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Music, Civil Rights, and Counterculture: Critical Aesthetics and Resistance in the United States, 1957-1968

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the role of music within the politics of liberation in the United States in the period of the late 1950s and the 1960s. Its focus is on the two dominant, but very different (and, it is argued, interconnected) mass political and cultural movements that converged in the course of the 1960s: civil rights and counterculture. Divergent tendencies in the popular musics of the period, which were drawn into the orbits of these two movements, are considered in the context of tensions between political commitment and aesthetic autonomy, between the call for collective political action and the pull of individualism, and between existing political reality and the utopian perspectives offered by art. The theoretical approach derives largely from critical theory (in particular Adorno, Bloch, and Marcuse), and the thesis argues that by tending toward autonomy and individualism popular musics in this period articulated a vision of society that was radically different from existing political realities.

The study situates itself in the existing literature on protest music, but seeks to take this further by examining the complexity of responses in music of this period to protest and liberation movements beyond protest songs and politically committed music to discuss issues of social critique and critical reflection. After an initial consideration of what might be meant by the categories 'protest music' and socially or politically engaged music, considering among others the work of Eyerman and Jamison (1998), Mattern (1998), Roy (2010), Street (2011), and in particular Denisoff (1968), notions of political engagement and autonomy are discussed

in relation to Adorno (1970) and Marcuse (1977). Subsequent chapters then function as case studies of particular tendencies as well as considering significant figures in the music of the period in the context of liberation, civil rights, Black Power, the counterculture, and the New Left. The Highlander Folk School is considered for the ways that it used music to foreground a collective political identity that was subverted by the needs of individual activists; Bob Dylan is examined in light of his retreat from collective political projects and his move toward aesthetic individualism that was nevertheless met with an increase in his perceived relevance to the liberation movements; John Coltrane for his experiments with autonomous music, despite the bitter political realities faced by many African Americans; and Frank Zappa, whose music, it is argued, attempted to stimulate a form of critical self-reflection amongst his audience.

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Introduction

Aims and Methodology

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between music and liberation movements in the context of the late 1950s and 1960s United States (US), in particular the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, the counterculture, and the New Left. A variety of popular musics were drawn into the orbits of these movements. Radical popular musics in this period are examined in the light of tensions between political commitment and aesthetic autonomy, between the call for collective political action and the pull of individualism, and between existing political reality and the utopian perspectives offered by art. It is argued that even though tending toward autonomy and individualism popular musics articulated a vision of utopia that was socially critical and oppositional in relation to dominant political realities of the period. This argument is pursued through a series of case studies: the Highlander Folk School, Bob Dylan, John Coltrane, and Frank Zappa.

Methodologically I build upon existing sociological understandings of political music (e.g., Serge Denisoff, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, and John Street), as well as those found in critical theory, particularly that of Theodor Adorno, Ernst Bloch, and Herbert Marcuse. As a conceptual apparatus, this latter approach is relevant to this thesis on a number of levels. Firstly, theorists such as Marcuse, Adorno, and Bloch were highly influential in the 1960s counterculture (Adorno and Bloch more so in Europe than the US). On one level, therefore, by engaging with critical theory one is simultaneously engaging with an aspect of the theoretical superstructure of the period. A second and more central reason for employing this approach is because, unlike straightforwardly empirical analyses, I suggest that critical theory is better able to grasp the more oblique connections between aesthetics and politics. This

is important because many of the most radical musicians of the 1950s and 1960s were not themselves part of any political movement – nor indeed could their music be said to be *about* the political movements, at least not in any obvious sense. Seen in this way, critical theory helps to understand the political dimensions of music that is not obviously political.

Given its focus on music and politics, the approach taken in this study is necessarily as much historical and sociological in orientation as it is musicological. Central to its subject matter as well as its method is therefore its emphasis on context.

Contexts: Historical, Political, and Conceptual

From an aesthetic perspective, this period is interesting because of the emergence of so many new, experimental, and socially critical forms of popular music: the late 50s and 60s saw a renewed interest in folk music, and the development of free jazz and avant-garde rock. From a political perspective, this period is significant because of its general instability, where tensions determined by class, gender, race, sexuality, age group, and political ideology became the focal points for mass campaigns and demonstrations.

Despite their convergence in the same historical period, there were many points of tension between the civil rights movement and the counterculture. Particularly in the southern states, African Americans had been subject to centuries of often violent discrimination, and were routinely denied even the most basic civil liberties. By contrast, the counterculture was composed of mainly white, well educated, middle-class young people who, despite their relative privilege, came to reject the dominant values of American society. Predictably, these differences played a significant role in determining the issues that each of the movements sought to address. Thus, on the one hand, the civil rights movement foregrounded demands that were rooted in the tangible improvement of existing reality, including desegregation of

public facilities, voting rights, pay equalization, and employment quotas, whilst on the other hand the counterculture was orientated more toward intellectual and spiritual fulfilment, the search for alternative forms of society and was sometimes characterised by a retreat from conventional politics. Seen in terms of these differences these two movements might not seem to have much in common. However, political tensions in the civil rights movement often drew young Black activists into alliance with the more idealistic elements of the counterculture, and it was on this basis that Students Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the white-led Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Black Panther Party worked together. Similarly, countercultural idealism was often the source of frustration for young activists looking for concrete political change, thus helping to draw elements of the counterculture into the orbit of the civil rights movement.

The relationship between different musics in this period was similarly conflicted. Because of its perceived association with ideas of community and collective identity, folk musics (Black and White) were used as political tools by the civil rights movement and the counterculture. Of particular interest in this respect is the Highlander Folk School, which helped to place Black folk music (spirituals) in the struggle for civil rights. In the mid-1960s, however, folk music in the tradition of Guthrie and Seeger, which had undergone a resurgence of interest since the 1950s, converged with rock – in origin a largely African American blues-based idiom. This coupling was met with mixed reactions, mainly because of the association between rock music and ideas of individualism. Around the same time, jazz and rock also began to take on aesthetic characteristics associated with avant-garde music, pulling in the direction of musical autonomy. These tendencies can be seen in many folk, rock, and jazz musicians of this period, but particularly pertinent examples are Bob Dylan and his extension of folk material into rock; John Coltrane and his development of jazz, through the materials of bebop, toward

an avant-garde aesthetic; and Frank Zappa and his omnivorous use of a wide range of musical styles and genres.

In exploring the question of what constitutes a political music, this study looks at existing sociological perspectives that consider music in relation to ideas of political protest and political engagement. However, in addition to these relatively straightforward understandings of music and politics, I am also concerned with tendencies in radical popular musics in this period toward individualism and ideas of autonomy. Thus, longstanding debates in critical theory that consider tensions between politically committed music and so-called autonomous music are also drawn upon.[1] By taking this approach, this study considers the ways in which apparently apolitical music can be understood as political through the socially and politically mediated nature of both the musical material and the artist who works upon this material.[2] Although there are a number of methodological problems that arise when applying critical theory to popular music (not least those associated with Adorno's outright hostility towards it), following Paddison it is argued that radical popular musics in this period, particularly in jazz and rock, began to develop a critical relationship to their own musical material and to exhibit properties associated with the 'work concept',[3] i.e., a work of art that is concerned principally with its own internal processes and refuses any direct social function to the extent of rejecting its status as a commodity.[4] A clearer picture of these historical, political, and conceptual contexts is to be seen in the literature upon which this study has drawn.

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[1] According to David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, by this account 'music achieves a certain aesthetic autonomy, the musical materials look to themselves ("without looking outward"), but it is through this process that a resemblance to the real world reveals itself and not through any process of "imitating the world".' David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, *Musicology the Key Concepts* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

[2] To this extent, I take a broadly Marxian perspective that sees music (like the commodity) as the objectification of human labour, but where processes of fetishization conceal this human quality: 'It [the commodity] is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.' Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol. 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990 [1867]), 165.

[3] Max Paddison, "The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music," *Popular Music* 2 (1982): 215.

[4] See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997/2002 [1970]), 7; *Beard and Gloag, Musicology: The Key Concepts*, 142-145; Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 228.

Survey of Literature

Because a substantial part of this dissertation involves case studies on individual artists (Dylan, Coltrane, and Zappa), a number of different types of literature have been consulted. Much of this has been academic in nature, but this has also been supplemented by more journalistic accounts that raise important issues in relation to the area of study. Similarly, in viewing the 1950s and 1960s in a broader historical, political, and musical context, it has been necessary to look at range of different sources. I have grouped this literature into four categories that I will deal with in this section: broad historical and political contexts of the period under question; literature on music and politics; sources that are used in relation to the development of concepts; and studies that treat the particular case studies in this dissertation.

In situating the 1950s and 1960s in a wider historical and cultural context, I have found Eric Hobsbawm's (1994) *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* extremely valuable.[5] The wide focus of this study, which is international in nature, has been particularly useful in framing the development of the civil rights movement and the counterculture in the global context of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, as well as within the propaganda war between communist and capitalist countries, in particular the US and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR). However, because Hobsbawm's focus is primarily on the macro-forces in history, I also draw upon studies that provide a view of history from the perspective of ordinary people. This is particularly important given the focus of this study on the civil rights movement and the counterculture, and thus the ways in which race and class were experienced in the everyday. In this respect Chris Harman's (1999) *People's History of the World* and Howard Zinn's (1980) *People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*

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[5] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991*, 1st American ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

has also influenced this study.[6] Moreover, by taking such long historical approaches, Harman and Zinn's studies also help to historicize twentieth-century issues and thereby prevent social categories such as race and class from becoming reified.[7]

To fully understand the political histories of the civil rights movements and the counterculture requires some knowledge of nineteenth-century US history, particularly that pertaining to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Consequently, African American political history has been central to this dissertation. Foremost amongst these studies are John W. Blassingame's (1979) *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, Eugene D. Genovese's (1974) *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, and George P. Rawick's (1972) *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*.[8] These studies are of particular importance because they represent some of first that were based on the slave narratives of the 1930s Federal Writer's Project and were therefore in a good position to elaborate the experience of slavery from the point of view of slaves. A number of studies have also been consulted that provide explicit links between racial oppression in the nineteenth-century and that in the 1950s and 1960s. Important in this respect are Vincent Harding's (1980) *The Other American Revolution* and Manning Marable's (1984) *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*, both of which clarify the similarities as well as the points of tension between these two historic periods.[9]

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[6] Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World* (London; New York: Verso, 2008); Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1482--Present* (London: Harper Perennial, 1980).

[7] For a comprehensive study of the develop of racism in the US, see Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London; New York: Verso, 2012); and *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 2: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London; New York: Verso, 2012).

[8] John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); and George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972).

[9] David Harding, *The Other American Revolution* (California: University of California Center for Afro-American Studies, 1980); Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

Lacking the shared identity created by the common experience of racial oppression, the history of the counterculture is considerably more difficult to trace. In doing this, therefore, I look at two diverging but related historical trajectories: that of the Old Left (and its relationship with African American politics) and the history of American bohemianism, particularly as understood through Greenwich Village. In the former case, I have found Philip S. Foner's (1982) *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981* immensely valuable both because of its long historical scope and for ways in which Black and white political histories are woven together.[10] In the latter, John Strausbaugh's (2013) *The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues* has been consulted.[11] Although Strausbaugh's book is more journalistic than academic, it nevertheless represents one of the more authoritative documents on the history of American bohemianism. In addition to this, however, Bernard Gendron's (2003) *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* provides a more critical study on American Bohemianism, particularly with respect to the countervailing tendencies of class and race.[12]

Because of the high levels of political involvement in the 1950s and 1960s, the line between activists and academics was frequently blurred: academics were often also activists, and activists have frequently published accounts of their experiences that sometimes exceeded academic documents in terms of intellectual rigour. This presents problems and opportunities in studying the literature of this period, with political commitments often taking priority over academic integrity. Todd Gitlin, an activist in the 1960s who went on to become a professor of sociology at Berkeley, is a particularly good example of this problem. In a much-cited (1993)

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[10] Philip Sheldon Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981* (New York: International Publishers, 1982).

[11] John Strausbaugh, *The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013).

[12] Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

book *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*,[13] Gitlin frames the trajectory of the 1960s in terms of well-reasoned activism that was eventually co-opted by mindless radicals – what Paul Buhle has referred to as the 'good sixties,' 'bad sixties' thesis.[14] A more reliable academic account of the 1960s can be seen in Maurice Isserman's (1987) *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*, which traces the continuities and departures between 1960s radicalism and that of the American Communist Party.[15] Similarly, Paul Buhle's (1987) book *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* also helps to contextualize the political developments of the late 1960s.[16] Additionally, the work of activists such as James Forman, (1985) *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, and Max Elbaum, (2002) *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*, clarify the processes that led to an increased radicalism toward the end of the 1960s.[17] Forman himself played a central role in the SNCC and the formation of the Black Panther Party, and Elbaum was a key figure in the New Communist Movement that emerged at the end of the 1960s.

Tracing the historical context for music in the civil rights movement and the counterculture has required a long historical scope. In the context of the civil rights movement, in which Freedom Songs played a prominent role, I have drawn heavily upon literature on slave spirituals, in particular Dena Epstein's (1977) *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* and Lawrence Levine's (1977) *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. To understand the role played by slave spirituals in the 1950s and 1960s, I have also considered Joe Street's (2007) *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement* and William G. Roy's (2010) *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social*

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[13] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993).
[14] Paul Buhle, "Madison Revisited," *Radical History Review* 57 (1993): 248.
[15] Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).
[16] Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1987).
[17] James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1985); Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London; New York: Verso, 2002).

Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States. Taken together, the different historical orientations of these studies help to clarify important differences between these periods, as well as possible similarities. Much of this literature is used to understand the activities of the Highlander Folk School.

Similarly, music in the 1960s has been considered through its history in the Old Left, particularly through the folk legacy of Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger.[18] Preeminent in accounts of US folk music is the idea of folk authenticity, and whether or not so-called 'folk music' really belongs to the folk at all or if it just an idealist abstraction. Much of this sociological literature is informed by Christopher Small's (1998) notion of *Musicking*, i.e., music as an activity that people do rather than a thing.[19] In relation to the counterculture, Roy's study of participatory vs performer-audience social relations, *Reds, Whites, and Blues*, is central to this dissertation because of the importance it places upon the sometimes alienating effects of technological mediation.[20] However, in addition to examining literature on ideas of the 'folk,' I also consider radical popular musics in this period within existing understandings of art and critical aesthetics. In considering this research area, I take my lead from studies that see the 1960s as a period in which popular music took on certain critical functions associated with art, in particular mutating toward forms of aesthetic autonomy. Foremost amongst these is Max Paddison's (2010) essay 'Postmodernism and the Survival of the Avant-Garde.'[21]

In examining the relationship between music and politics, this dissertation draws primarily upon literature from sociology and critical theory, as well as sources that are more

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[18] See Lawrence J. Epstein, *Political Folk Music in America From its Origins to Bob Dylan* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2010); Jerome L. Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn: The Folk-Protest Singer as a Cultural Hero* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976).
[19] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998).
[20] William G. Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[21] Max Paddison, "Postmodernism and the Survival of the Avant-garde," in *Contemporary Music: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Max Paddison and Irène Deliège (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

popular in nature. Sociological studies, I suggest, can usefully be situated into three categories. First are those concerned with protest song, of which I find Serge Denisoff's (1968) 'Protest Movements: Class Consciousness and the Propaganda Song' particularly useful. Indeed, because Denisoff also takes the 1960s as his subject matter, his work is important to this study in more ways than one. The second group are those concerned more generally with politically engaged music.[22] Studies which exemplify this approach are Mark Mattern's (1998) A*cting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action* as well as more popular studies such as Robin Denselow's (1989) *When the Music's Over: The Story of Political Pop*.[23] Finally, there are studies that define all music as political providing it exists in a social context. Examples of this can be seen in the work of John Street (2011) *Music and Politics*, in which it is argued that 'if musical pleasure and choice are purely private matters of personal consequence, they are not political.'[24]

In addition to these sociological understandings of the relationship between music and politics, this dissertation also draws upon studies in aesthetics that seek to return to the art object a degree of 'musical specificity.' In doing this, I follow Lee Marshall's (2011) essay 'The Sociology of Popular Music, Interdisciplinarity and Aesthetic Autonomy' in which he argues for a 'materialist sociology of music.'[25] Drawing upon Theodor Adorno's (1966) *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), as well as Hebert Marcuse's (1977) *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, this study considers how music may be understood as political through the socially and politically mediated status of its

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[22] R. Serge Denisoff, "Protest Movements: Class Consciousness and the Propaganda Song," *The Sociological Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1968).
[23] Mark Mattern, *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Robin Denselow, *When the Music's Over: The Story of Political Pop* (London: Faber, 1989).
[24] John Street, *Music and Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 1.
[25] Lee Marshall, "The Sociology of Popular Music, Interdisciplinarity and Aesthetic Autonomy," *British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 1 (2011).

material.[26] Conceptually, therefore, this dissertation builds on a combination of sociological and critical theoretical understandings of music and politics, in particular through the tensions between political commitment and aesthetic autonomy.

The arguments in this dissertation are pursued through four case studies, each with their own sets of literature (with some obvious overlap). The chapter on Highlander is considered in relation to key historical texts such as John M. Glen's (2014) *Highlander: No Ordinary School 1932-1962*.[27] Fortunately, the musical practices at Highlander have been well documented in publications by movement activists, such as Guy and Candie Carawan's (2007) *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through Its Songs* and Bernice Johnson Reagon's (1975) PhD dissertation 'Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History'.[28] The literature on Bob Dylan is considerably larger than that of Highlander – it has been necessary, therefore, to be very selective. In examining Dylan's life I tend not to rely on his autobiographies, which are prone to distortion, but look instead at some of the more authoritative biographies such as Anthony Scaduto's (1972) *Bob Dylan* and the first of Paul Williams' (1994) multivolume work on Dylan, *Bob Dylan, 1960-1973: Performing Artist*.[29] The main literature that I draw upon is that which seeks to situate Dylan's rejection of collective political projects around the middle years of the 1960s. Important in this respect is Denisoff's 1968 study of protest music and class consciousness as well as Mike Marqusee's (2003) *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art*.[30]

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[26] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*; Adorno *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973 [1966]); Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978 [1977]).
[27] John M. Glen, *Highlander No Ordinary School 1932--1962* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014).
[28] Guy Carawan and Candie Carawan, *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through its Songs* (Montgomery, Alabama: New South Books, 2007); Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History" (PhD Diss., Howard University, 1975).
[29] Anthony Scaduto, *Bob Dylan* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972); Paul Williams, *Bob Dylan, 1960-1973: Performing Artist* (London: Omnibus, 1994).
[30] Denisoff, "Protest Movements: Class Consciousness and the Propaganda Song"; Mike Marqusee, *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art* (New York: New Press, 2003).

The literature on John Coltrane differs substantially from the other case studies because of its dependence upon primary sources, which although not reliable in an academic sense provide a rich source for understanding race relations in the music industry of the 1950s and 1960s. Interviews and articles in *Downbeat*, *Jazz Hot*, *Jazz Magazine*, *and Melody Maker* are cited as well as well as the compendium of articles recently put together by Chris Devito (2010), *Coltrane on Coltrane: the John Coltrane interviews*.[31] Frequently, however, these debates spawned theoretical works themselves, which sought variously to justify or undermine existing conditions in the jazz industry. Of these, I have found Frank Kofsky's two books on the period, *Black Music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz* (1998) and *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, which, because extremely polemical, reveal much about the political tensions in the period under question.[32] Not unlike Dylan, Zappa's musical career extended far beyond the era of civil rights and counterculture. For the purposes of this study, however, I confine my research area to his musical activities in the 1960s. Unusually for a musician, Zappa liked to discuss the technical elements of his music at great deal. As a consequence, this study draws upon his own critical reflections found in *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (1990) as much as on secondary sources.[33] Important in this latter category are James Borders's (2001) 'Form and the Concept Album: Aspects of Modernism in Frank Zappa's Early Releases' and David Wragg's (2001) '"Or Any Art at All?": Frank Zappa Meets Critical Theory'.[34]

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[31] Chris DeVito and John Coltrane, *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 2010).

[32] Frank Kofsky, *Black Music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz* (New York: Pathfinder, 1998); *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s* (New York: Pathfinder, 1998).

[33] Frank Zappa and Peter Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (London: Picador, 1990).

[34] James Borders, "Form and the Concept Album: Aspects of Modernism in Frank Zappa's Early Releases," *Perspectives of New Music* 39, no. 1 (2001); David Wragg, "'Or Any Art at All?': Frank Zappa Meets Critical Theory," *Popular Music* 20, no. 2 (2001).

