicological approaches. By this I mean that analyzing the traditions present in even a single performance like the Byrds’ “Eight Miles High” would entail a rundown of black and white rural music, the folk revival of the same, rock and roll, modern jazz, and Hindustani classical music, very little of which the members of the band have any direct ethnic or regional connections too. Examining all the possible

manifestations of alignment with traditions in the post-1960s underground, however partial those alignments might be, is beyond the scope of this project. The second obstacle is that however static any given tradition may appear—including Christopher Small’s arguments about European “folk” styles I cite in Chapter 1—there is inevitable change over time. Nevertheless, I do address these issues in more depth below.

The second part of this chapter, “The Now Sound From Way Back,” concerns the latter obstacle noted above. To help understand the problem of musicking’s change over time, I have re-purposed the idea of “novelty” in popular music into a more general theoretical concept. The importance of novelty was suggested to me by the recurrent appearance of references to novelty music—in the typical comic gimmick sense—in the literature on and recordings of The Residents, Smegma, and the various projects within the Los Angeles Free Music Society, the latter two profiled in the next chapter. I was also strongly influenced by the assertion that Stewart Home makes in *Cranked Up Really Loud: Genre Theory and Punk Rock* that punk music’s effective communication with audiences was dependent on its novel sonic elements.¹ While Home’s conception of punk is, as his title suggests, more limited than the musicking that I have been building a frame for thus far, Lester Bangs’ “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise” demonstrates that punk was also an important aspect in the development of the underground as a sensibility.²

¹ Stewart Home, *Cranked Up Really High - Genre Theory & Punk Rock* (Mesquite, TX: Codex Books, 1999).

² Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*.

In the third part of this chapter, “High Art and Hackery,” I continue one of the arguments made in the previous section: that novelty and the avant-garde serve a similar cultural function. Here, the focus extends back to the beginning of recorded music in the 20th century and moves up to the end of the 1960s. Through a set of five comparisons between a novelty song and an avant-garde composition, five strategies that are essential to understanding the permanent underground emerge. These are “mimesis,” “form,” “foreign music,” “vocal technique,” and “collage.” The specifics of what these strategies entail is expanded upon in the section, but their significance is due to the fact that they constitute the “traditions” of the underground, however mutable those are in practice. In the profiles of the final chapter, I triangulate the musicking practices of each subject via an aggregation of both these strategies and the concepts I addressed in Chapter 2, which included both broadly defined genres like punk and specific acoustic effects like loudness.

“The Future Sound of the Present,” the final part of this chapter, takes on Jacques Attali’s 1979 book, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Although Attali’s work has been cited a few times in previous chapters, he remains a figure to be reckoned with—much like Theodor Adorno—in any scholarship that addresses popular music, particularly the noisier end of the sonic spectrum.³ But more specifically, I am interested in the parallels and divergences between Attali’s claims in *Noise* about music’s “prophetic” function and my own establishment of coherences between musicking and

³ For example: Paul Hegarty, *Noise Music: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

social formation. Furthermore, Attali's conceptualization of a coming era of "Composition" bears some similarity to what I argue is the already-existing permanent underground. The critique of Attali serves as a bridge to the profiles of underground musicking in Chapter 4, which constitutes an expansion of the argument for The Residents at the end of the first chapter.

PART 1: IN THE TRADITION...

"One very important aspect of our contemporary musical culture - some might say the supremely important aspect - is its extension in the historical and geographical senses to a degree unknown in the past."

--George Crumb

In the Introduction, I noted that there were two major obstacles to understanding the role of tradition in the musicking of the permanent underground: the problem of diversity/voluntarism, and the problem of change. In this part of the chapter, those issues are refined into four topic areas. The first two topics split the issue of change over time into two related concerns: first, that tradition itself is an inevitable component of musicking (and, indeed, any cultural practice), and, second, that there is less *de facto* opposition between tradition and new developments in musicking than is sometimes claimed. The third topic is an expansion of the claim made in the Introduction to this chapter that the traditions invoked by the permanent underground are too diverse to be addressed in a comprehensive way. And, finally, I suggest why and how the voluntary alignment with multiple, heterogeneous traditions renders the idea of "tradition" in the singular an unsustainable assertion in the 20th century. The sum of these arguments—

each addressed rather briefly—provides the justification for why the remaining bulk of this chapter is devoted to novelty and avant-gardism; like “noise” in the preceding chapter, this is an argument of definition-by-limit, the outer boundaries of sociomusicological possibility providing clearer insight than the dominant, mainstream forms of musicking.

Forever Changes

“All things change, nothing is extinguished.”

--Ovid

The inevitability of change is a philosophical observation that comes up in Western thought from Heraclitus’ river to proverbs in every European country to the “wisdom” of the most recent self-help tomes to hit the shelves of airport bookstores, enticing jet-setting business people to “embrace the flux.” But even if this truism holds, it’s not necessarily the case the opposite isn’t also valid: tradition is inevitable. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci touched on this when he wrote in his *Prison Notebooks* that, “The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.”⁴ Gramsci’s observation can be interpreted at two levels.

The first (and easier) of these is an autobiographical accounting. As a scholar, I can point to intersections between my own life and the thoughts that I write in these

⁴ Antonio Gramsci, “The Study of Philosophy: Some Preliminary Points of Reference,” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers Co, 1971), 324.

pages, ranging from childhood encounters with the choral music of my great-grandmother's church to the copy of Gramsci's notebooks that I bought in a bookstore in Iowa City—where I went to college—a decade ago as influential in the product before you. At the second level, more effort was needed to extrapolate the way that the musicking of that church was rooted in the events at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1802, or that Gramsci became part of the theoretical repertoire of the Anglophone humanities because a friend of Stuart Hall's read him in the original Italian as a grad student in the '60s, bringing the philosopher to the attention of colleagues in Birmingham and, ultimately, to the United States.⁵

A similar process affected musicians in the 20th century. For example, jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman was inevitably influenced by his experiences in the marching band at a Fort Worth high school, his time spent in the *Silas Green from New Orleans* African-American minstrel show in the late 1940s, his time spent in the Los Angeles R&B scene in the '50s, and his studies of cutting-edge art music—all of which came together in *The Shape of Jazz to Come*.⁶ At the same time, paralleling the encounters in the late '30s/early '40s between African-American jazz musicians and Afro-Cuban drummers discussed in Chapter 1, Coleman's "inventory" expanded diachronically to include the "traditions before the tradition," e.g. the musicking of Africans. This is most fully expressed on his 1975 album, *Dancing in Your Head*, where the saxophonist collaborated with traditional Moroccan musicians from Joujouka. Or, to

⁵ For the particulars of this story, see: Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁶ P. N. Wilson, *Ornette Coleman: His Life and Music* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 1999).

cite another example, we might consider the way that Charles Ives incorporated Stephen Foster, village brass bands, and American Protestant songs into his complex, path breaking early 20th century compositions; undoubtedly, Ives was affected by his own father's work as a bandleader in Danbury, Connecticut, as well as studies of the hymnal history and minstrel legacy of American music.⁷

Tradition is inevitable because, according to Jacques Ranciere, through sonic habituation we “already know a mass of things [...] by listening and looking around [...] by observation and repetition, by being mistaken and correcting [...] errors.”⁸ There are very few who can credibly make an argument that their musicking is *sui generis*. (Jad and David Fair and other outsider artists perhaps come closest.) Ranciere calls this the act of “translation” between the known and the unknown, an “emancipatory practice” that bridges the distance of a “radical gulf” that separates present knowledge from the further reaches of Gramsci's inventory.⁹ This process is, in any case, a social one: whether through self-directed study of primary evidence or reliance on “expert” knowledge of the same. The former is facilitated by the availability of documents or experiences to the student seeking to deepen their understanding of their affinity for a tradition, whether they are ethnographic recordings, Coleman's anachronistic choice to join a minstrel troupe in the '40s, or innumerable jazz musicians' trips to Africa from the '50s forward. In the latter case, the importance of texts like Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones' *Blues People* or

⁷ Jan Swafford, *Charles Ives: A Life with Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

⁸ Jacques Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

Harry Partch's *The Genesis of a Music* on subsequent generations of musicians cannot be overstated.¹⁰ We are all inevitably a product of the historical process.

Ethno-Experimentalism

“Mixing one's wines may be a mistake, but old and new wisdom mix admirably.”
--Bertolt Brecht

At the same time that both tradition and change are inevitable, there is often less opposition between traditional and new music than is sometimes assumed. As discussed in Chapter 1, the idiosyncrasy of the case of white American country music in this case is instructive. While country is *de facto* syncretic musicking, it is *de jure* static as an aesthetic abstraction. This is in sharp contrast to both the other, openly creole musicking of the Americas *and* to the practices of many Asian and African traditional musicians in the 20th century. For example, even practitioners of highly formalized traditions like those of Hindustani classical found enough commonality with newer American musicking to form fruitful collaborations, like those between Pandit Pran Nath and La Monte Young. Similarly, the even more ancient Berber traditions of the musicians of Joujouka in Morocco were joined with the avant-garde jazz of Ornette Coleman, and the Malian musician Ali Farka Toure played duets with American blues guitarists Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder.¹¹ While it's reasonable to interrogate these interactions both for

¹⁰ Leroi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999); Harry Partch, *Genesis Of A Music: An Account Of A Creative Work, Its Roots, And Its Fulfillments* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979).

¹¹ While the Young/Nath and Coleman/Joujouka collaborations have been mentioned previously, Toure's work with Taj Mahal can be found on *The Source* (1993) and with Ry Cooder on *Talking Timbuktu* (1994).

exploitation by the American musicians—who come to foreign traditions with considerably greater cultural and financial power—or, as opportunistic moves to lucrative markets by the traditional musicians themselves, it’s also worth considering that the right of refusal is always open.¹² This right can manifest itself along both religious and aesthetic lines: the rites of Pan performed by the Master Musicians of Joujouka could be closed to outsiders based upon lack of belief, or someone like George Harrison could be ignored by Ravi Shankar for lacking sufficient skill on the sitar. But, in general, musicians are an omnivorous bunch, a fact reinforced by the frequency of itinerant lifestyles—even if listening experiences aren’t always translated to change in playing style.

Concurrently, the 20th century art music avant-garde has frequently found interest and drawn influence from traditional music from around the globe. Perhaps the earliest example of this was Claude Debussy’s 1889 encounter with Javanese gamelan music at the Paris Universal Exposition, which left him impressed by the tradition’s melodic percussion and symphonic atmosphere.¹³ Although this and other early encounters can be understood as a residual effect of colonialism in the same way that the Byrds’ “Eight Miles High” is—in part—a result of global capitalism, the causes and the ideologies of its beneficiaries are not necessarily in sync. The American composer Henry Cowell studied with foundational organologist Erich von Hornbostel at the Berlin Phonogramm Archiv, bringing back to the U.S. recordings collected by that institute to teach classes on “world

¹² This topic is the subject of: Timothy D Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹³ Roger Nichols, *The Life of Debussy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57.

music” at various universities. (Cowell had already been exposed to Asian music as a young man living in California, in addition to Euro- and African-American vernacular musics.) Cowell later compiled an LP series titled *Music of the World’s Peoples* for Folkways Records, and the influence of non-Western music is palpable in his own compositions.¹⁴ A similar interest, if less obvious level of influence, can be found in New Mexico’s pioneering electronic composer J.D. Robb, who recorded both the Hispanophone traditional music of his home state and his own tape music pieces for the Folkways label from the 1950s to the 1970s. And, anachronistically for a European State composer, Pierre Schaeffer was the co-founder of the Ocora label in Paris, which was the French equivalent of U.S.-based ethnographic labels like Folkways, Lyricord, and, later, Nonesuch Explorer.¹⁵ Other State composers like Boulez and Stockhausen have expressed hostility to music outside the European art tradition at various points in their careers. While it can be argued that many art music composers have been drawn to the “high culture” music of other societies—whether Hindustani classical or “court” gamelan—this is not always the case, as Cowell’s Franz Boas-like sonic egalitarianism demonstrates.

Within the more vernacular forms of American musicking, the lack of opposition between tradition and the new is nowhere more evident than in the rapid assimilation of new technologies. Even in tradition-bound country music, this is clear from the use of

¹⁴ Michael Dustin Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

¹⁵ I use the phrase “State composer” to denote those individuals, primarily Europeans after WWII, who spent their professional careers as part of a government-controlled cultural institution.

the electric pedal steel guitar in the 1930s—a device that was built by people like Californian Paul Bigsby, who spent as much time designing motorcycles as he did building ultra-modern instruments for country musicians. (The relationship between California’s D.I.Y. custom vehicle culture and the musicking of the permanent underground is explored in the section “The Other Side of the Garage” in the next chapter, which details the history of the Los Angeles Free Music Society.) An richer vein of traditional styles mixed with new technologies exists throughout the history of African-American music, from the early adoption of the electric guitar by blues artists, the creative use of recording techniques like echo and reverb by labels like Chess and Sun Records, and the widespread use of electronic keyboards across all genres, from the Hammond organ in jazz and blues to the early synthesizers in the music of Sun Ra and Stevie Wonder. As is often the case, Sun Ra is exemplary in this regard, releasing albums that switch track-to-track between ‘30s-style big band jazz to “free” playing to atmospheric electronic pieces.

A Cultural Cornucopia

“I am certain that most composers today would consider today's music to be rich, not to say confusing, in its enormous diversity of styles, technical procedures, and systems of esthetics.”

--George Crumb

Although it may seem at first like a feeble excuse, perhaps the greatest difficulty in addressing the problem of tradition in this chapter is that events transpired in the 20th century alerting listeners to the exasperating diversity of global musicking. As Karl

Miller points out in *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, for most American listeners this began with the revelation of the startling variety of musics extant in the American South at the beginning of the 20th century, even if it would be left to later scholars to fill back in the gaps where styles that the agents of the record labels found unappealing were left out of the story.¹⁶ At the same time colonialism was helping to reveal massive (and themselves diverse) traditions within the Indian subcontinent and Indonesia to composers, it was also recording the local music for sale to local consumers—some of which would eventually find its way back to the U.S. and European metropolises. Further into the century, the astounding variety of African-American music was documented by the kinds of regional, commercial labels described in the first chapter. Also discussed in Chapter 1 were the direct interactions between American musicians and different African or Afro-Caribbean styles, from the Cuban drumming that fascinated the bebop artists of the ‘40s and ‘50s to the Yoruba/pan-African style of Babatunde Olatunji in the ‘60s. These are only the highlights of the diverse traditions that musicians in the U.S. could encounter by mid-century.

Then there are what Mark Slobin calls “micromusics.”¹⁷ These relatively autonomous, typically ethno-centric traditions exist as subcultures within the Western world, from Turkish music in the immigrant districts of postwar Germany to the mix of Eastern Mediterranean musics that were played alongside one another in “Greek” restaurants in the U.S., and from the German/Czech/Polish polka enthusiasts in the

¹⁶ Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1993).

Midwest to the conjunto fans in Texas. Most recently, this has been explored through what Richard K. Spottswood called the “neglected heritage” of “ethnic music,” which were the pre-WWII musics marketed specifically to recent immigrants.¹⁸ Initially ignored by music scholars (who in the ‘50s and ‘60s focused on rural black and white styles), this began slowly changing through the efforts of people like Chris Strachwitz, whose Folklyric Records—a sub-label of Arhoolie—was instrumental in bringing attention to such otherwise forgotten traditions like Ukrainian-American dance music, Yiddish klezmer, and Anatolian Greek rebetika—the last being one of the musics of the refugees from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹ Traditions like these have received increased attention in recent years via the work of scholar-compilers like Ian Nagoski, whose 2011 triple CD, *To What Strange Place: The Music of the Ottoman-American Diaspora, 1916-1929* documents rebetika alongside the music of Armenians and Assyrians who fled to the United States as the Turkish Empire was collapsing (and ethnically cleansing itself) in the years around WWI.²⁰

In many respects, projects like *To What Strange Place* are the latest result of what might be called the “ethnomusicological impulse,” the compulsive recording of the music of the world, for commercial or anthropological reasons and with all of the biases that those two dimensions bring with them. Alongside the European and American recording industries’ practice of profiting off of local cultures through phonograph sales, this

¹⁸ American Folklife Center, *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing, 1982).

¹⁹ Larry Benicewicz, “Chris Strachwitz and the Arhoolie Story”, n.d., <http://www.bluesartstudio.at/NeueSeiten/pageA54.html>.

²⁰ Ian Nagoski, liner notes, *To What Strange Place : The Music of the Ottoman-American Diaspora, 1916-1929* (Tompkins Square, 2011).

impulse could also be said to begin with the “comparative musicology” of the early 20th century, whose first practitioner was probably the German philosopher Carl Stumpf—the founder of the Berlin Phonogramm Archiv—and his inheritors, Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs, who devised the Sachs-Hornbostel instrument classification system.²¹ Also included in this early group is the composer Bela Bartok, who made extensive studies of Hungarian vernacular musics; Frances Densmore, who began recording Native American music as soon as recording equipment was available; and John Lomax, who collected folk songs throughout the U.S., both alone and with his son Alan.²² By mid-century, an pretense to “comparison”—meaning to the Western classical tradition—was dropped, in favor of Dutch scholar Jaap Kunst’s concept of an “ethnomusicology,” which would take each culture’s musicking on its own terms.²³ In the United States, Charles Seeger, Willard Rhodes, Alan Merriam, and David McAllester, soon to be joined by Bruno Nettl, inaugurated this shift through the founding of The Society for Ethnomusicology in 1955.²⁴ This illustrious group found common cause with fellow travellers Colin Turnbull, Laura Boulton, Harold Courlander, Hugh Tracey, Lydia Cabrera, and Alan Lomax, among many others—some of whom specialized in specific countries or regions,

²¹ Lars-Christian Koch, Albrecht Wiedmann, and Susanne Ziegler, “The Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv: A Treasury of Sound Recordings,” in *Acoustical Science and Technology*, 25(4) (2004), 227–31.

²² For more on these topics, see: Bela Bartok, *The Hungarian Folk Songs* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1980); Charles Hofmann, *Frances Densmore and American Indian Music: A Memorial Volume*, First ed. (Washington, DC: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1968); Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life and Times of John A. Lomax, 1867-1948* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

²³ Jaap Kunst, *Ethnomusicology: A Study of Its Nature, Its Problems, Methods and Representative Personalities* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959).

²⁴ “Society for Ethnomusicology-History,” *Society for Ethnomusicology*, n.d., http://webdb.iu.edu/sem/scripts/history/sem_history_categories.cfm.

others who roamed around the whole world, tape recorder in hand.²⁵ Many of these recordings ended up being commercially released on labels like Folkways, Ocora, and Nonesuch, speeding up the process of simultaneity discussed in Chapter 2. As George Crumb hints at in the epigraph to this section, the general and lasting effect of the ethnomusicological impulse is that the contemporary sonic world is both incomparably vibrant and dizzyingly complex.

Beyond a Birthright

“I want to live in the whole world of music.”

--Henry Cowell

If mechanical reproduction of sound hipped the intrepid listener to what Alan Lomax called the “Global Jukebox,” it also helped to disintegrate the older tradition-transmission process at the same time.²⁶ As I pointed out in the first section of this part of the chapter, change to tradition has always been inevitable. However, recorded music provided an *intensification* of opportunities of encounter with other traditions and, consequently, increased probability of geographically and historically discontinuous syncretization. Whereas before recording such encounters happened at the borderland

²⁵ For more on these figures and their work, see: Roy Richard Grinker, *In the Arms of Africa: The Life of Colin Turnbull* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001); Laura Boulton, *Music Hunter: The Autobiography of a Career* (New York: Doubleday, 1969); Nina Jaffe, *A Voice for the People: The Life and Work of Harold Courlander* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997); Hugh Tracey, *The Evolution of African Music and Its Function in the Present Day* (Johannesburg: Institute for the Study of Man in Africa, 1961); Edna M. Rodriguez-Mangual, *Lydia Cabrera and the Construction of an Afro-Cuban Cultural Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

²⁶ Alan Lomax, “The Global Jukebox,” in *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings, 1934-1997*, ed. Ronald Cohen (New York: Routledge, 2005), 317–19.

between two regions, in zones of trade, or through chance encounters with travelers, the recording-as-object could be transmitted much faster and more broadly; James Brown's records had a greater impact on the music of West Africa in the '60s and '70s than his few performances could possibly have had alone, in other words.²⁷ These general, global conditions resulted in two, seemingly paradoxical, effects on musicking. The first dimension of this was that—all fears about the homogenizing influence of U.S. culture aside—local traditions inevitably made their way into the emulations of foreign styles. This is especially clear in the case of West Africa in the mid to late 20th century, when Cuban *son* became incredibly popular in the Congo region and American jazz and—later—R&B and funk seeped into the popular music of Ghana and Nigeria. Congolese *soukous* does utilize the clave rhythm, but it's hardly an unadulterated form of Cuban music.²⁸ Similarly, jazz was incredibly influential on Ghanaian highlife, but no one would confuse Victor Olaiya with Dizzie Gillespie, nor the aforementioned James Brown with Nigerian Afrobeat star Fela Kuti.²⁹ This process is not limited to non-U.S. musical cultures, however; Lebanese-American surf guitarist Dick Dale's uncle—an oud player—was an important early musical influence, and his signature song, "Miserlou," is actually a cover of a 1920s Egyptian tune, combining oud-style picking with amplified rock and

²⁷ Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, *Soul Power* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010).

²⁸ For more on this topic, see: Gary Stewart, *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos* (New York: Verso, 2004).

²⁹ For more on this topic, see: John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds: African, Caribbean, Latin, and African-American Traditions* (New York: Schirmer, 1998).

roll; similar syncetizations between the local and the global are explored in the profiles in the next chapter.³⁰

The second paradoxical dimension to the conditions acknowledged above is that, in important ways, playing in a tradition became voluntary choice for individual musicians. With little or no exposure to other musical cultures, the musicking of a regional or ethnic group will tend to maintain an internal coherence—which is not to say stasis. While it's conceivable that a musician might choose to play in a foreign tradition in geographic and cultural isolation from other practitioners of that tradition (say, an extraordinary sitar player in West Texas) through the study of recordings and written texts, this manifestation of traditionalist voluntarism is rather unlikely. What's more likely is a self-chosen alignment with multiple traditions, some direct and some distant. The possibility of engaging with multiple traditions simultaneously is the final “problem of tradition.”

The pianist Cecil Taylor provides a good demonstration of this issue. On the one hand, Taylor's playing can be traced back through Thelonious Monk (most evident on his 1956 debut, *Jazz Advance*) to Art Tatum, and from Tatum to “stride” stylists James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, and Earl “Fatha” Hines. This genealogy places him “in the tradition,” if still a singular talent. On the other, Taylor's use of “tone clusters” also aligns him with the American art music tradition of Charles Ives, Leo Ornstein, and Henry Cowell. In Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, he notes that there is a profound ambivalence around a “European-influenced

³⁰ The original appears on *To What Strange Place*.

black artist” like Taylor.³¹ Several pages later, he continues: “Cecil Taylor is out in many respects. He is out of the outside/s that the music constitutes—of narrow and superficial understandings of (the) tradition.”³² While I think it’s worth noting that Moten is probably including Euro-Americans with his Europeans, the contrast that he sets up between Taylor is not just between white folks and jazz; it’s also between Taylor’s music and the idea “tradition” as a zone *within* the musicking of “the black radical tradition” where deviance from norms are policed. For Moten, Cecil Taylor is the radical of radicals. Incorporating African elements into jazz in the ‘60s was almost *de rigueur* for any artist that wanted to gain entrance to the club where one had to be “black enough, a black enough man, a manly enough black man.”³³ Taylor, who, in addition to his use of European musical forms, was also not-so-secretly gay, clearly failed to meet these ideals, as Amiri Baraka made clear in his essay “Apple Cores #5—The Burton Greene Affair.”³⁴ Unlike Baraka, Moten sees Taylor’s incorporation of European forms not as blasphemy against the tenets of Black Nationalism, but as a deeper adherence to “tradition” insofar as that word means improvising with the materials one has at hand. Like many others, the European art music tradition is certainly “at hand” for the musicians of the African diaspora; one would have to be a fool to willfully ignore it, as Frantz Fanon pointed out, not leastways because the power of “(the) tradition” is ultimately its ability to syncretize

³¹ Fred Moten, *In The Break: The Aesthetics Of The Black Radical Tradition*, 1st ed. (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2003), 140.

³² *Ibid.*, 158.

³³ *Ibid.*, 148.

³⁴ Leroi Jones, "Apple Cores #5--The Burton Greene Affair," in *Black Music* (Da Capo Press, 1998), 136-9.

freely and transform again into something both new and old—a characteristic of Cecil Taylor’s music and the aim of the permanent underground.³⁵

PART 2: THE NOW SOUND FROM WAY BACK

“Yes! We Have No Bananas

--Frank Silver and Irving Cohn

“Blago Bung Blago Bung Bosso Fataka!”

--Hugo Ball

Novelty music has a bad reputation. Although in the first half of the twentieth century, novelty recordings formed a major portion of the market for recorded music, since the 1940s the word “novelty” has tended to imply lowbrow humor and the incessant repetition of de-contextualized musical fads like “The Macarena.” Even the word is anathema to many music fans. Not surprisingly, then, “novelty music” is among the least represented categories of American song in both academic and popular publications. There are multiple book-length studies on every sub-genre or style of blues, jazz, country, and rock and roll, but in my research quest I managed to locate only two books on novelty music, neither scholarly, and one decidedly condescending.³⁶ Perhaps this is due to the fact that what “novelty” even means is nebulous. And yet, if we can abstract ourselves from both the Weird Al connotations and a very pronounced “presentist”

³⁵ This is most fully explored in the section “On National Culture” from: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

³⁶ Bad: Ace Collins, *Disco Duck and Other Adventures in Novelty Music* (New York: Berkley Trade, 1998); Better: Steven Otfinoski, *The Golden Age of Novelty Songs* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 2000).

tendency in musical historiography, “novelty” reveals itself to be as fundamental to understanding listening experience as noise does.

The word “novelty” entered the pop music lexicon via Tin Pan Alley songwriters, publishers, and publicity men in the late 19th century. At the time, “novelty” was used to distinguish a song, initially as sheet music, eventually as recording, from the dominant mode of songwriting: sentimental songs, often dealing with love themes. The sentimental song forms’ roots extend back to the earlier “parlor songs” of the Victorian era and forward to the virtually infinite reiteration of “silly love songs” that continue to make their presence felt today.³⁷ The fundamental similarity between these widely separated eras in terms of style centers on the idea of “sentimentality.” The non-derogatory definition of “sentimental” is an aesthetic that implies loss or absence, typically of a love object—frequently a person of romantic interest, occasionally a family member, periodically a place, or “home.” (It’s not an accident that a lot of Carter Family performances, and by extension much country music, owes a great deal to the sentimental/parlor music aesthetic.³⁸) By contrast, when “novelty” was used to describe a piece of music during the last decade of the 19th century and the first three or four of the 20th, what was usually meant was that it was virtually *any* kind of music that didn’t fit this criteria. Collectors of pre-war 78 rpm records will find this nomenclature familiar; the word “novelty” is printed on the record label of music ranging from “coon songs” to

³⁷ For more information on the early days of novelty, see: Charles Hamm, *Irving Berlin Early Songs* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1994), xxxiv; Elizabeth Axford, *Song Sheets to Software: A Guide to Print Music, Software, and Websites for Musicians* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2004), 20; Nicholas E. Tawa, *Supremely American: Popular Song in the 20th Century* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005), 55.

³⁸ For example: Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone? The Carter Family & Their Legacy in American Music* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

Hawaiian groups, and from foxtrots done by hotel bands to early blues singers. Of course, vaudeville-style humor was also present in much music marketed as “novelty” during this period.

It should be clear from the above description that in the early period “novelty” could hardly be said to denote a specific genre, though it was certainly a marketing strategy. However, as marketing to consumers became more precise between the 1920s and 1940s, specific terms were more and more frequently imprinted on the record labels, resulting in the widespread use of genre names like “country,” “blues,” and “jazz,” though the history of the names for these categories are fraught with racial and class-based antagonisms. By the late 1940s, “novelty,” in the music business at least, had come to mean a song that exploited a peculiar gimmick, often to comic effect. When the word has been used at all in the ensuing years, it has generally attached itself to music of this type, well documented by Barry Hansen, a.k.a. Dr. Demento.

In the previous chapters, I have made references to Bakhtin’s idea of “novelization” in relation to literature. For Bakhtin, this meant that the long-form prose narrative—the novel—was capable of regeneration through synthesizing new formal elements.³⁹ This concept is also particularly applicable to popular music. One of the favorite pastimes of music history aficionados is identifying the “first” example of a specific genre. Songs like “Livery Stable Blues,” “The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane,” and “Rocket 88” have all been held up at one time or another as “firsts” in their

³⁹ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982).

subsequent genres. But this raises an important historiographical and phenomenological question: how was it possible for listeners of these songs—in 1917, 1923, or 1951—to hear them as examples of jazz, country, or rock and roll, respectively, when these terms/concepts, did not effectively exist outside of subcultural slang and certainly weren't part of any record industry marketing strategy? In a more contemporary vein, we might ask how, beyond a relatively small audience in New York (and primarily in the Bronx borough alone) “Rapper’s Delight” could have been heard as “hip hop” in 1979.

In order to evade this kind of “presentist” fallacy, I suggest that the idea of “novelty” be reinserted into analyses of musical phenomenon like the above examples. When we try to occupy the perceptual space of historically contemporary listeners and how they *could* have heard such landmark recordings, the popscape of the 20th century starts to sound very different. For one thing, it suggests that “newness” is fundamental to modern ear experience, even when that particular meaning of the word “novelty” has been vacated. Some—and maybe all, really—of that sonic novelty has been driven by vulgar economic concerns; there are, obviously, only so many love songs you can sell before your audience gets bored. And of course, even the “new” can become standardized over time: witness jazz at Lincoln Center or “oldies” radio stations playing early rock and roll singles.⁴⁰ Both of these formerly low cultural forms have been museum-ified.

⁴⁰ Detailed in, respectively: Herman S. Gray, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Jim Ladd, *Radio Waves: Life and Revolution on the Fm Dial* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1992).

Which isn't entirely different from a lot of other "radical" culture in the modern era; today families file patiently into art museums to view paintings that were so scandalous a century and a half ago they could only be hung in cafes and bars in bohemian sections of town. It's a long way from "The Painter of Modern Life" to Sister Wendy, after all.⁴¹ Still, it begs the question: at this point in history, what *is* "avant-garde"? It seems relatively clear at that, perhaps barring a few unreconstructed Bolsheviks, the "advance" part of this military metaphor formulation hasn't really been geared towards prescribing any ultimate human fate for some time, though there are arguments to be made that the art guard *has* anticipated some short- and mid-range cultural shifts (cf. the Warhol discussed in Chapter 1). Perhaps Harold Rosenberg's turn of phrase was too narrow in its descriptive cast; the Western—and not simply American—"avant-garde" has, since the 19th century, been predicated on a break with the past, a tendency which itself appears as, ironically, a tradition of recurrent "newness."⁴² And that sounds an awful lot like at least one element of novelty music. Then again, how much really separates Rrose Selavy from Tiny Tim? Or Nervous Norvus from F.T. Marinetti?

The idea that novelty music and the avant-garde might share an aesthetic of insistent newness suggests a carnival of inverted cultural values; using voodoo-as-theory, we might describe it operating in the Gwede aesthetic domain. But it doesn't quite explain *why* there would be similarities at the margins of cultural production. In order to

⁴¹ Sister Wendy's publications and BBC specials are too numerous to list, but for the essay, see: Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995).

⁴² Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition Of The New* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994).

access the ramifications of this question, it's useful to consider Marx's "defense" of bourgeois capitalism in *The Communist Manifesto*. In the section "Bourgeois and Proletarians," Marx details the rise of the bourgeoisie in terms of a break with (aristocratic) tradition, an emphasis on personal liberty, and the proliferation of new consumable commodities, all the result of a global economy benefiting the Western Europe and the United States. As this class rose to hegemony in the nation-forming 18th and 19th centuries, a parallel development occurred within the arts, what might loosely be called "bohemianism."⁴³ It's typical for historians to isolate cultural producers into "schools" or "movements" and then assert their respective opposition to the vulgarities of the *nouveau riche*. Some, like the British Lake Poets or the Pre-Raphaelites, combined radical formal innovations with a pronounced nostalgia for a pre-capitalist past. Others, like the original "bohemian" circles of Paris—beginning with Stendhal and Henry Murger and continuing throughout the 19th century with Baudelaire, Manet, Rimbaud, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Satie—insisted on a more complete break with the past in both the form and content of their work. And among the less artistically revered examples, it's impossible not to include either the impractically fashionable Beau Brummel or the rapid turnover of pop songs on the United States' minstrel stage.

But are these varied examples truly oppositional to the fundamental values of bourgeois capitalism? Or are they rather an attempt at total fulfillment of the promise of freedom to express and consume the new without recourse to tradition? If we accept a

⁴³ Robert Blaisdell et al., *The Communist Manifesto and Other Revolutionary Writings: Marx, Marat, Paine, Mao Tse-Tung, Gandhi and Others* (Dover Publications, 2003), 126.

conclusion reached from the second question, then the 20th century avant-garde and its lowbrow cousin novelty might best be understood as the continuation of earlier attempts at a complete ideological cash-in on a promissory note co-signed by Locke, Rousseau, Smith, and Jefferson: the fullest expression of the “modernism” described at the beginning of Chapter 1. Still, the avant-garde and the novel—hallowed or reviled as they might be—are hardly the stuff of “good” middle class taste, that stalwart of ideological reproduction. Perhaps, then, the fact that these types of cultural objects frequently evoke laughter, derision, or rage is less a mark of their antithetical ideologies than an indicator that the un-adorned face of capitalism is too much to bear, that we are less anxious in front of Jane Austen’s Elizabeth than Fritz Lang’s Maria.

This second conclusion is derived more from the first question posed in the preceding paragraph, and follows lines similar to the ones laid out by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, wherein they posit that, in order to create new markets, capitalism dissolves social relations at the same time that it reinscribes ideologically the “centrality” of those bypassed relations.⁴⁴ As Fredric Jameson would have it, this means that the 1950s are the “privileged site of nostalgia” for promoters of “family values” precisely because that era signaled the separation of members of the “nuclear family” into economically individuated consumers.⁴⁵ Unlike Jameson, I would argue that this is anything but a recent phenomenon; Walter Scott, Stephen Foster, Dante Gabriel Rossetti,

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁴⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1990), 27.