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into five chapters and a short concluding section. Chapter 1 provides a clarification of the concepts used throughout this study. In doing this, I examine a range of literature on protest music and politically engaged music. Although situating itself in this literature, this dissertation goes beyond these definitions to examine issues of social critique and critical reflection in music. It is argued that existing studies of music and politics have tended to view music as political only to the extent that it is used in political contexts. By contrast, this chapter proposes a materialist understanding of music, which views music as an objective repository for human activity and therefore political in and of itself. In viewing music in this way, it is argued that seemingly apolitical music can be understood as political. Following Adorno, Bloch, and Marcuse this section examines ideas of autonomy and utopia in music. It is argued that the by resisting subordination to political reality, critical musics encode negatively the possibility of happiness.

The second chapter is the first of four case studies: the Highlander Folk School. The chapter is concerned with the role played by individual critique in the development of a collective musical material. Looking at the ways in which Highlander activists reconstituted Black historical music as a force for positive social change in the civil rights movement, it is argued that their success in placing a collective musical material at the service of the movement came only by superficially overcoming important differences. Thus, much of this chapter is committed to examining the ways in which the Freedom Songs became the repository for reflexively criticizing tensions in the movement even as they suggested their sublation. In taking an organization rather than an individual as the object of study, this chapter differs substantially from later ones. This is done because Highlander activists made a conscious effort to downplay the importance of single individuals in the production of music. That individual expression became central to the songs is therefore all the more significant.

The third chapter examines Dylan and his relationship with the counterculture. Dylan shares with Highlander the perception of his music as powerfully political. Unlike Highlander, however, this was often against the wishes of Dylan. Of central interest to this chapter is the way that Dylan's rejection of collective political projects coincided with an explosion in his popularity. It is argued that Dylan's ability to draw upon a stock of cultural images that were both individualist in content and part of the collective American imagination accounts for this apparent contradiction. This problem is seen as intimately bound up with loss of real individuality.

The fourth chapter turns to an artist who, although often associated with the Black Power movement, did not himself use his music to make explicitly political points: John Coltrane. Drawing upon a tradition of music (jazz) that has historically been considered a highly collective music, throughout the 1940s a form of jazz (bebop) began to develop that was highly technical. Coltrane picked up and developed this musical material that, on the surface at least, was completely disengaged politically. Even in spite of the political conflicts of the 1960s, Coltrane continued to bury himself in the musical material. Coltrane's music is examined as a form of autonomous art, the politics of which are understood through the refusal to be subordinated to existing political realities. Thus, in important respects, this chapter is committed to understanding the politics of apparently apolitical music. It is argued that by mediating subjectivity within the collectively formed musical material, Coltrane's can be understood as providing images of a critical utopia.

Chapter five looks at the critical aesthetics of Frank Zappa. Although Zappa is often understood within the context of 1960s psychedelia, because of the wide range of musical material on which he drew his music resists easy categorization. Unlike Coltrane, it is argued that Zappa's music was both concerned with the development of musical material, but also with reconstituting the relationship between his music (as an aesthetic object) and the audience.

In discussing this issue, I draw upon Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, in particular his critique of constitutive subjectivity. It is argued that the locus of Zappa's critical aesthetics can be found in his rearrangement of the hierarchical relationship between the subject and the object. This critique is considered in relation to tendencies within the counterculture toward the extremes of constitutive subjectivity and conformity.

This dissertation finishes with a short concluding section. It is argued that although existing literature in sociology reveals much about the relationship between music and politics, the tendency to dismiss the objective aesthetic characteristics of music has meant that the politics of some of the most radically individual works of art has largely gone unaddressed in the literature – or at least are only addressed when they are seen to be used in a political context. By contrast, this thesis argues that even the most individualistic works of art should be considered political in and of themselves because of the socially mediated nature of the musical material. This is of particular importance in the context of the US in the 1950s and 1960s, where radical popular musics coincided with a number of liberation movements.

Chapter 1. When is Music Political?

Introduction

The idea of 'political music' is problematic and calls for clarification from the outset. In the context of popular music and folk music, the term is most usually associated with what became known in the 1950s and 1960s as 'protest music', particularly as protest songs in relation to the protest movements of the time. In the case of art music, however, the idea of a specifically 'political music' is usually understood as politically committed or politically engaged music, in the way often associated with composers like Hanns Eisler in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s, and in the 1950s and 1960s with composers like Luigi Nono. In addition to these, there is the association of music—both art music and popular music—with political propaganda, especially in the Second World War and in the Cold War that followed. However, whilst all of these notions of 'political music' need to be addressed early on in this chapter, a further important issue is raised as a result: what about musics that do not easily fit into any of these categories, but which nevertheless came to be regarded as 'political' or politically provocative and critical in their implications, even though not obviously or directly political in their content or their function?

The purpose of this chapter is therefore not only to explore the problematic notions of 'protest music,' 'politically engaged' music, and the political use of music as propaganda, but also to discuss the 'politically mediated' character of so-called autonomous music in order to clarify concepts that are fundamental to the rest of this dissertation. Beginning with a cursory examination of definitions of protest music and politically engaged music that foregrounds the role of song text in determining the political meaning of music, I then move on to consider

ways in which supposedly 'apolitical' music can be considered political when it is used in a political context. Finally, I turn attention to the political implications of so-called 'autonomous music', arguing that it is through its critical relation to its material, which is itself of a collective and socially mediated character, that such music can be understood as radical and politically critical.

Protest Song

In a 1968 article, Serge Denisoff identifies two forms of protest song: 'magnetic propaganda songs' and 'rhetorical protest songs.' According to Denisoff, there are two essential features of magnetic songs: first, they 'persuade… both emotionally and intellectually, individuals into supporting or joining the movement or goals of the writer and of the organisation for which the song is written'; and second, 'the ballad creates social cohesion or a feeling of solidarity among the membership or supporters of a given movement or ideological set.'[35] For Denisoff, one of the determining factors of protest music is the song text. Thus, he argues, that magnetic songs are characterised by a tendency to include the listener in the song through the use of personal pronouns such as 'We' and 'Us.' 'The Internationale' provides one of clearest examples of this form of music:

> Of the past let us make a clean slate
> Enslaved masses, stand up, stand up
> The world is about to change its foundation
> We are nothing, let us be all

Far from being passively addressed, for Denisoff the listener is being called upon to participate in the events of the song.

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[35] Denisoff, "Protest Movements," 230.

The second category that Denisoff identifies ('rhetorical protest songs') are protest songs which attempt to highlight and describe a condition but do not offer an 'ideological or organisational solution such as affiliating with a social movement' (in other contexts these have been referred to as 'topical songs'). Denisoff writes that 'the rhetorical song poses a question or a dissent in relation to the institution of the social system, e.g., Wall Street,' but because they do not go beyond mere complaint they should therefore be 'defined as "outbursts of desperation" rather than mobilizing factors or problem solving devices.'[36] Emblematic of this, for Denisoff, is Bob Dylan's 'Masters of War':

> I hope that you die and your death will come soon
> I'll follow your casket by the pale afternoon
> And I'll watch while you're lowered down to your death bed
> Then I'll stand over your grave til I'm sure that you're dead

The text is clearly distinguishable from that of 'The Internationale' for its use of the personal pronoun 'I.' For Denisoff, rhetorical protest songs are much more personal and introspective and, unlike magnetic songs, they do not attempt to include the listener in the dialogue of the song.

Denisoff's approach is an interesting place to begin this enquiry because it is so well grounded in the sentiments of the 1960s, which saw the collective forces of the Old and New Lefts attempting to influence the more individualistic trajectory of the counterculture. However, given the fame and perceived relevance of Dylan's music to the social movements of the 1960s (albeit ones not framed in terms of social class), Denisoff's model poses more questions than it answers. Clearly there was something in Dylan's music which exhibited certain magnetic qualities, even if it did not include the listener in the dialogue of the song.

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[36] Ibid., 230-231.

Denisoff's analytical dependence on the textual content of songs is of particular importance when examining music of African American origins, in particular Freedom Songs. For example, one of the most well-known Freedom Songs to come out of the civil rights movement, 'We Shall Overcome', has its textual origins in 'I Shall Overcome Someday', a gospel hymn penned by the Black Methodist preacher Charles Albert Tindley. A sample of the latter's song text reads:

> I'll overcome some day.
> I'll overcome some day,
> I'll overcome some day,
> If in my heart I do not yield,
> I'll overcome some day.

Now, compare this with the civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome':

> We shall overcome,
> we shall overcome,
> we shall overcome someday.
> Oh, deep in my heart I do believe,
> we shall overcome someday.

The textual content is nearly identical aside from the all-important substitution of the 'We' for the 'I'. Does this mean that the earlier version was not expressive of ideas of 'community'? In order to answer this, one would need to examine individual instances of this song and its surrounding and constituting contexts (a point that I take up in Chapter 2). The 'I' may implicitly mean something very different when sung in unison.

A still more fundamental issue with Denisoff's model is the specific definitions given to 'I' and 'We' in the community under question. It should not be taken for granted that Denisoff's binary interpretation of the words can be applied automatically to other cultures (neither should it be assumed that it applies automatically to Dylan); attempts to universalise a

binary conception of the individual and collective are open to accusations of cultural imperialism. For instance, in the dialect of English associated with the Rastafari movement 'I' does not straightforwardly mean 'I'. In an article exploring the 'dialectical nature of the Rastafari Movement', Michael Barnett, himself a Rastafarian, argues for an interdependent view of the individual and the collective: 'The movement… clings to the concept of cohesion but through a shared consciousness and common consensus.'[37] Seen from this point of view, the 'I' and the 'We' are defined interchangeably.

Other academics have argued for a more specifically musical understanding of song texts, which do, after all, belong to music, not to speeches (although there is often some overlap). Foremost amongst these is Robbie Lieberman, who, in a book examining the intersections of music and politics in the context American communism, argues that by setting words to music the former is able to draw on some of the latter's emotive quality. Unlike speeches, Lieberman argues, music 'may be more effective… in reaching people, touching them emotionally as well as intellectually.'[38] For Lieberman, song texts must be understood in the context of its accompanying music (this may sound a little obvious, but it is surprising how many musicological works, Denisoff's included, tend to forget about the actual musical material). In taking this approach, Lieberman is able to demonstrate the ways that musical content can help to draw the audience into identity with the song text. Simon Frith takes a similar position, arguing that a 'song doesn't exist to convey the meaning of the words [song text]; rather, the words exist to convey the meaning of the song.'[39] When we are talking about song texts we are not dealing with words *per se*, but with 'words in performance', 'oratory', or

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[37] Michael Barnett, "Rastafari Dialectism: The Epistemological Individualism and Conectivism of Rastafari," *Caribbean Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2002): 54.

[38] Robbie Lieberman, *My Song is My Weapon: People's Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 164.

[39] Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 166.

'rhetoric.'[40] Seen from this perspective, a political music does not necessarily concern political ideas, but rather acts a way of expressing political ideas latent in the music. The difference is subtle, but important. Whilst for Denisoff, it is taken for granted that the meaning of music rests in the song text, Frith argues that the song text is a way of explaining what the music is meant to *express*.

Wayne Hampton's 1986 book *Guerrilla Minstrels* also provides us with a view of protest music which emphasizes the determining role of the song text, whilst simultaneously pointing to the narrow limitations of this model. Taking the eclectic examples of John Lennon, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan as case studies, Hampton defines 'Guerrilla Minstrels' as those who use 'cultural and artistic items in a symbolic and conceptual approach to revolutionary politics and whose primary objective is consciousness change.'[41] Although Hampton stresses the importance of song texts throughout his study (or at least he demonstrates an interpretive dependence on them), his suggestion of a 'symbolic' political approach can usefully be extended beyond the limited fold of the text—for instance, in the ways that Lennon adopted certain stylistic and cultural traits associated with the working classes.

This is an important step in opening up the meaning of the text to wider issues relating to identity, including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, and age, as well as other more mutable social categories, such as genre and fashion. Certainly the meaning of 'I' and 'We' is dependent upon the listener's relationship with the singer, and 'identity' undoubtedly plays an important role in making or breaking this relationship. Lennon's adoption of working class characteristics, for example, presumably had a greater resonance in White working class communities than amongst African Americans. The 'I'—metaphorical in this case—is understood through the lens of class and race. Similar conclusions might be formed

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Wayne Hampton, *Guerrilla Minstrels* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 43.

about the 'Internationale', which is likely to carry very different meanings depending upon geopolitical context.

Allan Moore's 2012 book *Song Means* is one of the more rigorous examinations of the of the relationship between the listener and the singer. In a chapter on 'Persona', Moore argues that when the audience is being addressed they can take on the role of either 'protagonist', 'observer', or 'antagonist'.[42] Which of these positions the audience takes up depends on their relationship to the 'persona'—i.e., the character, adopted or real—of the singer. If, for instance, someone is listening to Dylan's 'Master of War' and finds themselves fundamentally at odds with the sentiment of the text (maybe they find Dylan's anti-war statements hopelessly idealistic), then it is likely that they experience the text *antagonistically*. In other words, rather than identifying with the 'I' in the song text they are more likely to identity with the 'You'—the 'Other'. If, on the other hand, they find themselves in agreement with the text, the audience is likely to see the persona as an extension of themselves. As Moore states, '[i]f I have experienced the [feelings]… which I take to be the topic of the song, then I can feel the song as an expression of myself – it is as if the… persona becomes superimposed on me. This is equally possible if I have not had such an experience but want to feel what it might be like to have done so.'[43] The final category, 'observer', is a more neutral category in which the listener neither identifies with nor opposes the singer.

Broadening out his interrogation of this relationship, Moore also examines the effects of recording technique on processes of identification between the singer and the listener. For Moore, the timbre of the recorded voice plays a central role in determining the listener's response:

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[42] Allan F. Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 185.
[43] Ibid.

> In everyday encounters between individuals, recognition of the distance between a speaker and a listener is crucial in determining the type of relationship they manifest during the course of their interaction, and is particularly determined by both olfactory and visual signals. This cannot be directly transferred to the purely aural realm, of course, but it can be addressed through a modification of proxemics to refer to recorded presences.

By 'proxemics', Moore is referring to the analysis of distances between the parties under question (in this case the recorded singer and the listener). Following Peter Doyle, Moore differentiates between 'realist' and 'romanticist' aesthetics in recorded song.[44] By 'realist', Doyle means recordings that seek to exclude the room ambience—what music technologists refer to as recording 'dry'. 'Romanticist', on the other hand, refers to recordings that capture the ambient sounds of the room. These different recording techniques are most often associated with, respectively, popular music and classical music. Understood from the perspective of the listener, realist recordings provide 'an effect of intimacy … the singer or soloist singing just for you'; and romanticist has the converse effect of seemingly 'bringing the listener into the studio or auditorium.'[45] What all of this suggests is that the tone of the recorded voice—what Roland Barthes famously referred to as the 'grain'—can disrupt or enable the processes of identification between singer and audience.

Again, to refer to back to the example of 'Masters of War', on the studio album Dylan's voice is recorded extremely 'dry' (although with a very faint reverb). This has the effect of making the listener feel like they are being addressed directly. Compare this to the version of 'Masters of War' on *Bob Dylan in Concert—Live at Brandeis University 1963*, and the difference is remarkable. The recording captures the sounds of the entire venue, of which

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[44] Peter Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recordings 1900–1960* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 57.

[45] Allan F. Moore, *Song Means*, 185.

Dylan's voice is just a part; the listener is now in the audience, being addressed as one amongst many.

Although Moore does not delve too deeply into the semiotics of these different recording techniques—whether or not 'realist' or 'romanticist' aesthetics constitutes an 'I' or a 'We' is not his principal concern—one presumes that a 'realist' aesthetic is likely to provide a more fertile ground for the audience to identify with the voice (as a 'protagonist'). By contrast, a 'a romanticist' aesthetic would more likely situate the audience in a more neutral position (as an 'observer'). This throws up some interesting questions about the relationship between the audience, singer, and song text. For instance, can romanticist aesthetics obstruct the listener from identifying with a song text to which they are sympathetic by placing them in a position of neutrality? Conversely, can realist aesthetics, through the semblance of intimacy, draw the listener into identification with a song text with which they feel no connection?

The idea that romanticist aesthetics renders the listener more neutral does not necessarily follow through to the experience of live music, however. If anything, our experience of live music can be *more* involved with the music, more likely to identify with the 'We'. Richard Hand's study of Frank Zappa's live performance in *Uncle Meat* is a case point. For Hand, the experience of Zappa's live music is rather like that of a carnival, where the audience comes together 'in a unified… mood.'[46] In theorising the dynamics between audience and performer, Hand draws upon the work of the Russian literary critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin, in particular his conception of the 'carnivalesque'. According to the Bakhtin scholar Renate Lachmann, the carnivalesque is defined as a 'game of inverting official values' which anticipates another, 'utopian world in which anti-hierarchism, relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in

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[46] Richard J. Hand, "Zappa and Horror: Screamin' at the Monster," in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed, Paul Carr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 21.

which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted.'[47] As the Lachmann suggests, a central part of the carnivalesque is the coming together of disparate elements. For the purpose of this study, these disparate elements might include the singer, the audience and the song text. Thus, it might be suggested that the experience of live music can draw the audience into identity with the song text—certainly the audience participation on the *Live at Brandeis University* recording of 'Masters of War' seems to confirm this view.

One of the things that all of the literature examined so far has in common is that each model reveals something about the persuasive power of music, that is, how it can be used to draw the audience into identification with the song text. The 'We' in music, whether it is examined explicitly (as in Denisoff's examination of song text) or implicitly (as in Lieberman's consideration of the emotive content of music, Hampton's critique of the symbolic elements of music, or Moore's examination of 'persona' and the tone of the recorded voice), is understood as political inasmuch as it attempts to draw people toward certain political ideas contained in the text. Important though it is, this is just one aspect of musics political being. The following section considers music and politics from a broader sociological perspective, in which music is understood as political inasmuch as it is something that people *do*.

Music and Political Engagement

In a 1998 study entitled *Acting in Concert* Mark Mattern examines music as a form of communicative action in which communities are able to resist, negotiate, and articulate political identities. Unlike the aforementioned studies, Mattern persistently refers to 'music practices' rather than the music itself.[48] This sociological strategy helps him to draw back from

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[47] Renate Lachmann et al, "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," *Cultural Critique*, no. 11 (1988-89): 118.

[48] Mattern, *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action*, 25-30.

a dependence on song text and to look at the social relationships in the context of music-making. Keith Negus takes a similarly sociological approach in his book *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. Drawing upon the pioneering work of Pierre Bourdieu, Negus argues that 'any attempt to study the "production of culture" needs to do more than understand culture as a "product" … [w]e need to understand the meanings that are given to both the "product" and the practices through which the product is made.'[49] From this perspective, music is seen as political because of the processes that take place in its production.

William G. Roy takes this broadly sociological perspective to its logical conclusion, arguing that music is not a thing, but an 'activity.' Following Christopher Small's now classic book *Musicking*, Roy makes a case for the primacy of the constitutive social relationships in determining the political meaning of music.[50] For Roy, music is at its most radical when the conditions of its production are participatory, removing the distinction between performer and audience (the 'I' and the 'We'). Participatory music-making is therefore seen as a form of political empowerment that affirms a common identity within the group. Looking in particular at the US from the early twentieth-century to the 1960s, Roy observes a tendency toward fragmentation in the civil rights movement and the counterculture. Unlike Denisoff, however, Roy does not see the song text as the determining feature of this process, but the tendency for music to become isolated into a professional/commercial sphere: 'instead of [being] an activity that the movement shared, music became a commodity that the movement members consumed.'[51] The 'We' for Roy exists in the common identity forged through collective music making rather than in the song text.

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[49] Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1999), 20.
[50] William G. Roy, "How Social Movements Do Culture," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 2/3 (2010): 88.
[51] Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, 214.

This understanding of music as an activity that people do is particularly pertinent to this dissertation because of the perceived importance of the medium of expression in determining musical meaning in the period under question. During the late 1950s to the 1960s, mass-mediated music sat uncomfortably alongside more participatory forms of music-making. These conditions elicited a variety of responses from musicians and activists. The Highlander Folk School, for instance, sought to circumvent the music industry altogether through the development of music practices at the grassroots level; Bob Dylan made use of the music business to sell the folk-protest tradition, which itself is generally (and ironically) associated with ideas of intimacy and immediacy; and Frank Zappa sought to use the music business against itself through his commitment to audience participation (intellectual and physical). The aesthetic theory of this period was preoccupied with many of these same concerns—see Susan Sontag's (1965) analysis of art in advanced technological society 'One Culture and the New Sensibility' and Marshall McLuhan's (1967) *The Medium is the Massage*.[52]

Roy and Small's highly contingent view of music and politics has led some authors to conclude that music cannot be reduced to typological models at all; rather, the meaning of music must be treated as unstable, liable to radical change at a moment's notice. In a detailed study of the Parisian music cultures that surrounded the events of May 1968, Eric Drott makes such as case, describing the multiple, often conflicting ways in which rock, jazz, and contemporary music all responded to the turbulent political events. These varied responses, Drott points out, were met by equally varied interpretations: '[f]or some, music was a distraction from properly political work or a displacement of revolutionary impulses. For others it represented a site where the unrealized aspirations of politics could be fulfilled, if only

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[52] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Random House, 1967); Susan Sontag, "One Culture and the New Sensibility," in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001 [1965]).

symbolically. Still others saw in politics an outlet for the utopian longings to which art gives voice.'[53]

John Street's 2011 *Music and Politics* represents one of the more systematic attempts to theorise the more general relation between popular music and politics to date. Wanting to distance himself from those definitions of political participation which see politics purely in terms of policy formation, institutional politics, social movements, or traditional forms of activism, Street argues for a conceptualisation of political participation which emphasises the 'content' of the political activity rather than the 'arena.'[54] In doing this, Street draws upon Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere represents a space in which 'private people come together as a public' to 'debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour.'[55] For Street, this model is useful because it 'makes music a part of a system of political participation in which talk is key.'[56] Thus, in discussing music we consider our own political commitments and we come to an understanding of those of others.[57] For Street, then, the ways in which we make sense of music is itself a political process. Street is careful, however, not to overextend this definition, thereby emptying it of meaning, arguing that 'if musical pleasure and choice are purely private matters of personal consequence, they are not political. It is only when musical pleasure… spill[s] over into the public realm and into the exercise of power within it that it becomes political.'[58] All music is therefore considered political, providing it takes place in a

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[53] Eric Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 14.
[54] Street, *Music and Politics*, 64-65.
[55] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989 [1962]), 27.
[56] Street, *Music and Politics*, 66.
[57] Ibid., 175.
[58] Ibid., 1.

social setting. To the extent that this is useful to this dissertation, it is because it expands the definition of politics to potentially encompass *all* music.

What all of these studies have in common is a tendency to view music as political only when it exists in a social context. This is a view that I challenge in this dissertation, arguing instead that music itself carries socio-political meaning; in this respect, this study goes against the prevailing wisdom of the 'New Musicology'. But before I go on to make this case, it is worth noting some of the existing literature on the sociology of music that has formed similar conclusions. Indeed, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison make this point in relation to the radical potential of traditions. Deploying social movement theory to aid their analysis, Eyerman and Jamison argue that 'social movements are not merely political activities…they provide spaces for cultural growth and experimentation, for the mixing of musical and other artistic genres, and for the infusion of new kinds of meaning into music.'[59] Music, in this case, constitutes a space in which traditions can be reworked according to the needs of the social movement. However, unlike the previous examples provided here, Eyerman and Jamison endow music with a degree of objectivity by constituting music as 'more than merely symbolic'—as 'artefactual… material.'[60]

Throughout their study, Eyerman and Jamison make frequent reference to the radical potential of traditions and how their 'mobilisation' can evoke the power of movements past. Operating beneath the surface of this argument is an understanding that music is political because of its social mediated character. Music, for the authors, is not simply awaiting politicization by an interested movement, but, as a historical-social product, is always-already

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[59] Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.
[60] Ibid., 23.

political. This conception of music goes some way toward illustrating the more general relation of music and politics, even outside of movements:

> There is more to music and movements than can be captured within a functional perspective, such as Denisoff's, which focuses on the use made of music within already-existing movements. Music, and song, we suggest, can maintain a movement even when it no longer has a visible presence in the form of organisations, leaders, and demonstrations, and can be a vital force in preparing the emergence of a new movement. Here the role and place of music needs to be interpreted through a broader framework in which tradition and ritual are understood as processes of identity and identification, as encoded and embodied forms of collective meaning and memory.[61]

Although Eyerman and Jamison are ultimately concerned with the potential that music has for being picked up by social movements, their understanding of music as political even when not used in the context of an active social movement goes a long way toward endowing music with innately political properties, irrespective of its use in the public sphere.

A similar strategy has been employed by academics like Marc Steinberg who, in an article on the politics of Yugoslavian music under the Milosevic administration in the 1990s, provides an understanding of music that is political because of its historical associations with certain ethnic communities as well as through its negotiation of political geography. Steinberg argues that the perceived association of Yugorock with western cultural values led to its systematic exclusion from state-owned media in favour of Turbofolk – a 'nationalist adaptation of pop culture used as a generator of a nationalist-consumerist mode of "Serbness".'[62] Although Yugorock was not rooted in a history of political struggle, its censorship contributed to the authentication of rock music as expressive of an anti-state sentiment. He writes, '[i]n their collective action repertoire rock music became an aesthetic technology for constructing

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[61] Ibid., 43-44.
[62] Quoted in Marc W. Steinberg, "When Politics Goes Pop: On the Intersections of Popular and Political Culture and the Case of Serbian Student Protests," *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 3, no. 1 (2004): 17.

collective identity, providing mattering maps and accentuating the framing of oppositional politics.'[63] Yugorock, in other words, became the voice of oppositional politics because of its perceived political allegiance to the Yugoslavian government's 'other': cosmopolitan liberalism.

Unlike the more straightforwardly sociological studies, Steinberg, Eyerman, and Jamison consider music as containing socio-historical meaning embedded within its own formal features. This materialist understanding of music—in which music is understood to have meaning that exists independently of the listener—is made clear when Eyerman and Jamison, in challenging Denisoff's association of the textual 'I' with individualism and the 'We' with collectivism, argue that 'part of the power of many protest songs' stems from the way that they 'open channels of identification through which the past can become present.'[64] Music, in this case, can say 'We' metaphorically. From this perspective the meaning of rhetorical protest songs seems not to be so different from magnetic music, since rhetorical songs may be deployed magnetically through appeals to a common tradition.[65]

Critical Theory: Autonomy as Political Critique

By contrast with Eyerman and Jamison, Adorno argues for a model of music and politics which views even the most radically individual and apolitical music as expressive of the 'We.' Indeed, for Adorno, the more individualistic the work of art the more expressive of this community it

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[63] Ibid., 19.
[64] Ibid., 43.
[65] The deficiencies of Eyerman and Jamison's argument reside in a somewhat understandable misrepresentation of Denisoff's model. Eyerman and Jamison interpret Denisoff's view of the disintegrating relationship between protest music and organizational structures as meaning to imply the absolute dissolution of the collective experience that music embodies. However, this is not the argument that Denisoff was making – though it could be justifiably pointed out that his functional model was deficient inasmuch as it was unable to comment on these issues. Denisoff's point was simply that as of the 1960s the prevalence of rhetorical protest songs meant that explicit affiliations between social movements and political ideologies were less often made. This remains true, even though the collective may have lived on in a somewhat less explicit aesthetic form.

is.[66] Moving, as we are, into the murky terrain of critical theory, some explanation of this seemingly paradoxical view is required. In doing this, I provide a critique of Adorno's distinction between politically engaged art and autonomous art.

In a 1962 essay entitled 'Commitment,' Adorno examines the tension between what he terms the committed and the autonomous work of art. Not unlike rhetorical protest music, committed art seeks to transform consciousness without recourse to political propaganda (a category of art that Adorno classifies as 'tendentious'). Its strategy for achieving this, however, is very different from rhetorical music. Committed art is characterised by a critical relation to its own commodity form: '[a] work of art that is committed strips the magic from a work of art that is content to be a fetish, an idle past-time for those who would like to sleep through the deluge that threatens them.'[67] How this is achieved differs from work to work, but typically the 'committed' artist will seek to disrupt the continuity of the work, to make the work 'appear strange' to the audience. Paradigmatic of this approach is the theatre of Bertolt Brecht, which sought to hinder 'the audience from simply identifying with characters': 'Acceptance or rejection of their [the characters'] actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious.'[68] By refusing to allow the audience to lose themselves in the work of art, Brecht aimed to engender a critical relationship between the audience and the content of his plays.

Adorno is highly critical of this form of art, however, arguing that the idea of commitment is naïve in its failure to address the limits of freedom experienced in an unfree society, paying 'no regard to the fact that the very possibility of choosing depends on what can be chosen.'[69] If, as Adorno presumes, we are living in an unfree society, this lack of freedom

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[66] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 167.
[67] Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment." In *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, edited by A. Arato & E Gebhardt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 301.
[68] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), 151.
[69] Ibid., 304.

will also be evident in the conscious choices that we make. By contrast with this notion of art, therefore, Adorno posits the autonomous artwork. One of the main characteristics of this form of art is its apparent political quietism, its refusal to accommodate the outside world—however, it is precisely this characteristic that Adorno sees as the most powerfully critical. He writes,

> What is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions. Its historical gesture repels empirical reality, of which artworks are nevertheless part in that they are things. Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness. Through their difference from a bewitched reality, they embody negatively a position in which what is would find its rightful place, its own. Their enchantment is disenchantment.[70]

According to Paddison, for Adorno 'art works are the "unconscious writing of history," and without needing to know anything of society directly, they nevertheless mediate society within their form because both the artist and the material are already socially mediated.'[71] Political realities are therefore 'inscribed' within the art work in ways that would not be possible through direct political engagement, which itself would only reveal the politics of the individual (the content of which Adorno sees as shaped by the subject's imprisonment within an oppressive reality). Indeed, 'artistic objectification enables art to express a latent social [and political] content and thereby to supersede merely individual subjects.'[72] Importantly, this is not a question of individual decision on behalf of the artist, but a process that takes place through engagement with the socially mediated musical material by the artist who is themselves socially mediated.

So what is this latent social content in art? For Adorno, it is the idea of utopia: 'art must be and wants to be utopia, and the more utopia is blocked by the real functional order, the more this is true.'[73] By this, Adorno does not mean that it is the job of art to represent ideas of peace,

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[70] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 227.
[71] Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 261-262.
[72] Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: The MIT Press, 1991), 119.
[73] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 32.

love, and harmony. Rather, the expression of utopia in art is negative in character. For Adorno, when untrammelled by the demands of existing reality, art provides a fleeting intimation of the possibility of what does not yet exist. In making this argument, Adorno takes his lead from Bloch, who argued that in resisting subordination to existing reality art provides an 'anticipatory illumination' of 'how to make the world… perfect.'[74] In his much quoted (and controversial) essay *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression in Listening*, Adorno provides perhaps his clearest formulation of the idea of a critical utopia when he writes that '[a]rt records negatively just that possibility of happiness which the only partially positive anticipation of happiness ruinously confronts today… the promise of happiness, once the definition of art, can no longer be found except where the mask has been torn from the countenance of false happiness.'[75] The most radical art, therefore, is art which exposes the lie that true happiness is possible in this society and it does so by showing the possibility of reconciliation (utopia) through the expression of the unreconciled in the midst of the falsely reconciled. Autonomous art cannot provide a *blueprint* for utopia, but can point to the *possibility* of one through its critical relation to what exists.

For Adorno, therefore, the political dimension in music—the 'We'—is not simply manifested in the appeal to traditional practices, but is also evident in the subject's immanent engagement with the historical musical material. Thus, in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that 'even out of so-called individual works it is a "We" that speaks and not an "I"—indeed all the more so the less the artworks adapt externally to a "We" and its idiom.'[76] The implication and relevance that this has for sociological models is to suggest a more materialist approach to reading the relationship between music and politics, which views music as political in and of

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[74] Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenberg (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 140.
[75] Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression in Listening," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001 [1938]), 33.
[76] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 167.

itself; and because the politics of this music appears only through the artist's mediation of subjectivity within the collectively formed musical material, it is socially critical in a way that transcends the politics of the individual.

Furthermore, autonomous music can also be thought of as political because of its critical relationship to the idea of giving art a function. In this respect, autonomous art is implicitly critical of what Adorno referred to as 'instrumental reason'. The specific use of this concept in Adorno's writings is highly complex; it therefore requires some consideration before moving on to consider its broader implications for studies of music and politics.

Instrumental Reason

In the opening pages of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and his Frankfurt School colleague Max Horkheimer state that 'in the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men [sic] from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.'[77] Reason, they argue, has become irrational. According to the authors, the prevailing system of thought that has directed this turn to barbarism is instrumental reason.

Adorno and Horkheimer's definitions of instrumental reason largely follows from the Weberian concept of 'rationalisation'. According to the sociologist George Ritzer, rationalisation is defined as the progressive erosion of 'substantive' rationality (i.e. 'value postulates' that determine ends in relation to their necessary means) by a formal rationalism ('universally applied rules') institutionalised within the 'bureaucracy, modern law, and the

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[77] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London; New York: Verso, 1997 [1947]), 3. For an excellent summary of these arguments, see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 [1974]).

capitalist economy').[78] For Adorno and Horkheimer, this concept provides a valuable tool for understanding the complicity of 'enlightened' thought with its extreme opposite, the fullest expression of which they argue can be seen in the Nazi death camps. Whereas most see the Enlightenment as a secular historical period or project to overcome the age of myth and superstition, Adorno and Horkheimer contend that the two cannot be so easily separated: 'myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.'[79] In explaining this riddle, Adorno and Horkheimer stress the ways that myth and enlightenment contain a basic continuity in the way that they both claim to represent reality. Whilst mythology is considered to be an unreflexive, uncritical mode of representation, it is an attempt to represent the world all the same. The second half of the construction – 'enlightenment reverts to mythology' – is considerably more difficult to explain, but it is worth doing so because it enables us to develop a framework for understanding important critical functions of autonomous music.

What Adorno and Horkheimer mean when they claim that enlightenment has reverted to myth is best understood through the way that (capitalist) society has come to view nature. In the pre-secularized past, nature—human and otherwise—was considered to be the work of divine hands; human beings were considered to be the object of nature, powerless to its demands. With the Enlightenment, however, nature came to be seen as a tool for human creation, to be mastered and manipulated to serve human need. When Adorno and Horkheimer state that enlightenment reverts to myth, therefore, they are referring to a return to conditions in which humans perceive themselves to exercise little control over their constitutive environment.[80]

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[78] George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 55.

[79] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvi.

[80] The distinction between powerlessness and perceived powerlessness is crucial for Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis, primarily because of the way that it suggests that myth and religion are in fact products of the human mind, i.e. a form of cognition, and as such a form of human agency (albeit an uncritical form). Adorno and Horkheimer write, 'the program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of

So, in what ways has enlightenment reverted to myth? In the first instance, when nature is subjected to human need, as a resource to be mined and manipulated, it comes to be seen as something distinct from humanity, or, conversely, humanity is seen as existing outside of nature. In a sense, this indicates an historical inversion of the relationship between subject and object. Whereas in the past humans were considered to be the object of a more powerful nature, with the Enlightenment nature becomes object and humans the subject. In both cases subject and object are conceived in terms of a hierarchy: powerful and powerless, active and passive. However, the domination of reason over nature is not as straightforward as it seems. Reason, a form of cognition, is still a way of representing reality. But this 'representation' is precisely that—i.e., it is a representation of reality, not reality itself. Enlightenment is an instrumentalized representation of reality. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that this form of reasoning comes to view its own concepts as synonymous with the reality it attempts to describe, concealing the fact that the reality it describes cannot be reduced to concepts. Concepts, they argue, are a means for understanding the external world; they are not the world itself. The reality that Enlightenment thought sees as synonymous with its concepts is nothing more than instrumentalized version of the world, where material exists to be dominated, to serve human need: 'Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way, their potentiality is turned to his own ends.'[81] This instrumentalized form of reasoning robs nature of its specificity and reduces it to concepts, which are, by their nature, generalizing. A cloud is no longer that specific instance of a woolly thing in the sky, but it is a 'cloud', a general concept.

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myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy.' 'From now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers, of hidden qualities.' (Ibid., 3 & 6) Thus, the Enlightenment is seen primarily as a way of disclosing the subjective nature of myth and religion.

[81] Ibid., 9.

The repercussions that this form of reasoning has for consciousness are—characteristically for the Frankfurt School—dire. In dominating nature, consciousness is treated as something outside of nature, nature's other. Of course, human thought is not so easily separated from nature—rather, it exists only in relation to its material circumstances. Thus the 'natural' element of thought, which is conditioned by what it is not, comes to appear as independent of human activity, and, like myth, instrumental reason—though a product of the human mind—comes to appear natural. Identity thinking, where facts are considered as such only when they are reducible to a highly categorical version of instrumental reason, comes to dominate human thought itself. Thus, as instrumental reason becomes natural, so does domination; and the domination of external nature becomes the domination of human nature.

To return to the issue of music and politics, by refusing to adapt to external conditions autonomous music can be understood as highly critical toward Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the 'instrumental reason'. By refusing to engage directly in political dialogues, autonomous music, as well as being political because of its socially mediated character, points beyond existing conditions—beyond a form of reasoning that perpetuates human suffering. This is another important respect in which autonomous music converges with Bloch's notion of utopia. The flipside of autonomous music is, of course, music that is politically committed. What the critique of instrumental reason enables us to do then is to examine the ways in which politically committed musicians, such as Phil Ochs, Joan Baez, or Nina Simone, may in fact be reinforcing the very conditions against which they protest because they are trapped within an instrumentalized way of thinking that is itself oppressive.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have critically examined pertinent debates on music and politics, considering notions of 'protest song', politically and socially engaged music, the use of music as propaganda, and have then viewed these debates from the perspective of critical theory. In doing this, it has been my aim to broaden the idea of political music to take in the tendency toward autonomy that, so I have argued, came to characterise radical popular musics by the end of the 1960s just as it had earlier with art music.

In what follows, I first consider the case of what I regard as a direct attempt to employ Black folk music and spirituals as a form of politically engaged music in relation to the civil rights movement, before going on to examine three cases that I propose demonstrate the emergence of different forms of politically significant popular music characterised by the move toward aesthetic autonomy.

Chapter 2. The Highlander Folk School, the Freedom Songs, and the Freedom Rides

There is no longer any '*folk*' whose songs and games could be taken up and sublimated by art.[82] (Adorno)

Introduction

The musical and political experiments of the Highlander Folk School represented a serious concerted effort, which involved vast numbers of people, to place music in the service of the civil rights movement. Drawing upon African American slave songs, it was reasoned that this music, embedded as it was in the collective history of Black America, was uniquely placed to create unity within the civil rights movement. In the context of this dissertation, Highlander's practices are in tune with the sociological understandings of the relationship between music and politics examined in chapter one, but their use of music also embodies many of the tensions in the political movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

Highlander was a leadership training centre located in Monteagle, Tennessee, that played a prominent role in the popularization of Freedom Songs in the civil rights movement. Established in 1932 by Myles Horton, Don West, and James A. Dombrowski, Highlander's project was twofold: (1) to ensure that community leaders are embedded '*within* the community rather than *above* it [the community],' and (2) 'for the conservation and enrichment of… indigenous cultural values.'[83] Although largely successful in helping to create a more positive

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[82] "On the Social Situation of Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard D. Leppert (Berkeley, California; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2002 [1932]), 427.
[83] Number 1 from Peter J. Ling, "Local Leadership in the Early Civil Rights Movement: The South Carolina Citizen Education Program of the Highlander Folk School," *Journal of American Studies* 29 (1995): 402; and

view of Black history and Black musical traditions, Highlander's achievements in developing grassroots community leadership in the civil rights movement were more mixed. Thus, whilst a shared musical heritage helped to draw the movement together, imbalances between community leaders and the movement base threatened to pull it apart. The unifying properties of African American music in the struggle for civil rights have been noted by a number of movement activists.[84] However, the issue of the extent to which this unity presupposed the superficial overcoming of difference has largely gone unquestioned.

The purpose of this chapter is to implicate music within the countervailing tendencies of class and race in the civil rights movement. In particular, this chapter looks at the use of Freedom Songs in fostering a strong sense of identity within the civil rights movement. The important role played by Highlander in introducing Freedom Songs to the civil rights movement has been widely acknowledged, with studies that have foregrounded Highlander's 'musicking' practices, the processes of fetishization (particularly of tradition) in their treatment of musical material, the role played by race in the maintenance and mobilisation of musical traditions, or, more broadly, studies that situate music and 'social action research' within a larger cultural context.[85] However, the focus of this analysis is the way that music, which was intended to affirm ideas of a positive racial identity, also became the repository for social critique. In helping to reconstitute traditional Black music as a positive force, Highlander

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number 2 quoted in Randall Beard Ben Williams, *This Day in Civil Rights History* (Montgomery, Alabama: New South Books, 2009), 139.