William Morris, and the Carter Family were all constructing narratives along these lines long before *Happy Days* hit the airwaves. And those are the *better* examples of sentimentality and nostalgia.

The persistence of sentimentality and nostalgia in culture over the course of the modern era highlights a central problem in one of the fundamental premises of Western Marxist thought; namely, all “reification” necessarily has a negative impact on human life. In its least politically charged definition, “reification” means simply the treatment of an abstraction as something concrete. This definition of reification is essential to human existence; without the supposition of the reoccurrence of specific kinds of events, the continuation of what Marx called our production of our own means of existence would not be possible. That is, of course, not what is generally implied by “reification” in Marxian discourse. In the Western Marxist tradition, “reification” has come to mean a veiling of capitalist machinations by ideology.⁴⁶ The veil is “naturalized” by the hegemonic power structure, starting with—as Adorno and Horkheimer insisted—the very idea of “nature.”⁴⁷ Adorno in particular was keen on extending this critique of reification from examples drawn from Western intellectual history to popular music. Consequently, a “moon” and a “June” that are “just for you” are indicative not only of the pseudo-individuation that Adorno finds at the heart of the “culture industry,” but also of the reproduction of the conditions of production necessary for the maintenance of the

⁴⁶ Most Marxist definitions emanate from: Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972).

⁴⁷ The fundamental point of: Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

bourgeois hegemon.⁴⁸ In other words, fall in love, get married, and have babies, because—as Henry Ford was well aware—a person with a family is less likely to go on strike, and wages can be kept low by a surplus of potential laborers (those babies again) who are ready to take your job. Adorno’s position even within Marxian discourse has met several points of opposition, not leastways because he never proffered a full alternative to this condition and because his favored examples of forms of culture opposed to commodification are pretty elitist; to fully appreciate Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, one needs an incredibly extensive understanding of European art music. Even positions that attempt to evade Adorno’s initial reasoning, like those derived from the “Birmingham School,” generally butt up against his final conclusion: the commodifying powers of the culture industry are all-pervasive.

But a critique of culture that starts and ends at the fact of cost is useless; Beethoven and Schoenberg “cost” something to Austrian aristocrats the same way Shostakovich “cost” Soviet Russia. We might then proceed with a question not of cost in the abstract, but of profit specifically. In financial terms, “classical” music creates virtually no profit. The classical music industry has been run at a loss for 300 years, from the churches that employed Bach to the prestigious divisions that continue to release his music at major record labels today.⁴⁹ This hardly makes them less commodities; as

⁴⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, “Commodity Music Analyzed,” in *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Music and Culture* (London: Verso Books, 1992), 37-52.

⁴⁹ Christopher Small, *Music, Society, Education* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996).

Pierre Bourdieu pointed out, it simply changes the terms of their exchange value.⁵⁰ Popular music is more straightforward in this regard. Whatever the artistic intent of the actual musicians involved, popular music is designed to turn a quantifiable profit, even when the product bestows the possessor some form of cachet. That it does so haphazardly is a slight rebuke to Adorno's totalizing. What is more important to emphasize is that all forms of musicking are premised on an economic component. This rather obvious point calls into question whether there is a "veil" to be lifted from music to begin with.⁵¹ Doubtless music can have an ideological function, but the malignancy of the reification of bourgeois values might be overstated; as Carl Wilson helpfully notes in his book on Celine Dion's *Let's Talk About Love*, songs about children and lovers don't necessarily soundtrack us to the gas chamber.⁵²

So perhaps reification has gotten a bad rap. That's not to say that "Ballad of the Green Berets" or "Courtesy of the Red, White & Blue" shouldn't give us pause, nor should it dissuade anyone from criticizing the popular music industry for willfully narrowing and flattening the expression of human experience to cliché, but feeling moved by "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" doesn't mean your fashion sense just went blackshirt. However, my main interest here is not in mounting a full defense of sentimentalism in

⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁵¹ As described in the sections in Chapter 1 on self-released gospel records, musicking cults, and The Residents, the recording-as-object can serve an exchange function beyond commodity fetishism; it can also operate as a kind of "gris-gris."

⁵² Carl Wilson, *Celine Dion's Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* (New York: Continuum Pub Group, 2007).

popular song.⁵³ Rather, I wanted to disengage from the mode of critique exemplified by Theodor Adorno, first by reference to considering the “sentimental,” that seemingly indefensible source of nostalgia for tradition. The next step is to turn to the avant-garde and novelty music, which, for the permanent underground, have come to constitute their own form of tradition.

If novelty and the avant-garde are capitalism un-adorned—but not “unveiled”—what social and economic purposes do they serve? Are they disruptive forces too pure for the market, or are they nothing more than prototypes under consideration for future mass production? Ultimately, the either/or proposition may be part of the problem—as it was for “modernism” and “nostalgia” generally in Chapter 1. In terms of philosophy and theory, the problem stems from a long-standing tendency to treat aesthetic issues in idealized terms. Kant’s condemnation of a direct appeal to the senses as “barbaric” differs little, as Peter Burger noted, from Adorno’s concern regarding the fascistic tendencies of the culture industry or Clement Greenberg’s disavowal of “kitsch.”⁵⁴ Regardless of the espoused political position of the author, these types of critique are rooted in a fundamental anxiety about the “stimulation” of the social body. From Kant to Adorno, this fear of culture’s effect manifested itself as a distrust of a “reactionary” mob. After Adorno, critics from Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard to Fredric Jameson have insisted that the “over-stimulation” of the masses has led to their ultimate passivity when

⁵³ Wilson does a rather remarkable job of this already, and I don’t want to tread on his territory too much.

⁵⁴ Peter Burger, *Theory Of The Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984).

confronted by the commodity spectacle.⁵⁵ In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Ranciere contends that these positions are not essentially different from one another, because they both presuppose one who “knows” and another, much larger group that is forever withheld from having all the knower’s knowledge. Ranciere counters that culture’s political potential is realized not by the self-perpetuation of “enlightened” intellectuals, but the understanding that all people learn by a roughly equivalent process of translation between the known and the unknown, accomplished by an, again, roughly equivalent “distribution of the sensible.”⁵⁶ This is why the “new” (or what Ranciere calls the “unanticipated”) is so crucial.⁵⁷ Unlike the sentimental song, novelty and the avant-garde do not reaffirm what we already know. Through our eyes, ears, noses, mouths, bodies...we perceive the new without our intellect at first being able to translate it meaningfully. When we do grasp this novel object, we may laugh with Bergson,⁵⁸ rage like those first patrons of Stravinsky and Nijinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, or deride it as “degenerate art.” In any case, what is at stake is *possibility*. Whenever the realm of the possible becomes closed, from the left or the right, new social relations remain out of reach. This is where Adorno’s fault lies in his condemnation of Stravinsky in favor of the closed referential system of Schoenberg, and where what Burger calls the “neo avant-garde” of Jeff Koons or the widely heralded “roots” style of Bruce Springsteen ultimately

⁵⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011), 46.

⁵⁶ These ideas are developed in, consecutively: Jacques Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Jacques Ranciere, *Politics of Aesthetics*, (New York: Continuum, 2006).

⁵⁷ This concept recurs throughout Ranciere’s work.

⁵⁸ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic - Henri Bergson* (Unknown: Book Jungle, 2007).

fail.⁵⁹ We either can't learn anything new from them, or what we can learn leaves us repeating minor variations in an intellectual, emotional, and social cul-de-sac, of interest only to the incestuous circles of academic serialism, art market fetishism, or "classic rock." As Michael Taussig points out in his book, *Mimesis and Alterity*, Walter Benjamin understood this far better than his friend Adorno when he valorized film as well as "low" forms like advertisements—perhaps the ultimate mash-up of a commodified avant-garde and novel form.⁶⁰

We *need* novelty and the avant-garde, not because they function as historical "progress" but because the possibility of understanding the world on terms different than the ones we started out with means that the social is still malleable, despite the lamentations of generations of critics, Marxist and otherwise. All avant-gardes pass, and all novelties fade, but neither their passing into obscurity nor their assimilation into the repertoire of the culture industry need be tragic. For one thing, we can sometimes rediscover their newness, their novelty, and their noise. For another, at some level the assimilation of the novel and the avant-garde means that they *worked*, that, as Ranciere would put it, their unknown qualities were translated into known qualities. That this might be a temporary state of radical potential being actualized shouldn't deplete the value of their function, as Hakim Bey points out in *T.A.Z.*;⁶¹ the worst thing that can happen to culture is stasis, like the ensconced position of socialist realism in the Soviet

⁵⁹ Burger, *Theory Of The Avant-Garde*, 53.

⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, (New York: Schocken, 1986), 85; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 28.

⁶¹ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

Union. What is necessary is the tension between the old and the new, because there are always newer novelties, other avant-gardes to disrupt the cultural flow and present us with new possibilities. Of course, not all novelties or all avant-gardes are created equal. They function differently for different people at different times in history, and some of what might be called “novel” or “experimental” or “avant-garde” can either be passé or even conservative for others. Furthermore, even if we concede a generalized subjectivity/relativism of perceptual judgment, it’s still necessary to establish where the concept of “radical” comes into play, a concept that transcends individual experience. Marx provides a characteristically humorous tautological pun in his “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” when he states, “To be radical is to go to the root of the matter. For man, however, the root is man himself.”⁶² For an audible commodity to be radical, it must therefore go to the most fundamental level of audible experience. That level might transcend the boundaries of a given individual’s experience, but not the range of human perceptual capabilities, nor can it escape entirely from the historical conditions that lead to its identification. (Here we might consider the circumstances leading up to 4’33”: the development of anechoic chambers, the increased probability of penetrating the “silence” of outer space, the availability of Zen Buddhist literature, etc.) Above all, the concepts of “novel” and “avant-garde” or “experimental” are best understood relationally to the transcendent “radical” and individual experience. The latter and former pairs of terms are hardly absolute, but they do form distinct zones of audible experience. In Figure 1

⁶² Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy Of Right,”* ed. Joseph O’Malley, trans. Joseph O’Malley and Annette Jolin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 137.

below, I've provided a diagram to help conceptualize these types of relations. These aesthetic modes (Deleuze and Guattari would call them “percepts”⁶³) are akin to the spectrum anti-State, anti-hierarchical musicking described in Chapter 1, rendered here on specifically sonic terms:

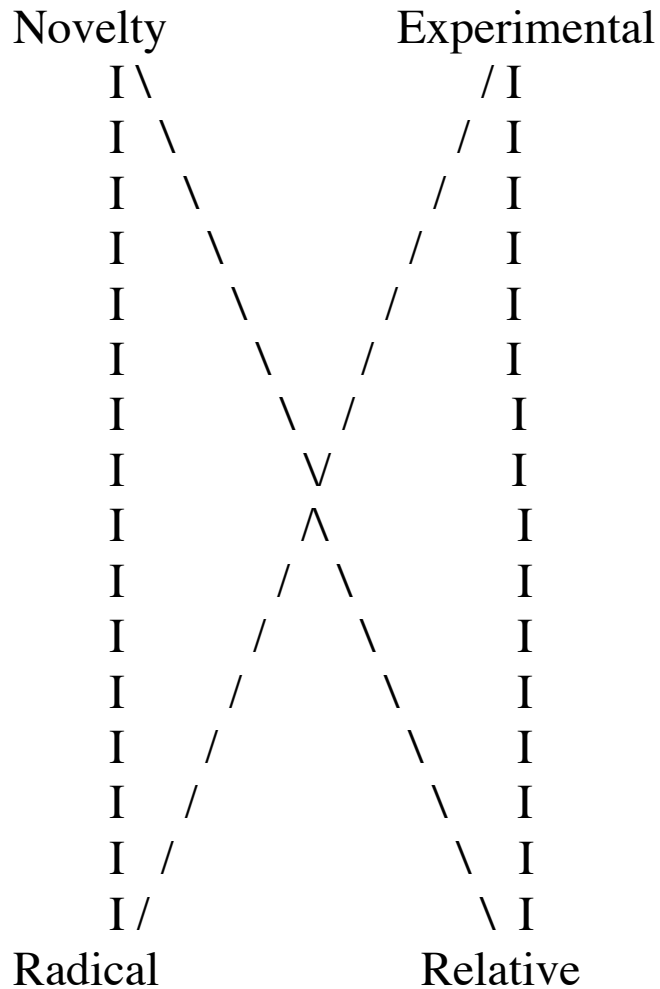


Figure 1: The Dynamics of Sonic Experience

⁶³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

The point to be gained from this admittedly crude diagram is that the “novel” and the “experimental” are two ways of rendering the same thing: the “new.” Furthermore, the “radical” is the trans-personal, whereas the “relative” is individual subjective experience. There is no ultimate example of any of the possible configurations, no Platonic “Ideal,” just ways of orienting oneself to the sounds being heard. To be more concrete, let me provide some autobiographical examples.

Through both my research and my own personal interests, I’ve gained a great deal of familiarity with the history and variety of music, especially the music of the United States and Western Europe. As a consequence, my understanding of what is or is not “radically experimental” or “radically novel” has changed over time. This perceptual shift has been especially apparent in my interactions with my undergraduate students in courses on popular music. Like many of them, at one point I was certain that *Sgt. Pepper* or Radiohead were really “out there” stuff. But having listened to Karlheinz Stockhausen or Krautrock, for instance, my opinions about these two examples have altered substantially. I’m not suggesting that my students or I have ever been *wrong* in terms of judgments of taste. But I do want to assert that auditory experience and the meaning we derive from it is defined parametrically—like noise—in relation to a fixed variable, in this case the “new.” Earlier in this section I provided a historical definition of “novelty” and at the same time noted that the term itself can today be understood in several different ways. Similarly, we might ask how Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, or Abstract Expressionism can continue to be “avant-garde” decades after their adherents desisted

from producing new work and since various cultural institutions have legitimated the work they produced. (It's common to refer to these as the "historical avant-garde," which presents an odd kind of a temporal paradox.) The present perception of antiquated novelties and past-due avant-gardes points to a dilemma at the heart of the total system of commodity production and consumption: "planned obsolescence" doesn't guarantee disposal. This is the inverted interpretation of the issue of "simultaneity" discussed in Chapter 2.

Walter Benjamin, a collector knee-deep in the dustbin of history, spent a great deal of time writing about the "fetish" character of outmoded commodities. Yet, his usage of that term is slippery; as a Marxist, one assumes that his conceptual frame matches up, however imperfectly, with the one espoused in the first volume of *Capital*. But his insistence that a commodity only becomes fetishized at the moment of its obsolescence betrays an alternate understanding, rooted as much in his life as the son of an antique dealer as his interactions with Freudian theory and Surrealism.⁶⁴ That understanding does not correlate with the commodity as fetishized because of its alienation from the social relations of production, but with the possibility of the opposite. As he examines "obsolete" objects in his writing, from old toys to decaying architecture, he pieces together the social relations of their production—de-alienating them, after a fashion. And yet they remain, in his terms, "fetishes." (I might say "gris-gris.") But to

⁶⁴ Michael Taussig, at least, seems to have concluded that the result of the intertwining of these disparate threads is "anthropology."

think through objects in this way, to reinscribe their social relations of production, involves a “corruption” of bourgeois history:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was.” It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. For historical materialism it is a question of holding fast to a picture of the past, just as if it had unexpectedly thrust itself, in a moment of danger, on the historical subject. The danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients. For both it is one and the same: handing itself over as the tool of the ruling classes. In every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it.⁶⁵

Thus, we might look at the process of institutionalization of novelties (like the recording compilations of Dr. Demento) or the avant-garde (like “special exhibits” on Dada or fin-de-siècle Paris) as attempts to fetishize—in the orthodox Marxist sense—those objects that might flash into our consciousness with their long-dormant disruptive force, to congeal those things that threatens to “melt into air.” That objects or traditions with these potential powers are often lined on the same shelves or hung in the same galleries as their nemeses only makes the act of wresting them free more imperative.

PART 3: HIGH ART AND HACKERY

Novelty and avant-garde music are not simply totemic objects to be rescued from history, however. The flashes of memory that they can induce are more than merely the remembrances of disruptions in the flow of the dominant mode of musical history. In different instances and with varying effect, they illuminate both specific moments of crisis and strategies for utilizing crises of capitalist ideology against itself. Although the

⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255.

pairings that I've created below are arbitrary (if roughly chronological), they do highlight the comparative functions of novelty and the avant-garde at specific historical junctures against a particular conceptual problem. As often as not, the "low" form of novelty music occupies, in my analysis, the more radical position. However, as illustrated by my diagram and its accompanying explanation, no judgment on these matters is absolute or final; the comparisons below are only suggestive of alternative modes of understanding the audible past. My pairing are then an attempt to reconstruct the "shock" of newness that greeted the first listeners to these pieces of music, what Michael Taussig would describe as "First Contact" with the Other of sonic difference.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the ultimate purpose of these comparisons is to identify the convivial tools and traditions of the new that are a self-replenishing source of musical ideas and sonic strategies for the permanent underground. They include mimesis, formal structuring, foreign music, extended vocal techniques, and collage. Of these five, perhaps collage is the most important, as individual compositions and performances within the permanent underground are in many ways a mix-and-match between both these strategies and the acoustic effects described in the preceding chapter. In the next chapter, "A Map Towards the Present," I profile six artists from the permanent underground by correlating their musicking to these ideas.

The Mimetic Turn

⁶⁶ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 72.

“We learned to associate the lute with the Middle Ages, plainsong with the monastery, the tom-tom with wild and primitive man, the viola de gamba with courtly dress. How can we really not expect to also find that music in the 20th century relates to machines and the masses, the electron and calculators?”

--Pierre Schaeffer

“Old MacDonald had a farm, ee-i-ee-i-o”

--Traditional

Composers and performers in the early 20th century faced circumstances that hitherto had only been imaginable: the preservation of music in material form, with, as Jacques Attali noted, potentially limitless repetitions of a single performance. Jonathan Sterne, in his book *The Audible Past*, argues that the development of sound reproduction technologies was intimately linked to a peculiar Victorian morbidity, one best summarized by his explanation that the famous RCA/Victor mascot, “Nipper,” who hears the sound of “His Master’s Voice,” is in fact derived from a painting whose title is “His Late Master’s Voice,” whereby the surface the little dog is standing on becomes more obviously a coffin. Sterne also suggests that sound reproduction technologies were initially intended for the preservation of the voice alone, and that the development of musical recordings was primarily market-driven, as private recording/playback on wax cylinders was much less enticing to consumers or durable than shellac discs of pre-recorded sounds.⁶⁷ Still, the extension of the body in time via the voice prefigured an important trend in early 20th century recordings.

This trend can be understood as an oscillation between ascribing to the phonographic system alternately a mechanical or an organic character. In the first

⁶⁷ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2003).

instance, the emphasis is on the technology itself: microphones that had limited reproductive range, recording systems that were constrained by time limits, and the playback device as a machine itself. Adherents to this line of thinking were primarily audio engineers and avant-garde artists. In the second instance, the technological character of sound reproduction and its limitations were downplayed in favor of understanding the recording as an imprecise—but constantly improving—document with a fidelity to the source performance, vocal or instrumental, unimaginable in the long era of written scores or even longer history of oral traditions that preceded mechanical reproduction. This was the standard advertising line—hence RCA/Victor’s slogan—and although not, as Sterne concludes, completely bought into by the consuming public, at least not seriously questioned.

This spectrum of comprehension of the new technology should also be placed into a wider context in the history of the United States and Europe. The first two decades of the 20th century saw the proliferation of many other machines, including the body-destroying ones deployed in the trenches of WWI. It was also an era that witnessed an increased understanding of man-as-animal, evidenced by advances in biology and anthropology, developments that came to a notable head with the “Scopes Monkey Trial” in 1925. Consequently, the two examples I cite, *Ballet Mecanique* by George Antheil and “Livery Stable Blues” by the Original Dixieland Jass Band, each deal with issues of representation and mimesis with regard to the mechanic/organic divide.

Ballet Mecanique was originally intended to be the soundtrack to a film of the same name, directed by Dudley Murphy and Fernand Leger. However, the film and the

score were of differing lengths, and so Antheil's music was not performed until 1926, two years after the premiere of the film. *Ballet Mecanique* the composition employs some standard orchestra instruments, including pianos, xylophones, bass drums, and—from a different orchestral tradition—gongs. However, the piece is most notable for its use of pre-arranged player pianos, electric bells, a wind-up siren, and airplane propellers. Arguably, during Antheil's lifetime, the piece was never performed as he had originally envisioned: player pianos and the wind-up siren were difficult to synchronize with the rest of the performance, and airplane propellers in a concert hall presented a logistical (and safety) nightmare.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, Antheil's piece can be placed into the same context as the work of Luigi Russolo and the Italian Futurists, whose *Intonarumori* also sought to harness the sonic power of industrial technologies.⁶⁹ Since electronic amplification didn't exist at the point when Antheil and Russolo were composing, their work utilizes either re-purposed industrial machines (airplane propellers, etc.) or their own sound-producing devices. Although the *Intonarumori* don't have a direct influence on later electronic music devices, their historical significance and the importance to later generations of Russolo's manifesto, "The Art of Noises," is hard to overstate.⁷⁰ However, it's Antheil's re-purposing of machines for musicking that I want to focus on,

⁶⁸ Carol Oja, "George Antheil's Ballet Mécanique and Transatlantic Modernism," in *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States*, ed. Ludington Townsend (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 175-202.

⁶⁹ Recordings of the *Intonarumori* from 1921 survive, but there are no extant recordings of *Ballet Mecanique* from the 1920s.

⁷⁰ Victoria Ness Kirby's translation of the text of Luigi Russolo's manifesto can be found in the Appendix section of: Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance*, 166-74.

because it exemplifies the problem of representation and mimesis inherent in the early period of recording technology.

“Representational” music is hardly a recent phenomenon. “Pastoral” and other programmatic music from the 18th century onward had deployed numerous devices meant to evoke certain sounds supposedly emblematic of the place the music was attempting to evoke: shepherds pipes, thunderstorms, bird calls, etc. These elements have been disparaged or accepted in the “classical” canon, but in either case it’s clear that the representational elements are considered secondary to composition as a whole. This cannot be said for “Livery Stable Blues,” which makes the mimesis of animal sounds central to its composition. The Original Dixieland Jass Band’s 1917 recording of the piece is fraught with ironies beyond that particular characteristic as well. The tune and its flipside “Dixie Jass Band One-Step” have begrudgingly been acknowledged as the first “jazz” recordings. This is despite the fact that the band was entirely white—albeit from New Orleans—performing a style that would properly be understood as originating in African-American musicking.⁷¹ Furthermore, from a 1917 perspective it’s historically inaccurate to describe the music as “jazz” at all, a term whose murky origin (and spelling, for that matter) wouldn’t even begin to become a standardized—and continually contested—genre name for some time. As such, “Livery Stable Blues” can be understood as a “novelty song,” both in the original marketing sense of the term and in the way that I have previously suggested. “Animalistic” also became a term of praise/derogation when “jazz” became a relatively stable genre in the 1920s, especially as

⁷¹ Tim Gracyk, *Popular American Recording Pioneers: 1895-1925* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 255.

practiced by African-Americans—a further irony for the all-white “first” band to record a “jazz” tune.

“Livery Stable Blues” and *Ballet Mecanique* confront the issues I’ve identified in this section in two quite divergent ways. In the case of *Ballet Mecanique*, the usage of machine technologies isn’t representational at all, at least in the score as originally conceived; there are literally airplane propellers in the concert hall. Instead, the machines operate as ends-in-themselves, a reaction to the historical conditions of modernity. The mimetic function of Antheil’s compositional move is far more complex. In Murphy and Leger’s film, it is fairly clear that they intended to depict human action—motion—as mechanical, a desire that stretches back in cinematic terms to Eadweard Muybridge’s photographic experiments. In Antheil’s music, the mimetic function is not in the machine’s imitation of some other sound, but in the composer and performer’s interaction with the machine as instrument. Wind, brass, and percussion instruments are, in some sense, elaborations on pre-existing human capacities: clapping, stomping, singing, whistling. Stringed instruments, on the other hand, are conceptually more modern, even if the history of their development overlaps unevenly with modern orchestra wind, brass, and percussion instruments. This may explain further Robert Palmer’s understanding of the ascendancy of the guitar in the 20th century.⁷² Re-purposing machines takes this a step further. In *Mimesis and Alterity*, Taussig suggests that the mimetic functions as a way of incorporating the Other, both to occupy its perspective temporarily *and* to

⁷² Palmer, “The Church of the Sonic Guitar.”

exorcise its hold, to emphasize “alterity” or difference.⁷³ Walter Benjamin’s “The Storyteller” complements this argument about specifically early 20th century conditions when he suggests that the technologized battlefields of WWI rendered the transmission of human experience in terms of older oral traditions impossible.⁷⁴ If we lack a sufficient discourse to describe the sounds of factories or howitzer shelling, then perhaps by *becoming*, mimetically, a machine, we can expel the terror the machine inspires in us.

“Livery Stable Blues” could be seen to operate in a similarly mimetic way, but it also addresses a slightly different problem. If science and technology have provided incontrovertible proof of the vulnerability of our bodies and inarguable evidence for our similarity to other animals, then the mimetic of barnyard noises, rendered on instruments by human subjects, confirms and differentiates—in altered terms—the man-animal. Both novelty music and the avant-garde return to these themes throughout the 20th century, from emulations of the sound of trains in blues music and the curious case of one-man bands to the use and manipulation of both machine and animal sounds in *musique concrète*—long preceding “cyborg” theory or a philosopher’s anxiety over his nudity in front of a household pet.⁷⁵

Forming

“Ragtime was fanfare for the 20th century.”

--J. Russell Lynes

⁷³ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*.

⁷⁴ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 83-110.

⁷⁵ That means you, Donna Haraway and Jacques Derrida.

“...every pleasure which emancipates itself from the exchange-value takes on subversive features.”

--Theodor Adorno

In his essay “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Popular’,” Stuart Hall begins his interrogation of the concept by looking closely at what “periodization” means for historians, and how it functions. His conclusion is that periodization is best understood as demarcating substantial changes in social relations, manifested in both the mode of production of what might be considered the “base” economy, as well as the “superstructure” of culture and ideology; this understanding contrasts sharply with the widespread tendency to identify periods simply by decade, each supposedly having a “unique” character. Written in the early 1980s, he notes that the period he believes deserved greater historical investigation was from 1880-1920.⁷⁶ Since his writing, there has been a great deal of research on the era in question, creating a fuller picture of what the effects of Taylorization and Fordism, the introduction of the cinema, recorded music, and the radio, and other forms of popular culture meant for people living in a period of massive transformation.

With an entirely new media, like film, the early period is marked by incremental developments in form. Early static camera shots of events gave way to cross-cutting, and eventually a system of formal devices emerged, even if, as Eisenstein argued, a considerable debt was owed by narrative cinema to the 19th century novel.⁷⁷ Despite allowing for the effects of substantial technological change, music in the early 20th

⁷⁶ Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’,” 227-40.

⁷⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today,” in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. Jay Leyda (Harcourt, 1969), 195–256.

century did not face the same situation. True, the limitations of the technologies involved set preconditions for instrumentation and compositional length. But the underlying structure of composition in the United States and Europe already had a host of governing traditions to contend with. With a longer historical view, however, it's apparent that the kinds of widespread social shifts that Hall identifies as constituting an "era" have indeed been accompanied by changes at the level of form in music. Plainchant, madrigals, Baroque keyboard music, Protestant hymn singing, and massed symphonic orchestras can all be linked to historical transformations of the social. In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali even argues that changes in musical form *precede* dynamic social changes, and constitute a kind of "prophesy."⁷⁸ While the veracity of this argument in general and the specifics of its causality are debatable, it seems to go without saying that the transformative period of 1880-1920 would see its own upheaval in music form. For present purposes, I am identifying that upheaval in the contrast between the work of two composers, Scott Joplin and Arnold Schoenberg.

There are probably few more dissimilar composers of the same era in any period. There are also probably few composers whose reception has been as substantially framed by singular outside forces; for Joplin, *The Sting* (1973) has become a dominant frame for cultural memory of his work, and Theodor Adorno's criticism has become inextricably intertwined with Schoenberg and his students, Alban Berg and Anton Webern, together comprising the core of the "Second Vienna School." That Joplin is remembered through

⁷⁸ Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*.

the nostalgic use of his music in a popular film is perhaps fitting, as is Schoenberg's championing by an avowed enemy of popular culture.

The dissimilarities don't stop there, of course. Joplin spearheaded the ragtime style that, by legend as much as historical convention, was introduced at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.⁷⁹ Formally novel as well as explosively popular, ragtime—particularly as a piano style—had few if any antecedents. By contrast, Arnold Schoenberg spent much of his career as a composer trying to break free of the German Romantic tradition, first by exhausting the legacy of Brahms and Mahler, and eventually by introducing elements of atonality and creating the 12-tone system. If we allow ragtime to be a relative of jazz, perhaps the only commonality is that the Nazi party considered both to be “degenerate” art forms.

More significantly, we might ask what the formal elements of two of their major works imply about their respective relationships to the social upheavals of their time, and what that in turn suggests about audience and, consequently, legacy. In Joplin's case, I want to look at “Maple Leaf Rag.” For Schoenberg, *Op. 11*. It's not my intention to provide a thorough musicological analysis of either piece, but rather to suggest that they are emblematic in a general way of two divergent trends in 20th century composition. Joplin's “Maple Leaf Rag,” composed in 1897 in honor of the Maple Leaf Club in Missouri, became the first piece of instrumental music to sell a million copies as a printed score. Charles K. Harris' landmark 1891 sentimental song, “After the Ball,” ultimately

⁷⁹ Edward Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2002), 21.

sold five million copies, but included lyrics.⁸⁰ Joplin considered “Maple Leaf Rag” the tune that would—and did—cement his reputation as a ragtime composer, remaining a classic of the genre. By contrast, Schoenberg’s *Op. 11* is somewhat of a transitional work.⁸¹ With *Op. 11*, Schoenberg made his fullest break with the tonal traditions of the past, but it would not be until the early 1920s, with *Op. 25*, that he would fully articulate his concept of a twelve-tone system.⁸²

In the simplest musicological terms, what makes “Maple Leaf Rag” and *Op. 11* landmarks in history are the concept of “syncopation” and “atonality,” respectively. Both of these characteristics signal a break with the musical past, though the legacies of these breakthroughs are at odds with each other. Both ragtime in general and Schoenberg’s work specifically are not limited to piano music; however, their respective—and iconoclastic—use of the piano are noteworthy and provide a more ready comparison to the stakes in compositional difference. Although, as Edward A. Berlin points out, ragtime cannot simply be reduced to the idea of “syncopation,” that formal feature dominates understanding of the music, aided in the contemporary era by the soundtrack to *The Sting* containing virtually nothing but syncopated piano rags.⁸³ In a basic sense, ragtime’s use of syncopation involves overlapping rhythms that, for the listener, often entail a sense of surprise at which beat is accented; hence, its novelty. Syncopation is neither unique to ragtime in music up to that point (there are examples in European

⁸⁰ Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: W W Norton & Co Inc, 1983), 299-300.

⁸¹ Allen Forte, “The Magical Kaleidoscope: Schoenberg’s First Atonal Masterwork, Opus 11, No. 1,” in *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 5.2 (November 1981), 127-68.

⁸² H. H. Stuckenschmidt, *Twentieth Century Music* (Tucson, AZ: World University Press, 1976), 108.

⁸³ Berlin, *Ragtime*, 11-12.

classical music) nor is syncopation directly linked through ragtime to various, predominantly Afro-disaporic, styles that emerged in the 20th century. However, the popularity of “Maple Leaf Rag” in 1899 heralded this as a formal feature to be contended with throughout the rest of the century, from bebop to reggae to the most current forms of electronic dance music. Foregrounding syncopation marked the ascendancy of an “African” influence in the “West” that predates “Livery Stable Blues” and cut sharply into the hegemony of older European compositional technique—the mainstreaming of American music as “creole” and syncretic.

“Atonality,” first fully explored by Schoenberg, also marked a break with the tradition. That tradition was more limited in scope, however. Rather than being a sensibility of a racial Other that could be applied to a wide variety of otherwise stable compositional forms (like ragtime), Schoenberg and later composers invested in atonality sought to radically de-center composition from the hierarchy of tones ensconced in European music from the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th. What that meant was that the sounding of a series of tones in a chromatic scale from the equal-temperament system was divested of expected relationships between individual tones; there was no tonic, or “center” to refer to. Schoenberg’s *Op. 11* marked the earliest phase of this break, eventually to be elaborated upon and codified in his own later works, as well as those by his students in the Second Viennese School and later followers like Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

The implications of the differences in the approaches of syncopation and atonality involve a fundamental disagreement over the nature of modernity. Although Joplin and

Schoenberg provide fine early examples of this difference, they cannot alone be credited for either the successes or repercussions of such compositional trends. The main point to draw from a comparison between these landmark works is rather a matter of inclusiveness vs. exclusivity, or that composers might either create rules to combat the chaos resulting from social upheavals, or they might suspend or break some rules in order to adapt. The openness or closed character of compositional form has social implications, as Theodor Adorno was apt to point out. Thus, he derides the work of Igor Stravinsky (which incorporated vernacular forms in an art music context) as well as jazz. His reasoning on this point is somewhat ironic for a Marxist critic: jazz was a commodified music, and Stravinsky's usage of ethnic vernacular forms provided ammunition for nationalism, particularly the forms of nationalism that lead to the rise of fascism across Europe.⁸⁴ The irony is, of course, in a Marxist disavowing the value of the culture of, in extremely broad terms, might be called the proletariat, working class African-American or Eastern European peasant in form. The further irony comes from his championing of Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg as "alternatives" to commodified music and *volk*-ish nationalism, given that Schoenberg's shift from the large orchestration of his early work to the smaller organizational unit of *Pierrot Lunaire* and, eventually, the even smaller performance groups during Schoenberg and Adorno's time in postwar Los Angeles, were less the result of rejection of the market per se than a necessary capitulation to the dying away of the old European system of aristocratic patronage and

⁸⁴ Variations on this critique occur at too many points in Adorno's considerable bibliography to mention here, but many of them can be found in: Theodor Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

the lack of available audience to the exiled German speakers. Boulez and Stockhausen would take full advantage of the new form of State patronage after WWII. Adorno's notorious "elitism" can consequently be seen as tied not just to some sort of intellectually autonomous aesthetic judgment, but to the very real conditions of production that—one assumes—a Marxist critic would have been conscious of. But the problematic legacy of Schoenberg's music doesn't rest solely in his greatest critical champion; the 12-tone system inaugurated by the composer gave birth to the more broadly defined methods of "serialist" composition, which, by the late 1950s, was resulting in compositions of a complexity that were beyond the cognition of most listeners—and most composers too, if they weren't privy to a score for analysis. The primary survival of serialism in academic institutions only highlights the fact that Schoenberg's break with the past had also sown within it its own seeds of negation.