[84] Martin Luther King states that 'songs bind us together, give us courage together, help us to march together.' King, Martin Luther. *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 61. Bernice Johnson Reagon, on the other hand, states that 'after the song, the differences among us would not be as great. Somehow, making a song required an expression of that which was common to us all.' Quoted in Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 63.

[85] See respectively, Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, 155-180; Peter. J. Ling, "Developing Freedom Songs: Guy Carawan and the African-American Traditions of the South Carolina Sea Islands," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 44 (1997); Joe Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); and Chris Baker et al., "The Highlander Research and Education Center: Utilizing Social Change-Based Models for Public Policy," *Race, Gender & Class* 15, no. 3/4 (2008).

activists tapped into a history which was both powerfully collective and, given the highly contradictory context in which the civil rights movement took place, arguably anachronistic.[86] What is at issue in this study, therefore, is the way that the Freedom Songs helped to construct an African American folk identity—a strategic unity—whilst simultaneously providing opportunities for reflexively criticizing this identity.[87]

This chapter is structured into two main sections. Section 1, 'Highlander and the Freedom Songs,' is committed to understanding the more general way that Highlander activists negotiated the tension between class and race. After beginning by providing an account of Highlander's political philosophy, this section goes on to consider the ways that Highlander used music to (1) embed movement leaders within the communities, and (2) reconstruct African American musical traditions in positive terms. However, because of the highly contingent use of music propounded by Highlander, it is argued that the best site for understanding their view of music is within the context of political struggle. Thus, Section 2 provides a contextual study of the 1961 campaign to desegregate interstate travel throughout the South, known as the Freedom Rides, giving particular attention to the ways music was used to work through movement contradictions. The Freedom Rides provide a particularly suitable case study because (1) so many of its participants had encounters, direct or not, with the Highlander folk school, music therefore played a prominent role in the campaign; and (2) the

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[86] Ella Baker has described the Martin Luther King as a member of the '"silver spoon brigade"… who did not identify closely enough with the people he sought to lead.' Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 189-190; Victor Hamilton and Stokely Carmichael state that '[t]he goals of integrationists are middle-class goals, articulated primarily by a small group of Negroes with middle-class aspirations or status.' Stokely Carmichael and Victor Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Randon House, 1968), 67-68; and Charles Denby writes that '[w]hen the Black movement continued to make political inroads, teachers and professionals came rushing in. They said they had the brains and the know-how to lead the Black masses to complete victory, and began calling the shots.' *Charles Denby, Indignant heart: A Black Worker's Journal, African American Life* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 220.

[87] This conception of a 'strategic unity' owes much to Gayati Chakravorty Spivak's understanding of 'strategic essentialism', whereby differences are suspended in the pursuit of common goals. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York; London: Routledge, 1988).

Rides were resisted by many elements of the movement, thereby throwing into question the 'folk' totality that the songs presupposed. Following this, I conclude with a section which situates the Freedom Rides and the Freedom Songs within the 1960s movements more generally. It is argued that, because of their emphasis on reconstructing Black history on positive, the freedom songs played an important role in the struggle for civil rights; nevertheless, the idea of a unitary culture to which they appealed is best understood as a nostalgic appeal to that which no longer existed. As Adorno argues, 'there is no longer any "folk".'

1. **Highlander and the Freedom Song**

Political Practices at Highlander

Sorely neglected in most civil rights histories, the Highlander Folk School played an important role in teaching democratic organizational methods in the civil rights movement, training such prominent figures as Rosa Parks, who attended Highlander workshops shortly before the Montgomery Bus Boycott campaign from 1955 to 1956, Martin Luther King, James Bevel, Hollis Watkins, and John Lewis. Individuals from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and those responsible for establishing SNCC in 1960, also came through Highlander at some point in the 1950s and

1960s. The lessons learned at the small Highlander workshops were applied with varying degrees of success and faithfulness throughout the civil rights movement as a whole.[88]

Operating out of a small building in Tennessee, Highlander was one of an extremely small minority of institutions to flout Jim Crow segregation laws in the 1950s. Although led predominantly by white activists, their emphasis on a non-hierarchical discussion-centred approach to political education aimed to limit the reproduction of existing patterns of inequality. Indeed, Parks described her experience with Highlander as one of the first times that she had ever been treated like an equal in the company of whites.[89] In intervening in the civil rights movement, one of Highlander's main political objectives was to link up existing community groups (and leaders) and to provide a hub for the sharing of ideas and strategies. Street writes that while at 'Highlander…communities would be encouraged to discuss their community problems. This pooling of intellectual resources often led visitors to recognize the common obstacles that they faced and the common bonds that united them.'[90] The activists were then expected to go out into the wider communities and put these democratic principles to work. Unsurprisingly given the political climate of the time, Highlander was described as a Communist Party training school by local segregationists and, indeed, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

However, in stressing the development of 'community leaders,' Highlander activists were often forced to contend with figures that were unrepresentative of their communities. Thus, dealing with issues related to social class also became an important element of Highlander workshops. One of the principal methods for ameliorating this tension was through collective music making, the function of which was to situate leaders within (rather than above)

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[88] Even today, Highlander's website articulates the same ideals: '[Highlander] work[s] with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny.' Highlander Research and Education Center, "Mission," http://highlandercenter.org/about-us/mission/.
[89] Reagon, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History," 80.
[90] Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, 19.

their surrounding (and constitutive) communities. Consequently, Highlander sought to develop 'song leaders' rather than individual performers. The distance between performer and audience in commercial music, it was reasoned, served to create an unequal relationship—performer and audience, active and passive, subject and object—and thus perpetuate existing structures of domination. By collapsing this relationship, however, Highlander sought to make music into a tool for democratizing social relations. Comparing Highlander's musical philosophy to other more typical protest music at the time, particularly that found in the North, Roy writes that '[w]hile the People's Songsters more actively engaged audiences than popular singers did and tried to make musical events as inclusive as possible, the context was still a performance.' By contrast, Roy argues that Highlander 'involved the constituency on a more visceral level, making music something the movement did, a central activity.'[91] Concluding, Roy states that '[c]ulture empowers most effectively when it is culture that people do, not just when its content affirms people.'[92] This radical inclusivity helped people from different backgrounds to better understand one another.

Whilst collective music making was undoubtedly an important practice at Highlander meetings, more significant were the obstacles that had to be overcome in getting people to participate. A common myth about the civil rights movement is that it was somehow *naturally* musical—a myth which arguably finds sustenance in the racist association of blackness and sensuousness. Of course, because of its roots in the Black church, the civil rights movement had always been musical to a certain degree, but the Freedom Songs for which the movement became known were met with resistance from large swathes of African American communities. Indeed, opinions of the Freedom Songs were often bound up with issues of geographic location and social class.

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[91] Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, 156.
[92] Ibid., 164.

Class, Race, and Place: Perceptions of the Freedom Songs

Whilst music making appeared on the programme of Highlander's early workshops, it was not until the 1950s and the turn toward the civil rights movement that it became a major feature of every meeting. This coincidence is perhaps understandable given the contradictory status of music within African American communities. On the one hand, music provided one of the few ways that African Americans could achieve a degree of fame or notoriety. Confined to this sphere, therefore, music took on a special importance in African American communities.[93] On the other hand, in spite of the undeniable influence of Black music, African Americans had consistently been taught the worthlessness of their own culture. Thus, Black music was a source of both pride and shame. At Highlander it was reasoned that if the spell of Black cultural inferiority could be broken, African American communities would develop the confidence to fight back against racism. Moreover, the resulting sense of pride would not be determined by social class, but by race. Thus, Highlander tapped into a powerful unifying force in the Black movement. In this respect Highlander positioned themselves in the tradition of Frederic Douglass, Marcus Garvey, and W. E. B. DuBois, who also argued that Black freedom was tied up with how Black people thought about their own history.[94]

The Freedom Songs did not achieve widespread popularity within the civil rights movement until around 1961.[95] Even in 1960, when a spate of student-led sit-ins rippled across

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[93] Because music provided one of the few routes out of poverty for African-Americans, there were a disproportionate number of black musicians – but this no more indicates natural musicianship than the suffusion of white CEOs indicates a natural tendency of white people to be in positions of leadership (or exploitation, depending on your class perspective). See Sidney Finkelstein, *Jazz, a People's Music* (London; New York: Citadel Press, 1964).

[94] This was also reflected shortly afterwards in the academic project to reorient the discussion on black history from narratives of degradation and impoverishment to those of subversion and resistance. See Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*; and Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*.

[95] Reagon, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History," 120.

the southern states protesting lunch counter segregation (amongst other things), music had not become a central feature of the movement. The reason for this, according to Guy Carawan, was that, before the sit-ins, 'college educated Negroes and students' had been 'educated out of their folk heritage' and have become 'ashamed of the ways their parents or grandparents from rural and working class backgrounds express themselves in song, speech and worship'.[96] Instead, young African Americans often found their identity within commercial music—from jazz to soul, funk to Rhythm and Blues. As one might expect, the allure of the culture industry was particularly attractive within urban areas. For many young urban African Americans, Black cultural traditions signified a past of primitiveness which they would rather forget; commercial music, on the other hand, was seen as suitably modern. The increasing power of commercial music in the South was exemplified by the formation of Stax Records in 1957: a label committed to, and partly responsible for, bringing Black music to commercial attention. The distinction between urban and rural taste cultures is particularly significant because it was during this period (from the 1950s to the 1960s) that, for the first time in history, the population of the urban South became larger than that of the rural South.[97]

Myles Horton himself has described a similar situation within the Highlander workshops, where movement leaders were frequently resistant to the implementation of traditional Black music and collective forms of music making: 'the middle class Negro is complacent, prestige conscious, generally well-heeled, and unaccustomed to the idea of giving for the cause, as over against giving for the purpose of achieving personal status.'[98] Consequently, early civil rights meetings were dominated by the more 'respectable' members of the Black community, and the tradition of spiritual singing at mass meetings had been lost

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[96] Ling, "Developing Freedom Songs: Guy Carawan and the African-American Traditions of the South Carolina Sea Islands," 205.
[97] "2010 Census of Population and Housing," ed. U.S. Department of Commerce (2012).
[98] "Developing Freedom Songs: Guy Carawan and the African-American Traditions of the South Carolina Sea Islands," 206.

in favour of more formal songs such as 'Onward, Christian Soldiers' and 'The More We get Together, The Happier We'll Be.'[99] In addition to meeting resistance within educated and middle class communities, Highlander's approach to music making was not immediately popular within rural Black communities themselves, despite their emphasis on older musical material. Carawan writes that it went 'against the reflexes of the older people at first to hear new words and new meanings put to their old church songs.'[100] Thus, whilst urban and middle class Blacks have tended to look at older musical traditions as primitive and unmodern, rural African Americans, whilst retaining some of this music, tended to bestow upon it a form of religious sanctity.

According to Street, such disparaging views of Black history have been a key factor in reproducing ideologies of white supremacism: 'in alienating [middle class and educated] Blacks from their heritage, white society was atomizing the Black community through developing a cultural as well as a political hegemony'.[101] Lawrence Levine has described the condition of the Black middle classes as 'poised… between two worlds, find[ing] its desire to absorb and emulate the culture of a dominant group, in an attempt to attain and enjoy the latter's privileges and status, in tension with its urge to continue to identify with many of its own central cultural traditions.'[102] Thus, it may be suggested that middle class and educated African Americans sought an improvement of their own situation through the rejection of their own history.[103]

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[99] Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, 167.

[100] Quoted in Ling, "Developing Freedom Songs: Guy Carawan and the African-American Traditions of the South Carolina Sea Islands," 206.

[101] Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, 22.

[102] Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 138.

[103] As Ingrid Monson has pointed out, however, because of the racial dynamics in the US the black middle class has differed from their white counterparts in two important ways. First, because of the persistent betrayal of promises by the American political elite, black liberalism has placed as much emphasis on equality of economic outcome as on the equality of economic opportunity. A further factor that has contributed to this, is the persistence of racism on all levels of society, so that economic equality, even when enshrined in law, may not exist in reality – the only test is the definite outcome. Second, and relatedly, the individualism inherent in 'mainstream… liberal

Far from being isolated to relations within the Black movement, the role played by class in determining the interest of Highlander activists in Black cultural traditions has not gone unnoticed in the literature on Highlander, or, indeed, the US folk revival more generally. Ralph Rinzler has provided a very clear elaboration of this tendency: 'The folk movements, which we take for granted today, have their roots in the romance of the pastoral. This idealization of the bucolic can only exist when there is an urban elite or privileged class that is separated from the idealized peasantry by education, social position, and economic resources.'[104] This was certainly the case with Highlander, where the majority of the staff were well educated and attendees were frequently from privileged backgrounds. However, it would be unfair (and unwise) to speak of their treatment of Black musical traditions as 'bucolic.' Rather, Highlander's approach to Black history must be seen as a necessary palliative for centuries of racist denigration. Moreover, Highlander's utilization of 'folk' traditions was not done with some aim of returning to some dim 'idealized' past, but was very much present-motivated. Thus, for the most part, sociological studies have tended to look favourably upon Highlander because of the way that its activists sought to root music within the movement—to 'make music something people do'—rather than appealing to abstract notions of 'folk' identity (as might be

thought' is not present, at least to the same degree, in black liberalism. The reason for this is, Monson writes, '[b]ecause African Americans have had minority status within a winner-takes-all form of democratic representation, the importance of collective responses to issues of community-wide importance has been an enduring theme of African American history.' Ingrid T. Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call out to Jazz and Africa* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14. As a consequence of this, the fate of the individual has been considered to be bound up with that of the 'race' to a greater degree than might be found outside of black communities. Whilst there is a risk of overstating the unified nature of the black movement, the relationship between the middle and the lower classes amongst African Americans is different from that of white society. Indeed, the attraction of liberal community leaders to Highlander shows a willingness to recognise social class as a potentially divisive factor in organizing resistance to racism and inequality.

[104] Quoted in Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta, "From the 30s to the 60s: The Folk Music Revival in the United States," *Theory and Society* 25, no. 4 (1996): 501.

said of the early Dylan);[105] the Freedom Songs are seen to be more 'authentic' because they were produced within the movement itself.[106]

Interim Conclusions

It is evident and widely acknowledged that, prior to the 1960s, perceptions of Black musical traditions were often framed by the social class of the beholder, particularly when encountering those apparently 'degraded' and 'uncivilized' forms associated with slave or rural culture. Consequently, the project to reclaim Black history and cultural traditions has rightly been associated with the fight against racism. However, whilst recognizing the strategic importance of a unified Black identity for the advancement of collective political objectives—where African Americans of all social backgrounds recognize common problems and are therefore better able to articulate common solutions—the following section looks for the points of tension in this identity.

In their origins, the Freedom Songs aimed to bridge the tensions between movement leaders and their communities. Whilst the resulting unity may have served important political purposes, it could not iron out differences altogether. Thus, I argue that the Freedom Songs became an important repository for reflexive criticism, whereby internal contradictions within the civil rights movement could be articulated: even as they affirmed the unity of the movement in the context of tradition, Freedom Songs pointed at the limits of this unity. It is to this contextual understanding of the Freedom Songs that I now turn.

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[105] For an exemplary example of this positive view, see Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States.*

[106] For a good recorded introduction to a variety of Freedom Songs, see The Freedom Singers et al. *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs 1960-1966*. (United States: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1997).

2. The Freedom Songs in Context

Guy Carawan, who on Pete Seeger's recommendation was recruited to coordinate musical activity after Zilphia Horton's tragic death in 1956,[107] is widely credited with the popularization of the Freedom Songs, most notably 'We Shall Overcome', 'Keep Your Eyes on the Prize', and 'We Will Not Be Moved.' The Freedom Songs themselves came from a variety of sources: slave spirituals, gospel songs, popular music, secular union songs, and original compositions.[108] Melodically and formally, the songs were usually very simple, making them easy to remember, and, not unlike the topical songs of early Dylan, the subject of the text was often general and the words changeable so as to make them applicable to contemporary issues.[109]

Shana L. Redmond recent (2015) book *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* provides a detailed study of what she describes as the 'anthemic' character of the freedom songs. For Redmond, anthems are songs that 'symbolize and call into being a system of socio-political ideas or positions'; furthermore, they seek to engage communities in the practice of collective singing and listening.[110] In doing this, communities can become invested in both the processes of music making and the political ideas in which they are shrouded. She writes: anthems 'require subscription to a system of beliefs that stir and organise the receivers of the music'. This, Redmond argues, helped to cut across

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[107] Horton died of kidney failure after drinking a glass of typewriter fluid, mistaking it for water.

[108] Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998), 203.

[109] See Clyde R. Appleton, "Singing in the Streets of Raleigh, 1963: Some Recollections," *The Black Perspective in Music* 3, no. 3 (1975): 246.
There are, of course, many exceptions which refer to specific events but which are still generally included in the definition of freedom song, such as Nina Simone's 1964 song 'Mississippi Goddamn', which refers to the 1963 murder of NAACP field secretary Medger Evers in Mississippi and, in the same year, the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, which killed four little girls.

[110] Shana L. Redmond. *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 2.

the influence of commercial music, 'construct[ing] an alternative constellation of citizenship' – a 'We', in other words, defined according to the specific needs of a given community.[111]

In the particular case of 'We Shall Overcome', there are a number of structural traits, which have developed historically in the musical material, that lend it to political utility and audience participation. 'We Shall Overcome' has its origins in slave spirituals, but a common thread that ties its early iterations in the nineteenth-century to later developments in the Black gospel tradition, Redmond states, is its reliance on 'short-phrasing and repetitive chorus in A-A-B-A style' (this is also a feature of other protest anthems such as 'We Shall Not Be Moved').[112] This structural simplicity is certainly a factor in helping to cast the songs to memory; in addition, one might note the simple stepwise melodic movement that characterises 'We Shall Overcome.' However, one of the more fundamental issue in tying songs to activity and movement—essential characteristics of protest—is the time signature. To understand this development, it is useful to examine the song's history.

The origins of 'We Shall Overcome' are multiple and diverse. It has been argued by Bernice Johnson Reagon that its 'root song' is 'I'll Be Alright', a standard in the Black Baptist and Methodist church.[113] However, Redmond has also made the case that Charles Albert Tindley's reinterpretation of 'I Shall Overcome Someday'—a different song but with extremely similar textual content—played a significant role in creating the song that we know today. In particular, Redmond notes Tindley's change in time signature from 3/4 to 4/4, which was then subsequently adopted in 'We Shall Overcome.' She argues that because of its relative simplicity, 4/4 'allows for greater participation from new learners or the musically untrained.'

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[111] Ibid., 1-2.
[112] Ibid., 149.
[113] Reagon, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History," 65.

Moreover, 'the even number of beats per measure allows for ease of use during marches and other physical movements where pace is measured, such as on a picket line.'[114]

'We Shall Overcome' was first used for explicitly political purposes in 1945 when the song was used on the picket line of striking Food and Tobacco Workers Union (FTWU) members. One of the workers on the present was Lucille Simmons, an African American woman with a background in gospel singing, who performed the song at the end of each day of picketing. Significantly, it is at this moment that the text of the song was changed from 'I will overcome' to 'We shall overcome'. Because the pronoun 'I' had long been synonymous with 'We' in African American culture, Redmond has speculated that this transition took place as a way of reaching out to non-Black cultures involved in the labour movement, for whom ideas of the individual did not automatically evoke the collective.[115]

The increased renown of 'We Shall Overcome', which came through its use in on the FTWU picket lines, further contributed to changes in its structure. In particular, after it was introduced to Highlander activists through Zilphia Horton, the song began to develop more syncopated elements, including improvised shouts, moans, and response, and exaltations. These latter features were very much in the tradition of Black gospel, but also lent themselves well to the uncertainty of marches, demonstrations, and pickets, so that reactions to dynamic and fluid situations could be integrated within the structure of the music

As has already been suggested, one of the chief determinants of the meaning of freedom songs is the context in which they are sung. This is as true for the meaning of the song text as it is for objective musical characteristics of the song. Singing for 'freedom', for instance, often meant something very different in church than in a jail cell; the historically formed association between freedom songs and physical movement—in particular, with political marches—have

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[114] Redmond, *Anthem*, 149.
[115] Ibid., 150.

similarly interesting repercussions for those in confinement, i.e., the expression of movement when it has been denied. Pete Seeger's account of his attempts to notate a freedom song at a 1965 civil rights demonstration is revealing in this respect: 'one woman on the Selma [Alabama] march saw me trying to notate a melody, and said with a smile: "Don't you know you can't write down freedom songs?"'[116] Thus, in order to understand the often unexpected meanings and functions of Freedom Songs it is necessary to see them in context.

In taking these songs into the community, Highlander relied mainly upon the Citizenship Education Program (CEP), established in 1954 by Esau Jenkins. Coordinated by Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson, the CEP helped to establish roughly 900 citizenship schools across the South. Although nominally the schools taught adult literacy (necessary for voter registration), the real content of their lessons was democracy, community organizing, protest, and civil rights; voter registration, though an important aspect of the lessons, provided a socially acceptable cover for community organization. Street, on the other hand, contends that the real 'seeds of the singing civil rights movement' were sown across three meetings that took place in 1960: the year that student sit-ins exploded across the South.[117] In April, Highlander's annual college workshop was attended by 82 students, many of whom were involved in the sit-ins—naturally for Highlander, group singing was high on the agenda. This event was followed two weeks later by the founding conference of the SNCC at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, where Carawan introduced 'We Shall Overcome' to the student organizers.[118] Four months later, Carawan directed a 'Sing for Freedom' conference attended by seventy-five community organizers. Street writes that the 'songs sung at these

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[116] Carawan and Carawan, *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through its Songs*, 6.

[117] Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, 22.

[118] The influence of Highlander at the founding conference of SNCC is of particular importance. SNCC was formed out of the sit-in movements as a way of coordinating student groups across the South. Although sharing with King's SCLC a commitment to non-violent resistance, the student group was suspicious of the idea of leadership and was committed to grassroots democracy. Many SNCC activists were involved with Highlander at some point, and it is no coincidence, therefore, that their commitment to music was perhaps the strongest of all the civil rights organizations, spawning the Freedom Singers.

meetings formed the bedrock of the repertoire of freedom songs that were sung throughout the civil rights movement.'[119]

The Freedom Rides

Many of the activists involved in the Highlander workshops played a central role in the Freedom Rides which began in May 1961. Unsurprisingly therefore, Bernice Johnson Reagon has argued, the experience of the Freedom Ride campaign 'provided the richest and most diverse musical experience the Movement had seen up to that time.'[120] This campaign is particularly apt for this study because it also indicates some of the recurrent tensions within the civil rights movement as a whole.[121] This section proceeds by giving an account of the Freedom Rides, looking in particular at the role of Freedom Songs in mediating political tensions within the movement.

Context within the Civil Rights Movement

On May 4, 1961, thirteen civil rights activists travelled from Washington D.C. to the Deep South to test Jim Crow segregation on public transport. Their aim was to expose and bring to national attention the injustice and pervasiveness of racial inequality in the South, and to compel the federal government to enforce anti-segregation laws, established by the Supreme Court in 1960, which prohibited segregation in interstate transit. The route was to travel through some of the most notorious Jim Crow areas in the South, including Virginia; North

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[119] Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, 22.
[120] Reagon, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965: A Study in Culture History," 120.
[121] Michael T. Martin, "'Buses are a Comin'. Oh Yeah!": Stanley Nelson on Freedom Riders," *Black Camera* 3, no. 1 (2011): 97.

and South Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; Montgomery, Alabama; and Jackson, Mississippi, before finishing their journey in New Orleans.

Much like the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, which is often wrongly seen as the first of its kind, testing segregation on interstate buses went back at least as far as 1949. By the early 1960s, however, conditions proved more favourable to the Riders' success. With the Cold War propaganda campaign at the forefront of American politics, the US government was under immense pressure to maintain a positive international image—an image which could be compromised if it were seen to tolerate racist violence. Of course, anti-Black violence was common across America in 1961 (as it had been for centuries), but what the government feared was a series of events which would bring this conflict out into the open, under the scrutiny of the mass media, and thus to the attention of their political enemies. Targeting some of the most notoriously racist locations across the South, such as Jackson, Mississippi, where nearly all levels of the establishment, including the police force and the local government, were under the control of white supremacists, the Freedom Rides signified just such an event.

Opposition to the Freedom Rides did not just come from the government, however, but also from within the movement itself. Indeed, the 'big three' civil rights organizations—the NAACP, the National Urban League (NUL), and the SCLC—did not initially get behind the Freedom Rides (though the latter was eventually won around).[122] The plea that was often heard at this time was for moderation and patience.[123] The Freedom Riders were unequivocal, however. When asked for a cooling-off period by the attorney general Robert Kennedy, James Farmer (director of a smaller but significant civil rights organisations called Congress of Racial Equality) responded that 'we've been cooling off for 350 years. If we cool off any more, we

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[122] With few exceptions, representatives of the NAACP and SCLC initially disapproved of 'the nature and timing of the Freedom Riders' campaign.' Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 195.
[123] Ibid., 289.

will be in a deep freeze.'[124] Throughout the Rides, the Freedom Songs provided a critical site for working through these conflicts even as they affirmed the identity of the civil rights movement as a whole.

The Early Rides: From the Bus to the Hospital

The Freedom Riders set out on two buses from Washington D.C. on May 4. Of the first volunteers to undertake this journey, most were members of CORE, two, however, were from SNCC: John Lewis and Henry Thomas, the former of whom was also a veteran of the Highlander Folk School. Generally speaking, the early stages of the Rides passed without event.[125] In Alabama, however, things were very different. The first major incident took place in Anniston on May 14, when the first bus came under attack. After a fire-bomb was thrown through the window of the bus, the passengers, choking on the smoke and heat, attempted to exit the bus only to find a mob of white racists holding the doors shut. It was only when an undercover FBI agent pulled out his gun that the passengers were able to alight—but once off, they were badly beaten. The fate of the second bus was no better. Upon arrival in Anniston, the bus was boarded by a group who beat the passengers with fists and clubs. Although the bus managed to escape Anniston and continue on to Birmingham, Alabama, the scene awaiting them there was even worse.[126] Although aware of the Riders' imminent arrival, the local 'commissioner of public safety' Eugene 'Bull' Connor had granted the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)

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[124] James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 206. Somewhat later, King's *Why We Can't Wait* can also be considered a response to calls for moderation. Martin Luther King, *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: The New American Library, 1964).

[125] Whilst two incidents took place in South Carolina – on May 9, after attempting to use a white-only waiting room in Rock Hill, Lewis and two white activists, Genevieve Hughes and Al Bigelow, were assaulted by a group of whites; and the following day, Thomas and a white CORE activist were arrested for 'trespassing' after entering a white lunch-room together in Winnsboro – opposition to the Riders' presence was isolated to individual cases. August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement,* 1942-1968 (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 137.

[126] Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, 34.

fifteen minutes to make the Rider's 'feel welcome' before police intervention. Most of the Riders were left bleeding and semi-conscious—some with injuries from which they would never fully recover—and were therefore unable (or willing) to continue the journey. No arrests were made and the Freedom Riders were evacuated by local activists and concerned onlookers.[127]

Much to the consternation of President Kennedy, whose Cold War commitment meant that he wished to downplay the events of May 14, the violent scenes in Birmingham had been broadcast on national television and appeared on the front pages of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.[128] The decision of the Riders to discontinue their journey would have come as some relief for the administration. However, members of the Nashville Student Movement (NSM)—the group responsible for coordinating the Greensboro sit-ins the previous year—and the newly formed SNCC argued that to let violence deter the Freedom Rides would set the movement back by years: 'If the movement allowed segregationist thugs to destroy the Freedom Ride, white supremacist extremists would gain new life, violent attacks on civil rights activists would multiply, and attracting new recruits to the nonviolent cause would become much more difficult.'[129] Against the protestations of the more liberal and older Black groups, a new group of students were quickly assembled and, on May 17, travelled to Birmingham to continue the journey—the NSM, SNCC, and other veterans of the sit-in movement were well represented amongst these individuals, as indeed were Highlander activists.

Setting off from Nashville, the Riders included, amongst others, Lewis and Thomas from the original group, Bernard Lafayette (a Highlander veteran) and Susan Wilbur (a close

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[127] Defiant, many of the Riders returned to the station the following day to continue their journey; however, the lack of police protection coupled with an unwillingness of the bus company to put their drivers 'at risk' meant that the activists were unable to find a coach. They thus resigned themselves to flying to New Orleans.

[128] The hypocrisy of Cold War liberals over the issue of African American civil rights was shared by a number of other high profile figures, such as ex-President Harry Truman who snapped at the Freedom Rider James Peck that 'you are helping the Communists.' James Peck, "The Freedom Ride and the Truman Walk," *Liberation* (1961).

[129] Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 180.

friend of the Carawans).[130] Upon arrival in Birmingham, the Riders were met by a throng of press and white supremacists and were quickly arrested by Bull Connor and placed in 'protective custody.' This spell in prison was the first time that Freedom Songs featured prominently in the Riders campaign. Lewis explains: 'We went on singing, both to keep our spirits up and—to be honest—because we knew that neither Bull Connor nor his guards could stand it.'[131] As Roy has suggested, part of the reason that jail proved so amenable to collective music making was because of the way that it brought groups of people into 'tight proximity' for long periods of 'unstructured time.'[132] Ironically, therefore, whilst in jail the Riders were afforded the necessary freedom to develop songs to reflect on their present situation. The use of music in this case, would seem to confirm the affirmative function which Highlander had attributed to it, helping to engender solidarity and raise spirits. In addition to this, however, the music took on an exclusive character inasmuch as the group it affirmed was defined against an *other*, i.e., the guards. This impudence was not without consequence: after spending the day incarcerated, at four in the morning the Riders were driven to the state line by Bull Connor and unceremoniously dumped in the middle of nowhere. David Fankhauser recalls Connor's complaint that 'I just couldn't stand their singing.'[133]

Although the governor of Alabama originally refused to provide protection for the journey to Montgomery the actions of the Freedom Riders, in full view of the national media, had placed immense pressure on the federal government to resolve the situation without further bloodshed. President Kennedy was forced to put pressure on Patterson who eventually agreed to provide protection. By early the following morning, a bus and police escort were waiting for

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[130] Bob Zellner and Constance Curry, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Movement* (Montgomery, Alabama: New South Books, 2008), 105.
[131] John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 149.
[132] Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, 195.
[133] David B. Fankhauser, "SNCC Gets Involved in the Freedom Rides," http://biology.clc.uc.edu/fankhauser/society/freedom_rides/freedom_ride_dbf.htm.

the Riders. Whilst their journey was uneventful, their arrival in Montgomery was met with yet another angry mob and yet more violence. Once again, the police were conspicuously absent and the severity of the attacks was worse than in Birmingham.

(Non)Violent Clashes at the First Baptist Church

Until this point, the SCLC had refused to get behind the Freedom Riders, with Julian Bond of the SNCC famously describing King's 'feet of clay.' However, pressure from Diane Nash and the tenacious example of the Freedom Riders, who refused to give up even after this latest particularly brutal attack, forced the SCLC and CORE leadership into action. A mass meeting was called on May 21 at the First Baptist Church in Montgomery,[134] where King (also an attendee at the Highlander Folk School) would publicly declare SCLC support for the Freedom Rides. This meeting would turn out to be a seminal event in the history of the civil rights movement for more than one reason, exposing the most abhorrent and potentially deadly characteristics of southern racism. Set to be attended by over 1,500 Black residents (of which hundreds were children) and the Freedom Riders,[135] news of the meeting had been broadcast on local radio and, throughout the afternoon, a crowd of white protestors began to assemble outside the church. By 8pm (the start time of the meeting) nearly 3,000 people had gathered outside; by the time federal marshals had arrived to take control of the situation, the assembly had developed into a full blown riot, with the protestors hurling rocks, bricks, and Molotov

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[134] The First Baptist Church had been one of the main venues for mass meetings in the Bus Boycott back in 1955 to 1956.

[135] It was King's involvement in this event that eventually gave the FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, sufficient reason to launch a decade-long investigation and counter-insurgency program against King and the civil rights, culminating the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) used to destroy the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, Hoover himself was unequivocal in stating that King and the Freedom Riders represented a more serious threat to America than the Ku Klux Klan. Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 247.

cocktails at the church. The violence would only be subdued after the arrival of 800 Alabama National Guardsman (many of whom were openly segregationist).

Although the National Guard eventually dispersed the protestors, the Black residents remained trapped in the church until four in the morning. Revealingly, many in the church stated that the National Guards' guns were trained on them rather than the outside protestors: Arsenault has suggested a comparison between this situation and the so-called 'protective custody' of Bull Connor.[136] As John Lewis explains, 'those soldiers didn't look like protectors now. Their rifles pointed our way. They looked like the enemy.'[137] Over one thousand Black residents were forced to spend the night in the church. In spite of the horror of this situation, Diane Nash suggests that the feelings of togetherness and of belonging that the experience engendered, helped to overcome a lot of the fear: 'I think it can almost be a generalization that the Negroes in Alabama and Mississippi and elsewhere in the Deep South are terribly afraid until they get into the [civil rights] movement.' She continues, 'I don't think I've even seen a group of people band together as the crowd in the church did that night.'[138]

The role played by singing in enabling the church-goers to get through the night seems to have been particularly powerful. Although earlier in the meeting, the mood had called for the singing of traditional hymns, by the time the rioters were outside the congregation was singing Freedom Songs such as 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round' and 'We Shall Overcome.'[139] Indeed, as Arsenault writes, '[e]ven in the face of tear gas and surging rioters, freedom songs reverberated through the sanctuary.'[140] For King, the function of these songs,

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[136] Ibid., 239.
[137] Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, 161.
[138] Diane Nash, "Inside the Sit-ins and Freedom Rides: Testimony of a Southern Student," in *The New Negro*, ed. Mathew H. Ahmann (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1969), 55.
[139] Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 236.
[140] Ibid., 236.

in particular 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round,' were expressive of the political will of the congregation: 'It is not just a song; it is a resolve.'[141]

The function of group singing in this context exemplifies some of the contradictions which Highlander encountered in the training workshops. Firstly, King's description of the songs as a 'resolve' not to be 'turned around' suggests a certain outward orientation, where the sentiment of the song was directed at the encircling mobs. Indeed, irrespective of the textual content of the songs, the simple fact of singing can be understood as an attempt to assert ownership over the space (it hardly a coincidence that Arsenault suggests an analogy between being trapped in the church and 'protective custody' and music was used in a similar sense). In addition to this, however, the togetherness which the music engendered can also be understood as an attempt to overcome differences within the congregation. John Lewis has noted that although 'there was no panic… [many of the congregation] were prepared to fight back. We Riders were nonviolent… but most of the people of Montgomery were not.'[142] Consequently, between songs King and the Reverend Seay implored to the churchgoers to 'adhere absolutely to non-violence.'[143] Whilst it is not my concern here to discuss the strategic merits of violence and nonviolence, it is apparent that this issue was one of the central differences which required negotiating at the meeting and which music, helping to overcome differences, played a partial role in realizing.[144]

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[141] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 61.

[142] Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, 160.

[143] For recently recovered video footage shot within the church, see WSB-TV, "WSB-TV newsfilm clip of a mass meeting held at First Baptist Church where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. encourages nonviolence during a riot outside, Montgomery, Alabama, 1961 May 21," in *Civil Rights Digital Library* (Athens, Georgia: Digital Library of Georgia and Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, University of Georgia Libraries, 2007).

[144] This threat to nonviolent discipline was also felt outside of the church, where a group of taxi drivers has gathered and were planning to confront the white protestors. Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 231.

Jail, No Bail

Over the following days members of the SNCC, NSM, SCLC, and CORE were engaged in lengthy talks to decide where to go with the Freedom Rides. Lewis and Nash have remarked upon the many difficulties faced by the student groups in these meetings, in particular Farmer's sense of propriety over the Rides and King's unwillingness to put his money where his mouth was and join the rides himself. Moreover, the unilateral decision to shut-down conversations, especially by King's aides, Ralph Abernathy and Wyatt T. Walker, seems to have particularly rankled amongst the students. When giving a press conference later that day before the Freedom Rides were set to continue, King's tendency to dominate discussions further contributed toward the idea that he was calling the shots in a movement that he only recently (and cautiously) got behind. Hearing of the situation some weeks later, the radical Black activist and Union County NAACP president Robert F. Williams sent a telegram to King chastising his hypocrisy: '[n]o sincere leader asks his followers to make sacrifices that he himself will not endure. You are a phony.… If you lack the courage, remove yourself from the vanguard.'[145]

Upon arrival in Jackson, the first contingent of Riders were placed under arrest for ignoring the police captain's order to 'move on.' As planned, the students refused a NAACP offer to post the $1,000 bond for each offender. The strategy became known as the 'jail-in': 'courting arrest and refusing to accept bail.'[146] The second group of Riders followed suit and refused bail after being arrested. On the way to jail, Arsenault writes, the Riders 'serenaded the paddy wagon driver with chorus after chorus of "We Shall Overcome," which included the line

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[145] Ibid., 251.
[146] Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 165.

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"We are not afraid"; and they seemed to mean it.' 'We sang until we reached the jail', Frank Holloway (a Rider) recalls.

Following conviction in the white courts, the first groups of Freedom Riders were transferred from the city jail to Hinds County Jail across the street. Although geographically close, the conditions at Hinds County were very different, a 'real Mississippi jail,' Holloway recalls.[147] After two days in Hinds, freedom songs once again became the locus of conflict with the prison guards. Even after the guards placed a number of students in the 'sweat box' and solitary confinement, they kept on singing.[148] It was during this time that Farmer famously rewrote the text for 'Which Side Are You On?', changing the focus of the song from union loyalty and scabbing, to the relationship between Black resistance and sections of the African American community who were seen as too conciliatory or passive:

> My daddy was a freedom fighter and I'm a freedom son,
> I'll stick right with this struggle until the battle's won.
> Don't 'Tom' for Uncle Charlie, don't listen to his lies,
> 'Cause Black folk haven't got a chance until they organize.
> They say in Hinds County, no neutrals have they met,
> You're either for the Freedom Ride, or you Tom for Ross Barnett.[149]
> Oh people can you stand it, tell me how you can,
> Will you be an Uncle Tom, or will you be a man?
> Captain Ray will holler 'move on', but the Freedom Riders won't budge,
> They'll stand there in the terminals and even before the judge.[150]

The use of this particular song for commentary on their situation in jail is interesting, mainly because of the element of judgement which it contains. Indeed, Hollis Watkins recalls that this

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[147] Frank Holloway, "Travel Notes From a Deep South Tourist," *New South* 16, no. July/August (1961): 7.
[148] Ibid., 7.
[149] Ross Barnett was the governor who vowed that Blacks would enter White schools in Mississippi over his dead body.
[150] Carawan and Carawan, *Sing for Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through its Songs*, 38-39.

specific song was used as a way of 'sending a message to those that were not working with us.'[151] In light of King, Abernathy, and Walker's resistance to joining the Freedom Rides, it is tempting to conclude that this song was directed at them—even if they could not hear it.

Although the more conservative civil rights organizations had initially distanced themselves from the Freedom Rides, as the weeks passed by even senior members of the NAACP were lining up behind them (although the organization never officially endorsed them). After the NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins paid a visit to the students languishing in the county jail, thus affirming the righteousness of their campaign, Farmer recalls that the prisoners exploded into song—once again, affirming their common identity. Moreover, in this particular instance one regular Black convict called out: 'Freedom Riders, if you teach us your songs, we'll teach you ours.' Of course the Riders complied and, Farmer continues, 'they were taught Freedom Songs, and we learned work songs, protest songs, and unfamiliar gospel songs.'[152] Although the Riders had been continually warned against fraternizing with the regular convicts, with the guards suggesting that they were dangerous and hostile to outside agitators, after this event Farmer concludes that 'the real fear was that we might contaminate the convicts, turning them into Freedom Riders.'[153]

Parchman Prison Farm

On June 15, the process of transferring the prisoners to Parchman Prison Farm, where they were to carry out the rest of their (mostly sixty day) sentences, began. The experience of the Riders at Parchman represents some of the darker elements of the civil rights movement.[154]

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[151] Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, ed. *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 124.
[152] Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement*, 14.
[153] Ibid., 14-15.
[154] For a full account of one prisoner's experiences at Parchman, see Carol Ruth Silver, *Freedom Rider Diary: Smuggled Notes from Parchman Prison* (2014).