Still, Adorno's concerns about the mass culture and ethnic nationalism can't be dismissed lightly. The problem with his criticism is that, in both cases, it's too broadly conceived. All music in the modern era is implicated in the commodity system at some level—which I doubt that Adorno would dispute—but the function of particular music commodities as materialist objects of analysis and forms of ideology is far more nuanced than Adorno's critique allows for. His condemnation of "pseudo-individualized"⁸⁵ mass culture misses the mark in terms of the historic position of African-American culture, as does his lack of distinction between the cultures of subordinate social groups like Bartok's use of the music of the Roma people, as opposed to the Teutonic myths in

⁸⁵ Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia*, 37-52 .

Wagner's operas. More fundamentally, he misses the openness to possibility—however qualified—that Walter Benjamin's work exemplifies. That openness is not even necessarily the domain of African-American musicking; as Robert Palmer would have it, it's indicative of a general American approach to composition. In his essay, "What is American Music?," Palmer contrasts what he sees as a tendency to deploy compositional techniques, however radical, in use-specific, pragmatic ways by Americans with the tendency to systematize in European composers, from Schoenberg to Boulez.⁸⁶ While I agree with Palmer's overarching premise, which allows him to link Charles Ives, Chuck Berry, and the very un-famous local musicians documented by people like Alan Lomax, it also lumps together "Europeans" when I think it's more apt to say "Western Europeans from large, dominant cultures and nations." To a lesser extent, it also downplays the rest of the Americas and Africa. Consequently, a non-system building tendency is evidenced by Gyorgy Ligeti, Iannis Xenakis, as well as Bob Marley and Caribbean music generally and Fela Kuti and the shifting forms of West African popular music of the 20th century in Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, and the Congo, among others. Perhaps this contrast rests on the very nature of what "de-centering" means in the first place. Like their anthropologist counterparts, for composers from the hubs of European colonialism, de-centering was defined on narrow terms, which they could subsequently control. For composers working in the "creole" Western hemisphere—periodic U.S. identification with Europe and current global dominance notwithstanding—the conception of an

⁸⁶ Palmer, "What is American Music?," in *Blues & Chaos: The Music Writing of Robert Palmer*, ed. Anthony DeCurtis (New York: Scribner, 2011), 1-12.

individual's subject-position at in the "center" of history has always been problematic, as it has for the peripheries of the European continent and colonized Africa. Metaphorically, Joplin's "syncopation" operates as a harbinger of multiplicity, repetition *and* difference, and the de-centered interconnectedness of the subject in both the form of musical composition and the flow of history. After WWII, with the influx of immigrant populations into the former centers of power (what the poet Louise Bennett calls "colonization in reverse"⁸⁷) "European" styles, from Krautrock to Franco-Algerian hip hop, indicate the ultimate pervasiveness of this tendency and verify that as historical conditions change, so music is transformed anew.

Two Sounds Clash

"In the old days, people used to risk their lives in India or in the Americas in order to bring back products which now seem to us to have been of comically little worth."

--Claude Levi-Strauss

"Since the Yankees came to Trinidad/
They have the young girls going mad/
Young girls say they treat them nice/
And they give them a better price."

--Lord Invader

In casual conversation between music fans, perhaps no idea looms larger than "authenticity." Within the realm of academic research on popular music, the flipside is intense political debate over the nature of "appropriation," usually from an "authentic" cultural source by an "inauthentic" one. While the debate surrounding both terms is historically comprehensible at a base level given the overall commodification of music in

⁸⁷ Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse," in *Selected Poems*, ed. Mervyn Morris (Kingston: Sangster's, 1982).

the 20th century (wanting the “real” product and not the cheap knock-off) and the recognition of unequal access to the means of musical production (African-American styles underpin many popular music developments, but white musicians have often been more financially successful with those same styles) both concepts ultimately fail to grapple with the dynamism of culture, deferring to relatively static understandings of what is “authentic” and who’s guilty of “theft,” the politicized judgment that is often synonymous with “appropriation.” Outright dismissal of the concepts of “authenticity” and “appropriation” is dangerous, not leastways because they are important for much the same reasons as they’re problematic. Benjamin Filene’s book, *Romancing the Folk*, makes a strong case for the continued inclusion of “authenticity” in discussions of music history precisely because audiences were affected by that idea and used it to frame their understanding of various musical styles, from Appalachian balladry as “Elizabethan” to the perception of Bruce Springsteen’s music as “roots” because it utilizes elements of early rock and roll—a style, not incidentally, that was decidedly “inauthentic” to earlier scholars invested in the Delta blues.⁸⁸ Filene’s understanding of “authenticity” as a constantly shifting locale is complemented by the arguments that Eric Lott makes in *Love and Theft* that if the music of the United States has had any one pervasive feature, it is that at almost every juncture of stylistic change, white people have attempted to benefit—either directly and economically or proximally through social cachet—from the cultural

⁸⁸ Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

products of African-American artists.⁸⁹ The fact that both have serious social and political ramifications is cause enough to keep them nearby in critical discourse.

However, neither concept seems sufficient to deal with either the issue of appropriation from “below,” or with the effects of an increasingly globalized marketplace for popular music. In his essay, “The Poetics and Politics of Pygmy Pop,” Steven Feld introduces the idea of music as a product of what he calls “schizophonic mimesis.”⁹⁰ The concept is an extension of issues he explores in “From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of ‘World Music’ and ‘World Beat’.”⁹¹ Although substantially altered in Feld’s work, the idea of “schizophonia” can be traced back to R. Murray Schafer’s *The Soundscape*. Schafer used “schizophonia” to describe “the split between an original sound and its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction,” and noted that it was a fundamentally 20th century phenomenon.⁹² Schafer’s arguments themselves eerily—if independently—parallel Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of technological capitalism resulting in a widespread state of “schizophrenic” subjectivity at the end of the 20th century; both ideas were introduced in the mid-1970s.

⁸⁹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁹⁰ Steven Feld, “The Poetics and Politics of Pygmy Pop,” in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 254-77.

⁹¹ Steven Feld, “From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis...,” in *Music Grooves*, ed. Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 257-89. It should also be noted that “schismogenesis” originates in the work of anthropologist Gregory Bateson.

⁹² R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape* (New York: Destiny Books, 1993), 90.

For Feld, the splitting of the sound source and its reproduction has global social implications that are not entirely negative, a conclusion he shares with Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. When he pairs "schizophonia" with "mimesis," the combination of his sources transforms syncretically into a wholly new idea. On the one hand, "schizophonic mimesis" is a more precise concept for appropriation on a global level; Feld is particularly interested in how the music of Central African pygmy tribes have gone from ethnographic recordings to source material for successful "pop" music projects, from Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man" to *Deep Forest*. In that sense, schizophonic mimesis is a coming to terms both with increasing awareness of the heterogeneity of the music of the world's people, and the homogenizing effects of capitalism, and therefore not completely different from alarmed interventions that probably stretch back at least as far as "hot" jazz fans' reactions to Paul Whiteman's performance of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.⁹³ However, in a passage curiously excised from the 2004 reprint of the essay in the collection *Western Music and Its Others* but present in the version published in *Yearbook for Traditional Music* in 1996, he notes that during Colin Turnbull's fieldwork resulting in both the classic book *The Forest People* and an invaluable set of ethnographic recordings, Turnbull encountered a tribal group and asked them to sing "the oldest song they knew." The group responded with a version of "Oh My Darling, Clementine."⁹⁴

⁹³ I identify a particular important global shift around this issue in the mid-1960s via a discussion of "Eight Miles High" in Chapter 1.

⁹⁴ Steven Feld, "Pygmy POP. A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (January 1, 1996): 29.

Although the first question that enters the mind when confronted by this evidence is how a group of African Pygmies were familiar with a 19th century American western folk ballad (and no explanation for that is available, as Turnbull skips right over it in his otherwise detailed liner notes) more significant questions entail grappling with the fact that a supposedly “authentic”—in this case most definitely connoting “primitive”—cultural group turned the tables in an unexpected way on the preconceptions of a British anthropologist. This is not, however, a completely isolated example, nor clear-cut evidence of Western cultural hegemony: Harold Courlander’s *Familiar Music in Strange Places*, Ras Michael’s reggae version of the country tune “Don’t Sell Daddy Anymore Whiskey,” and a substantial portion of the output of the Sublime Frequencies label attest to schizoid nature of uneven global cultural exchange. Pygmies singing “Clementine” and the examples I’ve cited are undoubtedly obscure, but they point to complications in understanding two extremely popular examples of similarly complex processes in American novelty and avant-garde music: Harry Belafonte’s 1956 song “Day-O (Banana Boat Song)” and Terry Riley’s 1967 album, *A Rainbow in Curved Air*.

Although it’s relatively easy to see Belafonte’s song (included on the album *Calypso*, the first LP to sell a million copies and eclipsing the sales record of Elvis’ first LP that same year⁹⁵) as a novelty, given Riley’s pedigree and personal associations, understanding *A Rainbow in Curved Air* as a kind of avant-garde novelty is also useful; it

⁹⁵ Michael Eldridge, “The Remains of the Day-O,” in *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2004* (New York: Da Capo, 2004), 71.

was surprisingly successful in album sales and inspired the Who's "Baba O'Riley."⁹⁶ Both examples are embedded in the particulars of their moments of production; significantly, this involves the faddish exoticism of Caribbean music styles in the 1950s (Belafonte) and the vogue for incorporating formal elements of Hindustani classical music in the 1960s (Riley).⁹⁷ However, what interests me most in both cases is the way these performers very pointedly situate these works as "inauthentic."

In Belafonte's case, the politics of appropriation and "inauthenticity" are doubly complex. A Jamaican-born immigrant to the United States, Belafonte gained success as a performer and interpreter of "traditional" or "folk" material from his native region.⁹⁸ And yet, as he himself notes in an interview with Michael Eldridge, his knowledge of Caribbean styles came mostly from research and access to ethnographic recordings—not unlike Pete Seeger and other white popularizers of "folk" material, domestic or international.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Belafonte's most famous song, "Day-O," is not really an example of calypso (as his album title would suggest) but rather a Jamaican work song.¹⁰⁰ However, due to the unprecedented success of "Day-O" and its accompanying album, Belafonte was crowned the "King of Calypso" by the U.S. press, a moniker that he was more than wary of accepting, since the Port-of-Spain Carnival—the primary locus of "calypso" in the strict definition of the style—annually crowned the best performer

⁹⁶ Peter Lavezzoli, *Dawn of Indian Music in the West* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 244.

⁹⁷ The latter is discussed extensively in Chapter 1.

⁹⁸ Harry Belafonte and Michael Shnayerson, *My Song: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

⁹⁹ Michael Eldridge, "The Remains of the Day-O," 68-92.

¹⁰⁰ "Day-O" isn't even really an example of "mento," a Jamaican folk style more similar to Trinidadian calypso.

“king.” Despite this disavowal of calypso “authenticity,” Belafonte takes pains in his interview with Eldridge to highlight the political value—he intimates “subversiveness”—of a black performer in the 1950s getting a mainstream audience to sing along to a Caribbean plantation worker’s lament, and notes that his financial success from this and other recordings helped him to bankroll Civil Rights activists.¹⁰¹

At the same time, it’s worth questioning the actual effectiveness of “Day-O” as political subversion. It certainly wasn’t the first “calypso” song to make it onto the American airwaves; the Andrews Sisters had a hit with a substantially altered version of Lord Invader’s “Rum and Coca Cola” in 1945,¹⁰² and Caribbean “exotica” recordings formed part of the pop periphery—alongside Hawaiian/Polynesian music to soundtrack a “tiki” party—that is indelibly linked to the proliferation of military and economic ties that were sought as a continuation of U.S. “Good Neighbor” policies that concurrently attempted to supplant European colonial influence and combat communism in the postwar period.¹⁰³ Belafonte’s work stands out in this context because, unlike the Andrews Sisters, it was possible to perceive his work as “authentically” West Indian—if not necessarily Trinidadian—despite his silk shirt nightclub attire and enormous popular success. At the same time, the novelty of his act was both a result of Schafer’s “schizophonia” and itself a primary example of the cultural de-contextualization of sound

¹⁰¹ Eldridge, “The Remains of the Day-O.”

¹⁰² “Music: Coca in Calypso,” *Time*, January 29, 1945,
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,933984,00.html>.

¹⁰³ For further examples, see: Philip Hayward, ed., *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-War Popular Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

recordings in the pop marketplace; after all, how many listeners to Belafonte in 1956 became invested in protesting the exploitation of United Fruit workers?

On the other hand, it is not possible to construct Terry Riley's use of Hindustani classical music forms along similar lines of "authenticity," though it's more probable that Riley's invocation of raga forms sparked interest in more "authentic" Indian musicians. However, Riley's whiteness does preclude easy, if erroneous, conflation of himself with a generic "India" the way it is possible for Belafonte's synecdochical Caribbean-ness.¹⁰⁴ Or, in another relevant example, we might think about how the Nigerian percussionist Babatunde Olatunji's recorded performances of a syncretic West African drumming style complicate his reception as a "real" exemplar of Yoruba tribal form.¹⁰⁵ Neither of these subject positions are possibilities for Riley. Still, Riley's work is similarly linked to the materialist particulars of his era: following Eisenhower's meetings with Nehru regarding U.S./India cooperation against communist China, recordings of masters of Hindustani classical music like Ali Akbar Khan, Ravi Shankar, and Pandit Pran Nath became available for the first time in the United States. Thus, in the 1960s, it became fashionable for multiple types of musicians—the jazz avant-garde, experimental art music composers, and psychedelic rock artists—to proclaim an allegiance to and influence from Hindustani classical music.¹⁰⁶ However, like the relative/radical schema that I introduced earlier, the distribution of Hindustani music was not uniform. Thus, "Eight Miles High" is more

¹⁰⁴ This parallels the way that "calypso" became a catch-all for all Anglophone Caribbean music before about 1970.

¹⁰⁵ Babatunde Olatunji and Robert Atkinson, *The Beat of My Drum: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁶ Lavezzoli, *Dawn of Indian Music in the West*.

radically novel/experimental in a rock music context than the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood," which only uses the sitar for ornament. Similarly, La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, Tony Conrad, John Cale, and Terry Riley's work inside and out of the "Theatre of Eternal Music" during the 1960s often drew inspiration from ragas. Despite this connection, it was still possible at the end of the decade for Riley to note "I had already done *Rainbow in Curved Air* and had a big record on CBS. I was launched to have a long career and then I just dropped out and went to India," and for Young and Zazeela to become acolytes of Pandit Pran Nath.¹⁰⁷ To become students of acknowledged Hindustani masters in this context meant to move beyond the novelty of earlier usage of the raga form in order to become more radically avant-garde—ironically, by more accurately imitating a profoundly rule-bound musical tradition.

Belafonte followed a something of a similar trajectory post-*Calypso*: his *The Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music* mines African-American musical traditions in order to produce a relatively stable sonic tableau.¹⁰⁸ The push towards a more "authentic" performance of a "foreign" style, historically or culturally, is never a completed process, and I would not ascribe the level of naiveté necessary for such a belief to either Belafonte or Riley. It does, however, raise the question of the value of the "imperfect copy," or what Taussig would consider unnecessary verisimilitude between mimesis and object.¹⁰⁹ In one sense, the employment of "foreign" sonic markers is a

¹⁰⁷ Gamall Awad and Ammon Haggerty, "Terry Riley," *Qaswa*, October 9, 1992, http://www.qaswa.com/thoughts/entry/terry_riley/?rhythm/terry.html.

¹⁰⁸ Eldridge, "The Remains of the Day-O."

¹⁰⁹ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 17.

direct result of the kind of “schizophonia” over which Steven Feld expresses concern in both the essay from *Music Grooves* and the journal version of “Pygmy Pop.” These concerns are rooted in the very real inequalities of access to the means of production, and the homogenizing effects of Euro-American cultural hegemony; they were not frequently articulated in the 1950s and ‘60s, but by the 1980s—when “world music” became a significant marketing category—authors like Feld were right to be wary of “utopian” musical hybrids like Paul Simon’s *Graceland*.¹¹⁰ But an alternate view is possible, indicated by the excised passage from “Pygmy Pop”: the “clash” between sonic cultures is not a one-way street of dominant vehicles over subordinate pavement. Such a perspective is more common in the speculative historical scenes depicting the contact between slave rhythms and European melodies (we can observe today which of those actually achieved “hegemony”). Less recognized or heralded are the more contemporary moments of sound “clash” between, say, traditional Thai music and American rock (documented by Sublime Frequencies, a topic in Chapter 4) or the collaborative projects that avant-garde jazz musicians like Don Cherry initiated between himself and musicians from a whole host of different cultures. I use the term “clash” to describe these types of sonic events because their results are often less a homogenous synthesis tolerable to American or European ears than a creative pidgin of styles—a continuation of the long history of the syncretic/creolization process. Which is to say that the novel, “inauthentic” first contacts may have more to teach our ears than their learned progeny.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *Global Pop*.

Techno-Human-Song

“Brekekekéx-koáx-koáx”

--Aristophanes

“Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do/
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.”

--Harry Dacre

In his celebrated essay, “The Grain of the Voice,” Roland Barthes approaches a critical, and up to that point under-theorized, issue within musical analysis. To summarize his prompt, the question is “To what are we responding when we hear the voice of a singer? The fidelity of the tones they sing to the ideal pitch indicated by the score? Or the expressiveness of that voice, the drama invoked by the singer’s approach to the text of the song?” Barthes’ singular contribution was to disregard the latter two questions when he reached his conclusion, arguing that “grain” was the element that listeners responded to most strongly, a reaction that transcended the power of adjectives—perhaps an alternate explanation for the “unknown tongue.” Barthes writes in his conclusion that,

The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs. If I perceive the ‘grain’ in a piece of music and accord this ‘grain’ a theoretical value (the emergence of the text in the work), I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual – I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic – but in no way ‘subjective’ (it is not the psychological ‘subject’ in me who is listening; the climactic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce – to express – that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it).¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 188.

Barthes' conception of "subjectivity" here is very complex. On the one hand, he clearly is not discarding individual perception. On the other, he is both identifying the process of listening as "oceanic fantasy" within the Freudian/Lacanian matrix, and at the same time rejecting the axiom of "regression" that lies at the heart of that mode of judgment. However, as he continues his concluding remarks, it becomes clearer that his valorization of "grain" is in many ways a dismantling of aesthetic hierarchies, eschewing "if/then" propositions of taste in favor what he calls "*signifiance*." The term is not easy to translate into English, though in a loose sense it can be understood as the "emergence" of meaning. This emergence is sharply contrasted for Barthes with the word *significance*, which means more or less the same thing in English: to adhere to pre-existing framework of meaning. In "The Grain of the Voice," Barthes is primarily interested in the pleasure (what he calls *jouissance*, whose meaning is as sexual as it sounds out loud) of the *signifiance* of sound, particularly but not exclusively that of the human voice.

More plainly, it is the pleasure of the discovery of meaning in the manner with which a voice expresses the body of the singer, outside of codified characteristics. For example, we might consider the process of elimination built into the television program *American Idol*. Generally, contestants sing pieces that are or have become a kind of "standard" in the old jazz sense of the term. The "variety" of contestants typically boils down to a "type." These types might include highly emotive male R&B singers, female R&B divas, pop crooners, campy cabaret stylists, or country singers. (Male rock singers are probably too tied to the idea of the "band-as-unit" to be useful in this context.) The judges have personal preferences for "type" but generally assess on relative merits—the

ability of a contestant to adhere to their respective type. The final winner of *American Idol* depends on that season's audience's preference for a particular type over another. The show's logic is basically what Barthes would call *signifiante*. However, and mostly for the sake of novelty/comedy, there are occasionally contestants who make it into the upper rounds of elimination based almost entirely on their *signifiante*, and this performer would, in Barthes' framework, be the only one of interest. Isn't William Hung's performance of "She Bangs" far more memorable than any of the individual performances of actual *Idol* winners? This analogy has its drawbacks, however. Although Barthes isn't explicit on this point, it's clear that his analysis hinges on the schizophrenic conditions created by the advent of recording. Barthes' concept of "grain" isn't strictly limited to recordings, but it's difficult to imagine arriving at this conclusion about hearing the body of a singer in their voice in an era when the embodied singer was always a physical presence. Still, the televisual nature of *American Idol* at least partially serves to verify the "grain" of *signifiante* of a singer like William Hung: we can see his awkward clothing, note his "Asian" pronunciations of certain English words, observe the small, narrow mouth that constricts the expansive expressiveness we expect from a Latin pop-dance ballad. Thus, the turnover from *signifiante* to *signifié* is quite rapid; from startlingly novel to "stereotypical Asian karaoke singer" in little more than a week's news cycle.

Not all voices, televised or not, are as easily codified into *signification*, though even some "bad" singers like Bob Dylan quickly came to denote a "type" even in the 1960s; some voices, like Yoko Ono's, operate at the level of *signifiante* throughout a

long career—Barthes would probably have appreciated the irrelevance of “I like” or “I don’t like” with regards to Ono. But Barthes’ understanding of “grain” has several major limitations. First, given the predication of his theory of the “grain” on recorded performances, Barthes’ explanations are curiously ahistorical; this problem plagues Barthes’ work as far back as *Mythologies* in the mid-1950s. In that work, the historical cracks through in his “Myth Today” when he discusses the Senegalese soldier saluting the French flag. (One imagines “La Marseillaise” playing in the background.)¹¹² In “The Grain of the Voice,” he comes closest to acknowledging the historical—again via the problem of race—when he notes particular “national” characteristics of European singers. But since he limits his discussion to German, Russian, and French examples, his argument is hardly satisfying on this front; if you’re looking for a way to finally answer the question “Can white people sing the blues?,” you won’t find it here. The second problem, given the erotic nature of his theory, is that there is surprisingly little distinction between “male” and “female” vocal mannerisms. But perhaps this lack of distinction is purposeful. As a queer theorist, Barthes’ work—particularly *A Lover’s Discourse*—evades the heteronormative binarisms of desire.¹¹³ And more generously, voice is hardly a primary sexual characteristic: without a biographical reference point, some performers aren’t obviously masculine- or feminine-sounding. In either case, a clear if not complete break with psychoanalysis has occurred. Finally, although the “grain” is a major breakthrough in understanding the effects of schizophrasia, the idea is rooted in a rather

¹¹² Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Mythologies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 126.

¹¹³ Roland Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

traditional—and Romantic—idea of what a “body” is. Barthes’ conception of “grain” expects a physical presence of body/voice prior to the schizophonic split, corresponding in visual theory to Bazin and Kracauer’s shared understanding of the “realism” of the photographic image.¹¹⁴ This issue is easy enough to ignore during the first six or seven decades of recorded technology, when the voice was transcribed into physical waves (“grooves”) on a master disk almost immediately prior to mechanical reproduction. However, with the advent of commercially available magnetic tape after WWII, conceptions of the body/voice as such became increasingly untenable, something Barthes either ignored or didn’t understand in 1972 when he wrote his essay, not least of all in the way that the gendered and racialized body interfaces with new technologies.

Although early pioneers of magnetic tape for pop music purposes like Les Paul limited their use of the technology to overdubbing vocal and instrumental parts—creating multiple back-up voices from a single performer, or playing duet with oneself on a single instrument¹¹⁵—or in avant-garde circles for the recording and editing of mechanical or electronic sound sources (Pierre Schaeffer, Louis and Bebe Barron, etc.), the full implications of magnetic tape as a tool for the manipulation of the human voice weren’t realized until the latter half of the 1950s. In particular, I would cite Karlheinz Stockhausen’s 1955/6 opus *Gesang der Junglinge* and David Seville’s (born Rostom

¹¹⁴ Andre Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹¹⁵ Robb Lawrence, *The Early Years of the Les Paul Legacy 1915-1963* (New York: Hal Leonard Corp, 2008), 1-48.

Bagdarsian) 1958 novelty hits “Witch Doctor” and “The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don’t Be Late).”

Of all of the pairings of novelty and avant-garde in this section, the contrast between Stockhausen and Alvin, Simon, and Theodore seems the most comically absurd. And yet because both sets of recordings were impossible prior to the development of magnetic tape, their relationship is perhaps more direct than any of my other examples. Which is not to say that either composer had any knowledge of the other. But what unites the two is their realization of the fundamental manipulability of the human voice made possible by magnetic tape—a realization whose effects have resonated through music from Vocoderes and “talk boxes” to Auto-tune.¹¹⁶ The technological process that both Stockhausen and Seville used is deceptively simple: by changing the speed of the tape, voices leave and then return to the same pitch at higher or lower octaves, provided that the tape speed maintains a steady ratio to the original recording of the voice. In fact, the use of variable speed recording/playback devices predates the use of magnetic tape, since John Cage had experimented with turntables with a similar capability as early as 1939 in his *Imaginary Landscape No. 1*.¹¹⁷ Although magnetic wire recording devices were available slightly before magnetic tape and remained in use for sometime after its introduction, their interest to composers was severely hampered by several factors.¹¹⁸ The first is that, because they ran at high speeds, variable speed playback was not

¹¹⁶ For an extensive discussion of this history, see: Dave Tompkins, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach: The Vocoder from World War II to Hip-Hop, The Machine Speaks* (New York: Melville House, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 29.

¹¹⁸ An important exception to this was the Egyptian-American composer Halim El-Dabh, whose 1944 proto-musique concrète piece, *The Expression of Zaar*, was done using a wire recorder.

practical. Second, unlike tape, which can be cut and spliced back together, magnetized wire lacked the ability to be easily edited. This wasn't a problem for field recordings, however, and consequently wire recordings continued to be used by recordists of oral histories, public speeches, live-in-studio radio performances, or anthropological documents. Finally, although this occurred somewhat later, magnetic wire cannot be divided into "tracks" that can be recorded separately but played back simultaneously.¹¹⁹ In a sense, magnetic tape—developed by the Germans and pillaged after the Allies took Berlin—is just an advance on wire technology. Its advances, however, were profound.

Although magnetic tape was initially only available to well-funded pop musicians, e.g. Bing Crosby,¹²⁰ and composers with institutional support (e.g. Pierre Schaeffer), the technology eventually made its way into the hands of "audiophiles," a breed of techno-acoustic enthusiast that arose after WWII and counted Ralph Ellison amongst its loosely connected adherents to "high fidelity," or "hi-fi." Unlike their music-producing counterparts, these consumers of tape technology were interested mostly in the quality of sound reproduction rather than formal manipulability, though the former characteristic undoubtedly attracted producers who felt that music recorded on tape retained superior sound quality even when transferred to 33 1/3 or 45 rpm vinyl disc.¹²¹ Hi-fi enthusiasts were and still are a specialized kind of consumer. Although many of them were probably music fans in a general way, glancing through the catalogs of 1950s

¹¹⁹ "Wire Recorders," n.d., http://www.videointerchange.com/wire_recorder1.htm.

¹²⁰ Steven Schoenherr, "The History of Magnetic Recording", November 5, 2002, <http://homepage.mac.com/oldtownman/recording/magnetic4.html>.

¹²¹ Joseph O'Connell, "The Fine-Tuning of a Golden Ear: High-End Audio and the Evolutionary Model of Technology," in *Technology and Culture*, 33:1 (1992), 1-40.

and early 1960s audiophile record labels like Cook and Audio Fidelity, one is struck by the abundance of offerings that fall far afield of the Perry Como/Elvis Presley pop majority. In particular, there is a preponderance of music made by people outside of the United States; Emory Cook and Sidney Frey of Audio Fidelity recorded a great deal of Caribbean music—predating Belafonte by a few years—and Frey was instrumental in reviving interest in “belly dance” music from the Middle East and in popularizing Brazilian bossa nova. Their catalogs also espouse an interest in decidedly non-musical fare, from *The Sounds of the Ionosphere* to all manner of mechanical sounds, but there is a special interest in the sounds of locomotives, especially varieties that were being phased out of use.¹²²

Endeavors to preserve the sounds of obsolete machines might at first seem curious—it’s worth noting that in *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx was concurrently exploring the destruction of the American pastoral in the 1840s by these same trains¹²³—Thoreau’s influence appearing yet again—but in another sense, there is a sort of logical continuation from the documentary efforts highlighted by Alan Lomax’s “folk” and Colin Turnbull “primitive” pygmies to records of steam engines, calliopes, and the soundscape that is a New York City street; Folkways Records released examples of each of these, though at significantly lower sound quality than Cook or Audio Fidelity. Aside from the archival impulse, the hi-fi examples of this curious subset of recordings

¹²² The full Cook Records catalog can be found www.folkways.si.edu. Audio Fidelity’s catalog can be found at Bruce Laing’s private website, www.afd.bruceiaing.com.

¹²³ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

from the period were definitely effective at showing off the dynamism of the enthusiast's set-up; it's one thing to listen to Toscanini conducting in NBC's cutting-edge studios, quite another to be able to play back the sound of a bullet or a calypsonian holding forth a raucous Carnival crowd in Port-of-Spain.¹²⁴ In *Mimesis and Alterity*, Michael Taussig identifies this fundamental contradiction between the "primitive" and advanced technology in his discussion of Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). From Taussig's view, the power of a new technology is only actualized when it is used on "primitive" subjects. (This is a somewhat different usage of "primitive" than the ethos I described in Chapter 1.) For Taussig, the quintessential scene of this exchange is the anthropologist and their gramophone, astounding the native Other with his "magic."¹²⁵ In the case of hi-fi records, that relationship is inverted: technology allows us to perceive the auditory worlds of faraway peoples, to experience sounds familiar to our parents and grandparents before the machines creak and grind to a halt, to amplify a forest or focus in on a cricket, and to single out from the noise the peculiarities of our most current technologies. In short, the same kind of simultaneous, psychedelic psychogeographic and/or psychoacoustic world described in Chapter 1.

Though it is easy to laugh at the native beholding the sound of "His Master's Voice," the implications of this power are disconcerting, to say the least, when they are applied to that which we think most familiar; namely, a voice singing in our own language. In his essay "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin writes of the veterans of the

¹²⁴ These are descriptions of actual Audio Fidelity and Cook Records releases.

¹²⁵ Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 201.

trenches of WWI that, “A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in the countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.”¹²⁶ A generation later, U.S. Army Signal Corps veterans brought back magnetic tape from a very different Germany than the one of Benjamin’s Berlin childhood. Even the sky was changed by the advent of the atomic bomb; in Gregory Corso’s words, the “Budger of History Brake of Time.”¹²⁷ Bodies were tinier and more fragile, and the voices that told stories—even a voice preserved from the grave like Nipper’s master—were now subject to previously unimaginable transformations. Under such conditions, it should not be surprising that even the wielders of a power as negligible in light of the bomb as recorded sound tread lightly, enrobing the machine, like Stockhausen’s *Gesang der Junglinge*, in the familiar guise of a choir boy, or that they find humor in the primitive and the animalistic, as with Bagdarsian’s witch doctor and chipmunks.

The heart of the problem posed by *Gesang der Junglinge* and “The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don’t Be Late)” is what it means to be human. The question embarrasses me as I write it, though it can usefully be traced at least as far back as the “mechanical-animal” posited in Descartes’ work—and is consequently intertwined with

¹²⁶ Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov,” 84.

¹²⁷ Gregory Corso, “Bomb,” in *Mindfield: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1998), 65.

modernity itself.¹²⁸ The valorization of the human as primarily mechanical (and thus not altogether different from “dumb” beasts) or as something transcendent of physiology alternated between intellectual trends of the 17th century forward: from Enlightenment thinkers falling mostly on the side of mechanistic theories—with deism, even god just sets the clock in motion—to the Romantic science of the Hegelians, and back again to the materialism of Hermann von Helmholtz and Charles Darwin. Scientists cut apart frogs and other animals in order to understand the human body; they invented numerous tools to see the mechanisms buried deep in living bodies so that defects or damages could be repaired.

As Jonathan Sterne points out in *The Audible Past*, the fundamental breakthroughs necessary for audio reproduction technology occurred when Alexander Graham Bell and others were able to transform Alessandro Achillini’s Renaissance-era discovery that the human ear functioned mechanically—hammer (malleus) and anvil (incus)—into a process of transcription of vibrations, ultimately resulting in the phonographic systems of Thomas Edison and Emile Berliner.¹²⁹ Likewise, scientific understanding of the larynx—the organ necessary to phonation in mammals—progressed rapidly in the 19th century. Investigators of the larynx were interested in both the rehabilitative opportunities offered by such knowledge, as well as its more abstract relationship to music; Theodor Billroth, a close personal friend of Johannes Brahms as

¹²⁸ This problem was redefined in the postwar period as the “ghost in the machine,” introduced in: Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind: 60th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹²⁹ Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 53.

well as a path-breaking surgeon, performed the first successful laryngectomy in 1873.¹³⁰ By the 20th century, numerous techniques existed for producing speech after the removal of the larynx, as did some of the first attempts at machine synthesis of human speech.

Despite the numerous positive effects on both individual lives and on society as a whole, the fact that these medical and technological breakthroughs occurred cannot be divorced from the fact that their developments stemmed from the exponential increase in cancer (a byproduct of the Industrial Revolution's factories and the proliferation of tobacco use among working people) as well as their applicability to military logistics; President Truman used a type of "vocoder"—an early speech synthesis machine—to send the coded message containing the order to drop the first atomic bomb on Japan.¹³¹ Although neither *Gesang der Junglinge* nor "The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don't Be Late)" is technically an example of speech synthesis, the technology used to produce them can be traced back to the German military-industrial complex: the conglomerate IG Farben manufactured both magnetic tape and Zyklon B.¹³²

However, the connection between Stockhausen's and Bagdarsian's compositions and WWII isn't simply the paranoid domain of *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Doctor Strangelove*. Stockhausen's entire career can be seen—in part—as a coming-to-terms with the legacy of the *Reichsmusikkammer*, the Nazi department charged with purging

¹³⁰ H. Engel, "Billroth, Christian Albert Theodor," in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography, Volume 2* (New York: Scribner, 1970), 129–31.