Parchman was known as the worst of the Mississippi jails, where torture and murder were relatively commonplace. Whilst national media attention spared the Riders the worst of this maltreatment, the guards had other ways of turning their imprisonment into a nightmare. For instance, it had been decided that, to stop them mixing with the other prisoners, the Riders would not be allowed out for labour, or even exercise. Confined to their cells, the activists were thrust into an interior world. Moreover,

> [t]hey [the guards] could make the jailed Riders miserable by withholding privileges, restricting movement, or serving inedible food. And, as John Lewis recalled, they could keep the lights on 'around the clock, making it difficult to sleep,' or keep the windows closed as the Riders 'baked in the airless heat.' Indeed, they could even spray the Riders with fire hoses, as they did on one occasion, and then bring in giant fans to blow cold air over shivering bodies…. On occasion prison authorities resorted to the extreme measure of placing an offending Freedom Rider inside a six-foot by six-foot metal box known as 'the hole.' This horrific creation, located in the basement of the maximum security wing, offered its unlucky inhabitants 'no light, no food,' and only 'an open hole in the floor for defecation'.[155]

In addition to this, the use of non-lethal weapons on the prisoners, such as wrist-breakers and cattle-prods, was commonplace.[156] One of the few moments of collective release from this isolation was through the singing of freedom songs. As Arsenault writes, '[f]reedom songs, hunger strikes, and other provocations provided a semblance of community life. For the most part, though, the individual Freedom Riders were on their own.'[157] Songs in this case were used to re-establish their common sense of humanity—and again reaching beyond the confines of the cell.

As their time in Parchman progressed, those Riders who were brave enough not to post bail began to make further use of music as a tool to resist the inhuman conditions imposed upon them. One instance of this was when one Rider, who happened to be a lead singer with the San

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[155] Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 352.
[156] Meier and Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*, 141.
[157] Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 352.

Francisco Opera Company was placed in 'the hole'. On confinement, the unnamed prisoner quickly found that the acoustics in the hole were ideal for projecting his voice across the prison. As Stephen Green recalls, '[t]he volume was incredible—his deep baritone could be clearly heard in every room of the building, by prisoners and guards alike. In silence, with tears of joy in some eyes and rage in others, we listened to the most moving concert I have ever heard, to this day.'[158] On the use of songs in prisons, Street has written that '[j]ailed protesters did not simply sing to while away the time: the songs were both a release from temporal surroundings and a message to the white authorities that their prisoners were not afraid.' This powerful tendency has been connected by other writers with the historical meaning of slave spirituals, where song is used to explode the boundaries of prison and plantation walls.[159]

By June 24 the guards had had enough of the Riders singing and, in an episode that has been dubbed 'the mattress war', threatened to remove their bedding if they did not let up. Clothed only in shorts and a t-shirt and confined to a room where the only comfort was a hay-stuffed mattress, this was a serious threat to the prisoners. Predictably by now, the Riders did not desist. Highlander veteran Jim Bevel called out across the prison: 'What they're trying to do is take your soul away. It's not the mattress, it's your soul.' Bevel's comment was met with cheers of approval, before the prisoners erupted into song:

> Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round, turn me
> Round, turn me round.
> Gonna keep on a-walkin',
> Gonna keep on a-talkin',
> Keep on walkin' to the Promised Land.[160]

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[158] Stephen Green, "Freedom Rider Diary--Forty Years Later " http://www.crmvet.org/nars/green1.htm.

[159] Guy Carawan writes that '…the songs provided a crucial link between the 1960s struggle and its antecedents… the historical memory of slavery and freedom.' quoted in Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, 38. Also see Thomas Barker. "Spatial Dialectics: Intimations of Freedom in Antebellum Slave Song." *Journal of Black Studies* 46, no. 4 (2015): 363-83.

[160] Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (London: Vintage, 1995), 95.

The 'Promised Land' is common theme in the Freedom Songs, and indeed, slave spirituals. In the latter case, it was often used as a metaphor for heaven, the emancipated North, or even Africa. In the context of Parchman, however, the Promised Land no doubt took on a humbler bearing, as freedom from the prison walls. The following day, after the mattresses had been returned, the head of the maximum security unit at Parchman, Deputy Tyson, warned the Riders that if they continued singing their mattresses would be permanently removed. The Riders responded by singing even louder. Tyson made good on his promise, and confiscated the mattresses for good.[161]

Conclusions

Highlander played an important role in bringing together different elements of the civil rights movement, uniting activists and communities of diverse social backgrounds. In order to achieve this, I have argued that Highlander activists sought to reconstruct Black history and cultural traditions in positive terms, thereby giving African Americans the confidence to overturn the status-quo through their own resources. However, although largely successful in this project, the construction of a politically useful Black identity could not overcome important divisions in the civil rights movement. Much of this chapter has been focused on the way that race intersected with social class in the civil rights movement, but there were also other important tensions, some of them already touched on, including those concerning generation (young and old) and geographic difference (urban and rural; North and South). These tensions were also evident in the diverging political beliefs of movement activists. At a specific level, these can be seen in the conflict between those committed to non-violence and those committed

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[161] Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 354.

to self-defence, as well as those advocating direct action and those with a more cautious approach to activism. At a broader level, these tensions can be mapped through larger political forces and ideologies, including conservativism, liberalism, capitalism, and socialism.[162] Concrete issues such as age, race, class, and location played an important, but not determining, role in shaping the way that communities thought about these latter categories.

The reason that Highlander activists became so entrenched in these kind of dichotomies is because of the politically committed nature of their music making. After all, Highlander members were not artists, at least not in the sense of Dylan, Coltrane, or Zappa; first and foremost, Highlander was a group of activists with definite political goals, and to the extent that they used music it was as a means for realizing these political objectives. As a consequence of this, disputes about identity and political strategy manifested themselves in their music. In this respect, Highlander is typical of much politically engaged music. When, for instance, sociologists speak of an 'I' or a 'We' in music—whether they see this as constituted through the song text, the performance, or the tradition—they are usually speaking about one identity against another, i.e., an individual or a group defining itself against what it is not: 'I' implies 'You', for every 'Us' there is a 'Them'. Thus, what Highlander mean when they state or evoke the 'I' is not always clear or straightforward; to understand it, I have argued, one must exam the concrete conditions in which it is articulated.

One way of thinking through Highlander's politically engaged music is through the concept of 'instrumental reason', particularly as it appears in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. For Adorno, politically committed music is condemned to reproduce the very conditions against which it protests because it remains trapped within a generalizing form of logic that commits

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[162] The main political distinction in US politics, that between Republican and Democrat, played a minor role in the internal manoeuvrings of the civil rights movement, not least because of the commitment of Republican candidates to the continuation of Jim Crow laws in the South and *de facto* segregation in the North.

violence upon the individual (the particular). Put differently, by surrendering itself to the needs of political movements, politically engaged music becomes embroiled in categories of thought that are unable to do justice to the specific character of individuals. In practice, this logic is the same as that governing commercial exchange, where commodities of a qualitatively different nature are reduced to the unit of price.[163] The idea of equating things that are not themselves comparable is particularly pertinent because I have argued that music used in the context of the Freedom Rides was always straining at the leash of ideas of community, throwing into question the idea of a unitary civil rights movement, *despite* being committed to forging a collective political identity. It is almost as if the Riders rebelled against the generalizing tendencies in the music. Paradoxically, therefore, one might say that when used during the Freedom Rides, songs such as 'We Shall Overcome', 'Which Side Are You On?', and 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round' began to develop their own tendency toward ideas of individualism. This is not to say that these Freedom Songs are in any way compatible with Adorno's conception of musical autonomy. For Adorno, subjective mediation of the objective musical material enables music to express a latent social and political content that transcends the politics of the individual.[164] The Freedom Riders, by contrast, used music as a way of thinking through the particular conditions in which they found themselves. The political content of this music was therefore unable to supersede their own specific needs.

That Highlander used music specifically to bolster the collective identity of the civil rights movement but in practice found that their intentions were subverted by the needs of individual groups of activists goes some way toward clarifying the contradictory relationship between the artist/performer and the musical material. In the following chapter, I consider the inverse relation of this problem, where collective political projects are rejected but tendencies

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[163] This is not to diminish Highlander's political and cultural contribution to the civil rights movement, which was substantial, but to highlight possible problems with the idea of a politically engaged music.
[164] See Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 119.

within the musical material work to draw groups of people together. Exemplary in this respect is, I suggest, the music of Bob Dylan.

Chapter 3. Bob Dylan, Individualism, and the Counterculture

> To say 'we' and mean 'I' is one of the most recondite insults.[165] (Adorno)

> In many people it is already an impertinence to say 'I'.[166] (Adorno)

Introduction

Although in the earlier years of the 1960s Dylan appeared to be interested in the idea of collective political action, by 1964 he had begun to distance himself from this position. Dylan differs from Highlander, therefore, in the respect that he rejected the political use of his music, at least for collective projects. In spite of this, however, Dylan's rejection of politics coincided with an exceptional increase in his perceived relevance to the counterculture. The reason for this, it is argued, were tendencies in the musical material that were collective in nature.

After a short flirtation with the folk protest movement in the early 1960s, by 1964 Dylan was proclaiming that 'I'm not part of no Movement…. I just can't have people sit around and make rules for me.'[167] Dylan considered himself an artist and, as such, subject only to his own rules. However, far from putting distance between himself and the counterculture, this stubborn individuality was embraced by much of the 1960s generation. As Tony Fluxman writes, in the mid-1960s Dylan became the 'leader and pace-setter of the counter-culture.'[168] That this

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[165] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005 [1951]), 190

[166] Ibid., 50.

[167] Bob Dylan and Jonathan Cott, "The Crackin', Shakin', Breakin', Sounds, by Nat Hentoff," in *Dylan on Dylan: The Essential Interviews* (London: Hodder Paperbacks, 2007), 26.

[168] Tony Fluxman, "Bob Dylan and the Dialectic of Enlightenment: Critical Lyricist in the Age of High Capitalism," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 77 (1991): 91.

introspective turn coincided with a drastic increase in Dylan's perceived relevance, even within the counterculture, reveals much about the contradictory nature of the 1960s.

This chapter is structured into two sections. Section 1, 'Demythologizing Dylan,' begins by looking at the authenticating myths that Dylan used in the folk protest movement. It is argued that, although false, these myths were rooted concretely in the conditions of Dylan's youth, and indeed many of his generation—as an expression of that which was repressed by US society. This section considers the myth of Dylan's childhood; the myth of Dylan as a political activist; Dylan's relationship to ideas of the 'folk'; before looking at Dylan's abandonment of these myths. Section 2, 'Dylan and the Collective Myth of the Individual,' situates Dylan's rejection of protest song within the political movements of the 1960s. This section begins by considering the ways that this moment in his career can be usefully understood within existing definitions of the New Left and the counterculture. This section therefore also provides a short survey of literature, looking in particular at definitions which foreground the distinction between culture and politics, on the one hand, and ideas of the individual and the collective on the other. It is argued that Dylan's rejection of politics served as both a critique of collective politics and an affirmation of a generational/class identity built upon the paradox of a shared idea of individuality. After considering this, I conclude with a section on the tenuous relationship between the individual and the collective in the United States. Drawing upon an essay by Robert Hullot-Kentor entitled 'Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being,' it is argued that Dylan's turn away from collective politics only to redeem them in the form of myth, represents a sort of existential crisis of the individual, where its expression is intimately tied up with its loss.[169]

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[169] Robert Hullot-Kentor. "Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being." In *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2006).

1. Demythologizing Dylan

Before proceeding to examine the various mythologies that helped to establish Dylan as a central figure in the counterculture, some clarity regarding the use of the word 'myth' is needed. In popular music studies, the word myth has a number of different meanings, but for present purposes it is used to denote the perceived identity, whether true or false, of a given performer or band. This identity can be communicated in a number of different ways, but is usually experienced through the identity of the singer. What I refer to as myth is, therefore, very close to what Allan Moore regards as the performer's 'persona' (already discussed in Chapter 1).[170]

When listening to music, in particular the voice of a singer, the listener is confronted with a personality. This personality is not necessarily the subjectivity of the singer, although it can be; rather, it is the result of complex interactions between the audience and the performer. Moore writes,

> Rather than imagine that we are listening to an individual singing to us, an individual able to express himself or herself directly, and through whose expression we understand his or her subjectivity, it is usually more helpful to recognize that we are listening to a person, projected by the singer, in other words to an artificial construction that may, or may not, be identical with the person(ality) of the singer.[171]

By conceptualizing the experience of music as a kind of 'conversation' between the persona and the audience, Moore's model foregrounds the *relationship* between the two parties. In doing this, Moore poses the question of whether the relationship is happy, neutral, or

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[170] I prefer to use the word 'myth' instead of 'persona' because I find its conventional meaning, as 'a widely held but false belief or idea', also helps to clarify something about Dylan, i.e., that his real identity has probably never been truly revealed to his audience. Moreover, as Beard and Gloag have written, the 'containment' of Dylan's music within a 'culture industry' where it is 'marketed as a consumer commodity' casts further doubt over any congruence between Dylan's myth and his real personality. David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, *Musicology: The Key Concepts*, 14.

[171] Allan F. Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song*, 179.

antagonistic, which further enables us to ask questions about the nature of the relationship the singer hoped to engender, and whether they were successful in doing so. Moreover, in posing the question of how close the persona is to the real personality of the singer, Moore opens up the discussion to broader problems in musicology, in particular those related to issues of 'authenticity'.

According to the cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg,[172] there are three main instances of authenticity in popular music, which have been summarised neatly by Johan Fornäs:

> Grossberg distinguishes three forms of authenticity in rock discourses. The most common is associated with hard rock and folk rock, and builds on the romantic ideology of rock as a construction by and expression of a magically dense community. In more dance-oriented and black genres authenticity is instead localized in the construction of a rhythmical and sexual body. A third form appears in postmodernist self-conscious pop and avant-garde rock, which plays with styles, well understanding that they are always artificially constructed, but through this very cynical self-knowledge shows a kind of realistic honesty.[173]

Although the concept of authenticity is not limited to this tripartite model, Grossberg's definition is very useful for understanding the progress of the Dylan myth throughout the 1960s, whose musical development, as we will see, might be said to have traversed each of these categories.

The Myth of Dylan's Youth

Part of the reason that Dylan attracted so much attention during his brief flirtation with politics is because of what he was seen to represent: the Dylan Myth, so to speak. Though subject to

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[172] Lawrence Grossberg, "The Media Economy of Rock Culture: Cinema, Post-modernity and Authenticity," In *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, ed. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg (London; New York, Routledge, 1993).
[173] Jonas Fornäs, *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity* (London; California: Sage, 1995), 276.

variation, the narrative form of this myth usually reads along the following lines: the small-minded parochialism of Hibbing (his hometown) drove Dylan repeatedly onto the road, though, he recalls, he was 'caught an' brought back all but once.'[174] Dylan spent much of his youth drifting through the south-western states, working and exchanging songs at travelling carnivals. At eighteen years, Dylan finally cast his family aside for good, the open road eventually taking him and his soft Okie drawl to Greenwich Village.

The first thing to say about this biography is that it is patently false. Dylan was not a drifter, he did not run away from home, he did not travel with the carnivals, and to the extent that he had an Oklahoma accent, it was affected. In reality, Dylan's upbringing was not unusual—even described as 'conventional' by some accounts.[175] His experience of childhood seems to be typical for middle class America at that time, marked by boredom and frustration.

Partly because of the crusade against communism, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and partly because of the relative social mobility afforded by an expanding economy, the 1950s are frequently characterized as a decade marked by conformity.[176] Scholars have consequently tended to look at Dylan's purposeful mythologization of his own youth as reflective of certain biographical and historical truths. Paul Williams sees these stories in terms of their personal meaning to Dylan, providing the necessary tools with which to shape his own image into one that 'more accurately reflected and made space for who he felt inside.'[177] Andrea Cossu, on the other hand, sees Dylan's investment in this image as an attempt to legitimate himself within folk communities.[178] John Gibbens takes a similarly sociological perspective of these narratives, but argues that these

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[174] Cossu, *It Ain't me, Babe: Bob Dylan and the Performance of Authenticity*, xiii.
[175] Marshall, *Bob Dylan: The Never Ending Star*, 49.
[176] See Epstein, *Political Folk Music in America from its Origins to Bob Dylan*, 143.
[177] Williams, *Bob Dylan, 1960-1973: Performing Artist*, 15.
[178] Andrea Cossu, *It Ain't me, Babe: Bob Dylan and the Performance of Authenticity* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm, 2012), 25.

stories 'did not really amount to an alternative, fictitious biography so much as an evasion of biography'[179]—an attempt, in other words, to become an everyman, a man from nowhere. The problem in these diverse analyses has been suggestively posed by John Dean when he asks whether Dylan was 'born or invented'.[180]

Although the intellectual climate in the 1950s may have been stifling, the level of material wealth was greater than it had been in the past—particularly in white communities. Historically speaking, therefore, the society into which Dylan was born was far from conventional—as Cantwell writes, the 1950s was 'perplexingly divided by the intermingling of an emerging mass society and a decaying industrial culture'.[181] In this respect, Dylan differed from the older generations of folk-protest singers that he sought to emulate. Whilst Woody Guthrie, an itinerant folk singer in the age of the dustbowl and the Great Depression and one of Dylan's early heroes, found his *modus operandi* in the grind of destitution and empty stomachs, Dylan was concerned more with a sickness of the soul, with mind-numbing conformity. Thus, Rodnitsky writes, 'whereas Woody had drifted around the country to escape small-town depression, Dylan adopted Guthrie to escape small-town monotony'. [182]

The vehicle for Dylan's exploration of radically different ideas was, of course, music. Dylan spent much of his childhood exploring different styles of music, from country-and-western, rhythm and blues, to rock and roll—in particular, Little Richard and Elvis Presley.[183] To this extent, Dylan's early musical experiments can be understood as analogous with Guthrie's travelling stories. Anthony Scaduto juxtaposes the stifling conformity of Hibbing

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[179] John Gibbens, *The Nightingale's Code: A Poetic Study of Bob Dylan* (London: Touched Press, 2001), 4.

[180] John Dean, "The Importance of the Folk Singer in the American Sixties. A Case Study of Bob Dylan," *Études Anglaises* 64, no. 3 (2011): 147.

[181] Robert Cantwell, *When we were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 319. It should be added to this that mechanisation in the production of cotton and food was also transforming the rural culture, and played no small part in the northward migration of unemployed black workers.

[182] Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn: The Folk-Protest Singer as a Cultural Hero,* 105.

[183] Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1986), 38-40.

against music, which, he argues, 'opened Bob Zimmerman's head as it opened the heads of so many growing up at the end of the repressed fifties.'[184] For Lawrence Epstein, 'Dylan found it [Hibbing] conformist, culturally oppressive, a place in which he couldn't be creative… enough'[185]—music, again, provided a refuge from cultural stagnation. Music, for Dylan, became a form of travelling. For Dylan, as for many of his generation, technological innovation and the development of the mass media meant that he 'could live in… [his] own world and at… [his] leisure take in electronic signals from the outside.'[186] This is in contrast to Guthrie's experience of music, which is often seen as more immediate (less mediated). (In reality we know that Guthrie's experience of music was no less mediated than Dylan's—in the sense that *all* music is mediated—but there remains an important experiential distinction between music found browsing at the local record shop and music encountered through the process of physical travel.)[187]

Interpreted alongside Dylan's focus on intellectual freedom, we are therefore presented with two distinct but analogous figures. On the one hand, is Woody Guthrie—a traveller, motivated by material poverty; on the other stands Bob Dylan—provincial, but striving for intellectual freedom. The distinction between the concrete and the imagined is important because it suggests a number of differences between Guthrie and Dylan's generation, as well as points of tension between coexisting struggles in the 1960s, such as the civil rights movement and the counterculture. Whilst the former was concerned with political and economic emancipation, the latter was frequently concerned with freedom of the mind. Indeed, Dylan's concern with the freedom of ideas certainly presupposed material privileges not granted to large swathes of American society, particularly African American.

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[184] Scaduto, *Bob Dylan*, 5.
[185] Epstein, *Political Folk Music in America from its Origins to Bob Dylan*, 143.
[186] Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn: The Folk-Protest Singer as a Cultural Hero,* 104.
[187] The distinction between Dylan and Guthrie is not, of course, absolute: Dylan did travel, though significantly less than Guthrie, and Guthrie did encounter music through records.