¹³¹ Tompkins, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach*, 77.

¹³² Diarmuid Jeffreys, *Hell's Cartel: IG Farben and the Making of Hitler's War Machine*, First ed. (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2010), 9.

“degenerate” music.¹³³ Although compositions like *Gesang der Junglinge* rejected Schoenberg’s 12-tone technique, they did retain similar serialist inclinations. Furthermore, Stockhausen’s studies with information theorist and phoneticist Werner Meyer-Eppler—who helped develop the electrolarynx—shifted the composer towards *Elektronische Musik*, as well as aleatory (chance-based) techniques.¹³⁴ The shift to electronic music was also aided considerably by Stockhausen’s time spent working in Paris with Pierre Schaeffer, the father of *musique concrète*. Stockhausen brought all of these influences together to create *Gesang der Junglinge* in the mid-1950s at Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), the Cologne-based West German radio station that housed that country’s most advanced electronic music studio; in a very literal sense, Stockhausen was a State composer.¹³⁵ Being a work of total serialism, it avoids any sense of thematic development as it would be found in the German classical tradition of Beethoven or Wagner. Like *musique concrète*, it manipulates the raw material of real acoustic events (a boy singing) and combines these with pure electronic tones in the form of sine waves and percussive sounds. As a result, no formal distinction is made between the human and the machine.

Bagdarsian’s goals were not so lofty as his German counterpart. Prior to “The Witch Doctor” and “The Chipmunk Song,” Bagdarsian was a moderately successful

¹³³ For further discussion, see: Michael H. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹³⁴ Meyer-Eppler’s significance is addressed throughout: M. J. Grant, *Serial Music, Serial Aesthetics: Compositional Theory in Post-War Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹³⁵ I am using “State” here to designate the distinction between government-funded European composers like Stockhausen, Schaeffer, and Boulez and the far less institutionalized American composers of the same period like John Cage.

songwriter and actor who had served in WWII; he took the pen name “David Seville” after the city he had been stationed in during the war.¹³⁶ Although sped-up voices had been used in earlier pop recordings, notably the Cowboy Church Sunday School’s “Open Up Your Heart (And Let the Sun Shine in)” in 1955, none had used it in such an extreme fashion until “The Witch Doctor” in 1958.¹³⁷ “Open Up Your Heart” used tape speed as a form of pitch manipulation to make an adult woman sound like a little girl, predating the similar-functioning Auto-Tune by about four decades. “The Witch Doctor” is a classic of 1950s novelty songs, and it spent a number of weeks at #1 in the spring of 1958. The song itself, as the title would indicate to anyone who has somehow escaped hearing it, most definitely falls within the broad category of exotica that existed in the postwar period in the U.S., with all of the accompanying racial undertones of that process of Other-ing. “The Chipmunk Song” adds to this exotica trend by zeroing in on *the* children’s toy craze of that era: what Alvin wants for Christmas is a Hula Hoop.

The Wham-O toy company started producing Hula Hoops in 1957, although hoops have been used as toys for centuries. In Tim Walsh’s *Timeless Toys*, he claims that the California toymakers became aware of the peculiar method of “hooping” they made popular via the work of an Australian physical education teacher.¹³⁸ However, some sources claim that the true origins lie with the “hoop dance” fad that occurred in England in the 14th century, and that 18th century British sailors who passed through Hawaii

¹³⁶ Otfinoski, *The Golden Age of Novelty Songs*, 14.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³⁸ Tim Walsh, *Timeless Toys: Classic Toys and the Playmakers Who Created Them* (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2005), 142–44.

combined “hoop” with “hula,” a native Hawaiian dance because of similar motions.¹³⁹ Whatever the origins, the centrality of the Hula Hoop to “The Chipmunk Song” enmeshes it in both the rise of the plastics industry (Hula Hoops are made of polyethylene) as well as the vogue for all things Hawaiian—the latter being a direct result of U.S. servicemen stationed in the future state prior to, during, and after WWII.¹⁴⁰

After the success of “The Witch Doctor,” Bagdarsian sought to extend the novel element of tape manipulation by speeding up not just his own voice, but by recording three different parts himself; when played back at normal speed, the three vocal parts would form a trio. According to Steve Oftinoski’s *The Golden Age of Novelty Songs*, Bagdarsian’s choice of chipmunks as the ostensible “singers” was due to a particularly aggressive chipmunk in Yosemite that reminded him of his precocious son.¹⁴¹ However, it is more than likely that Bagdarsian was thinking of Chip ‘n Dale, Disney’s popular chipmunk cartoon characters from the period; Bagdarsian hoped to create a franchise to compete with Disney using *his* chipmunks after the success of the initial song—a competition that continues long after his death and the acquisition of the characters by Universal.¹⁴² Although it’s not entirely clear how Disney managed to speed up Chip ‘n’ Dale’s voices for their first appearance in 1943, this was likely accomplished with optical sound recordings, specifically RCA Photophone, which licensed its use to both RKO

¹³⁹ Charles Panati, *Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1989), 370.

¹⁴⁰ Sven Kirsten, *The Book of Tiki* (London: Taschen, 2003).

¹⁴¹ Oftinoski, *The Golden Age of Novelty Songs*, 15.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

Radio Pictures and Walt Disney Productions, whom RKO distributed.¹⁴³ The primary difference between the two sets of chipmunks is that Chip ‘n’ Dale’s voices are essentially gibberish. Using sound-on-film recording, the voice actors could record at a slower speed, but the playback options for optical recording were not precise enough to make that speech intelligible.¹⁴⁴ With “The Witch Doctor” and “The Chipmunk Song,” the vocal part is not only intelligible but is actually in the same key as the instrumental parts. “The Chipmunk Song” takes this further by having three intelligible vocal parts harmonize. This was only possible with magnetic tape.¹⁴⁵

At the moment of their popularization, the new possibilities for sound recording afforded by magnetic tape are as abundantly clear as the anxieties that they provoked precisely because sound recording is uniquely suited to dealing with questions involving human/animal vs. machine. Unlike film—the other great reproductive technology of the 20th century—recording practices by design assume human actors. Whereas film records the reflection of light off of an object and finds its greatest power in depicting the motion of those objects, organic or not, sound recording from Edison’s “little lamb” forward assumes both a voice and an ear interfacing via an inorganic machine. The consequence of de-stabilizing the relationship between voice and ear through manipulation or synthesization of the voice reinforces and compounds this condition by establishing a spectrum that runs between the purely machinic voice (like a vocoder) and what Douglas

¹⁴³ Leo Enticknap, *Moving Image Technology—From Zoetrope to Digital* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 110–19.

¹⁴⁴ For examples of the slowed down audio track, see: “Chip ‘n’ Dale Online – Chip ‘n’ Dale and Rescue Rangers » Audio”, n.d., <http://chipndaleonline.com/audio/>.

¹⁴⁵ It also helped the song win the 1959 Grammy for “Best Engineered Record (non-classical),” alongside wins for “Best Comedy Performance” and “Best Children’s Recording.”

Kahn calls the “meat voice,” or assertively embodied phonation—akin to what Barthes refers to as the “grain.”¹⁴⁶ Each example along this spectrum is best understood as a series of potential dialectics; Stockhausen “machines” a human voice to make it more mechanical, and Bagdarsian uses a machine to invoke an animal using his own voice.

Both the “machine voice” and the “meat voice” have their own histories that bear sketching out. Machine voices include the throat microphones used by military pilots, Alvino Rey’s use of the same technology to make his pedal steel guitar “sing” in 1939, and the Sonovox used by Walt Disney to make the train “speak” through its whistle in *Dumbo* (1941). The vocoder is also a form of machine voice via synthesis, from its prototype demonstration at the New York World’s Fair in 1939 through its use in the SIGSALY military transmission system (the one Truman used) to the eventual adoption of the vocoder by Walter/Wendy Carlos for the soundtrack to *A Clockwork Orange* and the many musicians who followed, notably Kraftwerk and Afrika Bambaataa. “Talk Boxes” like the one used for Peter Frampton’s “Do You Feel Like I Do” and many of Roger Troutman’s recordings are low-tech attempts to create “robot” voices, though speech synthesis became much easier and cheaper between the IBM 704 mainframe that sang “Daisy Bell” in 1961 (inspiring Arthur C. Clarke’s HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey*) to the Speak & Spell toy marketed by Texas Instruments in the late 1970s made famous in the movie *E.T.*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*.

¹⁴⁷ All of these examples are discussed in: Tompkins, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach*.

“Meat voices” have a similarly long history, and perhaps a more complex one as well. Although the pleasure of guttural, animal-like sounds probably stretches back to the point of speculative anthropology, the postwar period saw an explosion of aggressively embodied vocal styles, from Artaud’s radio piece *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* in 1947 to the “beast language” in the poetry Michael McClure, field recordings of Native American songs, Screamin’ Jay Hawkins’ witch doctor-like “I Put a Spell on You,” Abbey Lincoln and Yoko Ono’s screams, the bizarre stylings of Wild Man Fischer and Tiny Tim, Captain Beefheart’s post-Howlin’ Wolf avant-garde incantations, and an uncountable number of rockabilly singles invoking animal noises. With the emphasis on the human-animal voice also came an interest in the voices of other animals, including touchstones like Folkways’ 1958 *Sounds of North American Frogs* and *Songs of the Humpback Whale* in 1970; The Residents would use the latter’s aesthetics to great effect on their 1979 album, *Eskimo*.

As 2001 made apparent, if a machine can speak, it is far easier to relate to it as human—perhaps terrifyingly so. But at the same time, by using the recording machine to howl, yelp, cry, and laugh, the essential animal-ness of the human voice is also revealed, which is nearly as unnerving. And yet, the curiosity piqued and occasional popularity of recordings that operate at the outer margins of the spectrum I’ve described attests to the fact that listeners—human listeners—are continuously drawn to the *significance* of voices both alike and different from their own, whether feminine/masculine, Euro-American/“foreign,” or machine/animal, from singing chipmunks and electronic choir boys to the latest robotic voice-effect used on a hip hop single.

Cut 'n' Paste

“Iron has always made a nation strong, butter and lard have only made the people fat.”
--Hermann Goering

“By ten o'clock the police organization, and by midday even the railway organizations, were losing coherency, losing shape and efficiency, guttering, softening, running at last in that swift liquefaction of the social body.”
--H.G. Wells

Thus far in my comparative pairings of avant-garde music and popular novelties, I've tried to limit the discussion to key modes radical sonic expression as they've played out in the 20th century. Although there is significant crossover in the issues at stake with each mode, aligned loosely, the section on The Original Dixieland Jass Band and George Antheil addresses anxieties about technology, Arnold Schoenberg and Scott Joplin invokes questions of compositional form, Harry Belafonte and Terry Riley wrestles with the music of the Other, and Karlheinz Stockhausen and David Seville explores the limits of the human voice. From these developments across the musical culture of the United States and Western Europe in the last century, we can extrapolate a rudimentary set of tools that served as the starting point for the work done by some of the inheritors of this radical legacy in the 1970s and 1980s that are profiled in the next chapter. However, one key component of this toolkit remains to be addressed: the practice of sonic collage. The novelist Donald Barthelme has suggested that “...the principle of collage is the central principle of all art in the twentieth century in all media.”¹⁴⁸ While it may be possible to argue that the work of composers like Bela Bartok or Igor Stravinsky earlier in the 20th century operated as a type of stylistic collage—being drawn from multiple vernacular

¹⁴⁸ Richard Schickel, “Freaked Out on Barthelme,” *New York Times Magazine* (August 16, 1970), 14.

sources—the “cut ‘n’ paste” physicality of the practice of sound collage was not easily practicable until the advent of magnetic tape after the fall of the Nazis, as discussed in the previous section. This stands in contrast to painting, writing, photography, and film, all of which were exploring the physical manipulation of raw materials prior to WWI. Although some experimentation had been done with phonographic discs (like John Cage’s 1939 *William’s Mix* and Pierre Schaeffer’s earliest *musique concrète* pieces in 1948), with the availability of magnetic tape, sonic collage made rapid strides. Although *musique concrète* has an important place and influence in the history of sonic collage, its actual practice was defined narrowly by the philosophy espoused by Schaeffer.¹⁴⁹ And, despite the technology only becoming available in the 1980s, the practice of “sampling” similarly denotes a specific, if more technologically bounded, compositional form. The two pieces that I want to discuss in this section, Dickie Goodman and Bill Buchanan’s 1956 “The Flying Saucer, Parts 1 & 2” and James Tenney’s 1961 *Collage #1* (“*Blue Suede*”) are neither examples of *musique concrète* nor a “proto” form of sampling, but they are exemplary of the collage method of sound production.

However, as insightful as a broad proclamation like Barthelme’s can be, the actual act of sonic collage creation is not well defined by the notion of a “cut ‘n’ paste” use of various recordings in a new arrangement. This is why I’ve saved this avant-garde/novelty pairing for last; in a certain sense, it encompasses all of the other concept areas that I’ve outlined above. That said, perhaps sonic collage is underserved by the

¹⁴⁹ Most clearly in the unfortunately un-translated essay known in English as “In Search of a Concrete Music.”

term “collage” itself. Instead, artists like Goodman and Tenney might be better explained as “bricoleurs,” a concept that Claude Levi-Strauss adapted from a French vernacular word approximating “handyman”:

The ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’, that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. The set of the “bricoleur’s’ means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project (which would presuppose besides, that, as in the case of the engineer, there were, at least in theory, as many sets of tools and materials or ‘instrumental sets’, as there are different kinds of projects). It is to be defined only by its potential use or, putting this another way and in the language of the ‘bricoleur’ himself, because the elements are collected or retained on the principle that ‘they may always come in handy’.¹⁵⁰

The usefulness of Levi-Strauss’s concept over and against the vagaries of “collage” is that it begins to address the problems presented by the materials used in a sonic collage: where do they come from? Why does the artist choose to use these specific materials? How are the materials themselves used in the collage? The backgrounds on the development of both “The Flying Saucer” and *Collage #1* hew closely to Levi-Strauss’s definition of the “bricoleur”; Levi-Strauss’ bricoleur parallels Illich’s notion of conviviality, as discussed in the Introduction, and his anthropological insights via this concept are further refinement of the ones explored in Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁰ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1968), 17–18.

According to Steve Oftinoski in *The Golden Age of Novelty Songs*, Goodman and Buchanan approached the project that would become “The Flying Saucer” with a specific end product in mind. This product would be an updated version of Orson Welles’ 1938 radio broadcast of H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*, well known to historians of mass media for the supposed panic it induced in listeners who were not aware that the space invasion wasn’t real. However, instead of using the cast and crew of the Mercury Theatre, Goodman and Buchanan used snippets of then-current pop songs to “answer” the questions about the landing of a UFO posed by a fake reporter, played by Goodman himself.¹⁵¹ The resulting sound text is best described as a “cut-in” record, a type of novelty song that emanated from Goodman and Buchanan’s massive hit. Although neither Goodman nor Buchanan were radio DJs, it is apparent from listening to “The Flying Saucer” that in order to produce such a text, they must’ve drawn from a fairly large sample of recent pop records; Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, and others were used. Speaking hypothetically, the power of “The Flying Saucer” to amuse stems from the recognizable source material: a finite set of recordings for a given audience at a specific time. It’s also worth noting that “The Flying Saucer” clearly lacks the critical edge of The Residents later *Third Reich ‘n Roll* album. Additionally, not all of the recognizable source material is fit for the creation of a “cut-in”; certain verses lend themselves better to serving as “answers” to the reporter’s questions. Top this off with the budgetary and technological constraints in terms of their ability to produce “alien” sound effects needed for a novelty song about UFOs—they used tape speed manipulation

¹⁵¹ Oftinoski, *The Golden Age of Novelty Songs*, 9–11.

slightly earlier, though more crudely, than Dave Seville—and Goodman and Buchanan’s hit becomes a clear case of bricolage.

James Tenney’s *Collage #1* is, like “The Chipmunk Song,” *Gesang der Junglinge*, and “The Flying Saucer,” a result of the manipulation of magnetic tape. According to Larry Polansky’s liner notes for Tenney’s *Selected Works: 1961-1969*, “Most of the ‘classical’ tape manipulations are used: speed changes, reversal, tape head echo, multi-tracking, splicing, and some filtering.”¹⁵² Although some of these techniques required greater sophistication than Seville or Goodman/Buchanan were capable of or had access to, the similarity lies in the fact that Tenney also made convivial use of “whatever [was] at hand.” Tenney himself stated that:

I had been deeply moved by Varese’s *Deserts* and *Poeme Electronique*, and by his vision of the new musical possibilities realizable through electronic technologies. In 1959 I began graduate work at the University of Illinois, attracted there by the fact that courses were being offered in electronic music (perhaps for the first time anywhere). Under the generous tutelage of Lejaren Hiller, I began to work in the new medium, but with absolutely no success at first. In spite of all my earlier expectations, the synthetic character of the electronically produced sounds seemed to resist my every effort to use them in a way that was musically satisfying to me. *Collage #1* (“*Blue Suede*”) arose, initially, as an act of desperation in the face of these difficulties, but once begun, it was completed in one feverish week in the studio. I consider it a celebration of Elvis Presley, and like to think that it would have pleased him.¹⁵³

As Polansky acknowledges earlier in his liner notes, Tenney’s piece was “a definite departure from the more European style of some of his earlier work.”¹⁵⁴ This fact can be attributed, in part, the “accidental” discovery of a copy of Elvis Presley’s

¹⁵² Larry Polansky, liner notes, *James Tenney: Selected Works, 1961-1969* (New World Records, 2003).

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

recording of “Blue Suede Shoes” in the U of I studio, which he then manipulated into a new collage piece. The record was “at hand,” in other words. But perhaps more significantly is the fact that this serendipitous encounter shifted Tenney’s work away from the more systematic forms of composition associated with the European tendencies/traditions of the 20th century. Polansky goes so far as to compare the structure of *Collage* to the work of Charles Ives, a composer much admired by Tenney, given his recorded performances of Ives’ songs released in two volumes by Folkways Records. Polansky’s Ives comparison also draws Tenney and *Collage* closer to the definition of “American Music” offered by Robert Palmer: “American music is nonproprietary, then, in that American composers (and performers) innovate and then move on.”¹⁵⁵ (page 2) This lack of a system-building tendency places Tenney squarely in the realm of the “bricoleur,” and not, as is the case with State composers like Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez, the “engineers.”

However, Palmer goes on to state that, “In at least one sense, however, American music *is* proprietary. Despite the generally open-minded attitudes of composers and musicians, our concepts of musical worth remain essentially European.” (page 2) Although Palmer’s notion of “proprietary” from his 1975 *Downbeat* article was directed at the persistent valuation of “serious,” conservatory-trained composers whose work fit within the continuing stream of Western European music against non-European, creolized, or otherwise vernacular traditions, another sense of “proprietary” is central to sonic collage: the problem of copyright. Although Tenney’s *Collage* was probably

¹⁵⁵ Palmer, “What is American Music?,” 2.

protected from legal action by the publishers of Carl Perkins' composition by its commercial obscurity—if not Tenney's "serious" pedigree—such protections were not available to Goodman and Buchanan, who were almost immediately sued by the publishers upon the ascendancy of "The Flying Saucer" up the Billboard chart. The record labels, benefiting from a secondary surge in sales for the source recordings used, were not as eager.¹⁵⁶

Although "The Flying Saucer" cannot in any realistic way be considered a prototype for the "sampling" techniques used by hip hop producers a generation or two later, the legal problems engendered by the lack of licensing for the source materials have continued to plague any artist who attempts to utilize recognizable elements and market their rearrangement to a broad, popular audience. *Musique concrète* and its heirs avoided this problem by sourcing their own material: raw recordings made in the field. James Tenney, though using arguably one of the most recognizable popular songs of the 20th century, manipulated "Blue Suede Shoes" almost beyond the point of easy recognition, but given the miniscule audience for experimental works like his, his collage remained "underground" and out of sight, up to and including its issuance on compact disc. There is no acknowledgment of licensing noted anywhere in the current release. Outside of hip hop, there have been both high profile cases of copyright infringement, like Negativland's infamous U2 debacle as well as examples that fell below the radar of the intellectual property police (The Residents' *Third Reich 'n Roll*, discussed in the first

¹⁵⁶ Otfinoski, *The Golden Age of Novelty Songs*, 11.

chapter, again comes to mind).¹⁵⁷ While all of the justifications on both sides of this legal question are too numerous to recount here in full, the one that I find most useful to the subject of this section is that the use of “whatever is at hand” by contemporary artists constitutes a kind of radical, electronic “folk” form.¹⁵⁸

To take a well-known example, the verses used in Delta Blues songs are often interchangeable, and the precise authorship of a line like “Poor boy long way from home” is ultimately unknown. Though the authorship of “Blue Suede Shoes” is a well-documented fact, the circulation of this text via individual, mechanical recordings and electronic broadcasts results, in some sense, in it transforming into a form of collective social knowledge—past and present existing together. That knowledge/information can be accepted “as it is written,” that is, as the copyright holder intends, or more along the lines that Levi-Strauss set out to demonstrate in *The Savage Mind* when he writes:

The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual ‘bricolage’—which explains the relation which can be perceived between the two.¹⁵⁹

In the case of sonic collage in the latter half of the 20th century, the “repertoire” in question is effectively whatever of the audible world that can be rendered into a material form capable of manipulation. That material can be drawn from the aural environment—

¹⁵⁷ Douglas Rushkoff, *Media Virus! Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 173–5.

¹⁵⁸ “Folk” is perhaps an even more problematic concept than “primitive.” I’m using it here partially out of convention, and partially because it’s a reasonable enough shorthand for vernacular musicking in a particular tradition.

¹⁵⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 16–17.

whether man-made or “natural”—or it can be lifted directly from prerecorded sources like pop songs. (One wonders whether the sounds of particular trains could be copyrighted the same way a series of guitar chords can.) However, the novelty of the structure and use of source material in “The Flying Saucer” wears off rather quickly, as demonstrated by the diminishing returns met by Goodman and Buchanan’s follow-up releases. Ultimately, the problem for the cut-in collage is that it is too dependent on the recognition of the source material, implicitly validating the proprietary argument put forth by their litigants. In other words, it’s not terribly radical as a form of sonic experience. As Levi-Strauss puts it, “...in our time the ‘bricoleur’ is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman.”¹⁶⁰ It would be a stretch to call Goodman and Buchanan “craftsmen,” but their collaborative projects and Goodman’s solo endeavors certainly suggest “hacks” working a gimmick to death. As much as James Tenney may have “celebrated” Elvis Presley with the “sensitivity and love” that Larry Polansky sees in *Collage*, there is something far more devious in its deconstruction of Elvis than the cornball humor of “The Flying Saucer,” itself already a knock-off of Orson Welles’ “deviant” radio performance.

So, if sonic collage can be understood as a type of electronic “folk” production, who are these “folk”? If it seems as if they consist not of “the people”¹⁶¹ but rather a small order of initiates disposed toward the subversion of conventions, be they legal, cultural, or experiential, then I don’t think the mark has been missed too widely. I’ve

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ The definition of “folk” that I’m trying to avoid.

placed collage/bricolage at the end of my series of comparisons between novelty and the avant-garde because the attitude that allows the convivial use of “whatever is at hand” encompasses the deployment of technological/“natural” mimesis, radical formal structuring, the music of the Other, and the extension of the human voice to its outer limits, using whatever mechanical or electronic means available. The individual texts I’ve used to illustrate these principles are not, in and of themselves, terribly significant; I’m not primarily interested in identifying the “first” or “most important” examples of the concepts I’ve outlined. The examples themselves have been pulled from what Walter Benjamin called the “wreckage” or the “pile of debris” of 20th century culture.¹⁶² As concepts, they aren’t even copyrightable. The knowledge that can be gained is not dependent on whether it is gleaned from a Goodwill record bin or the dusty record shelves of a public library or a mail order form, and certain forms of sonic “trash” are completely free. As such, the price of initiation into the sonic “underground,” wherein the value of radical forms of sound making and hearing is contrary to the profit motive of commodity capitalism, is very, very low. As Pierre Clastres suggested and musicians like Sun Ra demonstrated, the adherence to the principles of bricolage—of non-system building—and the continuous negation of commodification, however, require a great deal of rigor.

PART 4: THE FUTURE SOUND OF THE PRESENT

Soothsaying in Sound

¹⁶² Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

“Conceptualizing the coming order on the basis of the designation of the fundamental noise should be the central work of today’s researchers. Of the only worthwhile researchers: undisciplined ones.”

--Jacques Attali

In 1977, the French economist Jacques Attali published an anachronistic book titled, in English, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*.¹⁶³ Anachronistic not solely because it stands out as the lone text in Attali’s oeuvre about this particular topic, but also in that he espouses a political reading of the power of music that is quite at odds with his otherwise neoliberal economic work as a scholar and advisor to the French government and the European Union. In *Noise*, Attali begins with a premise that is familiar territory for Marxist theorists and historians of music: that musicking is related to the material conditions of the society in which it was created. In the earlier section on “pitch,” I discussed the 19th century phenomena of “pitch inflation,” a condition wherein the frequency value of a given note in equal temperament drifted upward over time, due to the increasing availability of stringed instruments using finer and more tightly strung wire, prized by soloists for their “bright” qualities. This reading is a relatively conventional historical-materialist argument regarding music; changes in music proceed from changes in production, which are ultimately part of overall changes in society. Attali’s singular contribution to musical historiography, however, was to assert that

¹⁶³ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*.

changes in music actually *precede* changes at the economic level, that “It heralds, for it is *prophetic*.”¹⁶⁴

Although Attali’s book is highly informed by Marxist theories of music, its goal exceeds the accepted boundaries of that range of critiques. Attali writes that “Music, as a mirror of society, calls this truism to our attention: society is much more than economic categories, Marxist or otherwise, would have us believe.”¹⁶⁵ He goes on to state: “My intention here is thus not on to theorize *about* music, but to theorize *through* music.”¹⁶⁶ His justification for this dual orientation comes a few pages later:

Music is prophecy. Its styles and economic organization are head of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the herald of the future. For this reason musicians, even when officially recognized, are dangerous, disturbing, and subversive; for this reason it is impossible to separate their history from that of repression and surveillance.¹⁶⁷

At one level, Attali’s assertions are not so very far from Plato’s *Republic* or Kant’s admonitions against a direct appeal to the senses. Unfortunately, by design or omission, Attali often fails to provide concrete historical examples of his theoretical positions. However, by way of illustration in an American context, I offer the following case study.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 4. It should also be noted that Attali is using “prophesy” in the predictive sense, not the declamatory one associated with St. Paul in Chapter 1.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 11.

In the chapter “From Ritual to Art: the Flowering of Sacred Music” from Richard Crawford’s *America’s Musical Life: A History*, the author contends that the development of religious singing in Puritan New England between the end of the 17th century and the first two decades of the 18th century was the result of efforts to standardize the music of hymns in order to synchronize the expression of the verses being sung; younger singers displeased church elders by coming to a line at an individuated pace, the result being a kind of inadvertent polyphony. The goal of standardizing singing through schools and hymn books was an outgrowth of the “Congregationalist” attitude towards religion and society that underpinned the entire Puritan project, and was wholly endorsed by major figures like Cotton Mather.¹⁶⁸ The impetus for such a change is obscure in Crawford’s reading, but it is more clear in Perry Miller’s essay on “Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening” from *Errand Into the Wilderness*: as generations passed between the arrival of the first Puritans in New England, each crop of youth were seen as straying further from their prescribed roles as congregants in a community of co-dependent believers. This conflict reached a boiling point after 1740, when attempts to assimilate youthful residents of Connecticut and Massachusetts by revivalists like Edwards took on a fervor that was blasphemous to the old guard like Mather, but ultimately an act of desperation.¹⁶⁹ As Miller notes in a separate essay, though educated men like Edwards might try to rectify the arguments of Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke with religious belief, individualism was a rising tide that no amount of ecumenical

¹⁶⁸ Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 29–55.

¹⁶⁹ Perry Miller, “Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening,” in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 153–66.

inclusiveness could stem.¹⁷⁰ Even for young people who were not readers of Locke, the future had been foretold in their tendency to “line out” the hymns, long before *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, *Common Sense*, or *The Declaration of Independence* popularized these ideas or the mercantilist theories of Adam Smith were put into practice in the early Republic.

In Attali’s account, this prophetic example of music mirroring social change occurs at approximately the point where what he calls “Sacrificing” gives way to “Representing,” the first two of four eras that he sketches out in *Noise*. Following from Attali, the music of 17th century New England is still “Sacrificial” in that it does not enter the realm of political economy. Of this period of music—which for Attali extends from pre-recorded history until somewhere in the 17th and 18th centuries—he writes,

Its [music’s] primary function does not depend on the quantity of labor expended on it, but on its mysterious appositeness to a code of power, the way in which it participates in the crystallization of social organization in an order. I would like to show that this function is ritual in nature, in other words that music, prior to all commercial exchange, *creates political order because it is a minor form of sacrifice*. In the space of noise, *it symbolically signifies the channeling of violence and the imaginary, the ritualization of a murder substituted for the general violence, the affirmation that society is possible if the imaginary of individuals is sublimated*.¹⁷¹

The “sublimation of the imaginary of individuals” strikes me as a particularly apt description of Puritan psalmody. The rift that developed between “Sacrificing” and “Representing” that I’ve sketched out above is exemplified by a passage quoted in

¹⁷⁰ Perry Miller, “The Rhetoric of Sensation,” in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 167-83.

¹⁷¹ Attali, *Noise*, 26.

Crawford: “As one group of reformers put it, ‘skilfulness in singing psalms is an acquired gift,’ adding with irony that ‘many thousands have attained it, by the Divine Blessing’ of learning to sing them.”¹⁷² Crawford’s “irony” is precisely the point where Attali would assert that “skilfulness” is in fact where professionalization comes into play, where audience and performer are separated, and where music becomes something to be exchanged.

For Attali, this state of “Representing” is roughly the period between Bach and the advent of recorded sound at the end of the 19th century, which then gives way to “Repeating,” the state in which to a certain degree we still find ourselves. In his formula, the transition between the three eras can be summarized as such: “Fetishized as a commodity, music is illustrative of the evolution of our entire society: deritualize a social form, repress an activity of the body, specialize its practice, sell it as a spectacle, generalize its consumption, then see to it that it is stockpiled until it loses its meaning.”¹⁷³ Even if music is prophetic, in Attali’s theory, his 1977 text is, in a way, prophetic as well: how else can we understand hard drives full of mp3’s that we haven’t and probably won’t ever listen to?

But Attali does not end his analysis on this pessimistic note: “Today, in embryonic form, beyond representation, lies freedom: more than a new music, a fourth kind of musical practice. It heralds the arrival of new social relations. Music is

¹⁷² Crawford, *America’s Musical Life*, 31.

¹⁷³ Attali, *Noise*, 5.

becoming *composition*.”¹⁷⁴ It is towards the question of “Composition” that I devote the remainder of this section.

Crisis and Subversion

In the Introduction, I quoted Ivan Illich’s criticism of the use of technology alone to solve social problems as being an attempt to “solve a crisis by escalation.”¹⁷⁵ Illich was writing four years before Attali, but both were prescient observers of the problem presented by excessive accumulation—of technology, of information, etc. However, whereas Illich hoped to turn towards conviviality before it was “too late,” for Attali, the collapse had already happened:

But the very death of exchange and usage in music, the destruction of all simulacra in accumulation, may be bringing about a renaissance. Complex, vague, recuperated, clumsy attempts to create new status for music—*not a new music, but a new way of making music*—are today radically upsetting everything music has been up to this point.¹⁷⁶

Though both Attali and Illich have a touch of the eschatological about them, Illich’s is, to use an appropriately theological metaphor, “Postmillennialist,” whereas Attali’s is “Premillennialist.”¹⁷⁷ In either case, it’s clear that something must be done. Illich’s suggestions are more general, whereas Attali’s focus is music. In fact, it’s reasonable to see his argument for “*a new way of making music*” as an endorsement of

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷⁵ Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 9.

¹⁷⁶ Attali, *Noise*, 134.

¹⁷⁷ In truth, Attali is Jewish (which has a whole other set of messianic beliefs) and the Catholic Church—particularly that of the current Pope Benedict XVI—has disavowed all millennialist theology, which might explain why things like The Catholic Worker Movement and Liberation Theology have been marginalized in recent years, not to mention Ivan Illich’s fraught relationship with the Vatican in his lifetime.

radical musicking; it's worth noting that Christopher Small introduced the concept of "musicking" in *Music, Society, Education* in 1977, the same year as *Noise*.¹⁷⁸ Attali continues:

Make no mistake. This is not a return to ritual. Nor to spectacle. Both are impossible, after the formidable pulverizing effected by the political economy over the past two centuries. No. It is the advent of a radically new form of the insertion of music into communication, one that is overturning all the concepts of political economy and giving new meaning to the political project. [...] Music, the ultimate form of production, gives voice to this new emergence, suggesting that we designate it *composition*. [...] Composition is not easy to conceptualize. All political economy up to the present day, even the most radical, has denied its existence and rejected its political organization. Political economy wants to believe, and make others believe, that it is only possible to rearrange the organization of production, that the exteriority of man from his labor is a function of property and is eliminated if one eliminates the master of production.¹⁷⁹

While I agree with Attali's prescription for a new form of musicking generally, a few clarifications are necessary, as well as stating some objections. First, it's important to recognize that "ritual" and "spectacle" are stand-ins for the eras he defines as "Sacrificing" and "Representing," or roughly all music until around the Renaissance, and music between the Renaissance and about 1900, respectively. Since Attali's conception of music history is Euro-centric, we can assume that he means to include Greco-Roman music, followed by the introduction of plainsong, organum, and polyphony, with the latter trio representing the development of medieval Christian music in Europe. Attali believes that this form of communal, vocal musicking was a bulwark against—or possibly just a sublimation of—the violence in nature. "Representing" is the

¹⁷⁸ Small, *Music, Society, Education*.

¹⁷⁹ Attali, *Noise*, 134.

development of notated music in Europe, without which the complex orchestration of the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic music was not possible. The massed, carefully divided musical laborers in this era created what Attali calls “spectacle”: the grandeur of the ascendancy of the State.