Dylan and Politics: A Quick Dip

Although Dylan was actively involved in composing music from a young age, it was not until he was eighteen that he developed an interest in folk music. After a year spent studying at the University of Minnesota, Dylan dropped out and became active in the Dinkytown folk music circuit. It was in this period that he adopted Bob Dylan as a pseudonym. The following year, in September 1960, Dylan travelled to New York to meet his musical idol, Woody Guthrie, and shortly afterwards to Greenwich Village to establish himself as a folk singer.

Upon arrival at the Village, some were suspicious of his affected persona, but within three months of his arrival Dylan was playing regularly in the Village coffee houses and had earned the respect of a good deal of the community. In September 1961, after appearing on Carolyn Hester's eponymous titled third album, Dylan was signed to Colombia Records. Dylan's first album contained ten covers and two originals and was a commercial failure. Though Dylan was not politically active at this early stage, he was well known for what Cossu refers to as his 'hard-core aesthetics'—rough voice, informal speech, with a modest communicative performance: Guthrie-style! As the first of the 'hard-core' folk singers to be signed to a major label, Dylan was a portent of things to come.

Soon after completing his first album, Dylan began to focus on writing original works, in particular topical songs. This political turn has been connected with the influence of Suze Rotolo, a secretary for CORE with a strong left-wing upbringing, with whom Dylan lived from early 1962.[188] It has also been understood as related to the trajectory of the folk movement as a whole. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the folk movement was torn between ideas about authenticity and commercialism. Advocates of the former lobbied for the preservation of

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[188] Clinton Heylin, *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades Revisited* (New York: Harper Entertainment, 2003), 88-89.

tradition, both with respect to musical forms and the means of transmission (immediate participatory performance, rather than mediated radio), whilst the latter argued for the benefits of the music industry in penetrating larger markets—in spreading the word, so to speak.[189] For the more socially conscious individuals (such as Pete Seeger and Irwin Silber) this contradiction was resolved in a form of authenticity defined by political engagement. The measure of good folk music for this latter group was not to be found solely in fidelity to historical forms, or in constitutive social relations, but rather in commitment to progressive social change. The mass media, it was believed, could play a vital role in disseminating progressive ideas—Dylan became the poster-boy for this brand of folk protest.

Written in April 1962 and published the following month on the cover of *Broadside* magazine, 'Blowin' in the Wind' established Dylan as 'the undisputed leader of the folk-protest genre.'[190] The melody of 'Blowin' in the Wind' was based on a Black spiritual entitled 'No More Auction Block', and, after popularisation by Peter, Paul, and Mary, shot Dylan to fame. More than just being a passage to commercial success, however, it was perhaps this song more than any other that contributed to the idea of Dylan as the spokesperson of a generation, thus inextricably binding him to the political fate of the decade. Whilst reviewing *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963), American journalist Janet Maslin exemplifies this view writing that '[t]hese were the songs that established [Dylan] as the voice of his generation—someone who implicitly understood how concerned young Americans felt about nuclear disarmament and the growing movement for civil rights: his mixture of moral authority and nonconformity was perhaps the most timely of his attributes.'[191]

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[189] Cossu, *It Ain't me, Babe: Bob Dylan and the Performance of Authenticity*, 25.
[190] Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn: The Folk-Protest Singer as a Cultural Hero*, 107.
[191] Jim Miller, *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll* (London: Pan, 1981), 220.

Part of the attraction of Dylan's image was the way that it seemed to embody much of what the folk protest movement stood for: social consciousness, honesty, intimacy, generosity, and anti-materialism. Like his mythologized upbringing, however, this image was carefully constructed by Dylan. One week after the release of *The Times They Are a-Changin'*, on January 20, 1964, Dylan wrote a letter to *Broadside* magazine. The tone of the address is reminiscent of Grossberg's first category of authenticity, which emphasizes commitment to progressive political change and a desire for closeness, to be rooted in the folk community. Some excerpts:

An I feel guilty
God how can I help not feel guilty
I walk down on the bowery and give money away
An still I feel guilty for I know I do not
Have enuff money t give away…
An people say 'think a yourself, dylan, you're
Gonna need it someday' an I say yeah yeah yeah
…
I don't understand the blacklist
I don't understand about how people aginst it go along
With it
I'm talkin about the full thing
Not just a few of us refusing t be on the show
…
I'm movin out a here soon
Yes the landlord has beaten me it hurts me t tell you
This place I am typin in is so filthy
My clothes cover the floor an once in a while
I pick up something an use it for a blanket
…the plaster falls in constantly
An the floor is tiltin an rottin

But somehow there is a beauty to it

Colombia records gave me a record player

Oh the goodness of some keeps on amazin me

An sometimes I play it.

He signs off:

Love t everybody in your house

See yuh

Softly and sleepy

But ready and waitin

Bob Dylan. [192]

And yet, the facts of reality contradict this image of a politically committed artist.[193] Although it is difficult to overstate the role played by Dylan's music—and, indeed, the *idea* of Dylan—in reflecting and even stimulating political change, regarding his personal involvement in active political struggle Dylan's record is far less impressive. John Dean examines Dylan in relation to Joan Baez, a politically committed artist who (after around 1962) 'consistently took physical-political risks'—such as going to jail, marrying a draft resistor, and aiding in the desegregation in the South.[194] For Dean, whilst Baez repeatedly put herself at the forefront of social protest, Dylan was more reluctant to place himself in the line of fire. This reticence is also suggested by James Dunlap, who writes that 'as late as mid-1963, despite his growing role as a spokesman, Dylan had never been to the South.'[195] In fact, only encouragement from the folk singer Theodore Bikel—and financial remuneration for Dylan's manager, Albert

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[192] Bob Dylan, "A Letter from Bob Dylan," *Broadside*, January 20 1964.

[193] It's interesting to note that around this time Dylan was making roughly $2,500 a month from sales from his 1963 album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. By 2015 standards this makes roughly $20,000 a month. Scaduto, *Bob Dylan*, 44.

[194] Dean, "The Importance of the Folk Singer in the American Sixties. A Case Study of Bob Dylan," 345.

[195] J. Dunlap, "Through the Eyes of Tom Joad: Patterns of American idealism, Bob Dylan, and the Folk Protest Movement," *Popular Music and Society* 29, no. 5 (2006): 564.

Grossman—led Dylan to Greenwood, Mississippi, to participate in a voter registration drive.[196] Compared to Baez, who earlier in 1963 escorted a young Black girl into her newly integrated school through a hostile crowd of racists, and, in 1964, participated in the Free Speech Movement, leading a group of one thousand activists to occupation of the University of California's Berkeley campus administration building, Dylan's engagement with actual political struggle was minimal. Thus, as Hajdu has argued, Dylan was perhaps not concerned so much with rebellion as with exploring the *idea* of rebellion.[197]

Similarly, Dylan was more concerned with the 'idea' of the folk rather than its reality. Whilst the use of commercial networks to disseminate protest music was not unique to the 1960s—one need only consider the chart success of The Weavers in the late 1940s and early 1950s[198]—with the rapid expansion of markets and improvements in recording techniques and sound reproduction that followed the end of the Second World War, the music industry that Seeger and others had sought to use against itself was not the same as the one confronting the 1960s generation. In his book on Dylan, Marshall writes that 'because the folk revival happened in a mass-mediated environment, Dylan became a folk music star in a manner inconceivable to someone of Seeger's generation.'[199] Marshall's conceptualisation of Dylan as 'star' draws attention to a crucial distinction between the protest singers of the Old Left and those of the 1960s. Whilst the early folk singers have generally been considered the 'personification of the multitudes', stardom introduced a strong element of individuality. Thus,

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[196] Marqusee, *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art*, 75.

[197] David Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Fariña, and Richard Fariña* (New York: Picador, 2011), 67.

[198] Indeed, even the neo-ethnic revivalists were heavily dependent upon commercial production – see, for example, Harry Smith's immensely influential Anthology of American Folk Music, without which the traditionalists would have had scant material. In this sense, the absolute division between the traditionalists and the commercialists is difficult to maintain. Harry Everett Smith, *Anthology of American Folk Music*, (New York: Sony Music Special Products/Smithsonian Folkways, 1997).

[199] Marshall, *Bob Dylan: The Never Ending Star*, 78.

Marshall writes, the former were 'representations of the folk', while the latter were 'representative of the folk'.[200]

The extent to which this individualism was unique to the 1960s or already evident in the folk songs of the Old Left has been the subject of wide discussion. Eyerman and Jamison consider the transition from folk music to rock music in terms of its progressive specialisation: 'The singer, who earlier had been a song-writer, performer, producer, and activist all rolled into one, became an 'artist' projecting a personal vision rather than a collectively political one'.[201] Certainly, the folk singers of the 1960s were subject to far greater commercial pressures than their predecessors and, as such, the turn toward more individualistic forms of musical expression can be understood as a consequence of the market. Roy, on the other hand, is more critical of the Old Left, arguing that the very category of folk music presupposed a difference from the folk and, as such, a degree of specialisation: 'the people who indigenously do the music do not call it folk music, and those who do call it folk music are rarely very folk-like.'[202]

In an article entitled 'How Social Movements Do Culture', Roy studies the effects of the division of labour, power, and social inclusion in the production of music within social movements. Following Christopher Small,[203] Roy argues that music is not a 'thing', but an 'activity'—something that people do;[204] consequently, in studying music in the context of political struggle, the constitutive social relations are of central importance to Roy: 'we need

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[200] Ibid. Not all music of the second folk revival was subject to this. As David E. James writes, 'the early sixties did produce a participatory musical practice of substantial cultural weight and range that radically revised the social relations and ideological possibilities of capitalist music. In this practice, records were by definition marginal, and where they did exist they were not made to valorize invested capital. Rather they preserved other activities and made them publicly available.' David James, "The Vietnam War and American Music," *Social Text*, no. 23 (1989): 129.

[201] Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, 107.

[202] Roy, "How Social Movements Do Culture," 92.

[203] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Also see Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

[204] Roy, "How Social Movements Do Culture," 88.

to move beyond attending to the content of art, music, drama, literature, etc. to examine how people relate to each other while doing music, drama, literature, etc.'[205] Taking the Old Left as an example, the failure to create a 'singing movement' is explained in terms of the primarily hierarchical performer-audience approach to the production of music. Roy continues,

> We need to recognize that the social relationship by which one person or group has a monopoly on creativity, which they disperse to audiences, is only one kind of social relationship for culture. The claim here is that many people doing art, doing music, doing drama, doing literature, not just consuming it, is an extraordinarily powerful mode for both solidifying commitment to social movements and for helping them achieve their goals.[206]

Thus, participatory music-making may reconstitute political power through collective action. By unproblematically adopting a model of music practice which exacerbated his distance from the movement base, Dylan was less able to maintain links between himself and the community on behalf of whom he was said to speak.

Dylan's dalliance with these images did not last long, however. In fact, for an artist considered so central to the political identity of the 1960s, his romance with politics was phenomenally short-lived. Beginning at a CORE benefit gig in February 1962, for which he wrote and performed his first protest song, 'The Death of Emmett Till' (*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*),[207] Dylan's direct engagement with politics lasted no more than twenty months.[208] It

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[205] Ibid., 86.

[206] Ibid.

[207] In their history of the Black Panther Party, Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin summarize the appalling events surrounding Emmett Till's death: 'In 1955, Till, a black fourteen-year-old from Chicago visiting relatives in Mississippi, whistled at a white woman. That night, local whites kidnaped him from his relatives' house and beat him brutally. They fastened a large metal fan around his neck with barbed wire, shot him in the head, and dumped his mutilated corpse in the Tallahatchie River. Witnesses identified the murderers, but the accused men were exonerated after only an hour of deliberation by an all-white male jury. After the case was tried (and could not be appealed), the murderers publicly confessed that they had killed Till for flirting with a white woman.' Joshua Bloom and Martin Waldo E., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2013), 75.

[208] Dylan, however, was a prolific song-writer, and in this short time he produced a mountain of material: 'Let Me Die in My Footsteps', 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', 'Only a Pawn in Their Game', 'With God on Our Side', 'Masters of War', 'When the Ship Comes In', and 'Hattie Carroll' to name but a few of his protest songs.

has often been said that the July 1965 Newport Folk Festival, where Dylan famously plugged in his guitar (and Seeger his ears), was the death of the folk protest movement. The truth is, however, that Dylan had long since sought to dissociate himself from politics. In a mid-1964 interview with the critic Nat Hentoff, Dylan explained, 'Me, I don't want to write for people anymore—you know, be a spokesman. From now on, I want to write from inside me ...I'm not part of no movement... I just can't make it with any organisation.'[209]

In February 1964, Dylan set out on a road trip across the US, confiding to friends that he 'wants to go out and feel what the people are feeling, find out what's going' on.'[210] On this trip, Dylan composed one of the last of his early protest songs, 'Chimes of Freedom'.[211] Dylan's final departure from politics, however, came in his 1964 song, 'My Back Pages'—'a dense, image-crammed critique of the movement he had celebrated in "The Times They are a-Changin'".'[212] In this song, Dylan excoriates the 'lies that life is black and white', and renounces the hypocrisy of an authoritarian approach to liberation—'I become my enemy in the instant that I preach', echoing Adorno's sentiment that '[t]o say "we" and mean "I" is one of the most recondite insults.'[213]

Because of its situation between two different periods of Dylan's artistic and political development, 'My Back Pages' provides a particularly interesting case study for this chapter. Through its text, 'My Back Pages' challenges one of the underlying assumptions of the folk protest movement: that music can and should be used as a force for progressive political change. Simultaneously, however, the musical material remains firmly within the tradition of folk-ballads. Like much of his early material, 'My Back Pages' is instrumentally sparse, with

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[209] Mike Marqusee, "The Politics of Bob Dylan," *Red Pepper* 2003.
[210] Scaduto, *Bob Dylan*, 164.
[211] Dunlap, "Through the Eyes of Tom Joad: Patterns of American idealism, Bob Dylan, and the Folk Protest Movement," 566.
[212] Marqusee, "The Politics of Bob Dylan."
[213] Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 190.

just Dylan's voice and an accompanying acoustic guitar. The song is partly based on an English folk song called 'Young but Growing', which Dylan covered directly on *The Basement Tapes* in 1975; and the mournful melody is reminiscent of Dylan's 1963 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.' Thus, despite the critical elements of the song text, Dylan was apparently not yet ready to jettison the stylistic devices of the folk protest movement.

This apparent contradiction between the song text and the musical material goes some way toward explaining the false idea that it was not until Dylan 'plugged in' that he rejected his political past. It also explains something about the political power of musical material. As Eyerman and Jamison have pointed out, historical associations with political movements and ideologies can become objectified into the musical material in such a way as to challenge the authority of the song text. Far from just interpreting song text, Eyerman and Jamison argue 'that the role and place of music needs to be interpreted through a broader framework in which tradition and ritual are understood as… encoded and embodied forms of collective meaning and memory.'[214] Authenticity within the folk protest movement was bound up with ideas of collective political struggle, but also with the musical material itself. So when Dylan lambasted the idea of the 'We' in the song text of 'My Back Pages', the implicit 'We' that existed in the musical material pulled in the other direction. Little wonder then, that Dylan's rejection of politics was not widely appreciated until he also abandoned the folk idiom a year later, in particular, with the release of his 1965 album *Bringing It All Back Home*.

The specific reasons why Dylan should have turned away from protest songs at this point has been the subject of considerable debate. Many critics see the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as one of the main contributory factors to Dylan's rejection of politics, with some arguing that he became disillusioned with the political establishment,[215]

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[214] Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, 44.
[215] See Marshall, *Bob Dylan: The Never Ending Star*, 48; and Scaduto, *Bob Dylan,* 161.

and others that he became fearful for his own personal safety.[216] Still others have connected this move with Dylan's artistic temperament, prioritising individual expression above the needs of the collective.[217] Whatever the reasons, Dylan was not alone in his disillusionment. As the 1960s developed, the cracks in the US's liberal facade progressively came into focus: the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963; President Johnson's betrayal of the civil rights movement at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in New Jersey, and his broken promise to scale-down the war in Vietnam; the repression of free speech on university campuses. There were plenty of reasons to be cynical, and there were plenty of people who turned away from politics as a result of these conditions. Consequently, Dylan's rejection of politics did not coincide with a collapse in his popularity, but rather with his rise to massive commercial success. After his first album (1962) sold just 5000 copies in one year, *Freewheelin'* (1963) sold roughly 10,000 a month and reached 22 in the US Billboard 200; *Another Side of Bob Dylan* saw him slip down to 43, but *Bringing it all Back Home* (1965) reached number 6 and *Blonde on Blonde* (1966) reached 9, both spawning a number of highly successful singles (two and four, respectively).

The social make-up of the 1960s political movements changed rapidly according to surrounding conditions; consequently, when Dylan stopped producing protest songs he did not exit the 'movement' per se, but rather realigned himself with different elements of it. Of course, Dylan was unequivocal in rejecting the idea of commitment to collective political projects, but there were enough similarly politically frustrated groups within the movement to provide him

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[216] Ray Pratt, *Rhythm and Resistance: Explorations in the Political Uses of Popular Music* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 208.

[217] Fluxman, "Bob Dylan and the Dialectic of Enlightenment: Critical Lyricist in the Age of High Capitalism."; Stefán Snaevarr, "Dylan as a Rortian: Bob Dylan, Richard Rorty, Postmodernism, and Political Skepticism," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 48, no. 4 (2014).

with a home.[218] An examination of this 'new kind of politics' forms the basis of the following section.

2. Dylan and the Collective Myth of the Individual

Post-Protest Dylan

After his protest period, in a 1964 conversation with the folk protest singer Phil Ochs, Dylan was reported as saying, '[t]he stuff you're writing is bullshit, because politics is bullshit. It's all unreal. The only thing that's real is inside you. Your feelings. Just look at the world you're writing about and you'll see you're wasting your time. The world is, well... it's just absurd.'[219] Rather than seeing this as a move away from politics per se, many critics have rightly understood this as a shift toward a different form of politics. Musically, this also drew Dylan away from notions of authenticity associated with the folk community and its concomitant meanings. Indeed, taking the 1965 tracks 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)' and 'Maggie's Farm' as examples, Williams argues that Dylan 'becomes the leading articulator of a whole new kind of politics, the struggle of new and in many cases unformed world views against the rigidity of the old, entrenched concepts (and the mechanisms that support those concepts).'[220] In this respect, Dylan's turn toward ideas of autonomy and independence is political to the extent that it is seen to reject existing regimes of thought.[221] However, the assumption that the individual subject represents a refuge from the 'corrupt' social whole is problematic to say the least. Indeed, the second Adorno quotation cited at the beginning of this chapter—'[i]n many

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[218] Not unlike the folk protest movement itself, which had political and apolitical (revivalist) tendencies within it, audiences of Dylan's new music were similarly conflicted, with some rejecting explicitly political gestures and others remained committed to progressive social change.

[219] Scaduto, *Bob Dylan*, 176.

[220] Williams, *Bob Dylan, 1960-1973: Performing Artist,* 131.

[221] See Lawrence Wilde, "The Cry of Humanity: Dylan's Expressionist Period," in *The Political Art of Bob Dylan,* ed. David Boucher and Gary Browning (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

people it is already an impertinence to say "I"'[222]—demands that we take such a critical perspective.

The reason that so many writers have been inclined to see Dylan's rejection of protest song as a commitment to a new form of politics, rather than simply as a form of introspection, has to do with the myth which Dylan studiously constructed throughout his career. In other contexts, the turn toward narratives of the self has been understood as a refusal to confront the 'We' as a subject of representation and interpreted as an avoidance of the 'other'.[223] Consequently, such approaches have been criticized for their failure to acknowledge the social mediation of the individual. Seen in terms of Grossberg's concepts of authenticity, this introspective development can usefully be seen in terms of a shift to more bodily, or sexual notion of authenticity. However, there are important ways in which Dylan does retain a sense of this 'other', even after his abandonment of protest songs. In order to consider this problem, I consider Dylan's myth within the broader context of the counterculture and the New Left.