The primary objection that I have to Attali’s claims in the quoted passage is with his assertion that “All political economy up to the present day, even the most radical, has denied its existence and rejected its political organization.” The problem with this argument is that it attempts to eke out a “new” space between capitalism (“political economy”) and Marxism (“the most radical”) without acknowledging that, even in Attali’s own France, people like Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had been staking out similar ground since the 19th century—the time of the 1848 Revolution and the 1871 Commune. Closer to Attali’s own time, his arrogant insistence also ignores not only the Situations/May ’68 events, they also fail to acknowledge that—three years before *Noise*—Pierre Clastres had argued in *Society Against the State* that the kind of political organization Attali calls for has *always existed*, even if Attali was right to claim that capitalist and/or Marxist thought would deny it.¹⁸⁰ Attali continues:

It is necessary to go much further than that. Alienation is not born of production and exchange, nor of property, but of usage: the moment labor has a goal, an aim, a program set out in advance in a code—even if this is by the producer’s choice—the producer becomes a stranger to what he produces. He becomes a tool of production, itself an instrument of usage and exchange, until it is pulverized as they are.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*, trans. Robert Hurley and Abe Stein (New York: Zone, 1989).

¹⁸¹ Attali, *Noise*, 134.

Here Attali continues to think along anarchist lines, incorporating a valorization of what Illich called conviviality.¹⁸² It's tempting to fantasize that what Attali calls the time before "an operationality to [musical] labor" was province of the "folk," but this would be missing his larger critique: that all music before the coming era of "Composing" is guilty in one way or another.¹⁸³ Like Durkheim and Eliade in Chapter 1, her Attali reveals a Judeo-Christian bias when he writes that,

From the moment there was a sacrificial ritual coded independently of the musician, the musician lost possession of the music. Music then had a goal exterior to the pleasure of its producer, unless he could find pleasure—as is the case in repetition—in his very alienation, in being plugged into codes external to his own work, or in his personal recreation of a preestablished score.¹⁸⁴

Attali's bias is evident in the lines "coded independently of the musician." Although it's possible that his critique is reaching back to the Greek scales (or modes) whose "codes" were the result of mathematical abstraction, it seems more likely that Attali's target is the prescriptions regarding liturgical music. As I've demonstrated at many points throughout this dissertation, European aesthetic rules like this have rarely been completely adopted in the creole Western Hemisphere—even among the Puritans. Where Attali gets it right is at two points. First, in his condemnation of pleasure in alienation that results from "being plugged into codes external to his own work," which I associate with the successful adherence to genre conventions. Second, with his suspicions regarding the "personal recreation of a preestablished score," which I associate with

¹⁸² Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*.

¹⁸³ Attali, *Noise*, 135.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

virtuosic performance of the classical canon. Both of these pleasures are alienating because they operate within a production-consumption cycle; recreation of genre codes or performance standards assimilate the codes via commodities—mass-produced instruments, scores, recordings—in order to produce other alienated commodities: the punk single, the symphonic concert experience, etc. Over the course of the 20th century, various technological “advances” coalesced, resulting in the over-production of the musical commodity. About this, Attali states:

Hear me well: composition is not the same as material abundance, that petit-bourgeois vision of atrophied communism having no other goal than the extension of the bourgeois spectacle to all of the proletariat. It is the individual’s conquest of his own body and potentials. It is impossible without material abundance and a certain technological level, but is not reducible to it.¹⁸⁵

I read this passage retroactively as a kiss-off to the bad utopianism of the uncritical cheerleaders of digital music distribution and the “new urbanism” with its “creative class.”¹⁸⁶ The flaw in the belief that the proliferation of inexpensive technologies lending themselves to D.I.Y. practice is that the Internet all-too-easily renders musicking without any social “value.” Although in the passages quoted earlier, Attali privileges individual pleasure, the idea of music’s communal function appears as what Attali calls “communication”:

There is no communication possible between men any longer, now that the codes have been destroyed, including even the code of exchange in repetition. We are all condemned to silence—unless we create our own relation with the world and

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Congress for the New Urbanism, *Charter of The New Urbanism*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Professional, 1999); Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

try to tie other people into the meaning that we thus create. That is what composing is. Doing solely for the sake of doing, without trying artificially to recreate the old codes in order to reinsert communication into them. Inventing new codes, inventing the message at the same time as the language. Playing for one's own pleasure, which alone can create the conditions for new communication.¹⁸⁷

As a way of describing how this process begins, Attali talks about the importance of Luigi Russolo (a recurrent figure in this dissertation), before continuing:

But the musician does not have many ways of practicing this kind of music within the existing networks: the great spectacle of noise is only a spectacle, even if it is blasphemous, or "liquidating," as Roger Caillois said about Picasso. It is not a new code. Both Cage and the Rolling Stones, *Silence* and "Satisfaction," announce a rupture in the process of musical creation, the end of music as an autonomous activity, due to an intensification of lack in the spectacle. They are not the new mode of musical production, but the liquidation of the old.¹⁸⁸

The rupture that Attali sees inherent in *Silence* and "Satisfaction" is precisely what that I have been laying out as the prehistory of the permanent underground throughout this dissertation. Although Attali was apparently unaware of The Residents, he does see promise in free jazz and the music of the Third World.

Emergent or Latent?

Although I make several specific interventions into Attali's thesis in the preceding section, the general problem that exists with his argument is there is a persistent sense that *Noise* is suggesting that "Composing" is an emergent phenomena that only starts with John Cage and the Rolling Stones. As I noted, this ignores the many forms of

¹⁸⁷ Attali, *Noise*, 134.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

musicking that do not fall into Attali's historical framework, which Clastres suggested have existed parallel to the dominant mode of Western musicking. However, Attali does suggest that there might be a latent element to "Composing" when he writes that we are witnessing "the reappearance of very ancient forms of production"¹⁸⁹ In truth, "Composing" and/or the permanent underground are a result of both: the emergence and latent, the novel and the "unknown tongue," the new and the old. Attali sees further signs of life:

First, there is a resurgence in the production of popular music using traditional instruments, which often are handmade by the musicians themselves—a resurgence of music for immediate enjoyment, for daily communication, rather than for a confined spectacle. No study is required to play this kind of music, which is orally transmitted and largely improvisational. It is thus accessible to everyone, breaking the barrier raised by an apprenticeship in the code and the instrument. It has developed among all social classes, but in particular among those most oppressed (the workers of the big industrial cities, Black American ghettos, Jamaican shantytowns, Greek neighborhoods, etc.).¹⁹⁰

Attali's emphasis on both traditional and handmade instruments echoes Illich's call for convivial tools, and his belief that the insurrection of "Composing" is most fully developed in the urban wastelands suggests that punk, hip hop, reggae, and rebetika are work of musical guerillas. This recalls David Fair's essay on how to play the guitar and Illich's thoughts on conviviality, and Attali goes on to state that, "Inducing people to compose using predefined instruments cannot lead to a mode of production different from

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

that authorized by those instruments.”¹⁹¹ This is a return to Attali’s earlier dismissal of genre- or canon-bound musicking, and stands in contrast to Levi-Strauss’ belief that,

Theoretically, if not in fact, any adequately educated man could write poems, good or bad; whereas musical invention depends on special gifts, which can be developed only where they are innate.¹⁹²

Leaving aside his odd claim about poetry, there’s a certain irony in Levi-Strauss’s assertion that musicking isn’t possible for everyone, at least in light of his theory of bricolage. Bricolage, which is itself a result of material abundance—one of Attali’s criteria for “Composing”—manifests in the re-use of refuse in the production of instruments, or in certain ideas being re-purposed as answers to new questions. Countering Levi-Strauss, Attali asserts:

Representation made repetition possible by means of the stockpile it constituted. And representation created the necessary conditions for composition by organizing an amazing increase in the availability of music. [...] Composition can only emerge from the destruction of the preceding codes. Its beginnings can be seen today, incoherent and fragile, subversive and threatened, in musicians’ anxious questioning of repetition, in their works’ foreshadowing of the death of the specialist, of the impossibility of the division of labor continuing as a mode of production.¹⁹³

Curiously, here Attali seems to be invoking something like the bricoleur, filtered through both what I called in Chapter 1 the “primitivist ethos,” and the notion of novelty addressed earlier in this chapter. However, elsewhere in *The Raw and the Cooked*, Levi-Strauss seems to agree with Attali’s idea that music “prophetic,” proposing something

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 141.

¹⁹² Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologies, Volume 1* (University Of Chicago Press, 1983), 18.

¹⁹³ Attali, *Noise*, 136.

very similar to what I have described as the coherence between musicking and social organization:

That music is a language by whose means messages are elaborated, that such messages can be understood by the many but sent out only by the few, and that it alone among all the languages unites the contradictory character of being at once intelligible and untranslatable – these facts make the creator of music a being like the gods and make music itself the supreme mystery of human knowledge. All other branches of knowledge stumble into it, it holds the key to their progress.¹⁹⁴

Although Levi-Strauss appears to concur with Attali's conclusion that music is "prophetic," though he rejects the implications of musical bricolage and is adamantly opposed to Attali's arguments regarding "Composing," as seen in the earlier quotation.

In Attali's world, playing for one's own pleasure "does not constitute, therefore, a new form of popular music [like a new genre] but rather a new practice of music among the people. Music becomes the superfluous, the unfinished, the relational."¹⁹⁵ Musicking as conviviality; musicking as counterpublic; musicking as Anti-State. In addition to the signs of life Attali sees emerging in the urban wastelands cited above, there is also the suggestion in *Noise* that free jazz is an important precursor to "Composing." Of this, he claims:

Free jazz, a meeting of black popular music and the more abstract theoretical explorations of European music, eliminated the distinction between popular music and learned music, broke down the repetitive hierarchy. [...] It also shows how the refusal to go along with the crisis of proliferation created *locally* the conditions of a different model of musical production, a new music. But since this noise was not inscribed on the same level as the messages circulation in the network of repetition, it could not make itself heard. It was the herald of another

¹⁹⁴ Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 18.

¹⁹⁵ Attali, *Noise*, 141.

kind of music, a mode of production outside repetition—after having failed as a *takeover of power in repetitive society*.¹⁹⁶

But perhaps is wrong in perceiving something like the AACM as a “failure” so much as one of many “Temporary Autonomous Zones” that collectively constitute the permanent underground, a collective impulse which spread rhizomatically like the “jes grew” in Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, because,¹⁹⁷

Composition ties music to gesture, whose natural support it is; it plugs music into the noises of life and the body, whose movement it fuels. It is thus laden with risk, disquieting, an unstable challenging, an anarchic and ominous festival, like a Carnival with an unpredictable outcome. [...] It gives voice to the fact that rhythms and sounds are the supreme mode of relation between bodies once the screens of the symbolic, usage and exchange are shattered. In composition, music emerges as a relation to the body and as transcendence.¹⁹⁸

Reading through this passage, I note strong parallels to the arguments laid made in Chapter 2. What remains is to highlight some of the exemplary practitioners of the Festival of Nois

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 140.

¹⁹⁷ “Rhizomatic” is a concept used to describe lateral rather than vertical organization in: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); the phenomenon of “jes grew” recurs throughout: Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

¹⁹⁸ Attali, *Noise*, 142–3.

Chapter 4: A Map Towards the present

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to accomplish three things. The first is to provide a more thorough critique of the narrative of punk and “indie” rock that I began in Chapter 2. The second and substantially more involved task is providing specific examples of permanent underground musicking. This is accomplished through six profiles of underground musicians, along the lines demonstrated in the section on The Residents in Chapter 1. While these first two goals are concrete, the third dimension to this chapter is a bit more abstract or “meta.” Consequently, after the extensive theorizing of the preceding chapters, the profiles in this chapter also work as a kind of conclusion, evidence that the conceptual claims are both true and that similar manifestations are possible. The significance of the permanent underground as an idea is that, unlike Attali’s “Composing,” it is something that actually happened, and continues to happen, in the realm of musicking. What is so striking about the examples provided in Part 2 of this chapter is that the individuals involved in these collectives were no such much struck by genius as willing to undergo a profound personal transformation in how they wanted to relate themselves to others through sound. Those transformations came in stages, from a tentative politicization of one’s everyday activities to the most radical approaches to playing a particular instrument. Such changes are difficult. But in material terms, they’re often quite cheap. “Do It Yourself” in this respect is both a description of a

particular type of cultural practice and an admonition. But not all D.I.Y. ideologies are alike, which is why this chapter contains the critique of “indie” rock.

The contrast between the content of Part 2’s profiles and the critique of “indie” rock in Part 1 is, in many respects, a reiteration of the either/or fallacy in the first section of Chapter 1: the story of “indie” rock retold by writers like Michael Azerrad and Kaya Oakes is essentially a nostalgia for what “could have been” in terms of a modernistic construction of the bands on independent labels in the 1980s and early 1990s in light of the commercialization of this movement in the wake of Nirvana’s *Nevermind* in 1991, akin to the narrative arc that Bernard Gendron and other writers on ‘70s punk follow with their own subject. Although the literature on the counterculture music of the ‘60s isn’t as extensive as that on punk or, increasingly, “indie” rock, it also hews to the same kind of melancholic lament about Madison Avenue’s commodification of hippie style: everything ends up being used in a commercial. But, to entertain an old cliché, isn’t the definition of insanity repeating the same thing and expecting a different result? This is what is most baffling about the conventional wisdom about ‘60s rock, punk, and “indie” rock and the literature that reinforces it. Shouldn’t the fundamental question be, in each case, what about it is about these musical styles and their practitioners that made them so *easy* to buy off or recreate and resell at a higher profit margin? If you don’t want to be “bought for gold, nor to the devil sold,” as Charles Bukowski put it, what are the lines of escape?

In his description of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone,” Hakim Bey suggested that it was in reactivating the legacy of the Maroons, the lost colony of Roanoke, to go to

“Croatoan.” The first real creoles were refugees from the brutal economics of colonialism, bonding together the Indian, the slave, and the indentured servant in spaces just beyond the reach of the agents of State authority.¹ Because there are no hollows left in which to hide out from the State, other strategies must be undertaken. These can be as abstract as the “psychic nomadism” of a musicking that crosses sonic boundaries without “papers,” or it can be as concrete establishing physical spaces where musicking can occur and turning away those who would construct a hierarchy at the door, or it can mean engaging in alternative forms of commerce that eschew the pursuit of profit altogether. To attempt this requires a profound personal transformation in the self, away from the dominant values instilled in most Americans from any early age regarding the primacy of accumulation of capital—including through such “bohemian” activities as playing in a rock band. At the same time, it cannot be accomplished alone; we are all social animals. Writers from Emile Durkheim to Joseph Jordania have suggested that musicking was the fulcrum from which human collectivity was launched, and Jacques Attali contends that it points the way to the future. While I will not suggest that any of the examples I provide below have broken completely free of all the constraints of the capitalist State in their sound and social formation, they have made impressive strides. The future is already here.

PART 1: “INDIE” AND AUTONOMY

The story of “indie” rock goes something like this:

¹ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).

In the late 1970s, in New York and London, a group of people—dissatisfied with the prog rock, singer-songwriters, and disco they were hearing—decided to form bands that stripped rock back to what they considered its most basic form: guitars, bass, drums, vocals. Not being particularly virtuosic on these instruments, they emulated the crude musical forms of ‘60s garage bands. However, they also magnified the characteristics of those earlier groups: where garage bands sneered, they snarled and spit; where garage bands played fast, they played so fast as to border on incoherent chaos; where garage bands adorned themselves in fashions drawn from foreign cultures or the working class, they donned bondage gear and tore holes in their thrift shop clothes. This was punk. Unfortunately, for all of their anti-conformist attitude, almost none of these early groups had the wherewithal to actually disengage with the capitalist music industry. And so they signed with both Major-Minors like Sire Records (The Ramones), or actual majors like EMI and CBS (The Sex Pistols and The Clash, respectively). Once the novelty and shock of their raw form rock and roll wore off, most of these bands ended up being pretty poor financial investments for their labels, so another name was coined for the music—“New Wave”—and more polished but still fairly basic rock bands like the Knack were given greater attention than the punks. Eventually, as it is wont to do, the mainstream music business exhausted this too, turning to things like synthesizer-based dance music.²

² For more on this, see: Clinton Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids: The Birth of American Punk Rock* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2005); Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming, Revised Edition: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002).

However, in suburbs and cities across the United States, the unrefined sounds of the first punk bands had really appealed to a group of young, mostly male, music listeners. Realizing that no new punk product was forthcoming, and that the music was, in any case, not that hard to make themselves, they too started bands. They played in what few rock venues remained, in basements, and at rented V.F.W. halls, probably to the consternation of the vets who wanted to drink their beer in peace. Because they were interested in making records and, understanding that even if the existing labels had any interest in their bands they would probably end up getting ripped off, they and their friends started their own little labels. They also printed up their own magazines (or ‘zines) to connect themselves to similarly disaffected youth across the nation, the better to sell their records and organize tours. Many of the bands, ‘zine publishers, label owners, and fans—and sometimes the same people performed all four roles—dressed kind of “straight,” compared to the confrontational fashions of their punk predecessors, but they played even faster and louder than the earlier groups, and so called their music “hardcore.” This was the first form of “indie” rock, and many respects it was dominant style for all of the 1980s. Its priorities were fairly rigid: speed, volume, hatred for authority—they slagged on Reagan even more than the hippies took shots at LBJ—and a penchant for violence, mostly between themselves, but occasionally against authorities like police officers.³

³ For more this style, see: Steven Blush, *American Hardcore (Second Edition): A Tribal History*, ed. George Petros (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2010).

However, the hardcore kids were not the only ones who were inspired by punk. Like the not-quite-punk bands at CBGB's in New York the Talking Heads and Television and, as they went further along, The Clash in England, these bands had both greater instrumental acumen and more diverse musical interests. Some of them loved Beefheart (The Minutemen), some the 13th Floor Elevators (The Butthole Surfers), and some the Rolling Stones (The Replacements). Others still weren't totally adverse to art-rock, from the Velvet Underground to certain strains of prog (Mission of Burma and Sonic Youth), or heavy '70s stoner bands like Black Sabbath and Grand Funk Railroad (Dinosaur Jr. and Mudhoney), or '60s AM pop (Beat Happening). Finally, some even started out as hardcore bands—Black Flag, Minor Threat, and Husker Du—but evolved over time, even changing their name, as with the case of Minor Threat-to-Fugazi. None of these bands ultimately fit the hardcore blueprint, but they benefitted from its network of 'zines, labels, and venues.

Although these were the big names in '80s "indie" rock, in late 1991 a relatively unknown band from Seattle named Nirvana released their second album, *Nevermind*, on a label owned by a man who had shepherded the careers of the very un-punk Jackson Browne, Joni Mitchell, and The Eagles in the '70s. *Nevermind*'s combination of Beatlesque hooks and punk noise proved surprisingly popular, piquing the interest of all the mainstream labels that had ignored the post-punk bands for a decade. They booked airline tickets as fast as they could from Los Angeles and New York to such out-of-the-way places as Seattle, Boston, and Washington, D.C. Some of the aforementioned bands decided that they were better off without the lucrative deals being offered (Beat

Happening, Fugazi) and some had already broken up (Black Flag, The Minutemen), but most signed on the dotted line. Overnight, their music became “alternative rock,” or, if they were from Seattle and played in a style reminiscent of Sabbath and Grand Funk, “grunge.” “Indie” rock had won...and then lost, when a bunch of similar sounding groups who hadn’t spent a decade sleeping in vans or on someone else’s couch cashed in on the trend. Nostalgic for those early days, but paradoxically proud of the mainstream “triumph” of a scene that they had participated in as youth, in the early 2000s a few music critics began the process of canonizing the above bands, arguing that for “Generation X” they were the equivalent of the Beatles, the Stones, and Dylan. However, being sensitive writer-types, they decided that they’d best ignore all that hardcore stuff.

The two paragraphs immediately above are a fairly comprehensive summary of Michael Azerrad’s 2001 book, the 500-page *Our Band Could Be Your Life*. On the surface, *Our Band Could Be Your Life* follows some of the same logic that I have used to construct the history of the permanent underground. Azerrad states in his Introduction that,

This book is devoted solely to bands who were on independent labels. So R.E.M., for instance, didn’t make the cut, since the band’s pre-Warner albums were recorded for I.R.S. Records, whose releases were manufactured and distributed by A&M (which in turn had a business relationship with RCA) and later, MCA.⁴

⁴ Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002), 5.

As far as political criteria go, this is a pretty good one, and it aligns in a rudimentary ways with the permanent underground. But the fault in his logic begins in the very next paragraph, where he suggests that the readers should note, “that the book concentrates on band’s stories rather than their music.”⁵ With the topic of sound off-limits, the exclusion of R.E.M. from Azerrad’s narrative becomes utterly arbitrary, since one of the reasons that R.E.M. became so successful was that their style was fundamentally recognizable: for most of the 1980s, they sounded pretty much like the Byrds. And although I argued in Chapter 1 that the ‘60s band’s “Eight Miles High” was a breakthrough to “psychedelic” musicking, R.E.M.’s jangle-pop was stuck on “Mr. Tambourine Man.” This is where the permanent underground diverges from Azerrad’s narrative: sound and social organization cannot be split into separate considerations. Azerrad’s disingenuousness on this point is again evident a few pages later when he writes that, “The underground’s musical diversity meant that there was no stylistic bandwagon for the media to latch on to, so the record-buying public had to find things there on a band-by-band basis, rather than buying into a bunch of talk about a ‘new sound.’”⁶ While there’s an obvious disagreement here over what does and does not constitute an “underground,” there are two gaping holes in this claim. The first, as I’ve already pointed out, is that Azerrad’s careful selection of bands in his book ignores the far more prevalent and homogenous hardcore scene whose network his subjects utilized. Of course, several of my own examples in the sections below did the same thing, notably

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 10.

Smegma and the Sun City Girls. The primary difference is that, with a very few exceptions, the “indie” groups in *Our Band Could Be Your Life* are only diverse *from each other*. While it would be difficult to point to an all-encompassing stylistic predecessor to The Minutemen, Dinosaur Jr. and Mudhoney worked with genres that were easily recognizable in the ‘80s and ‘90s, especially given the continued presence of ‘70s rock on FM radio. So when Azerrad writes that, “These bands are legendary, but many folks don’t know why,” he already answers that hypothetical question by pointing out the “profound debt of the alternative rock boom owed to bands like the Replacements.”⁷ Azerrad *has* to ignore the sound of bands like the Replacements, because if he didn’t then it would be too obvious that what this “debt” entails is making the sound of old Stones records cool again after the band itself had become way too old and wealthy to carry much cachet for young audiences.

But even on this point Azerrad betrays himself when he points to other ‘60s artists like the Beatles, Stevie Wonder, and Bob Dylan as precursors to his conceptualization of what “indie” rock is, highlighting those artists’ unprecedented “creative control” but ignoring that this “control” was a reward for having earned their label bosses enormous sums of money.⁸ He also connects the “indie” rock labels to the old Major-Minors like Motown, Stax, Chess, Sun, and Atlantic, despite many artists signed to these labels having attested to the fact that they were exploited to an extent that cannot be mitigated

⁷ Ibid., 4–5.

⁸ Ibid., 7.

by the “human face” that the small business owners gave to their capitalist enterprises.⁹ Even if, for Azerrad, “Beneath the radar of the corporate behemoths, these enterprising, frankly entrepreneurial people had built an effective shadow distributions, communications, and promotion network,” like the labels documented by Numero Group, they were often the “little guy who dreamed of being a big guy.”¹⁰ As Kaya Oakes points out in her book *Slanted and Enchanted*, the “indie” labels were just as likely to “sell out” as the bands they first signed, specifically citing the case of Matador Records, who entered into a distribution deal with Warner Brothers in 1999.¹¹ She also notes that major label executives have openly acknowledged that they use distribution deals like these as a “minor league” to vet which groups are the most likely to prove profitable in through major media outlets and retailers.¹²

But perhaps Azerrad’s most distressing claim in light of the arguments made in this dissertation is his belief that,

There are interesting parallels between indie rock and the folk movement of the early Sixties. Both hinged on purism and authenticity, as well as idealism about the power of music within culture and society, both were a reaction to a shallow, complacent times and their corresponding shallow, complacent entertainment.¹³

In Chapter 1, I acknowledged that the politicization of musicking within the folk revival was a necessary step towards a permanent underground. But as should be clear

⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3; Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to Its Own Past* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2011), 157.

¹¹ Kaya Oakes, *Slanted and Enchanted: The Evolution of Indie Culture* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 150.

¹² Ibid., 151.

¹³ Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, 8.

from the emphasis throughout this dissertation on concepts like “creole,” “syncretism,” “novelty,” and “bricolage,” the kind of valorization of “purism and authenticity” that Azerrad engages in is a deathtrap in the quest for autonomy from capitalist music business. “Pure” and “authentic” are words to describe genres, and genres can be reproduced and easily sold. Oakes’ overtures toward the folk revival are more sympathetic, given that her preferred examples are the punk scene at the 924 Gilman St. club in Berkeley, California in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the Riot Grrrl movement of the same era that emerged in Olympia, Washington.¹⁴ Both of these scenes were *explicitly* political, and the feminism of the Riot Grrrls configured itself in part as a rejection of the kind of boys-with-guitars aesthetic that dominates *Our Band Could Be Your Life*. There *are* examples of political bands in Azerrad’s book—notably The Minutemen—as well as bands/labels who have demonstrated a significant political dimension to their work, like Ian MacKaye’s Dischord label and his bands Minor Threat and Fugazi. Big Black’s Steve Albini has also frequently expressed anti-capitalist opinions, even if his lyrics are remarkably misogynist.

As of this writing, on the eve of the 2012 SXSW Festival in Austin with its many corporate-sponsored music showcases, it’s clear that “indie” rock *is* mainstream. Kaya Oakes acknowledges the same when she writes that, “the line of demarcation between mainstream and indie is almost unrecognizable,” and points to Sonic Youth’s Thurston Moore deciding to sell an album exclusively through Starbucks.¹⁵ Perhaps the difference

¹⁴ Oakes, *Slanted and Enchanted*, 61–78, 116–35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, viii, 16.

between “indie” rock and the permanent underground is reflected in the word “indie” itself. Like “hippie,” “indie” was a corruption of another word. “Hip” was originally used to connote a certain sense of being both an outsider *and* “in the know” with other outsiders, and “hippie” was a derogatory term for pretense to that sense of belonging. “Independent,” by contrast is all about individualism. Independence is a mainstream American value, *laissez-faire* and everyone for themselves, but ultimately protected by the State. “Indie” is the hollow, cynical shell of that libertarian desire. The permanent underground, by contrast, is rooted in the ongoing quest for collective autonomy, for self-government outside the State, “individual freedom realized in mutual interdependence.”¹⁶

PART 2: LIVING UNDERGROUND

The six sections that comprise Part 2 of this chapter consist of six primary profiles of seminal figures within the permanent underground, as well three secondary topics. The profiles begin with Philip Cohran, a veteran of Sun Ra’s Arkestra and the AACM, and track his musicking activities from the late 1960s to the present. Sections follow this on the Los Angeles Free Music Society and the band Smegma, two collectives that came out of the L.A. suburbs in the early 1970s as a kind of SoCal counterpart to The Residents in San Francisco. The profile on Smegma is accompanied by a discussion of the band Earth, who recorded their first album in Smegma’s studios. I consider Earth in light of the long history of Pacific Northwest guitar rock alongside their integration of principles endemic to the permanent underground. The fourth section is devoted to the

¹⁶ Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 11.

short-lived Ann Arbor collective, Destroy All Monsters. Section 5 explores the work of Bill Laswell, a multi-faceted, somewhat ambiguous figure within the underground. This section also contains a brief sketch of “loft jazz,” a musicking practice that emerged in New York in the 1970s, in part out of the remnants of the ‘60s jazz collectives in St. Louis and Chicago that I discussed at length in Chapter 1. Many of the musicians associated with the “loft jazz” scene would go on to collaborate with Laswell in the ‘80s and ‘90s. The final section investigates the band Sun City Girls, whose investment in furthering the idea of a global underground continues through the members’ record label, Sublime Frequencies, even though the group itself has dissolved. An exploration of the Sublime Frequencies project closes out this part of the chapter and concludes the profiles.

The collectives and individuals who are included in this part of Chapter 4 were chosen because they demonstrate the core principles outlined in the Introduction to this dissertation: musicking, conviviality, counterpublic, and Anti-State. In practice, they each draw on the techniques I described in Chapters 2 and 3. These include creative deployment of fundamental acoustic properties like loudness and rhythm, approaches derived from broad categories like tape music and punk, and the invocation of specific strategies like the incorporation of foreign music and the use of extended vocal techniques. In keeping with goal of narrowing the gap between ethics and aesthetics, I have tried to consider both sound and social organization in relation to Cohran, the LAFMS, Smegma, DAM, Laswell, and the Sun City Girls, even if, for the sake of clarity, these are sometimes addressed in separate subsections within each profile.

However, it is not my intention to “canonize” the musicians that I profile within these pages. The point isn’t that Smegma is “better” than Sonic Youth and therefore deserves to be included in a book like *Our Band Could Be Your Life*.” The purpose of constructing a genealogy of the permanent underground is to demonstrate how alternative forms of aesthetics and social formation—rendered together as “musicking”—came into being in the 20th century. The “why” is based on the underground’s adherence to a heterogeneous set of anti-capitalist values, and the examples provided represent some of the most radical breaks with the dominant, mainstream form of musicking. While I find all six exemplars of these principles, the decision to include each of them was, at one level, a matter of convenience. The idea of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone” suggests that longevity is not a necessary criterion, even if the conditions for an underground are permanent. At the same time, because this dissertation is a work of scholarly research, it requires that evidence be available to substantiate claims. Consequently, while a group like Destroy All Monsters was relatively short lived, its members’ later careers as renowned visual artists has meant that it is better documented than similar groups. The other individuals and collectives have had, by contrast, a quite long-lasting presence—Cohran, for instance, is well into his sixth decade as an underground musician. Still, documentation on these musicians is rather meager. This is another reason for their inclusion. While I would be happy if everyone who reads this dissertation rushed out to listen to the Sun City Girls, their importance has as much to do with providing a general model of what kind of alternative musicking is *possible* according to the principles and strategies I’ve described in the preceding chapters as it does with their actual music. I’d

also encourage anyone to go out and listen to Caroliner Rainbow or Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening Band—both of which, sadly, are not be included—or, better still, make their own noise.

Philip Cohran

According to Peter Shapiro's 2001 article for *Wire* magazine, "Blues and the Abstract Truth," about Philip Cohran, "The history of jazz is largely the chronicle of musicians who tried to play, think and live outside the lines; the story of visionaries, heretics, misfits, cranks and miscreants; the history of square pegs and round holes."¹⁷ Philip Cohran is just such an artist, and despite Shapiro's claims that although such musicians are "valourised in academic circles or by their fervent cults, there has yet to be a paradigm designed that can successfully map the contributions of trumpeter, instrument designer, scholar, shaman, community activist and educator Kelan Phil Cohran and The Artistic Heritage Ensemble," it is my belief that the various dimensions of the permanent underground that I've described in the preceding chapters offer such a paradigm.¹⁸ Aside from the Cohran's exemplification from the arguments of this dissertation, his importance to alternative forms musicking within his own community is best summarized by Gwendolyn Brooks' lines about him in her 1967 poem, "The Wall":

¹⁷ Peter Shapiro, "Blues and the Abstract Truth," *Phil Cohran*, n.d., http://www.philcohran.com/pc_wr_fr.htm.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Phil Cohran gives us messages and music made of/ developed bone and polished hone cult. It is the/ Hour of tribe and of vibration, the day-long Hour. / It is the Hour of ringing, rouse, of ferment – / Festival.¹⁹

Forging a Philosophy

Philip Cohran was born in Oxford, Mississippi in 1927, the height of the rural-industrial Delta blues style. Although too young to have been directly affected by this moment in alternative musicking, Cohran, according to Clovis E. Semmes's article, "The Dialectics of Cultural Survival and the Community Artist," received his introduction to music through singing spirituals as a child with his family, in home and at church—a background similar to many of those blues artists.²⁰ The Cohran family relocated to St. Louis in the late 1930s, and like the BAG members a generation later, Cohran would attend Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. After a stint in the Army during the Korean War, Cohran's first professional gig was with the Kansas City-based bandleader Jay McShann, who had also mentored Charlie Parker. In his *Wire* article, Peter Shapiro quotes Cohran about this period:

But everywhere I went with McShann, I found good musicians and I was shocked because it seemed that if you were so good you would become famous. But that wasn't the case; we had giants around here in every town... The rock 'n' roll, I believe we had something to do with that because there was a record company called Peacock in Houston, Texas and we recorded for them all summer. Don Robey brought McShann in to be the house band. They brought singers in from Louisiana, Mississippi, everywhere [he probably recorded sides with Clarence

¹⁹ Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 92-4.

²⁰ Clovis E. Semmes, "The Dialectics of Cultural Survival and the Community Artist: Phil Cohran and the Affro-Arts Theater," *Journal of Black Studies* 24, no. 4 (June 1, 1994): 450.

'Gatemouth' Brown and Big Mama Thornton]. Five days a week we were in the studio, putting backgrounds to different singers. That was a great experience because that's what made me really a musical historian, a musicologist.²¹

Cohran does not speak ill of the dead gangster-capitalist Robey, but it's reasonable to assume that, youthful excitement as the prospect of playing professionally aside, the grueling environment of both McShann's chitlin' circuit tours and the session work at Peacock left an impression on Cohran, given his later predilection for non-commercial musicking. After his stint with McShann's band ended, Cohran relocated from St. Louis to Chicago in search of better professional prospects. Not finding any paying gigs initially, he "spent much of his time in the library downtown, intensively studying world cultures and musical traditions."²² If his work with McShann had turned him towards "musicology," the Chicago Public Library would only help deepen that interest. As quoted by Shapiro,

I went to the library and I bumped into folk music accidentally. I saw that there was [Indian shenai player] Bismillah Khan on Folkways, and I made selections and I'd listen to them, and I began to see the common thread in all of the music. I began to pursue it and study its structures, and little by little, I made some discoveries that all the music had come from a single source, then it became a mission once I discovered that.²³

Cohran's independent study led him both to conclusions similar to the ones reached by Emile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, and Weston La Barre, and to the kind of ancient/futurist synthesis that resulted in Charles Mingus' *Pithecanthropus Erectus*.

²¹ Shapiro, "Blues and the Abstract Truth."

²² Francis Gooding, liner notes, Philip Cohran & The Artistic Heritage Ensemble, *Zulu 45s Collection* (Jazzman, 2010).

²³ Shapiro, "Blues and the Abstract Truth."

Cohran states, “That's what I deal with: music's effect on the body, and the ancient tuning systems and how ancient people were aware of these properties. They didn't have the analytical terms for it, but they knew it existed and they knew how to reach it.”²⁴ Furthermore, along the same lines as microtonal composers like Harry Partch discussed in the section on “Pitch” in Chapter 2, according to Francis Gooding’s liner notes for *The Zulu 45s Collection*, Cohran followed the conviviality principle in designing and building his own instruments to meet these ends, “in order to perfect a tuning system which went beyond the limits of the regular 12-tone scale.”²⁵ These instruments included both the amplified thumb piano that Cohran called the “Frankiphone” mentioned in Chapter 1’s section on the AACM, and a bowed, zither-like instrument similar to the “diddley bow” found in the rural South, itself related to instruments found in the Mandinka culture of Mali.²⁶ According to Semmes, this “research and development” served a purpose beyond Philip Cohran’s personal interests: “In the tradition of the griot, Cohran educated his audience through musical and oral expression. He typically explained the meaning and significance of the musical compositions that he played. Cohran always bonded with his audiences and brought them to the center of each performance.”²⁷ This approach is exemplified by his 1968 composition, *The Spanish Suite*. According to Cohran himself in the album’s liner notes,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gooding, *Zulu 45s Collection*.

²⁶ Clovis E. Semmes, *Cultural Hegemony and African American Development* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 234, 236.

²⁷ Ibid., 236.

“The Spanish Suite” was written to magnify the contribution that Moorish Spain made on the European Renaissance. The relationship of music to cosmic rhythms and harmony as altered from the original state of Spanish music, and eventually distorted down to the 12-tone equi-temperment system of tuning. The Artistic Heritage Ensemble was taught to play outside of the 12-tone system and to recognize natural tone relationships.²⁸

As discussed in greater detail below, the Artistic Heritage Ensemble was a group that Cohran put together with various, often-younger musicians from Chicago in the 1960s and 1970s. The combination of intensive understanding of musical traditions and inventive explorations of new possibilities in sound carried out within a communal environment are a hallmark of Cohran’s unique manifestation of the permanent underground sensibility.

Reaching the Other Shore

Philip Cohran’s time between his first trips to the Chicago Public Library and *The Spanish Suite* was not spent in isolation, however. After some years gigging around Chicago in the 1950s, according to John Szwed, Cohran was introduced by saxophonist John Gilmore to Sun Ra, and eventually recruited into Ra’s Arkestra.²⁹ Cohran’s time in the Arkestra lasted from 1958 to 1961, at which point Sun Ra and the group moved to New York City and Cohran stayed behind in Chicago. Cohran’s time in the Arkestra is documented on four releases for Saturn Records: *Interstellar Low Ways*, *Holiday for Soul Dance*, *Fate in a Pleasant Mood*, and *Angels and Demons at Play*. Typical of Saturn releases, these were issued throughout the 1960s, although, according to Robert

²⁸ Philip Cohran & The Artistic Heritage Ensemble, *The Spanish Suite* (Katalyst Entertainment, 2009).

²⁹ John F. Szwed, *Space Is The Place: The Lives And Times Of Sun Ra* (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 176.

Campbell's massive Sun Ra discography, they were all recorded at the same 1960 session.³⁰ Cohran generally plays cornet or trumpet on these recordings, but on "Music From the World Tomorrow" from *Angels and Demons at Play*, he performs his homemade zither-like instrument. According to Semmes, while Cohran had already established himself as a respected musician up to the point of his involvement with the Arkestra, after Sun Ra's departure, he "emerged as a mystic and visionary who saw divine purpose in music as a medium for inspiration, intellectual and spiritual elevation, and social development."³¹

By 1965, Cohran had met some like-minded individuals in the Chicago scene, including Muhal Richard Abrams. According to Ronald Radano, it was through the meeting of these two individuals that the AACM "truly got off the ground," because Cohran was "a leader among young rhythm 'n' blues players, and someone who could summon musicians' support. Despite their differences in taste, Abrams and Cohran sought similar social ends: the complete creative freedom and autonomy of the black musician."³² In his book on the AACM, George Lewis suggests that the "autodidact practices of the kind Abrams, trumpeter Phil Cohran, and many others were following were important not only to learning music, but also to emerging explorations of alternative lifestyles, diet, and histories."³³ Like Father Yod's cult in Los Angeles during the same period, this included such then-unusual practices as vegetarianism and

³⁰ Robert L. Campbell, *The Earthly Recordings of Sun Ra* (Syracuse, NY: North Country, 1994).

³¹ Semmes, *Cultural Hegemony and African American Development*, 230.

³² Ronald M. Radano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994), 83.

³³ George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009), xxxviii.

communal living, with an added dimension of a more Afro-centric account of history lessons used as a corrective to the dominant Euro-centric narrative imparted to citizens of the actually creole United States.

Unfortunately, Philip Cohran quickly parted ways with Abrams and the AACM, over what James Smethurst characterizes as Cohran's perception of "the group's jazz elitism," considering "its focus on jazz at the expense of other forms of black music too limiting."³⁴ After his break with the AACM, Cohran would found several organizations to further his artistic and political goals. The first, the Artistic Heritage Ensemble, was established in 1967 as a performance group that took in many young players from Chess Records' studio band, including, "tuba player Aaron Dodd, bassist Louis Satterfield, saxophonist Donald Myrick, trumpet player Charles Handy, drummer Bob Crowder, and guitarist Pete Cosey," who, according to Natalie Moore and Lance Williams, "shared his respect and admiration for tradition, but who knew it so well that they could take it into rarely explored realms of trance and freedom."³⁵ Smethurst notes that the "Sun Raesque Artist Heritage Ensemble became a mainstay of Black Arts and Black Power events in Chicago, mixing avant-garde jazz, swing, rhythm and blues, and neo-African music with dance, theater, and visual arts."³⁶ The Artistic Heritage Ensemble came together during a

³⁴ James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 215, 241.

³⁵ Natalie Y. Moore and Lance Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2011), 45.

³⁶ Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 215.

series of free outdoor concerts in the summer of 1967 on the shores of Lake Michigan.³⁷

About these performances, Cohran states:

Before that, no one played in the park. We'd have a parade once a year or a band playing for a special group, but no one played in the parks for the general public before this grant we got from a sister Betty Montgomery. She secured a grant from a wealthy man to have art exhibitions on the lakefront in an old boathouse that wasn't being used. So they brought together sculptors, writers, poets, dancers, painters and musicians and I had the music. It was next to Lake Shore Drive, so people would drive by and hear this strange music because we weren't playing like other people., and they would hear the thumb piano and the zithers, so they would come back and check us out. At our last performance we had three thousand people, so that place was just run over, and that's where we got established.³⁸

Out of this seizure of public space for counterpublic musicking grew the second of Cohran's post-AACM organizations, the Affro-Arts Theater. Taking advantage of the low rent on an otherwise abandoned South Side theater, this space was used for music, poetry readings, and exhibitions of visual art, and drew participation from Cohran's old compatriots in the AACM, as well as numerous performances by the Artistic Heritage Ensemble.³⁹ According to James Smethurst, both the Artistic Heritage Ensemble and the Affro-Arts Theater projected a "radical, Afrocentric, countercultural vision."⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the Affro-Arts Theater was closed in 1970, due to both financial issues and "internal fighting (often based on personal rather than political differences), and external attacks by local authorities," problems faced by other Black Arts groups around the country and exacerbated by the notorious COINTELPRO government surveillance

³⁷ Moore and Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation*, 45.

³⁸ Ibid., 45–6.

³⁹ Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 215.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 241.

and political infiltration/disruption activities of the 1960s and 1970s.⁴¹ Cohran recollected for Peter Shapiro that, “I found out later on who it was and what had happened. I guess I responded a little wrong because we were all a bunch of victims. They were playing dirty pool with us, the government was, because of us setting our own agendas. We were marked. I guess we should have expected it. It didn't bother me,” he concludes with a laugh. “I call it respect.”⁴²

Cosmic Tones for Social Therapy

Between the founding of the Artistic Heritage Ensemble in 1967 and its demise in 1970, Philip Cohran helped the group release several recordings through the label that he set up himself, Zulu Records. In keeping with his mentor Sun Ra's Saturn Records, these recordings were done in small runs and were only available in-person at performances. Until very recently, when they were reissued by other small labels run by people interested in Cohran's work, this meant that the music of the Artistic Heritage Ensemble was obscure to all but those who were there at the Affro-Arts Theater in the 1960s—an extreme form the recording as gris-gris. However, in hindsight, we can see a clear move from the historical edification on the aforementioned *The Spanish Suite* to celebrations of the contemporary black community in *On The Beach* (1968), portents of the backlash against the Black Power movement that would eventually crush the entrepreneurial Affro-Arts Theater on *Armageddon* (1968), elegies for a fallen leader on *The Malcolm X*

⁴¹ Ibid., 215.

⁴² Shapiro, “Blues and the Abstract Truth.”

Memorial (1969), and an acknowledgement of the need for music that just grooves hard on a Saturday night on the various 45s released throughout the mid-late sixties. *On the Beach*, perhaps the Artistic Heritage Ensemble's most representative record, is described by Peter Shapiro as having Cohran "venturing close to Moroccan Joujouka territory with his zithers and an absolutely mindbending guitar solo from Pete Cosey, six years before his memorable contributions to Miles Davis's *Agharta* and *Pangaea*: splashes and prismatic shards of intense colour that not even Hendrix was approaching at the time."⁴³

Peter Margasak quotes Cosey in *The Chicago Reader* as noting that, "There was a great division in those days, I'm sorry to say," says Cosey. "The blues people and the jazz people did not get along. I don't know whether it was jealousy or not, but it wasn't like it is now where people have an appreciation for all styles of music."⁴⁴ Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble would go to great lengths to break this division down, and, like the former members that "irradiate society" in the Goodman brothers' account of communes, Cosey and other veterans of Cohran's groups would infiltrate popular music in the ensuing years, the most famous of them being Maurice White, founder of Earth, Wind, and Fire, who borrowed Cohran's use of the thumb piano for his band's far more commercial records.⁴⁵ However, according to Clovis Semmes, perhaps because of their emphasis on commercial success, "even though there have been others who have

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Peter Margasak, "Playing With Fire: Pete Cosey/In a Silent Way," *The Chicago Reader*, August 28, 1997, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/playing-with-fire/Content?oid=894254>.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 176.

emulated various aspects of the Phil Cohran concept, none have totally or consistently captured the Phil Cohran sound or his approach to performance.”⁴⁶

Marching Forward

Even before the demise of the Affro-Arts Theater and the Artistic Heritage Ensemble, Cohran’s involvement with the African-American community on Chicago’s Southside went beyond music. Like the Young Disciples, Katherine Dunham, and the BAG in St. Louis, Cohran tried to use music to counter the social problems intensified by deindustrialization, first through his relationship with the civil rights group the Blackstone Rangers in the 1960s. According to Natalie Moore and Lance Williams’ *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation: The Rise, Fall, and Resurgence of an American Gang*, it was via participating in the Affro-Arts Theater-sponsored “forums pertinent to black liberation such as the Conference on Third World Countries,” and the classes on “African history, African languages, and African civilization,” that the Rangers morphed into the Black Panthers-like Almighty Black P Stone Nation, even if they would later, like too many Black Power organizations, devolve into a criminal gang.⁴⁷

Even if this particular outcome of the political and aesthetic priorities of Cohran’s communal musicking are ambivalent, as early as 1971 the positive value that such activities could have was being acknowledged by Phyl Garland in the pages of *Ebony*:

⁴⁶ Semmes, “The Dialectics of Cultural Survival and the Community Artist,” 458.

⁴⁷ Moore and Williams, *The Almighty Black P Stone Nation*, 45–6; For more on this general topic, see: Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005).

For some time, there have been black musicians in our midst who realized the power of music as a force that might be used to galvanize the black community...As might be expected, they steered clear of affiliation with commercial firms that might restrict the depth and breadth of their expression...Foremost on this front has been Chicago's Phil Cohran.⁴⁸

According to Francis Gooding, although Philip Cohran has historical ties to better-known collectives like the Arkestra and the AACM, "he himself has long remained something of an unknown quantity. But unlike many lesser known artists, Cohran intentionally eschewed the limelight: he was following a different star."⁴⁹ Clovis Semmes explains that, following the setbacks suffered in 1970, he would try to regroup over the next twenty years, attempting to "forge a disciplined nucleus of musicians, largely consisting of immediate and extended family."⁵⁰ These activities include a 1993 performance that would result in the 2010 album, *African Skies*, credited to "Phil Cohran and Legacy." Like *The Malcolm X Memorial* 25 years earlier, this performance was a tribute, now time on the occasion of his former mentor Sun Ra's death.

Although Cohran himself continues to perform sporadically in and around Chicago and self-releases recordings of past performances on tape and CD-R, aside from the recent availability of his older recordings perhaps the most visible evidence of his legacy is the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, comprised of eight of his biological sons.⁵¹ According to the group's website, their musical training began early, being "wakened at 6

⁴⁸ Phyl Garland, "Sounds," in *Ebony Magazine* (November 1971), 32.

⁴⁹ Gooding, *Zulu 45s Collection*.

⁵⁰ Semmes, "The Dialectics of Cultural Survival and the Community Artist," 453.

⁵¹ My knowledge of this facet of Cohran's career comes second hand from my brother, Nicholas Cline, who was a frequent attendee at Cohran performances between 2004 and 2008, and acquired several of the recordings mentioned, passing a few along to me.

a.m. for several hours' music practice before going to school.”⁵² David Dacks notes in an interview with the group's trumpeter Gabriel Hubert that “their background with cosmic, collective music gave them the view that their music should have ‘no boundaries. One of the reasons we never put lyrics on our music is cause then people can categorize it,’ according to Hubert.”⁵³ However, their inspiration was not only the mixture of older black popular musics that formed their father's sonic world, but hip-hop as well. After listening to artists like Public Enemy and NWA, “We used to hum. We used to all hum the same way that we play our horns now, everybody on beat boxes or making harmonies.”⁵⁴ They started performing in the late 1990s, busking around Chicago—a seizure of public space not altogether different from the guitar evangelists of their father's Mississippi youth or his own performances along Lake Shore Drive. However, as Dacks quotes Hubert,

“Hip-hop is the music we grew up with, when we wanted to get away from the things our parents wanted to put on us and do our own thing, we gravitated to it. We don't actually construct our music conventionally, we construct it in a rap form where you have a chorus then you have different brothers conveying different thoughts in the song through 16 bar solos.” Hubert's assessment of hip-hop pretty much sums up the band: “It's full of life, it's forever changing.”⁵⁵

With a collaborative album between the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble and Phil Cohran slated for release in May of 2012, what Clovis Semmes describes as the “self-conscious commitment to uplifting the quality of African American life and intellect,

⁵² “The Band « Hypnotic Brass Ensemble,” *Hypnotic Brass Ensemble*, n.d., <http://hypnoticbrassensemble.com/the-band>.

⁵³ David Dacks, “Hypnotic Brass Ensemble Spread The Message,” *Exclaim*, June 2009, http://exclaim.ca/Interviews/FromTheMagazine/hypnotic_brass_ensemble_spread_message.

⁵⁴ “The Band « Hypnotic Brass Ensemble.”

⁵⁵ Dacks, “Hypnotic Brass Ensemble Spread The Message.”

while resisting countervailing political and market forces,” appears to be alive and well in Chicago.⁵⁶

The Los Angeles Free Music Society

According to Edwin Pouncy’s review of the 1999 career-spanning box set of the Los Angeles Free Music Society (LAFMS), *The Lowest Form of Music*, the “early 70s were lean years for American music, which was still suffering from the aftershock of Altamont, Manson, and the death of the Love Generation.”⁵⁷ Nowhere was this more apparent than in sunny Southern California. Whereas punk was beginning to emerge out of the wastelands of the Midwestern Rust Belt and Manhattan’s Lower East Side, and in San Francisco The Residents were issuing their first slabs of noise on an unsuspecting public, Southern California appeared—if the radio waves were any kind of indicator—to be lost in the faux-country and airless pop of groups like the Eagles and the Carpenters. And yet, for Pouncy,

In the middle of all this rose the awe-inspiring spectre of The Los Angeles Free Music Society, a happy band of musical oddballs who had grown up on the collected works of The Mothers Of Invention, Captain Beefheart, Sun Ra and composer Harry Partch (to name a few) and were eager to let their own creative demons loose on the world. This Californian collective were well versed in the room-clearing power of free jazz and improvised music in general, but they were also aware that something new and revolutionary was required if music on a challenging level was to progress and survive.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Semmes, *Cultural Hegemony and African American Development*, 230.

⁵⁷ Edwin Pouncy, “Review- EDWIN POUNCY (box Set),” *LAFMS-the Book*, n.d., <http://lafms.wordpress.com/edwin-pouncy-review/>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The Los Angeles Free Music Society is perhaps the most unusually organized of all of the profiles that I provide in this chapter. In one sense, it operated like the AACM, an umbrella organization comprised of a shifting cast of members who both came together in various combinations or produced solo projects under the aegis of the larger group. On the other hand, LAFMS was a business unto itself, unlike the AACM, releasing recording of those collaborative or solo projects on its own imprint, even occasionally incorporating the work of non-LAFMS members like Smegma, The Residents, and the Phoenix, Arizona punk band The Meat Puppets into their multi-artist releases. Byron Coley summarizes this dual purpose in an essay contained in the box set when he writes that although “This compilation deals primarily with the association’s core members and their good works, one of the LAFMS’ prime functions was to transform itself (via “mere” extended activity) into a kind of magneto-art-sump for universal noise oddballs.”⁵⁹ He further suggests that, in the mid-1970s—the collective’s heyday—knowledge of their activities “became a kind of secret handshake” that allowed the “culturally disenfranchised [...] to identify each other” and that what they produced “was the exact kind of thing that every isolated suburban Beefheart fan imagined himself or herself producing in the company of true peers.”⁶⁰ Their sound, comprising tape music bricolage, extremes of loudness and pitch, free jazz-like improvisation, and the kind of extended vocal techniques that owed as much, according to member Dennis Duck, to the novelty of the “Firesign Theatre as John Cage,” could be found on self-produced records

⁵⁹ Byron Coley, liner notes, *LAFMS: The Lowest Form Of Music - Artist Edition* (Cortical Foundation, 1996).

⁶⁰ Coley, liner notes, *Ibid.*

and tapes, “For those who were brave enough to send away for them.”⁶¹ According to Coley, the LAFMS “will yawp forever as a wide portal to a parallel cosmos that could only be suspected in the years before the ‘cassette revolution’ (so called). And since almost no one has ever heard all the material that makes up [the retrospective box set], it is guaranteed to be its own set of trap doors to a very special void.”⁶² So now you know.

The Other Side of the Garage

If the musical landscape of early ‘70s Southern California was barren, the individuals who came together to form the LAFMS had grown up in an atmosphere of general abundance, even if such abundance lent itself to a unique form of boredom. According to LAFMS member Joe Potts,

Growing up at the end of the baby boom in the Southern California suburbs there was always a crowd of kids. Most households had three kids roughly two to five years apart. Most families got started around the same time. The result was absolute hoards of kids about the same age, with very little to entertain them. I think a large part of the LAFMS mindset came from that early experience with do it yourself entertainment. We built cars, skateboards, dungeons, caves, castles, dummies. The projects were always communal. [...] Doing things with the same group of family or friends for long periods, you develop your own micro-culture.⁶³

According to Potts, the “idea of community ownership” carried over into the LAFMS, “where all of the equipment, toys and instruments became a communal pile,”

⁶¹ Dennis Duck, “Interview- DENNIS DUCK (for The Wire),” *LAFMS-the Book*, n.d., <http://lafms.wordpress.com/dennis-duck-interview/>; Coley, liner notes, *Lafms*.

⁶² Coley, liner notes, *Lafms*.

⁶³ Joe Potts, “Interview- Joe Potts (for The Wire),” *LAFMS-the Book*, n.d., <http://lafms.wordpress.com/joe-potts-interview/>.

because “It was a group project. No one owned it. No one was competing.”⁶⁴ Potts’ recollections, while given in the context of the development of a highly unusual group of musicians, are also of a piece with a very widespread set of D.I.Y. practices in postwar California.

In important ways, these practices depended upon a ubiquitous part of the California landscape: the garage. Beginning with Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard’s work in electronics from a Palo Alto garage in 1939, a whole host of suburban enthusiasts would take up the intricate work of soldering transistors after WWII, culminating in the Homebrew Computing Club (1975-1986) that gave birth to Apple Computers.⁶⁵ Similarly, as Tom Wolfe explored in his 1965 essay, “The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby,” young people in the postwar period took advantage of disposable income and easy access to older model automobiles in order to “customize” these cars with fancy paint, bigger engines, and modified body panels. This led to a whole “hot rod” culture in the region. Most of the participants in this hot rod culture started out working in their parents’ garages, though a few, like Ed “Big Daddy” Roth, would go on to professional careers in the custom automotive industry.⁶⁶ Finally, even though the average suburban homeowner undertook occasional “home improvement” projects in the 1950s and the early 1960s, the hippie “back-to-the-land” movement at the end of the decade (which included many Father Yod-like communes) took advantage of

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution - 25th Anniversary Edition* (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2010).

⁶⁶ Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York: Picador, 2009), 75–105.

Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* to set up their alternative domestic spaces. While neither launched from a garage nor targeting garage D.I.Y.-ers, Brand's catalog's pre-Illich emphasis on convivial tools is especially relevant: "This is a book of tools for saving the world at the only scale it can be done, one hand at a time."⁶⁷

While the term "garage band" is tossed off knowingly, implying an enthusiastic, amateurish take on material like "Louie Louis," but like Warhol's "Factory," the importance of "garage" in this formulation is often overlooked. For most "garage bands" of the 1960s and after, it was simply a convenient practice space. However, for Joe Potts and the other members of the LAFMS, the garage was also a space of physical creation, first for toys and later for their own homemade instruments. As LAFMS member Tom Recchion notes in the liner notes to *The Lowest Form of Music*, "I've always been inventing instruments. My intention was to produce a sound that was totally acoustic in reality, but sounds electronic. The instruments were crude and technically simple, with a foundation in very basic acoustic principles. However, the result is quite sophisticated."⁶⁸ Recchion goes on to describe one of his creations, the "strungaphone," which "when played in a particular way sounds like a giant bumble bee."⁶⁹ He also suggests that, like Philip Cohran's homemade zither-like instrument described in the preceding section, this instrument is similar to the diddley bow.⁷⁰ Unlike the punk bands that would emerge after the LAFMS in SoCal with their mass-produced guitars and

⁶⁷ Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence, KS: Univ Press of Kansas, 2011), 43.

⁶⁸ Tom Recchion, liner notes, *Lafms*.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

drums, Potts, Recchion, and the rest of the LAFMS were working on the other side of the garage.

Crate Digging

Even though the mentality that gave rise to the LAFMS originated in the garages of postwar California's "geography of nowhere," the collective's actual formation can be traced to a specific location: Poo Bah Record Shop in Pasadena, California. According to the book *Pasadena: A Business History*, the store has been "Locally owned and operated since 1971" by Jay Green.⁷¹ One of Green's first employees was Tom Recchion. Between 1971 and 1974, most of the future members of the LAFMS and Smegma (who moved to Portland in 1975 to pursue their own, if related, interests) would congregate at Poo Bah. According to Joe Potts' brother Rick, another LAFMS member, "For us it was a refreshing surprise to meet like minded folks" at Poo Bah.⁷² An uncredited LAFMS member continues in *The Lowest Form of Music*'s liner notes:

It was in the air and in the vinyl in the record bins at Poobah's. That cheap vinyl fix. Names like Nonesuch and Folkways, Cage and Kagel, Silver Apples of the Moon and Electronic Sounds. Dealt to us in hits by the man, Tom Recchion [...] somewhere in that Pasadena basement that was our vinyl shooting gallery, gamelans and ragas merged with serial and chance compositions finally melting together with instructional records and Beatle bootlegs.⁷³

⁷¹ Patrick Conyers, Cedar Phillips, and Pasadena Museum of History, *Pasadena: A Business History (CA)* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 103.

⁷² Rick Potts, "Free Ears Part 1: A History of the Los Angeles Free Music Society," *LAFMS-the Book*, n.d., <http://lafms.wordpress.com/free-ears-part-1/>.

⁷³ *Lafms*.

These more obscure influences were combined with the early '70s Californian weirdo's staple diet of Zappa and Beefheart, much like The Residents to the north. However, even if Rick Potts claims that, "I'm not sure LAFMS ever 'formed'. It was never a solid. It pooled and oozed and that made it more flexible," it was clearly inspired by the pre-LAFMS self-release of Joe Potts' group Le Forte Four's *Bikini Tennis Shoes*.⁷⁴ After encountering the recording, Tom Recchion sought out his regular Poo Bah customer:

"Next time I saw him I said, 'What is this?' And he said it was kind of a joke. I said, 'We should really do that! I have these guys here, appreciate what you're doing and there's strength in numbers. So we did. Started doing shows, releasing records on our own, magazines. Started working as a collective, occasionally in a very organized way and occasionally disorganized.'" ⁷⁵

Dennis Duck was also impressed, stating, "People didn't do that. Record companies were big, important things and the guy down the street just didn't do that. That was eye-opening."⁷⁶ *Bikini Tennis Shoes* inspired Tom Recchion to set up a show in the empty warehouse above Poo Bah in January of 1975, which even Rick Potts acknowledges is the probable "birthday" of the LAFMS . The show featured Le Forte Four, the Doo-Dooettes, and Ace & Duce—all fairly stable combos within the larger

⁷⁴ Steve Hochman, "The Los Angeles Free Music Society Will Liberate Your Ears at the Getty," 89.3 *KPCC*, November 30, 2011, <http://www.scpr.org/blogs/newmedia/2011/11/30/3912/los-angeles-free-music-society-will-liberate-your-/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

LAFMS orbit.⁷⁷ According to Tom Recchion, they were all intrigued by the “idea of free music,” which is that,

[E]ach of you come together with the idea that we’re coming together as experimenters to create something spontaneous, allow for a tremendous amount of freedom and work off each other—and not work off each other, but come to an agreement to get together and work,” he says. “You’ve got to go along for the ride. Got to be willing to go, ‘Where’s this going to take me?’”⁷⁸

The combination of the free and the homemade would become a hallmark of the LAFMS collective’s activities in the ensuing years.

A Brief Guide to the Recordings

Because *The Lowest Form of Music* box set has, ironically for a recording meant to make obscure older releases more widely available, already become a rare collector’s item, this sub-section is devoted to a quick sketch of the recorded legacy of the LAFMS label. In general, their output can be divided into two categories. The first are compilations, both on LP and cassette, which contained music by the various groups working under the LAFMS banner, as well as sympathetic bands like Smegma and The Residents. These include 1976’s LP *I.D. Art #2*, three *Blorp Essette* cassettes (#1 in 1978, and #2 Volume 1 and Volume 2 in 1980), 1980’s *Darker Skratcher* LP, and the dozen or so cassettes released as part of the *Lightbulb Magazine* series between 1977-1981. The other types of releases by the LAFMS label were projects carried out by

⁷⁷ Potts, “Free Ears Part 1: A History of the Los Angeles Free Music Society.”

⁷⁸ Hochman, “The Los Angeles Free Music Society Will Liberate Your Ears at the Getty.”

specific groups or individuals. Although not a comprehensive list, below I've summarized four representative recordings from the collective's diverse oeuvre.

Le Forte Four—*Bikini Tennis Shoes* (1975, LP)

According to an interview with Joe Potts in *Wire* magazine, “It was my parents who loaned us the money to release *Bikini Tennis Shoes*. They almost fell over when we paid them back.”⁷⁹ The album was recorded secretly at Cal Arts using a Buchla synthesizer. Le Forte Four member Chip Chapman was a student at Cal Arts, and Morton Subotnick—who was working as a professor there in the early 1970s—had given Chapman a few lessons on its use. Potts recounts that, “We would improvise on top of records from the ten-cent bin at Poo-Bahs too. We would show up at Cal Arts on Sunday night about 9 in our parents’ station wagon full of steel barrels and duffle bags full of baseball bats and drag piles of crap into this slick ‘2001, a Space Odyssey’ studio.”⁸⁰ The result veers from the whimsy of period novelty Moog records to blasts of electronic feedback, interspersed with bits of in-studio banter and samples from bargain bin spoken-word and patriotic albums. Plus, “chipmunk” noises.

Doo-Dooettes—*Live at Brand* (1976, LP)

Because of their emphasis on “free” music, much of the recorded output of the LAFMS is documents of live improvisations; this is the first of those types of releases. *Live at Brand* was recorded at the Brand Art & Music Library in Glendale. According to

⁷⁹ Potts, “Interview- Joe Potts (for The Wire).”

⁸⁰ Ibid.

the original liner notes, the group initially consisted of Tom Recchion and Harold Shroeder, who went by “The Two Who Do Duets,” before settling on the more scatological homonym—especially useful since they quickly expanded to a quintet.⁸¹ This performance was recorded on July 8, 1976 during a double bill with Le Forte Four, who “tried to play back prerecorded tapes through 44 pyramid shaped headphones,” although the effect of this is impossible to discern from their identically named album.⁸² The Doo-Dooettes’ performance was entirely improvised, which at times sounds like the intellectually intricate work of Cecil Taylor, at others the ecstatic drone of La Monte Young’s Theatre of Eternal Music.

Dennis Duck—*Dennis Duck Goes Disco* (1977, cassette)

The title *Dennis Duck Goes Disco* is a joke on two levels: as a reference to the novelty song “Disco Duck,” and as pun on the very concept of “disco,” since the album consists of nothing but manipulations of LP records. Although not a “cut-in” like Buchanan and Goodman’s “The Flying Saucer,” the original cassette demonstrates what would later be called “turntablism” in reference to NY artist Christian Marclay.⁸³ Its genesis in all probability owes as much to novelty records like “The Chipmunk Song” as to John Cage’s similar work—both of which could have been found in the racks at Poo Bah. Although the recording process destroyed both a variable speed turntable and countless records, in his liner notes to the 1996 reissue, Duck concludes “I am still

⁸¹ “Liner Notes- DOO-DOOETTES (Live at the Brand),” *LAFMS-the Book*, n.d., <http://lafms.wordpress.com/doo-dooettes-brand-notes/>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hochman, “The Los Angeles Free Music Society Will Liberate Your Ears at the Getty.”

thrilled by some of the strange and beautiful patterns resulting from these admittedly crude and mostly random processes, and I still laugh at some of the silly, oddly coherent phrases and melodies that pop out unexpectedly, then disappear back into the chaotic tumble of wildly chattering voices and sounds.”⁸⁴ He suggests that listeners “give your feet a rest. This is music your mind can dance to.”⁸⁵

Airway—Live at LACE (1978, LP)

Live at LACE is another document of a free improvisation, this time at an art gallery. It not an exaggeration to suggest that this album is one of the most brutal sonic experiences ever recorded. Although *Airway* consisted of seven participants playing mostly acoustic instruments, Takuya Sakaguchi has called the effect the embodiment of Joe Potts’ “human synthesizer concept,” noting that Potts wanted to “hypnotize listeners” through “sonic fascism.”⁸⁶ According to Kevin Laffey’s account of the performance in *The Lowest Form of Music* box set,

After we drove the entire audience out of the room, we continued to play long into the night, the sound of the band bouncing wildly from building to building through the open windows outside. It was only when we finished that we looked down three floors and saw most of the crowd still there in the street below, addicted enough to take it in small doses, but widely aware of the potential health hazard should they dare indulge too much.⁸⁷

The album consists of approximately 40 minutes of unrelenting noise, and as the sound washes over the listener—if you can endure it—certain vague patterns began to

⁸⁴ Dennis Duck, *Dennis Duck Goes Disco* (Poo Bah, 2006).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Takuya Sakaguchi, “Essay- (AIRWAY / Live at LACE),” *LAFMS-the Book*, n.d., <http://lafms.wordpress.com/essay-takuya-sakaguchi-airway-live-at-lace/>.

⁸⁷ Kevin Laffey, liner notes, *Lafms*.

emerge from the chaos. Still, playing it on a turntable makes it difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of Potts' Petwo-ish goal of "conducting listeners to a common conscious."⁸⁸

Garage Sales

The unofficial motto of the LAFMS record label was "The music is free, but you have to pay for the plastic, paper, ink, glue and stamps." This meant that, if you knew how to get a hold of them, LAFMS releases were relatively cheap, since "all of the LAFMS catalogue was originally available only in limited quantities and mostly by mail order."⁸⁹ For the musicians, however, the LAFMS record label functioned in one of two ways. For the solo and group releases, the participants put up all the money to record, press or dub the material, and print the sleeves and/or inserts. Once this initial stage was reached, other members of the collective would pool their efforts to assemble the recording into a final package—much like the members of Sun Ra's Arkestra did with the Saturn releases.

With the compilation releases, a different pattern was followed. Starting with *I.D. Art #2*, the LAFMS would put out a call to its members and to sympathetic friends that for a set amount of money, they could have 15 seconds of music committed to tape or vinyl. For every 15 seconds purchased, the contributor got one copy of the recording, with the option of purchasing as many additional copies as they wanted, to be distributed as they saw fit. In the liner notes to the CD reissue of the *Blorp Essette* releases, LAFMS

⁸⁸ Sakaguchi, "Essay- (AIRWAY / Live at LACE)."

⁸⁹ Pouncy, "Review- EDWIN POUNCY (box Set)."

member Ace Farren Ford writes that, following the *I.D. Art #2* formula, for his call for contributions, “Response was plentiful, so much so that before it was done plans were underway for volume 2, which grew to become 2 records.”⁹⁰ Not only was this unique method of record production an interesting form of gris-gris for artists and listeners alike, it was run literally as a co-op. Although this kind of “to each according to their ability” approach to recording does not, to my knowledge, have many other examples, it strikes me as a viable model for future musicking.

The Lowest Shall Be Made High

Despite the Los Angeles Free Music Society going more or less dormant in the mid-1980s, its various members have continued to create new works in the LAFMS spirit over the last 30 years. Since 1996, there have also been numerous reissues of previously obscure LAFMS releases, most expansively on the 10-CD *The Lowest Form of Music*. More recently, several of the groups from within the LAFMS collective have reconvened, first for a series of shows at the Getty Center in Los Angeles in late 2011, and in early 2012 for a multimedia retrospective at The Box gallery.⁹¹ Beyond this latter day recognition, noted L.A. punk artist Gary Panter offers some poignant considerations of the collective’s legacy in his review of *The Lowest Form of Music*. Panter reasons that, like himself, the LAFMS members had attempted to decode the list of sixty-six musicians that had inspired Frank Zappa included in the liner notes to the *Mothers of Invention*’s

⁹⁰ Ace Farren Ford, liner notes, *Los Angeles Free Music Society--Blorp Esette* (Transparency, 1999).

⁹¹ Hochman, “The Los Angeles Free Music Society Will Liberate Your Ears at the Getty”; Elke Silvia Krystufek, “Los Angeles Free Music Society: Beneath the Valley of the Lowest Form of Music,” *The Box*, n.d., <http://theboxla.com/exhibitions/>.

album, *Freak Out!*, “with the difference that they made lots and lots of music.”⁹² But he also concludes that there was something more fundamentally interesting about them, in part because what they did was actually fairly simple; “a bunch of young people, back in the 20th century, on separate and converging teams,” hanging out in garages and digging through record crates, “determined to forge their own sonic world.”⁹³

Smegma

Like the Los Angeles Free Music Society, Smegma emerged out of the Southern California suburbs in the early 1970s. In fact, there is some debate about whether Smegma constitutes just another group within the LAFMS orbit or an entity unto itself, given that Smegma and its members have released records through the LAFMS label and have, on occasion, shared members. In his profile of the group for *Oregon Music News*, Noah Mickens acknowledges that he had “always though of Smegma as a sub-set of LAFMS, but apparently I have always been mistaken.”⁹⁴ Smegma member Ju Suk Reet Meate (not his real name) attempts to clarify this in an interview with Tom Coulter of *WFMU’s Beware of the Blog*, noting that while the future members of Smegma were also some of LAFMS member Tom Recchion’s customers at Poo Bah in Pasadena, in 1975 they collectively decided to moved to Oregon. According Reet Meate, they did this, “for

⁹² Gary Panter, “Review- GARY PANTER (Box Set),” *LAFMS-the Book*, n.d., <http://lafms.wordpress.com/gary-panter-review/>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Noah Mickens, “A Brief History of Smegma: An Interview With Music Pioneer Ju Suk Reet Meate,” *Oregon Music News*, December 16, 2009, <http://oregonmusicnews.com/2009/12/16/a-brief-history-of-smegma-an-interview-with-music-pioneer-ju-suk-reet-meate/>.

mostly idealistic reasons -- it was certainly not a career move. Crazy go-back-to-the-land fantasies, better pot laws, moss, trees—all the good stuff.”⁹⁵ In other words, for many of the same reasons that the cult/communes like Father Yod’s group did in the 1960s, and that Paul and Percival Goodman identified as the driving force behind planned communities throughout their long history in the United States.

More specifically, Reet Meate acknowledges that, “L.A. seemed a very grim and wacky place in 1972, with the Manson Family still fresh in memory, and headlines on the front page of the *L.A. Times* like, ‘L.A. Police Train for Food Riots.’”⁹⁶ He also suggests that the small glam scene around KROQ D.J. Rodney Bingenheimer and impresario Kim Fowley, documented by Marc Spitz’s book *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, didn’t interest them, even though it was an important precursor to the L.A. punk scene.⁹⁷ Seeing “no future” in Los Angeles, “We moved to the tiny town of Corvallis and managed to move into a cockroach-infested flophouse by the river. We soon realized we needed a bigger city and wound up in Portland. Back in the blown-out inner city.”⁹⁸ While this meant that Smegma missed the early days of the LAFMS, Reet Meate believes that the Smegma and the LAFMS have long existed in parallel worlds, first through being customers at Poo Bah. Later, according to Reet Meate, after the move to Portland they received a flyer calling for participation in the co-operative *I.D. Art #2*, and “we participated in that, and

⁹⁵ Tom Coulter, “There’ll Always Be Smegma: An Interview with Smegma’s Ju Suk Reet Meate,” *WFMU’s Beware of the Blog*, January 7, 2010, <http://blog.wfmua.org/freeform/2010/01/smegma.html>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.; Marc Spitz, *We Got the Neutron Bomb : The Untold Story of L.A. Punk* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 6–29.

⁹⁸ Coulter, “There’ll Always Be Smegma: An Interview with Smegma’s Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

participated in everything on all kinds of levels with LAFMS for as long as it lasted in an active state.”⁹⁹

Houses of the Damaged

However much the stories of Smegma and the LAFMS might intertwine, there are some key differences in their approach to musicking. The first is that while the LAFMS operated as an umbrella organization for a wide variety of projects by individuals and in various group configurations, Smegma functions more or less as a singular unit. Although the group, according to David Keenan’s 2006 article for *Wire* magazine, has “adopted a virtual revolving door to membership” involving many one-off collaborators, the core group has remained for many years Ju Suk Reet Meate, Oblivia, Dr. Id, Burned Mind, and Conroy.¹⁰⁰ The unity of this collective is reflected in their long-standing practice of communal living, which began during the group’s decision to move to Oregon in the mid-1970s and, according to Noah Mickens, continues to the present, with the group living together in a house painted “shocking pink” in an otherwise normal Portland neighborhood.¹⁰¹ This practice aligns Smegma with one facet of the history of alternative musicking in the U.S., from Sun Ra’s Arkestra to Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band to Father Yod’s Source Family to The Residents.

In the interview with David Keenan, Reet Meate verifies Smegma’s allegiance to that particular tradition, noting that, “We loved all of that late 60s music, but we were not

⁹⁹ Mickens, “A Brief History of Smegma: An Interview With Music Pioneer Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

¹⁰⁰ David Keenan, “Tripping in the Ooze,” *Wire*, August 2006, 37.

¹⁰¹ Mickens, “A Brief History of Smegma: An Interview With Music Pioneer Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

hippies. Instead we saw ourselves as extending what you might call freak traditions, and what I mean by that is someone like Captain Beefheart or even Sun Ra.”¹⁰² He continues,

We felt like we were bolstering that same weird tradition, in as much as no one knew what to make of us. I mean, were we a cult, a commune, a band? But when the bottom fell out of the freak scene in the early 1970s, we had to wait until punk rock happened before we even began to feel that there were places for us to play and a whole new energy to tap into.¹⁰³

Reet Meate’s description of the circumstances affecting out-there musicians recalls the same impetus that drove The Residents to self-release their recordings when they realized that the ‘60s haphazard, major label hippie bonanza that let Beefheart and Frank Zappa to put out records was over, and like The Residents, Smegma would operate in isolation until punk re-opened the doors to musical weirdness—even if most punk had little to do with either group’s wildly varied sound, being much more conventionally rock-structured. Smegma, having been fed the same sonic diet from Poo Bah as the LAFMS, was interested in John Cage and Harry Partch.¹⁰⁴ Reet Meate comments on this influence that,

There’s a lot of other aspects of that classy art scene that aren’t so pretty, but certainly some of the actual things that were done and some of the ways that it affected people were very inspirational. That affected us a lot. We knew about this broader different concept, and we were trying in a very folk way to apply those concepts to our version of music.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Keenan, “Tripping in the Ooze,” 37.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Mickens, “A Brief History of Smegma: An Interview With Music Pioneer Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

At the same time, Reet Meate insists that, “No one had gone to art school or seemed to have any great artistic gifts.”¹⁰⁶ This is somewhat different than their peers in the LAFMS, who boasted several Cal Arts alums in their ranks. This fact helps explain why Reet Meate still considers Smegma a “rock band,” though he contends that this designation means “something to me that it wouldn’t mean to anyone else. But I mean a primal rock and roll energy, a 1950s style. Link Wray is my god that I worship to, like a template for what rock and roll might stand for.”¹⁰⁷ What Reet Meate is attempting to define with his allusion to Link Wray is what elsewhere in this dissertation I’ve described as the “primitivist ethos.” In late 1970s and early 1980s Portland, this approach to musicking was the point of commonality between Smegma and the burgeoning punk rock scene. Reet Meate recollects, “That was a beautiful thing to be against something, and that first punk rock thing was a beautiful thing because it was really a rock and roll revival movement, in the sense that true spirit. There is a true American spirit of underground rebels.”¹⁰⁸ Even if the sense of camaraderie between Smegma and their Portland neighbors didn’t last long, it revitalized a group that had been up to that point shouting in the dark.

Bad Taste is Timeless

At the same time that Smegma negotiate the art/rock divide, they also draw from odder and less prestigious sources. Reet Meate notes that “as early as Smegma goes back

¹⁰⁶ Coulter, “There’ll Always Be Smegma: An Interview with Smegma’s Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

¹⁰⁷ Mickens, “A Brief History of Smegma: An Interview With Music Pioneer Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

we covered stuff like Elvis's "Santa Bring My Baby Back to Me" and Bob Luman's "Red Cadillac & a Black Moustache."¹⁰⁹ In the early '70s, novelties like these were unlikely to earn much respect from either the rock *or* the art crowd. When Noah Mickens visited the Smegma commune for *Oregon Music News*, he observed that,

I think how fortunate it is that I'm not a vintage record collector, because if I were this interview would be long-delayed as I rifled through the Smithsonianesque accumulation of gorgeous old LPs, 45s, and whatever you call those weird thick old records that come in the boxes. 78s? I never could keep all of that straight. A lot of it looks like novelty records, the crazy traveling variety musicians whose unique and prodigious talents were eventually encapsulated in the old Spike Jones shows before shuffling off to Dr. Demento land in the face of the unstoppable television wave. Tap dancing xylophonists, six-man harmonica ensembles, that sort of thing.¹¹⁰

Reet Meate himself suggests that the group always had "broad musical filter," leading them to the infamous Folkways album *Sounds of the Junkyard*, as well as to Pygmy music.¹¹¹ A love for the unusual also pops up in their collective admiration for *An Evening With Wild Man Fischer*, with whom they collaborated on a project titled *Wild Man Fischer and Smegma Sing Popular Songs*, recorded in the mid-1970s but not released until 1998. They were impressed by the humorous, unpretentious, and, perhaps, childlike characteristics of Fischer's outsider music. In keeping with that aesthetic, David Keenan observes that,

Smegma's approach to improvisation seems informed by the untutored folk-primitive modes of early American polyphony—the mass multiple voicings of field choirs and rough house orchestras—as much as it is by the relative ground

¹⁰⁹ Keenan, "Tripping in the Ooze," 37.

¹¹⁰ Mickens, "A Brief History of Smegma: An Interview With Music Pioneer Ju Suk Reet Meate."

¹¹¹ Keenan, "Tripping in the Ooze," 37.

zero for free music that events like Bill Dixon's 1964 October Revolution in Jazz Festival [in New York] provided, an event at which Smegma collaborator and free clarinetist Perry Robinson actually played.¹¹²

At one level, Smegma's sound is the result never having had mothers that made them stop banging on pots and pans on the kitchen floor. At another, it is the careful product of the same kind of autodidacticism that George Lewis identified as informing Philip Cohran's musicking. Like Cohran and the LAFMS, Smegma also make extensive use of homemade instruments, a convivial practice that involves the "hijacking of random consumables in the name of furthering avant garde tongue."¹¹³ These includes everything from re-purposed electronics to a dental dam that Smegma member Conroy plays with the virtuosity of a saxophonist.

Chants Democratic

Over the years, Smegma's recordings have been released through a variety of outlets. One of their first, 1979's "Pigface Chant" 7", came out on their own Pigface Records. This single was released almost simultaneously with the album *Glamour Girl 1941*, which was put out through LAFMS records. Reet Meate states that, because Smegma had participated in the *I.D. Art #2* compilation, the LAFMS crowd helped connect him to their source for record pressing in Smegma's old hometown. He recalls that,

¹¹² Ibid., 40.

¹¹³ Ibid., 38.

I discovered these incredible “Mom and Pop” type places like Virco, run by a nice lady named Virginia who did the books, and a man whose name I can’t remember, who ran and built the cutting lathe and board. I was in the room as they cut the “mother,” and the first time, after five seconds, he stopped the tape and lathe and said, “something’s wrong with the tape!” We had to tell him, “No, it was the way we wanted it.” O.K. then. They just sent us a bill on our word (we did always pay).¹¹⁴

Like the D.I.Y. gospel artists, Smegma were using a business that specialized in “custom records” in order to do the industrial work of pressing their otherwise self-released recordings. Their second album, 1982’s *Pigs for Lepers*, was also completed in this manner, as was Ju Suk Reet Meate’s *Solo 78/79* in 1980. Records since the mid-1980s like 1988’s *Nattering Naybobs of Negativity* have been released on other labels, although Reet Meate maintains that, “Pigface Records has been sleeping, but future releases can’t be ruled out.”¹¹⁵ The group, however, have ventured into even greater gris-gris territory with no-label releases like *Live At The New Paris, Portland, Org. 1/25/98*, a performance with rock writer and fellow Portland resident Richard Meltzer on vocals, only available for purchase on CD-R at Smegma performances. In talking with Noah Mickens, however, Reet Meate expressed some ambivalence about this state of affairs,

I’m not really celebrating the death of record companies. I’m sad that record companies lost what they were supposed to be doing, where they were so adrift that they were just ripe for the picking. [...] I’m kind of saddened by the fact that it’s supposed to be up to everybody at home with their computer. There’s something wrong with that. I mean, it’s fine, as far as it goes, but a big huge team effort is what was required to do some of these fantastic things in the past.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Coulter, “There’ll Always Be Smegma: An Interview with Smegma’s Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Mickens, “A Brief History of Smegma: An Interview With Music Pioneer Ju Suk Reet Meate.”

At the same time, it's hard not to see Reet Meate's own Smegma as its own solution to this problem, a blurring of the lines between the cult/commune that can provide a "huge team effort" to release records, in addition to being a band dedicated to unique sonic experiences.

The Smell Remains the Same

Although the members of Smegma openly acknowledge a debt to the Butthole Surfers for helping them put on shows in the late 1980s, their relationship to the rest of the "indie" rock world is mostly hostile, particularly toward the music that came from their neighbors to the north in Seattle in the early 1990s.¹¹⁷ According to Reet Meate, "grunge" was "such a slick, conformist version of rock music. I mean, Soundgarden? It seemed much straighter and much more conservative than our own vision of what rock music was about."¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, they have found common cause with a few of the bands associated with Seattle's Sub Pop label. Most recently, this has manifested itself in collaborations with the younger noise band Wolf Eyes, who went so far as to title their 2004 album *Burned Mind* after one of the members of Smegma. The two groups have collaborated on a number of limited-edition releases and regularly perform together.¹¹⁹

Before their collaborations with Wolf Eyes, however, Smegma maintained a relationship with other musicians in the Pacific Northwest through their Smegma Studios,

¹¹⁷ Keenan, "Tripping in the Ooze," 40.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹¹⁹ Sara Pourghasemi, "Smegma Vs Wolf Eyes," *Static Magazine*, 2005, <http://wnyu.org/static/smegma>.

run mostly by Dr. Id under his real name, Mike Lastra.¹²⁰ Among the many recordings to have come out of Smegma Studios, perhaps the most interesting is *Extra-Capsular Extraction*, the 1991 debut EP by Seattle's Earth. Released in the same year as *Nevermind* and led by Kurt Cobain's personal friend Dylan Carlson, Earth were both an idiosyncratic group in the grunge era and, in another respect, a logical culmination of the Pacific Northwest's love of guitar-based rock that dates back at least to the Kingsmen's "Louie Louie." Taking their moniker from Black Sabbath's original name, Carlson's drum-free band extended the practice of slowing down Sabbath-style riffs that had been the hallmark of the earlier Seattle group The Melvins, incorporating drone techniques learned from Hindustani classical music and La Monte Young records. To do this, they relied on the massive Sunn amplifiers that were designed and built in Portland by Norm Sundholm, the Kingsmen's bassist, paying homage to this technological influence on their 1995 live album, *Sunn Amps and Smashed Guitars*.¹²¹ Placing an extraordinary emphasis on loudness and infrasound-level pitch—their 1993 debut LP was titled *Earth 2: Special Low Frequency Version*—the synthesis of these elements results in a sound that is an almost literal "Church of the Sonic Guitar," the human voices of the Gregorian monks echoing off the walls of Gothic cathedrals replaced by electronic tones that are felt as much as heard. Although the band has recorded almost exclusively for Sub Pop, their approach to musicking redefined the role that metal could play in the underground.

¹²⁰ Keenan, "Tripping in the Ooze," 40.

¹²¹ Kim Peyton, *Band Boys: Teenage Music Makers of the Sixties* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2006), 189–90.

Destroy All Monsters

From the turn of the century until the 1960s, the industrial cities of the Midwest had drawn countless people, black and white, in search of a better paying job. For African-Americans, this migration had also been undertaken in the hope of relief from the violent segregation that was a part of daily life in the South. However, while a city like Detroit could spawn the mostly-optimistic sound of Motown in the early 1960s, by the end of the decade, things had taken a turn. The 1967 riots signaled the end of African-American optimism about the city's promise, as Suzanne Smith notes in *Dancing in the Streets*, and, according to critic Nicole Rudick, for whites "the counter-culture era had birthed the gritty, aggressive sounds of bands such as the MC5 and the Stooges."¹²²

Further inspired by the Velvet Underground's tours through Rust Belt cities like Detroit and Cleveland, the early 1970s would see the rise of a new kind of rock band, from Cleveland's Rocket From the Tombs (which would split into the prole-rock/punk of The Dead Boys and the art-damaged Pere Ubu) to the post-human conceptual music of Akron's Devo.¹²³ However, none of these matched the unusual combination of musical genres and abrasive theatricality of Ann Arbor's Destroy All Monsters (DAM), who, according to Rudick "rejected outright the legacy of hippie optimism."¹²⁴ According to DAM founder Cary Loren's "a manifesto of ignorance,"

¹²² *Los Angeles Free Music Society--Blorp Esette*.

¹²³ Heylin, *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*, 142–54.

¹²⁴ Nicole Rudick and Cary Loren, *Return of the Repressed: Destroy All Monsters 1973-1977*, ed. Mike Kelley and Daniel Nadel (New York: PictureBox, 2011), 5.

i felt we were creating sounds we wanted to exist but weren't to be found in the slick desolate landscape around us. with virtually no audience and little support, we continued expressing our end-of-times messages and outsider beliefs; a sort of paranoiac-critical garage band. emerging from the detroit rust-belt stained our activities with an industrial psychedelic patina.¹²⁵

Loren's reference to the "paranoiac-critical" is an invocation of Salvador Dali's surrealist method of the same name. Like some of the members of the Los Angeles Free Music Society, all of the original incarnation of DAM—Loren, Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw, and Niagara—were art students, at the University of Michigan. For Dali, the "paranoiac-critical method" was a purposeful inducing of shamanistic altered state of consciousness that allowed the practitioner to relate things that were seemingly unrelated in new, meaningful ways.¹²⁶ Growing up amongst the detritus of post-industrial Michigan, DAM had plenty of material to work with.

You Set the Scene

DAM was definitely a product of its environment. In a prose poem from *Destroy All Monsters* magazine—a project related to the band—an anonymous contributor writes that,

In my apartment building the bathrooms are set one on top of the other. They all have windows (in the 20's life was communal) opening into a shaft extending to the roof. I hear the songs of my neighbors, some chants to the Maharishi but most of it is beautiful. A man who imitates Dizzy Gillespie, a woman who sings siren songs and an occasional These Boots are Made for Walking.

¹²⁵ Cary Loren, "a Manifesto of Ignorance; Destroy All Monsters," *Perfect Sound Forever*, May 1996, <http://www.furious.com/PERFECT/dam.html>.

¹²⁶ Salvador Dali, *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 262.

Sometimes I wish we would all get into our showers simultaneously. A fusion as in native dances or love recaptured for past friends and Lovers dissipated but still alive.¹²⁷

This passage is eerily reminiscent of Ralph Ellison's "Living With Music" and Lester Bangs' similar statements in "A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise." Although the author of the prose poem is unknown, DAM member Mike Kelley is similarly insistent on the primacy of place in his account of the group in the liner notes to the 1994 archival release of their recordings:

I lived a couple of blocks away [from Cary Loren and Niagara] in a three-story Victorian house housing a large enough group of freaks to make the rent affordable to everyone. I think around seven or eight people lived there. I moved into the basement, which cost me between 40 and 50 dollars a month. This house, it could be called a commune except no one shared anything, was called God's Oasis Drive-In Church because a sign saying as much was nailed to the front porch.¹²⁸

Kelley goes on to note that the barely habitable house was filled with "cultural cast-offs," scavenged from garage sales, and thrift stores.¹²⁹ According to Nicole Rudick, beneath all this junk was "Kelley's hospital-green basement room in God's Oasis, which served as the group's practice space, became a laboratory for the ecstatic."¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Mike Kelley, Jim Shaw, and Niagara, *Destroy All Monsters Magazine 1976-1979* (New York: Primary Information, 2011).

¹²⁸ Mike Kelley, "To the Throne of Chaos Where The Thin Flutes Pipe Mindlessly (Destroy All Monsters: 1944/77): Some Thoughts on the Period of Transition from Progressive Rock to Punk Rock, in the Form of Liner Notes for a Three CD Box Set.," *Mike Kelley*, 1993, <http://www.mikekelley.com/DAMthrone.html>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Rudick and Loren, *Return of the Repressed*, 6.

The Sounds of the Junk Yard

Destroy All Monsters was named as such because of member Jim Shaw's obsession with a Godzilla-like Japanese film and comic book series of the same name.¹³¹ Functioning loosely as an art collective, Nicole Rudick notes that "the collaborative environment was a way to consolidate the various creative impulses each member was individually pursuing and to explore, within that difference, the characteristics that united them: a postmodern (though the term wasn't then in common usage), unrefined aesthetic and distinctly anti-utopian sentiment."¹³² According to member Niagara—the lone female of the group—the decision to go in a "musical" direction with this collective was more or less spontaneous:

We were all doing stuff together. We never talked about it and one day they were like, "Niagara, do you sing?" They wanted to start a band, like us. Two days later we were playing, so you can imagine how good we were! We kept those standards to the end...Two days, from inception of the band idea to playing. That just kills me. We were good. We did "Iron Man" for an hour.¹³³

Niagara's anecdote about their first show recalls the Kingsmen's hour-long performance of "Louie Louie," but takes on a different sociomusicological cast when it is acknowledged that the group's performance—appropriately enough, at a comic book convention—was not the result of an invitation, but rather, like Allan Kaprow's Happenings, a kind of prank—a seizure of space that they were not "entitled" to.

¹³¹ Brett Callwood, *The Stooges: Head On: A Journey Through the Michigan Underground* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 88.

¹³² Rudick and Loren, *Return of the Repressed*, 5.

¹³³ Callwood, *The Stooges*, 88.

Although DAM performances outside of Kelley's basement room were rare, they were often approached from a similar stance to the one that resulted in the "Iron Man" cover. The band would advertise something like a Ram Dass lecture on psychedelic drugs on the University of Michigan campus (hypothetically, a big draw in mid-1970s) only to ensnare the unsuspecting student who showed up with Destroy All Monsters' clangorous noise.

However, even if the forming of DAM was spontaneous, the members were already interested in the possibilities of sound. Mike Kelley recollects that in high school, he was looking for "inspirational noise," finding it in same rogue's gallery as Lester Bangs: the MC5, the Stooges' "L.A. Blues," Frank Zappa, and the Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray."¹³⁴ He adds that "these oddities led to the realization that there was 'another' history behind these records, a much more brutal and anti-pop, history that deserved looking into."¹³⁵ This in turn led him to Sun Ra, Harry Partch, La Monte Young, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Luigi Russolo; Kelley's own musical discoveries are essentially the same as the pre-history of the permanent underground that I've presented in the preceding three chapters.¹³⁶ Also among these inspirations, according to Nicole Rudick, was Sun Ra's "Arkestra's purposefully disjointed mélange—from big band standards to free jazz to drum-heavy ritual to walls of electronic white noise—appealed to the group of young art students who felt they were

¹³⁴ Kelley, "To the Throne of Chaos Where The Thin Flutes Pipe Mindlessly (Destroy All Monsters: 1944/77): Some Thoughts on the Period of Transition from Progressive Rock to Punk Rock, in the Form of Liner Notes for a Three CD Box Set."

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

living in a post-nostalgic time, when idylls had been smashed and anything was possible.”¹³⁷

Citing Partch, Russolo, and, as Rudick points out, the Art Ensemble of Chicago’s use of “little instruments,” DAM’s musicking also aligns with the same principles of conviviality that have been highlighted throughout this dissertation, and ties them to the other profiles of the permanent underground in this chapter. Rudick notes that the group “procured a range of nontraditional instruments for their new band: they employed typical ones—Niagara initially played violin, and Shaw bought a guitar at a department store (their most expensive purchase)—but they also incorporated hair dryers, rattles, army-surplus cassettes, vacuum cleaners, metallic objects, squeeze toys, and garage-sale amps.”¹³⁸ Although the version of Destroy All Monsters that existed from 1974 to 1976 didn’t release any recordings during their lifespan, the ones that were made available on 3-CD box set in 1994 demonstrate that the group’s musicking might be understood as extending from the unrecorded “bongolated oil drums” that Lester Bangs describes as the early Stooges’ sound in “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise”—a group that DAM would have likely seen as teenagers numerous times.¹³⁹

According to an anonymous text in *Destroy All Monsters* magazine, the purpose of Destroy All Monsters was “to be engaged in an activity that provides instantaneous feedback of powerful cleansing noise.”¹⁴⁰ Cary Loren recalled that during performances

¹³⁷ Rudick and Loren, *Return of the Repressed*, 6.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Lester Bangs, “A Reasonable Guide to Horrible Noise,” 301.

¹⁴⁰ Kelley, Shaw, and Niagara, *Destroy All Monsters Magazine 1976-1979*.

in Kelley's basement room, "miraculous FX happened, from exquisite in-tune celestial harmonics to shattering monstrous roars, nothing could be duplicated twice...[P]laying by instinct, we often got lost inside or miasmic cloud."¹⁴¹ The same anonymous author in *Destroy All Monsters* magazine would go on to claim that, "Destroy all Monsters is therapeutic," that it can function as "pleasantly gurgling muzak to file the rough edges off" or "electro-shock therapy to wake you up when you slip into a coma. It can blow away the cloud with speed and volume."¹⁴² This is Lester Bangs' "livid twitching of one tortured nerve," which, for DAM, is the outcome of the anxiety stemming from the repetitiousness of "good American physical work" in the factories of their native Michigan.¹⁴³ The group claims that their music can make you "sweat the poison out of your system."¹⁴⁴ Consequently not only is the group's music itself therapeutic, but their work is a general "call for a new therapeutic popular music," because,¹⁴⁵

I'm sure by now everyone realizes the importance of popularization, of mass production to ease the lives of as many people as possible. Why not mass produce the Destroy all Monsters achievement? Everyone should pump out Monstrous, destructive Destroy All Monsters black noise. If everyone let their aggression voice themselves in sound there wouldn't be any need for popular entertainment of any kind.¹⁴⁶

The statements made in this manifesto add up to a kind of combination between the revolutionary rage of Petwo and the Carnival inversions of Gwede, a valorization of

¹⁴¹ Rudick and Loren, *Return of the Repressed*, 8.

¹⁴² Kelley, Shaw, and Niagara, *Destroy All Monsters Magazine 1976-1979*.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Durkheim's "effervescence" and my "conniption fit" for a world that, in the mid-1970s, certainly seemed as if it were about to collapse. And perhaps still does.

The Later Years

In 1976, Jim Shaw and Mike Kelley left Ann Arbor to attend Cal Arts in Los Angeles, where both would become highly regarded visual artists.¹⁴⁷ After the move, Mike Kelley came to realize, "there indeed were other bands working in the world who had somewhat the same interests as Destroy All Monsters: Suicide, Airway, Pere Ubu, Throbbing Gristle, Half Japanese, Devo, the Screamers, Non, the Residents and such New York No Wave groups as Teenage Jesus and the Jerks and DNA," groups who had discovered the same underground history that he had as a student in Michigan, and who in turn would constitute some of the earliest incarnations of the permanent underground sensibility.¹⁴⁸

Cary Loren and Niagara stayed behind in Ann Arbor, where Destroy All Monsters was beginning to undergo a massive transformation. Starting first with the addition of Ben and Larry Miller, according to Loren, the group "slowly progressed into the kind of band we were originally in revolt over."¹⁴⁹ This situation was compounded by the addition of Ron Asheton and Michael Davis, formerly of the Stooges and the MC5, respectively. Although in those groups the two musicians had pressed musical

¹⁴⁷ Kelley, sadly, passed away in early 2012.

¹⁴⁸ Kelley, "To the Throne of Chaos Where The Thin Flutes Pipe Mindlessly (Destroy All Monsters: 1944/77): Some Thoughts on the Period of Transition from Progressive Rock to Punk Rock, in the Form of Liner Notes for a Three CD Box Set."

¹⁴⁹ Loren, "a Manifesto of Ignorance; Destroy All Monsters."

boundaries, Asheton's post-Stooges group, The New Order, had flirted with fascism and his playing devolved into the plodding blues-based punk and metal that's found on the second incarnation of Destroy All Monster's few recordings; by this point Loren had already left, and Niagara—Asheton's girlfriend at the time—was handling the singing. Loren notes that, "dam continued on until 1985 as a typical tired power-pop band, a victim of its own excesses and flatulence."¹⁵⁰ Still, Loren notes that among the few people to ever attend a show of the original Destroy All Monsters was a young David Fair, who with his brother Jad would found Half Japanese when their family moved to Maryland from Michigan a few years later. Loren suggests that the title to the Half Japanese song "Calling All Girls" (the title track to their first, self-released EP) was actually lifted from a DAM song.¹⁵¹

Writing in the catalog for the 2000-2001 *Strange Früt: Rock Apocrypha*, a multimedia celebration of all things Detroit underground, Mike Kelley was more circumspect about Destroy All Monster's legacy:

Destroy All Monsters still embrace the avant-garde position. We started off as an anti-band, questioning the mindless pap produced by the culture industry for the youth market by adopting the form of the rock band, and fucking with it. Even though such a position is no longer tenable in the current environment where noise music is simply another form of pop music, we still strive, as artists, to examine pop culture through a critical and analytical mindset - albeit one with a sense of humor.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Mike Kelley, "Strange Früt: Rock Apocrypha, by the Destroy All Monsters Collective.," *Mike Kelley*, 2001, <http://www.mikekelley.com/DAMDIA.html>.

But perhaps Kelley's contention that "such a position is no longer tenable" was inaccurate. Regarding the impetus behind the 1994 3-CD box set documenting the first incarnation of Destroy All Monsters, Cary Loren writes in "a manifesto of ignorance" that, "a synchronous vibe happened when mike called to suggest the cd project. i had spent the summer listening to our tapes and was amazed at what was there in light of the bland 'alternative' music i had heard."¹⁵³ The underground is dead, long live the underground.

Bill Laswell

Bill Laswell is difficult. With a discography rivaling Sun Ra's in sheer quantity, defining exactly what Laswell does, musically speaking, is an enormous task. According to the discography on *The Laswell Pages* website, since 1978 he has been involved in literally hundreds of different recordings, as bandleader, producer, and contributor, the last usually on bass guitar. The site also notes that, "Since the late '70s, Laswell has relentlessly pursued the future with a stunning range of musicians and thinkers," before listing approximately three dozen relatively well-known names he's worked with and acknowledging "dozens more from the Americas, Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East and Japan" who are less familiar.¹⁵⁴ These facts are one of the primary reasons for Laswell's inclusion in this chapter; more than anything, Laswell has been a catalyst for collaboration, engaging in what he calls "collision music" whereby musicians

¹⁵³ Loren, "a Manifesto of Ignorance; Destroy All Monsters."

¹⁵⁴ "The Bill Laswell Pages", 2011, <http://www.silent-watcher.net/billlaswell/>.

from disparate traditions are brought together just to see what might happen. While the results are almost always interesting, they don't always "work," in the sense of being very effective or enjoyable musicking. Still, in a catalog as vast as Laswell's, there are a lot of highlights.

The second major difficulty in dealing with Laswell is that, in one very significant way, he doesn't meet the criteria I've established as integral the permanent underground; he has never self-released any of the innumerable recordings that his name is attached to. While he has had a great deal of creative control over his the labels Celluloid (1980s) and Axiom (1990-present). On the one hand, this can be attributed to an *auteur*-like attitude that he inherited from his mentor Giorgio Gomelsky, working from within a corporate system and taking advantage of its resources to accomplish projects that the self-financed usually cannot undertake. On the other, it's possible that Laswell sees no contradictions in these corporate affiliations.

This explanation is reinforced by the fact that the core of all of Laswell's projects, his fundamental interest is in *dance*. From 1970s disco to the latest club music emerging from every pocket of the world, dance music operates according to different principles than other forms of popular music because its production is more or less anonymous. Dance music is not played on the radio, its listeners are mostly confined to the social spaces of established clubs or illegal raves, and DJs there are not obligated to announce the name of the artist that the crowd is or is not responding to. Furthermore, not only are the records that these kinds of DJs spin difficult to acquire outside of specialty shops, the musicians who put them together tend to operate under a wide variety of pseudonyms.

Even Laswell, who's well enough known to warrant a web page devoted to his discography, only releases a small portion of his projects under his own name. If there's no brand name, then it's far more difficult to fetishize the recorded commodity—though, of course, there are still those that do. According to this logic, working with Georgakarakos and Blackwell was a means to an end: the possibility of a crowd's ecstatic response to a record that they've never heard before and may never hear again.

At the same time as Laswell presents the difficulties I've outlined above, both in terms of my ability to fit his work within the confines of this chapter and his appropriateness to the narrative of the permanent underground, his inclusion is meant to serve as two-point historiographical corrective. On the one hand, Laswell's collaborative projects allow me to begin the task of continuing the story of the '60s jazz collectives as their members moved into the late '70s, '80s, and '90s, which has been neglected in the literature on jazz. At the other end, foregrounding Laswell is a rebuke to recent writers on New York No Wave like Simon Reynolds, Byron Coley and Thurston Moore, and Marc Masters.¹⁵⁵

Out of the three books that these writers have produced on the same historical moment out of which Laswell emerged, only Masters bothers to mention Laswell or his No Wave-era group Material at all, in two short paragraphs near the end of a two-hundred page book that chronicles in great detail groups that performed fewer than a dozen times,

¹⁵⁵ Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Thurston Moore and Byron Coley, *No Wave: Post-Punk. Underground. New York. 1976-1980*. (New York: Abrams Image, 2008); Marc Masters, *No Wave* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007).

released a single 7”, and exhausted themselves before the leaves changed.¹⁵⁶ While it should be clear from this dissertation’s emphasis on “Temporary Autonomous Zones” that longevity is not an especially important quality to consider with regards to the underground, it’s clear in both Masters’ *No Wave* and Coley and Moore’s *No Wave: Post Punk. Underground. New York. 1976-1980*, that the authors’ privilege a hyper-aggressive, mostly guitar-driven version of the No Wave story. The fact that Laswell’s dance-oriented music doesn’t fit well into this narrative and that his career extended far beyond that brief New York moment is apparent enough. Of course, there’s also the possibility that Moore particularly is invested in nostalgia for No Wave precisely because his own guitar-driven band Sonic Youth ended up on a major label and he doesn’t care to share the spotlight with Laswell as the era’s ambivalent torchbearer. Instead of producing underground music, Moore has made a second career—often with Byron Coley’s help—marketing himself as a curator of a narrow vision of the history of the musical underground that just happens to coincide with his band’s aesthetics.

Simon Reynolds’ exclusion of Laswell from his *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* is more curious, given his personal sympathies for dance music, most evident in his earlier book on rave culture, *Generation Ecstasy*.¹⁵⁷ However, while the early incarnation of Laswell’s group Material shares many characteristics with the dance-punk fusions of Reynolds’ youthful fandom, the British author displays a clear preference for the UK-based bands of the period he covers.

¹⁵⁶ Masters, *No Wave*, 181.

¹⁵⁷ Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Gomelsky Comes to New York

Still, Reynolds' attitude is doubly strange given that Laswell's career got its initial boost from another Brit, Giorgio Gomelsky. Gomelsky began his career in the music business in London as the proprietor of the Crawdaddy Club, whose first house band was the Rolling Stones.¹⁵⁸ According to Richie Unterberger, "Gomelsky was one of the very few important nonmusicians of the 1960s rock industry who, to most appearances, was motivated more by creative vision, love of music, and a hunger for innovating artistic and social change than he was by financial concerns."¹⁵⁹ Gomelsky's priorities were first apparent in his dealings with the Rolling Stones, whom he encouraged in the early 1960s to legally incorporate in order to wield greater clout against record labels and concert promoters, to which end he offered to be their manager. Gomelsky's argument was that "If an *artist* owns his own corporation, he's a lot more powerful and can negotiate from strength."¹⁶⁰ Instead, enticed by promises of immediate financial reward, Andrew Loog Oldham swept in to take Gomelsky's place as the Rolling Stones' manager, and through his partnership with the notorious American lawyer Allen Klein managed to help bankrupt most of the group by the early 1970s—though they've obviously recovered.¹⁶¹ The next Crawdaddy house band, The Yardbirds, did follow Gomelsky's advice and incorporated. According to Gomelsky, what attracted him to the band was that,

¹⁵⁸ Richie Unterberger, *Urban Spacemen and Wayfaring Strangers: Overlooked Innovators and Eccentric Visionaries of '60s Rock* (New York: Backbeat Books, 2000), 124.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 128.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

They had one thing that the Stones didn't have. [...] They had the concept of altering the material. [...] They were doing the rave-ups, speeding up. [...] I said, this is good for me, because I like the idea of pushing the envelope further. And I saw how rhythm and blues could then be connected with jazz, which connected with ethnic music. Little by little, I wanted to get to the point where we are at now, planetary popular music.¹⁶²

Although the Yardbirds—three of them apparently having discovered that being a guitar “god” was a more lucrative proposition—dispersed before they could help Gomelsky realize his dream of a “planetary popular music,” Gomelsky continued his musical endeavors through associations with the British and continental art-rock groups The Soft Machine, Daavid Allen’s Gong, Magma, and Henry Cow (featuring Fred Frith), before relocating to New York in the mid-1970s. There, Gomelsky opened a new club, Zu Place, hiring Bill Laswell as part of his new house band, Material. According to Gomelsky, his concept at this point being to “connect the alternative music in Europe” with the alternative music developing in the U.S.¹⁶³ Gomelsky produced the first several Material releases under the title “Temporary Music,” and states that for him this idea meant that “you didn’t bind yourself, tie yourself, into a format or formula. So that it could be people coming and going; it would be ensembles. It would all be one-off-type projects. My old dream, of pulling together this kind of collective-type situation.”¹⁶⁴ For better or worse, Laswell and Gomelsky parted ways shortly after the “Temporary Music” recordings, with Laswell going on to attempt Gomelsky’s “planetary popular music” in ways that his mentor never realized, as I demonstrate below. Still, given the precarious

¹⁶² Ibid., 131.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 143.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

position that Laswell has been in vis-à-vis corporate record labels since breaking with Gomelsky, it is interesting to consider how much an effect the entrepreneur had on the bassist's ideas about the music business, where, ideally musicking is part of a "fair exchange of goods and services" and not "a means to accumulate capital, exercise power, and exploit."¹⁶⁵

The Jazz Collectives Come to New York

Although jazz critic Gary Giddins has suggested that there is no identifiable style known as "loft jazz," claiming that it is "any jazz played in a loft," events of the late 1960s and early 1970s certainly led to a unique musicking practice in New York in the latter 1970s, most of which took place in re-purposed industrial spaces or "lofts."¹⁶⁶ While this kind of re-purposing of space recalls the similar practices of the BAG in St. Louis, the AACM in Chicago, and Philip Cohran, loft jazz was in fact the result of the destruction of many of those earlier organizations. After the BAG's demise in 1970, its members Oliver Lake, Julius Hemphill and Hamiet Bluiett had relocated to Paris, where they joined the Art Ensemble of Chicago in exile, even while the AACM persisted at home. Around 1972, these musicians returned to the United States, convening in New

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹⁶⁶ Gary Giddins, *Riding On A Blue Note: Jazz And American Pop* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 190.

York City, where they were joined by fellow Midwesterners and AACM members Henry Threadgill and Anthony Braxton, as well as veterans of Horace Tapscott's Los Angeles group, David Murray and Arthur Blythe.¹⁶⁷ Although the commercial market for experimental jazz in New York was no better than the cities they had fled, these musicians found common cause with local avant-garde artists like former John Coltrane drummer Rashied Ali and saxophonist Sam Rivers, as well as ethnomusicologist Verna Gillis—a specialist in the music of Africa and Haiti—each of whom operated an alternative performance space during the 1970s.¹⁶⁸

Peter Cherches suggests that Rivers' loft played host to the inauguration of the loft jazz scene as a “full-blown cultural phenomenon” when he and his wife Beatrice hosted a counter-event to the more mainstream Newport Festival in 1972.¹⁶⁹ Although the musicking of these years was under-recorded, one of the most important documents of loft jazz also emerged from the Rivers' Studio Rivbea: the multi-disk *Wildflowers* compilation. All of the musicians listed above are represented on this set, a group that Ross Firestone describes in the liner notes as working “tirelessly, expanding their tonal vocabularies and creating shimmering and brilliant soundscapes for whoever was still

¹⁶⁷ Peter Cherches, “Downtown Music IV: Loft Jazz, 1972-79,” *Downtown Music IV: Loft Jazz, 1972-79*, 2007, <http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/fales/DowntownMusic/cherches8.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

listening.”¹⁷⁰ Cherches contends that the musicking of these artists was clearly outside the bounds of mainstream jazz, but still carried forth the legacy of ‘60s free jazz, since,

The musicians continued to eschew the popular-song harmonic foundation of bebop while often foregrounding the blues elements that were somewhat more subliminal in much of free jazz. Rhythmically, some of the music began to incorporate influences of funk, African and Afro-Caribbean music, alongside the more abstract free-jazz foundation.¹⁷¹

Although rising rent costs eventually led to the end of the loft jazz scene, George Lewis notes that, “It can be fairly said that the loft period provided entry-level support for an emerging multiracial network of musicians.”¹⁷² Among these was Bill Laswell, who would go on to either collaborate with many of these artists or help produce and release their recordings through Celluloid and Axiom, including guitarist Sonny Sharrock’s magnificent final recording, 1994’s *Ask the Ages*.

Laswell Comes to New York

Although Bill Laswell was born in the tiny Illinois town of Salem, he spent most of his formative years in Detroit, like the members of Destroy All Monsters soaking up the influence of the Stooges and the MC5, but also finding himself drawn to African-American music, especially Funkadelic and Miles Davis’ early ‘70s jazz-fusion.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Ross Fireston, liner notes, *Wildflowers: Loft Jazz New York 1976* (Douglas Records, 2009).

¹⁷¹ Cherches, “Downtown Music IV: Loft Jazz, 1972-79.”

¹⁷² Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 351.

¹⁷³ David Toop, “Bill Laswell: Telematic Nomad,” *The Wire*, December 130AD, <http://www.thewire.co.uk/articles/170/>; Peter Wetherbee, “Axiom History,” *Axiom*, n.d., <http://music.hyperreal.org/labels/axiom/axibook1.html>; “The Bill Laswell Pages.”

According to Peter Wetherbee, Laswell began his musical training by in school ensembles and privately developing his personal style on the electric bass.¹⁷⁴ Wetherbee also notes that in his teens, Laswell began performing professionally, “backing up soul, country and funk artists, and playing live in front of demanding audiences in all types of contexts,” touring the Midwest and the South.¹⁷⁵ The ability to read a crowd, like the streetcorner entrepreneurs described in Chapter 1, is an essential skill to a dance-oriented musician. In keeping with this Gwede aesthetic, *The Laswell Pages* suggest that his “vibe has more to do with repetitive low blows that grease the hips and cast spells on the mind.”¹⁷⁶ Conversely, in an interview with David Toop, Laswell notes that his experiences attending a sanctified church in the South with an organ-playing friend gave him a glimpse of music that could make people “completely lose it,” though “not as intense or aggressive” as through the Saturday night ritual.¹⁷⁷ In addition to these kinds of on-the-ground experiences, Laswell also developed an interest in the free jazz of John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, being drawn to its improvisatory qualities.¹⁷⁸

These disparate interests coalesced when Laswell left Detroit for New York in the late 1970s, where Wetherbee notes he “had opportunities to fully explore improvisational, avant-garde, and progressive forms of rock and jazz, interfacing with a vast array of musicians.”¹⁷⁹ His early gigs were at the Zu Club with Material were a

¹⁷⁴ Wetherbee, “Axiom History.”

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ “The Bill Laswell Pages.”

¹⁷⁷ Toop, “Bill Laswell: Telematic Nomad.”

¹⁷⁸ Wetherbee, “Axiom History.”

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

launching pad for his later work, starting with his first recording, 1979's *About Time* with Daevid Allen's art-rock group, Gong. While this album in retrospect sounds more like the first Material recording rather than a continuation of Allen's European art-rock, on Material's "Temporary Music" recordings that followed, the group "merged funk rhythms, dance beats, and noisy guitar into a constantly morphing sound," creating a "messier hybrid" than the other No Wave groups.¹⁸⁰ According to *The Laswell Pages*, the bassist's early interest in Miles Davis would have a profound effect on the music that followed these early recordings: "Albums such as *On the Corner* and *Get Up With It* suggested that under the right circumstances beats and prominent basslines could merge on equal footing with sounds from different cultures and genres."¹⁸¹ These lessons were incorporated into 1981's *Memory Serves*, which saw appearances from Sonny Sharrock and Henry Threadgill, as well as British art-rocker Fred Frith.¹⁸² On the Material albums that followed, the group would also showcase loft jazz luminaries like Olu Dara, Philip Wilson, and Billy Bang.¹⁸³

Other Planes of Sound

Although primarily a dance-oriented artist, the punk edge of his early Stooges influence and aggression of his No Wave peers has been reflected in some of Bill Laswell's projects. *The Laswell Pages* notes that, "Catharsis - or what some might

¹⁸⁰ Masters, *No Wave*, 181.

¹⁸¹ "The Bill Laswell Pages."

¹⁸² Masters, *No Wave*, 181.

¹⁸³ Wetherbee, "Axiom History."

consider violent music - has also played a consistent role in Laswell's music over the years. The volatile Last Exit, active from 1986 to 1989, left unsuspecting listeners at a loss for what these supposedly respectable musicians were doing onstage," the musicians in question being Sonny Sharrock, German free improv saxophonist Peter Brotzman, and former Ornette Coleman drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson, alongside Laswell.¹⁸⁴ Also citing the projects Massacre, Painkiller, and Praxis, *The Laswell Pages* concludes that, while each of these groups is unique, "they all specialize in a sonic reaming of the psyche. Like fire, music can be a great cleanser."¹⁸⁵

During the 1980s, like many of the other permanent underground musicians, Laswell developed an interest in foreign music. As a bassist, he was initially drawn to the heavy sounds of Jamaican dub, and his love for the writer William Burroughs led him to the Master Musicians of Joujouka, friends of Burroughs' since his time in Tangiers in the 1950s; Laswell also helped create several spoken-word albums with Burroughs. He eventually used the resources available through the Axiom label to produce perhaps the finest field recording of the Moroccan musicians, *Apocalypse Across the Sky: The Master Musicians of Joujouka*, alongside the excellent *Night Spirit Masters: Gnawa Music of Marrakesh* and *Ancient Heart: Mandinka and Fulani Music of the Gambia*. He also brought together jazz musician Herbie Hancock and hip hop DJ Grandmixer DST on the album *Future Shock*, punk singer Johnny Rotten/John Lydon and Afrika Bambaataa on the "World of Destruction" single, and collaborated with Hindustani classical musicians

¹⁸⁴ "The Bill Laswell Pages."

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

through the Tabla Beat Science dance music collective. In his book *Avant Rock*, Bill Martin sees Laswell as very self-conscious about his sources, that he knows where the materials are coming from and why he's combining them.¹⁸⁶ Martin suggests that,

In experimental rock music, the “channeling” of diverse influences takes many forms. In critical circles there can still be found the background assumption that all of the eclectic concatenations being assembled (sometimes thrown together) out there must still be the result of some “natural” or “authentic” affinity for all of these musical forms on the part of the musicians. Why the crossing of social and aesthetic boundaries needs to be a “natural” thing—or why some critics or listeners feel the need to think that such authenticity is possible or desirable—would make for an interesting study in itself.¹⁸⁷

Laswell “collision music” makes no attempt at overall “authenticity,” and he states that, “I appropriate music from everywhere. I don't think it's possible to own a piece of music. To me, we're all playing the same stuff. It's just combinations that make it new.”¹⁸⁸ This despite the fact that he has frequently worked with musicians renowned within their respective traditions, albeit ones who themselves are interested in crossing boundaries. Together, Laswell and his collaborators engage in global psychedelia, moving “freely across perceived lines of culture, geography, genre, and generation.”¹⁸⁹

Sun City Girls

The Sun City Girls were a band originally from Phoenix, Arizona, started in 1979 by the brothers Alan and Rick Bishop, functioning for most of their life as a three-piece

¹⁸⁶ Bill Martin, *Avant Rock: Experimental Music from the Beatles to Bjork (Feedback)* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 125.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Toop, “Bill Laswell: Telematic Nomad.”

¹⁸⁹ Wetherbee, “Axiom History.”

with percussionist Charles Gocher; the group came to an end with Gocher's death in 2007.¹⁹⁰ Named after the Sun City retirement community near Phoenix, the group was originally part of the same Arizona punk scene as the Meat Puppets, the Feederz, and Jodie Foster's Army (JFA), although even in the early days their strange mixture of styles put them at odds with punk fans.¹⁹¹ Having heard first heard them at a punk show in the '80s, longtime fan and D.I.Y. gospel music scholar Mike McGonigal writes of attending their latter-day shows that,

I'll close my eyes to better lose myself in the experience, and hear this weird, high-pitched caterwaul on top of the music. And then there's another otherworldly voice that sounds like Tuvan throat singing as practiced by Bowser from Sha Na Na. It happens over this droney music that's situated precariously between hippie and punk, song and free improv, and between Western sounds and the "bent" tonalities of North African and Far Eastern music.¹⁹²

He goes on to describe their stage presence as "one part Haitian voodoo rite and one part the channeling of an unknown Borscht Belt comedian. Really."¹⁹³ This combination of ritual and novelty led Tad Hendrickson of *The Village Voice* to conclude that, "They've never made any sense, conventionally speaking, and that's what makes them them."¹⁹⁴ Even though they existed in obscurity for all of their years as an active band, after dozens of LPs, cassettes, CDs, VHS tapes, and DVDs over three decades, there was some justification in Derek Monypeny's 1999 claim that,

¹⁹⁰ Alan Bishop, "Invisible Tempos of the Vanishing Assassin: Charles Gocher (1952-2007)," *Perfect Sound Forever*, April 2008, <http://www.furious.com/Perfect/charlesgocher.html>.

¹⁹¹ Mike McGonigal, "Sun City Girls: The Great North American Tricksters," *The Stranger, Seattle's Only Newspaper*, May 16, 2002, <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=10798>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Tad Hendrickson, "You Go, Girls," *The Village Voice*, November 19, 2002, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2002-11-19/music/music/>.

The Sun City Girls are America's premier underground band. No qualifiers such as "arguably" or "possibly" are necessary. For going on 20 years now they have steadily, relentlessly amassed a body of work that is simply without peer or precedent in American music, "rock" or otherwise. Their oeuvre encompasses a dizzying array of styles, genres, and influences, yet no bands' music is more completely and distinctly their own.¹⁹⁵

Taking a shot at Volvo owners with "subvert the dominant paradigm" bumper stickers and people who claim to be into "all kinds of music," Monypeny flatly asserts that the "Sun City Girls take these and many other kinds of ideological and aesthetic statements, push them to their conclusions, and reap the attendant rewards of obscurity, confusion and ridicule. Apparently they believe that somebody has to."¹⁹⁶

Sonic Nomads

Although the Sun City Girls began their life as a band in Phoenix, for founders Alan and Rick Bishop, their musical roots are in the Middle East. Their grandfather, Jamil Salman, was a Christian Druze who left Lebanon, traveled around the world working various jobs, and finally settled in Michigan, which has one of the largest Arab populations in the U.S. During their youth, they enjoyed the parties that their grandfather threw, with the music, food, and drink of the Levant, before their mother and father relocated to Arizona.¹⁹⁷ Monypeny, as well as Erik Davis in *Wire* and Tim Bugbee in *Perfect Sound Forever*, are all quick to point out that it was their grandfather, a "master

¹⁹⁵ Derek Monypeny, "Laundry Is Such Bad Karma: Glimpses Into the World of the Sun City Girls," *Perfect Sound Forever*, May 1999, <http://www.furious.com/perfect/suncitygirls.html>.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Erik Davis, "Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls," *TechGnosis*, 2004, http://www.techgnosis.com/index_scg.html.

oud player,” who was their most important early musical influence, much like surf guitarist Dick Dale’s uncle, as related in Chapter 3.¹⁹⁸ According to Davis, for the Sun City Girls’ detractors, “this matter of Orientalist appropriation is further complicated by the fact that the Bishop boys have the Orient within, coded into their DNA and the tenderest layers of their memory banks.”¹⁹⁹

But for whatever impact that these early experiences with their grandfather’s hookah-smoking, coffee-drinking friends had on their later ideas about musicking, perhaps an even more profound influence came through their own world travels. Erik Davis notes that, “The brothers are addicted to third world travel, and have been so since they first hit the Moroccan hinterlands in 1984. Gocher has joined a Bishop expedition only once, during a 1989 trip through Indonesia.”²⁰⁰ He goes on to compare an encounter during that trip between the Sun City Girls and a Gwede-like troupe of Indonesian performers who, “Whenever tourists stopped, the leader cracked a bullwhip next to their heads and scared them off.”²⁰¹ After years in the brutal world of ‘80s punk rock, exacerbated by their attitude of being, as Monypeny puts it, a “band *against* the audience,” Davis observes that, “The Girls, characteristically, held their ground,” adding

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.; Monypeny, “Laundry Is Such Bad Karma: Glimpses Into the World of the Sun City Girls”; Tim Bugbee, “Third Eye Staring Contest: Rick Bishop Interview,” *Perfect Sound Forever*, May 1999, <http://www.furious.com/perfect/suncitygirlsinterview.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

“Guys like that can certainly deal with a stingless lash from a Javanese heavy. They could even see where the guy was coming from.”²⁰²

At the same time that ritual sonic combat informs the Girls’ musicking, there is an important level of deference in their attitudes to the musics that fall outside of their own formative experience (punk rock and Middle Eastern music, specifically). Erik Davis quotes Alan Bishop as stating that,

Obviously there's a sense of respect for how to play something like the gamelon. But to give in to that respect you don't do right by tradition. Tradition is not about slavish imitation. The last thing I want to see is a bunch of fucking white guys playing Javanese gamelon proper. It's disrespectful. [...] They are being disrespectful because they are not evolving the situation. They are not rolling the dice. They are copying, just following somebody else's rules.²⁰³

This approach comes with certain risks, however. As Davis notes, these involve claims of “insensitivity, political incorrectness, and crappy music.”²⁰⁴ *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*’s Will York states “That's why I never trusted Sun City Girls' fans: they'd never admit that, as great as much of the band's music was, they could also really stink sometimes.”²⁰⁵ At the same time, for Davis,

[T]heir punk disdain for multicultural pieties paradoxically allows them to extend the creative logic of folk appropriation. That's why you can't always tell the difference between the "ethnic" tunes they make up and the “ethnic” tunes they cover, and why Alan babbles in languages he does not understand. [...] Call it

²⁰² Monypeny, “Laundry Is Such Bad Karma: Glimpses Into the World of the Sun City Girls”; Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²⁰³ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Will York, “Sun Worshipers: Contemplating Fandom, Following the Sun City Girls,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, October 30, 2002, http://www.sfbg.com/37/05/art_music_suncitygirls.html.

underground world music, or underworld music, a place of creative misunderstandings and mutual fascination.²⁰⁶

Davis also points to Peter Lamborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey) and his use of the concept “psychic nomadism,” which, as I suggested in Chapter 1, is a subset of the function of music’s psychedelic properties.²⁰⁷ According to Davis, although the Sun City Girls play with the novelty of “prefab images of the exotic,” at root they are engaging with foreign musics at the level where “deep travel, in the soul and in space, extends the ‘heretical margin’—a liminal zone that exists, not within homogenous traditions, but between them as they dream and penetrate one another.”²⁰⁸

The Kult of Kali

In addition to introducing the Bishop brothers to Middle Eastern music, their grandfather also offered entre into the world of the occult. According to Rick Bishop’s interview with Tim Bugbee, Jamil Salman was adept at the doctrines of the Knights Templar and the Egyptian Rites of Memphis and Mithraism, and “didn’t buy into the ‘Christianization of Freemasonry.’”²⁰⁹ Bishop also notes that, “Everything you learn and forget at an early age reawakens itself at the right moment later on. It has served me well.”²¹⁰ Erik Davis continues this interpretation when he writes that, “For Rick, that toy

²⁰⁶ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²⁰⁷ Bey, *T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*.

²⁰⁸ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²⁰⁹ Bugbee, “Third Eye Staring Contest: Rick Bishop Interview.”

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

initiation blossomed into a lifelong love-affair with the occult. The Orientalist vibe of Masonry led him into Egyptology, and from there he moved into Crowley, sexual ritual, Haitian voodoo, tantra.”²¹¹ In addition to whatever money he made from the Sun City Girls’ performances and recordings—as meager as it might be—he supplemented that income by dealing in esoteric books and ephemera, opening a shop after the group’s move to Seattle in the early 1990s. Along the way, Bishop became a devotee of Kali, the Hindu goddess of sex and death, a kind of Indian counterpart to the Gwede lwa Baron Samedi in the Vodou pantheon. In his interview with Davis, Bishop explains the treacherousness of a Westerner practicing other religious rituals, following a line of reasoning that Paul Veyne called the “constitutive imagination”:²¹²

“I can't approach it like a Hindu because I haven't done the studies a Hindu would do,” he said. “But it doesn't matter. There's still a connection. So if I want to worship Kali -- and it would be bad for me to say that I never do - I'm gonna do it when I know I have to do it. And I'm gonna improvise. It could be silent inside, it could be through her images, it could be with incense or whatever. There's no order to it. I don't do it three times a day because, well, I don't have to. I don't have to do it at all. But sometimes I do.” [...] “It's kind of the same way with our music. Sure we don't always improvise, but if you're gonna play music and improvise, just like you might perform a ritual, you're gonna try to approach it in a certain way.”²¹³

Similarly, his brother Alan could be said to practice the “unknown tongue.” Davis points to this when he writes that,

²¹¹ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²¹² Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?: An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988).

²¹³ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

Alan knows bits of Indonesian, Spanish, and Burmese, but he's not particularly facile with languages and some of his singing is outright glossolalia. "Sometimes I'm singing exact words from a language and sometimes I'm not singing words from any language," he says. "And sometimes I'm singing my own language of before birth and after death." Alan guesses this peculiar skill started when he was a kid, making fun of Chinese or the Arabic he heard at home, but now it has blossomed into an expressive art beyond linguistics -- a vocalization of the unsayable.²¹⁴

Carnival Folk Music

The Sun City Girls' unusual combination of punk attitude, global musical knowledge, and occult spirituality/unknown tongue-isms has resulted in some unique music. Although their catalog of recordings is too diverse for easy summarization, viewing any of their numerous VHS tapes—which combine avant-garde film with performance footage—reveals a group that revels in costuming, operating somewhere in between performance art and rituals of unknown provenance, not unlike the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Of their best-known recording, 1990's *Torch of the Mystics*, Byron Coley wrote that they were "the first truly crazy band to emerge from the shards of hardcore. At first they seemed almost like a goofus prank being played by post-core stoners, but by the time that *Torch of the Mystics* was released, they were absolutely amazing and obviously pure of heart," adding that "Without these french-fried, grass-skirted motherfuckers it would all sound like Merzbow," meaning that the permanent underground might have been reduced to the all-electronic, all-aggression sounds of the

²¹⁴ Ibid.

Japanese noise bands without the bizarre, hyper-creole style of the trio from Phoenix.²¹⁵ Erik Davis describes *Torch of the Mystics* as an “astral cabaret of voodoo folk jams and dark ethno-psychedelic rites,” and suggest that these qualities are central to its enduring popularity among the initiated.²¹⁶ Regarding the rest of their catalog, Derek Monypeny challenges anyone who claims to be working “in the Sun City Girls vein,” asking:²¹⁷

Does that mean the aggressive, Middle Eastern-influenced trio smashing one hears on their most well known record *Torch of the Mystics* amongst the lambada-crooning and mysto-poking? Did you turn the tape on and recite from the collected works of Adam Weishaupt while your pals destroyed a Thermos and whistled "I'm Bringing Home a Baby Bumblebee"? Or maybe you did an extended improvised piece of the kind found on *Live From Planet Boomerang*, *33,033 Cross-Dressers from the Rig Veda*, or the live *C.O.N. Artists* LP? Or it coulda been you guys pulled off a vulgar, novelty-topical-political, Tuli Kupferberg/Chadourne blast like the SCG did on *Horse Cock Phephner*? Or maybe you all sat around and made like inbred hillbillies full of Rebel Yell, picking and grinning with banjos and whoops, just like *Jack's Creek*? Perhaps you guys did a movie score, like the SCG has done for the films Juggernaut, Dulce, and Piasa, Devourer of Men? Probably you took the easy way out and did shitty covers of "Fly by Night," "Sweet City Woman," "Love Train," "Who's That Lady," etc. like on *Midnight Cowboys from Ipanema*.²¹⁸

Good questions.

Escaping Dante's Disneyland Inferno

Despite existing as a band for almost three decades and releasing more albums than the Beatles and Rolling Stones combined, the Sun City Girls remained throughout their lifespan undeniably obscure. Recording for many small labels throughout the 1980s

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Monypeny, “Laundry Is Such Bad Karma: Glimpses Into the World of the Sun City Girls.”

²¹⁸ Ibid.

and early 1990s, “relatively few people have heard their music, even in experimental or indie/avant-garde circles,” according to Derek Monypeny²¹⁹ Even though Monypeny believes that making and selling records is important to the band, “they have never been interested in any of the traditional methods of self-promotion.”²²⁰ Instead, they released “1000-copy runs of LPs and CDs that went out of print more or less quickly and more or less stayed that way.”²²¹

Their practice is one of the more extreme forms of the recording as gris-gris, snapshots of a group ever evolving, defying collector fetishists the opportunity to command total knowledge of the band’s musicking. Erik Davis concludes, “Believe me, you don't need to collect 'em all. And you couldn't do it if you tried.”²²² This is no doubt related to Alan Bishop’s own belief that, despite the expansive activities of the Sun City Girls, the group “is not our only interest; it's not the main focus of any of our lives. It's a muse, an escape, a hobby, and an obsession at times,” adding that the machinery of commercial popularity is “one we're unwilling to participate in.”²²³ This attitude is reflected in the Sun City Girls decision, at the moment in the ‘90s when major labels were signing up any underground group they could in the hopes of finding the next Nirvana, to cut ties with the small labels that had been up to that point their outlet for releasing recording in favor of one they owned themselves, Abduction Records.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²²² Ibid.

²²³ McGonigal, “Sun City Girls: The Great North American Tricksters.”

²²⁴ Ibid.; Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

Post-Girls

Charles Gocher's death from pancreatic cancer in 2007 brought an end to the Sun City Girls as a band, but the Bishop brothers have continued their musicking through two different projects. Rick performs mostly solo guitar works in the tradition of John Fahey and Robbie Basho as "Sir Richard Bishop," a perverse homage to 19th century British explorer and anthropologist Sir Richard Burton. Together, Alan and Rick, along with Hisham Mayet, run the Sublime Frequencies label out of Seattle. Sublime Frequencies represents the latest stage in the long history of "world music" in the United States, which began with what Dick Spottswood called the "ethnic music" of immigrants prior to WWII, continued through the ethnographic documentary recordings of labels like Folkways and Nonesuch Explorer, and took a commercial turn with the creation of the "world music" marketing category in the 1980s, as major labels began searching for the next Bob Marley in the Third World.²²⁵

Sublime Frequencies combine parts of the ideology of each of these eras in their practice of releasing foreign music to U.S. audiences. Roughly speaking, their releases fall into one of three categories: field recordings of traditional music of the Folkways/Nonesuch Explorer type, contemporary or recently popular music from foreign countries which combine the idea "ethnic" music with the global synthesis of "world music," except that they were originally intended for non-Western audiences, and "radio

²²⁵ American Folklife Center, *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing, 1982); Richard Carlin, *Worlds of Sound: The Story of Smithsonian Folkways* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2008); Timothy D Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

collages” which sample the street music, environmental sounds and mass media of a given country or city in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East. They’ve also produced the one-off *Broken-Hearted Dragonflies*, which extends the human-machine problem identified in Chapter 3 to the animal kingdom; on it, phonography of massed Burmese insects takes on the characteristics of electronic music. Recalling Steven Feld’s discussion of “Clementine” in his article on Pygmy music, in an interview with Andy Beta for *The Believer*, Alan Bishop notes that,

Coming from that Western viewpoint, where you know about Hendrix and the Rolling Stones, you can hear that even overseas they heard these people as well, from the visiting American G.I.s and stuff during the Vietnam War. It’s an odd reflection back on us about our own culture. I think of this one Molam song [Thai folk music] that uses the “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” riff that just sounds off. Not to deem it as being “lost in translation,” but how they re-appropriate our pop music is striking.²²⁶

Although Sublime Frequencies has been criticized for “taking this music from other cultures and not paying royalties on it,” Alan Bishop contends that they attempt to pay royalties to the performers that they can find, although this is difficult given the ephemeral nature of much of the music the label releases, acquired via cassettes purchased at bazaars and of dubious legality themselves—a fact in keeping with the mostly non-propriety nature of the permanent underground.²²⁷ Nevertheless, according to Erik Davis, “The Bishop brothers hope that Sublime Frequencies will fill a gap in what Alan calls ‘international recordings,’ presenting unusual documents with a passionate

²²⁶ Andy Beta, “Interview with Alan Bishop,” *The Believer*, August 2008, http://www.believermag.com/issues/200807/?read=interview_bishop.

²²⁷ Ibid.

informality rather than the clinical dissections of Smithsonian/ Folkways or the high-tech fetish of lots of world fusions.”²²⁸ Bishop adds, “As far as I’m concerned, it’s open season, and you record what you want to record,” because, “You don’t have to go to school to learn how to record or to learn how to interpret a foreign culture or bring it back and spin it for someone.”²²⁹ Through endeavors like Sublime Frequencies, it has become easier for anyone to tap into the Global Festival of Noise that is the permanent underground.

CONCLUSION

Although the examples of a permanent underground that I have examined in this dissertation have been concentrated between the late 1960s and early 1990s, this by no means is meant to suggest that the underground came to an end at that point. For one thing, many of the collectives that I have highlighted in this chapter and in Chapter 1 continue their musicking practices, reaching their small, dedicated audience through the most localized of performances and the most far-flung networks of trade in sonic talismans. Furthermore, in the years since these groups’ formation there have been countless other collectives inspired by the models like The Residents and the Sun City Girls, or even further back to Father Yod, as is the case with the No-Neck Blues Band.²³⁰ While groups like the No-Neck Blues Band are comparatively well known, their practice

²²⁸ Davis, “Cameo Demons: Hanging with the Sun City Girls.”

²²⁹ Beta, “Interview with Alan Bishop.”

²³⁰ Mark Masters, “’70s Commune Band YaHoWha 13 Opens the Fold with a Drag City Collection,” *Independent Weekly*, 2009, <http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/70s-commune-band-yahowha-13-opens-the-fold-with-a-drag-city-collection/Content?oid=1216637>.

of regular communal performance and self-release of recordings is not unusual; innumerable similar collectives convene all over the U.S. daily, weekly, or monthly, and distribute their unconventional sounds on vinyl, cassettes, CD-Rs, and digital files through channels that are too dispersed and obscure to attempt description. Still others make no moves toward documentation at all, preferring, after Attali, to “compose” for themselves, their friends and family, reveling in the pleasure of sound, on instruments homemade and salvaged. In fact, having concluded this survey of the permanent underground, I think I’ll go bang along to a tape of white noise on my yard sale mandolin or the set of tablas I brought back from a trip to Ind

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