Situating Dylan: The Counterculture and the New Left

The term 'counterculture' was first coined by Theodore Roszak in a 1969 study entitled *The Making of a Counterculture*. Central to his thesis, is the apparent complicity of the dominant categories of political thought with what he calls the 'technocracy' (a managerial regime in which the whole of industrial society is subordinated to the controls of a technocratic elite). He writes, 'the technocracy grows without resistance, even despite its most appalling failures and criminalities, primarily because its potential critics continue trying to cope with these

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[222] Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 50.
[223] Such as in Christopher Pavsek's critical study of autobiographical filmmaking in German cinema. Christopher Pavsek, "The Impertinence of Saying "I": Sylvia Schedelbauer's Personal Documentaries," in *The Autobiographical Turn in Germanophone Documentary and Experimental Film*, ed. Robin Curtis and Angelica Fenner (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2014).

breakdowns in terms of antiquated categories.'[224] Tory vs Labour, Republican vs Democrat, French Communist vs Gaullist, Socialist vs Capitalist—for Roszak, the rejection of these categories was one of the unifying elements of the counterculture, bringing together 'radicals' and 'dropouts'. Not coincidentally, such 'anti-dichotomous' tendencies in the counterculture have also been noted in Dylan's post-protest music.[225]

Although more recent theory has tended to complicate Roszak's view, highlighting, for instance, common features between the 1960s generation and their predecessors,[226] or differences rather than similarities between the radicals (also known as the politicos) and the dropouts (hippies),[227] the relationship between these two strains of the counterculture remains a persistent theme in the contemporary literature.[228] According to Eyerman and Jamison, 'the 1960s are interesting primarily as a key stage in the recurrent attempts by activist and artist alike to confront the dialectical tension between cultural and political practice.'[229] Thus, at a broader sociological level, the tension between the politicos and the hippies is characterised as a dialectic between culture and politics.[230] For many, the relationship between these two spheres was one of the most central issues of the era. Carl Oglesby, President of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) from 1965 to 1966, argues that the Old Left had failed to understand the relation between political and cultural rebellion. The objective of the 60s generation, he

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[224] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber, 1970), 8-9.

[225] Snaevarr, "Dylan as a Rortian: Bob Dylan, Richard Rorty, Postmodernism, and Political Skepticism," 49.

[226] See, for example, Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*; Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (London: Bookmarks, 1988); Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left.*

[227] Dean, "The Importance of the Folk Singer in the American Sixties. A Case Study of Bob Dylan."

[228] It is interesting to note the parallel developments of the civil rights movement at this time, as it began to fracture along political (Black Panther Party, for instance) and cultural (Amiri Baraka and other Black Nationalist artists) lines.

[229] Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth* Century, 107-08.

[230] This view is supported by Dean, "The Importance of the Folk Singer in the American Sixties. A Case Study of Bob Dylan."; *Eyerman, Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*; and Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*. It is also the central focus of Eric Drott's 2011 study of 1968 France, in which he examines 'the range of possible relationships between culture and politics that were imagined, advocated, and put into practice.' Drott, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968-*1981, 14.

suggests, was 'to bring the cultural and the political into the most intimate interplay'.[231] One might suggest, therefore, that what has often been understood as a rift between politics and culture, is better considered as ways of *doing* politics culturally and *doing* culture politically.[232]

As suggested by Oglesby, the New Left in the 1950s and 1960s generally defined itself in relation to the Old Left, particularly its association with the perceived 'workerism' of the Communist Party of the USA and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. For some, this relationship was built on opposition; for others, the New left was seen as the heir to the political struggles of the past. According to the socialist historian Van Gosse, the New Left was a collective project to overcome the various discriminations that plagued US society, including those defined by race, gender, sexuality, and age group, many of which the Old Left was felt to have neglected.[233] Issues of 'identity' might be said to have been at the heart of the New Left's political projects, although there is a risk of overstating the separation of these struggles when seen in these terms.

There are also important ways in which the New Left continued the work of the Old. In reality, both periods of political struggle in the US shared an abiding, but often implicit for the 1960s generation, emphasis on social class. For the Old Left, class was defined in terms of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; by the 1950s and 1960s, political struggle centred around minority groups who were themselves disproportionately represented at the bottom of society. The issue of 'class society', albeit in different forms, was therefore common to both phases of conflict.[234] For the New Left, the war in Vietnam played an instrumental role in bringing together these different forces. Whilst some highlighted the congruence between the war and

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[231] Quoted in David R. Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 131.

[232] For a discussion on the cultural politics of the avant-garde, also see *Stuart D. Hobbs, The End of the American Avant Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 61

[233] Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.

[234] This is precisely what Gosse is referring to when he characterises the New left as a 'movement of movements.' Ibid.

the 'internal colonialism' to which minority groups were subjected,[235] or questioned the

paradox of fighting the communist monster in the name of liberties they did not themselves

possess, others stressed the necessity of war in capitalist society, relating the deaths in Vietnam

to a military-industrial complex which lined the pockets of the rich.[236] To be sure, there were

less radical (and less far-sighted) interests involved in the anti-war movement, such as the

simple desire not to be drafted, or the moral opposition to violence, but common opposition to

the Vietnam War helped to unify many different groups and individuals on the Left.

For Marcuse, one of the common themes of the 1960s was the rejection of instrumental

reason. In his critique of the New Left, Marcuse writes:

> The movement took the form… of a cultural revolution from the very beginning; it conceived of the revolution of the 20th century as one in which not only political and economic demands, but also radically other desires and hopes would be articulated: the desire for a new moral sense, for a more human environment, for a complete 'emancipation of the senses' (Marx), in other words, a liberation of the senses from the compulsion to perceive people and things merely as objects of exchange. 'Power to the imagination!' The New Left was concerned with the emancipation of imagination from the restraints of instrumental reason.[237]

Although Marcuse ascribes these features to the New Left, the 'desire for a new moral sense,

for a more human environment, for a complete "emancipation of the senses",' are also central

features of the counterculture, particularly as described by Roszak. The same could be said for

the opposition to instrumental reason, which, given the fact that Dylan came to renounce his

music being used for political purposes, is particularly important for this study.

There are also important organizational differences between the New Left and the

counterculture. In his study of *Social Movements in the 1960s*, historian Stewart Burns

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[235] An important document in this school of thought was Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

[236] Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 39.

[237] Herbert Marcuse, "The Failure of the New Left?," in *New German Critique*, no 18 (Autumn, 1979): 4.

examines the conflicts between the New Left's communal social relations and the 'ethic[s] of self-reliance' typical to the counterculture.[238] The ways in which politics and culture interacted with ideas about the individual and the community throughout the 1960s are also important for understanding the trajectory of the counterculture. In analyzing Hunter S. Thompson's classic text, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the literary critic, Manuel Luis Martinez provides a trenchant critique of the political limits of individualism within the counterculture:

> What Thompson does not seem to acknowledge is that the failure to cohere, to construct a viable *communitas*, has more to do with the superficial nature of the appropriation of marginal identity without a profound commitment to struggles at the periphery. This failure to form a lasting alliance with racial struggles facilitated later reintegration into the mainstream for student and middle-class rebels, an option not open to their counterparts of color. Thus the barrier to a long-lasting social alternative was based in large part on the commitment to individualism rather than to civil rights and a communally based egalitarianism.[239]

For other elements of the counterculture, however, the New Left's commitment to collective struggle posed a risk to individual freedoms, and was seen as complicit with the technocracy. One of the characteristic features of the postwar period was the transition from a primarily industrial culture to a mass consumer society. As economic growth reduced unemployment and labour struggles reduced the working week, capital accumulation came to depend increasingly upon the commodification of free time—that is, time not spent engaged in economically productive labour.[240] This was the context in which the youth movement came

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[238] Stewart Burns, *Social Movements of the 1960s: Searching for Democracy* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 101.

[239] Manuel Luis Martínez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (London; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 139.

[240] Whilst there has always been a sense in which leisure time is a necessary component of work itself (recharging batteries, for instance), prior to the emergence of a 'mass' consumer culture free time was to a great extent embedded outside of the world of commercial exchange, and thus stood in contradiction to the working day. By the 1950s, however, leisure had become synonymous with consumption. Cinema, TV, music, theatre—all had become mass industries, churning out hits with mechanical regularity. Beyond entertainment, consumer technologies were mass-produced to service the needs of the individual or family, needs which the industries themselves often created. See Theodor W. Adorno and J. M. Bernstein, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

to flourish. The Beat Generation were some of the first to smell the stench of inauthenticity in this period, an insight which drove Jack Kerouac onto the road, inspired the directionless prose of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, and besieged the young Jim Stark in 'Rebel Without a Cause'; but the sense of cultural inertia persisted into the 1960s, finding perhaps its most famous formulation in Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*: 'The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment.'[241] It is against this surrender of individuality that much of the counterculture defined itself.

But as is so often the case in such matters, both the counterculture and the New Left have more in common than first meets the eye. Although Martinez observes that, in failing to address problems with the existing political structure, the counterculture was to a large extent condemned to a form of submissiveness (and thus to reproduce many of society's existing structures of inequality), a common thread which weaves throughout Martinez's work is the existence of a sphere of privilege which insulated members of the counterculture from many of the worst elements of political oppression.[242] Thus, to the extent that countercultural individualism can be seen as intersecting with ideas of community, it was as a community of individuals defined by a privileged social status. Consequently, the idea of the individual which predominated in certain elements of the counterculture was often closely bound up with a collective identity defined by social class, race, and generation.[243]

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[241] Herbert Marcuse*, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1991 [1964]), 11.
[242] Martínez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera*, 7, 75, & 121-123.
[243] That much of the counterculture was dominated by middle class youths is borne out by Paul Krugman's history of economic inequality in the US. Paul R. Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (2009).

Dylan and the Counterculture

In situating Dylan within this complex of political forces, studies of his musical output have yielded crucial insights. With the release of *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (his first post-protest song album) in 1964, Williams argues that Dylan finally becomes the character he set out to be—'there is a feeling of arrival about this album. What has arrived is a sort of mythic being, a projected entity, "Bob Dylan".' Previously, Williams suggests, Dylan was concerned to tell the audience who he was, with getting the audience to 'see him in a certain way'; however, with the release of *Another Side* Dylan is finally content to just *be*: 'the puppet walks by himself'.[244] The music critic, Tim Riley, has also remarked on the deepening of the Dylan myth as the decade progressed: 'his mystique became all-consuming.'[245] The idea that Dylan eventually became the myth is highly suggestive.

Writing in more explicitly political terms, Fluxman has suggested that Dylan's rejection of protest song does not constitute a rejection of social criticism as such, but rather as a shift to a more 'sophisticated political perspective.' Whilst previously Dylan's songs were characterised by 'moral outrage', after he had moved away from protest music he no longer relied on some 'pre-established truth in terms of which reality is to be judged.' He continues:

> The focus of Dylan's critique is the contents of his own experience; social institutions are approached through the artist's own experience. It is precisely through presenting the social world through his own experience enables [sic] the sensitive individual to reveal the manifold social relationships and social structures around him. By being sensitive to the various alienating situations he finds himself in, Dylan is able to capture the varied and subtle ways in which Enlightenment society maintains its control.[246]

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[244] Williams, *Bob Dylan, 1960-1973: Performing Artist*, 115-16.
[245] Tim Riley, "Another Side of Bob Dylan," *World Literature Today* 79, no. 3/4 (2005): 9.
[246] Fluxman, "Bob Dylan and the Dialectic of Enlightenment: Critical Lyricist in the Age of High Capitalism," 96-97.

Although Williams, Riley, and Fluxman note the historical coincidence of Dylan's introspective turn and his rejection of protest song, they do not connect this change with the concept of the individual as understood within the 1960s.

Situating Dylan amidst the New Left and the counterculture means understanding the ways that he simultaneously disavowed collective political action only to affirm it through his mythic identity. Part of the reason for Dylan's ascendance in the early 1960s, I suggest, is rooted in his ability to draw upon a stock of cultural images which were both individualistic in content but part of the collective American imagination. It was, however, only with time that this tendency came into focus. The influence of Guthrie's hard-travelling mystique is ever-present within Dylan's early image, providing a great source of legitimacy within Greenwich Village. As an image, the travelling hobo builds upon the more general themes of exploration, the Wild West, steamboats and railroads, and, above all, the frontier. The mythology of the frontier—particularly as understood through the (1890) work of Fredrick Jackson Turner—and its relation to the American psyche, has been usefully summarized by the historian Gerald Nash:

> [The frontiering experience] molded the distinctive character of Americans, shaping traits such as individualism, hard work, and self-reliance; it was the major determinant of the democratic character of their political institutions; and it provided American cultural life with unique characteristics.[247]

Though interpretations vary greatly, the importance of this myth to the American psyche has been remarked upon by a number of scholars.[248]

Although Dylan's rejection of protest song had significant effects upon this myth, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that this reorientation was somehow inconsistent

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[247] Gerald D. Nash, *Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991) 3.

[248] For an ethnographic study of the American Dream and its many interpretations, see Studs Terkel, *American Dreams* (London: Paladin, Granada Publishing Ltd., 1982).

with his earlier behaviour. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the Dylan myth was never really about constancy or holding true to a particular stable set of values; Dylan was a 'shape-shifter',[249] a modern day Proteus, more akin to the restless artist than the political activist. One of the defining features of the Dylan myth is its constant evolution. Williams writes, 'if his given name and his natural voice and the circumstances of his childhood didn't seem to him appropriate vessels that were moving him, he was ready and eager to change them all.'[250] Timothy Hampton goes a step further, explaining Dylan's constant skin-shedding in terms of a 'poetics of escape.'[251] It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that even after the mythical nature of Dylan's early biography was exposed in a 1963 *Newsweek* article his credibility came through relatively unscathed.[252]

This protean figure possibly finds its most complete expression in the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, who Dylan did in fact cite as an influence early in his career.[253] A child prodigy, Rimbaud was born in 1854 and had taken early retirement by the age of nineteen, choosing instead a life of filth and squalor. In a detailed study of his final poem, 'Une Saison en Enfer', Gerald Macklin remarks that a defining feature of Rimbaud is his tendency to 'adopt a position only to disown it, to espouse a style or thought process only to move rapidly forward to a new outlook and form of expression.'[254] For Macklin, Rimbaud embodies the contradictions of the modern individual more than any other poet: isolation driving him to constant self-renewal, but leading no closer to self-understanding. This futile exploration of the

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[249] Cossu, *It Ain't me, Babe: Bob Dylan and the Performance of Authenticity*, xiii.

[250] Williams, *Bob Dylan, 1960-1973: Performing Artist,* 15.

[251] Timothy Hampton, "Tangled Generation: Dylan, Kerouac, Petrarch, and the Poetics of Escape," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 4 (2013).

[252] More substantial studies, such as Andrea Cossu's *It Ain't me Babe*, have looked in detail at Dylan's protean characteristics across the breadth of his career; however, what is of paramount concern in this study are the specific ways in which his myth negotiated the tensions between individualism and communalism within the counterculture and the New Left.

[253] Bob Dylan, *Chronicles: Volume 1* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 288.

[254] Gerald Macklin, "Madness and Modernity in Rimbaud's Une Saison en enfer," *Neophilologus* 95, no. 3 (2011): 380.

self is a theme which resonates well with Dylan. It is also a theme which situates Dylan firmly within the tradition of the 60 counterculture.

Conclusions

Developments in Dylan's music reveal much about tensions between the individual and the collective in the counterculture. During his post-protest phase, Dylan's attempts to distance himself from the idea of political commitment only served to increase his perceived political relevance. I have argued that this is because Dylan's music was felt to be more expressive of the 'We' when he had given up trying to use it as a mobilizing force and had begun to explore ideas (or 'myths' as I have argued) associated with the individual. This certainly gives credence to Adorno's claim that 'even out of so-called individual works it is a "We" that speaks and not an "I"—indeed all the more so the less the artworks adapt externally to a "We" and its idiom',[255] but it also brings into view certain contradictions in the counterculture itself. Was it really about individualism? If it was, who were the group of people, numbering in their millions, that catapulted Dylan to fame after he gave up protest song? Do they not constitute a collective of sorts? In answering this question, I examine 'Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being' by the critical theorist and Adorno scholar Robert Hullot-Kentor.

Citing Alexis de Tocqueville, Hullot-Kentor begins controversially by describing the 'American' (by this he means the US) mind as being amongst the least philosophical of any civilization that has walked the earth.[256] In the US, Hullot-Kentor claims, the rights and the wrongs of philosophical disputation are of little consequence; the right of each to express their

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[255] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 167.
[256] Taken at face value, this assertion is essentializing and potentially offensive. However, the content of such remarks need to be understood within the tradition of critical theory, which seeks to examine issues from the perspective of extreme opposites. See the section on 'Mediation through the Extremes' in Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 120.

views, however, is something that many in the US hold dear. The American psyche, for Hullot-Kentor, is remarkable for its 'generalizing' tendencies, its ability to deal not with the content of an exposition, but with its right to be. By way of comparison, Hullot-Kentor defines the philosophical mind as being alike to that of the deity: 'when the deity thinks… he [sic] sees individuals, each separately, each in the resemblances that make each like his fellows as well as in the differences that make him unlike his fellows…. The deity is not ever obliged to make unlike like, or to subsume the particular to the general.'[257] By this definition, the philosophical mind is able to articulate fully the 'one and the many'—for present purposes, the 'I' and the 'We'—whilst the 'unphilosophical mind' would tend to elevate the general as above the particular or, indeed, the particular over the general.

Although on the surface this 'typically American' (postmodern) way of thinking seems to allow for the proliferation of difference ('différance?') and diversity, the levelling out of any criteria by which value might be adduced robs the individual of its specificity at the very moment that it is made possible. In this radically generalizing context, Hullot-Kentor writes, 'all that sounds might as well be called music… every ragged list of words might as well be called a poem… wherever people accumulate is a civilization… everyone who thinks is already a philosopher.' After all, to comment on what encompasses 'music' or 'poetry'—let alone what constitutes good music and good poetry—would presuppose a position in society which sought to circumvent the isolation of the individual, a position like that of 'the deity' or 'the philosopher.'[258] Thus, the particular, the existence of which presupposes the full articulation of the one and the many, becomes a simple reflection of the general.

Hullot-Kentor continues to remark that the origins of this state of mind can be found in the contradiction between a society which has been simultaneously 'deprived of any historical

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[257] Hullot-Kentor. "Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being," 198-199.
[258] Ibid., 198-199.

resonance by the democratic break from tradition' and subjected to a form of socio-economic organization which places each individual in direct competition with the other. It is, of course, a function of generalization that things that are not alike should be treated as if they are. Thus, under the pressure of these conditions, each individual perceives the other in generalizing terms—as alike—and, consequently, as a threat to their own individuality. Because the 'other' is understood as a threat, each individual is 'compelled to insist on wanting to answer every question on the basis of its own self… this mind has no alternative but to take itself to be a general self.' (For Hullot-Kentor, this issue also plays a legitimating role in the market economy, where acts of self-interest are rationalized as beneficial to the general interest.) Consequently, the US psyche remains locked in a cycle where individuality is constantly subverted through its reduction to a general schema, and the possibility of the collective is constantly undermined through the individual's hostility toward it.

So, what does this tell us about Dylan? For a start, it provides a possible theoretical framework for understanding his rejection of collective liberation projects. When Dylan decided that he wanted nothing more to do with 'the movement' this can be understood as a consequence of the perceived threat of the general, the loss of his own individual identity. By itself, this suggestion is not controversial and—as has been shown throughout this chapter—is explicitly evidenced by Dylan himself. However, that Dylan's popularity and perceived relevance soared after he moved away from collective political projects is more interesting. As I have described throughout this chapter, this explosion in his popularity is largely to do with the way that Dylan drew upon a stock of cultural images that were simultaneously individualistic in content but part of the collective national psyche. Bearing in mind Hullot-Kentor's conceptualization of the dynamics between the particular and the general in the United States, I would like to suggest the possibility that Dylan's assertion of individuality was *of necessity* bound up with the collective myth of the individual, as an expression of that which

he perceived himself to have been denied. That is to say, the particular, in the sense that Dylan intended it, no longer existed and, therefore, every attempt to affirm the particular would always be in reality an affirmation of the general. Indeed, his agitation toward the idea of the collective, to the idea that he could be understood in terms of a general scheme, was a symptom of his latent identity with it. Dylan's protestations against the general, I argue, are best understood as a form of overcompensation for his loss of self. As Adorno writes in his 1969 essay 'Subject and Object': 'The more individuals are really degraded to functions of the social totality as it becomes more systematized, the more will man pure and simple, man as a principle with the attributes of creativity and absolute domination, be consoled by exaltation of his mind.'[259] Dylan's rejection of collective politics and the valorisation of the individual can be understood as a compensation for his loss of real power, the loss of the individual. Even in his post protest phase, no amount of individualism could overcome this fact.

Whilst Dylan's relationship to the political movements of the 1950s and 1960s can be understood through the way that myths intersect with ideas of the individual and the collective, a different though related tendency in music of this period can be seen in that of John Coltrane. Rather than being concerned with myths, Coltrane explored ideas of the individual in relation to the collective musical material.

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[259] Theodor W. Adorno, "Subject and Object," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. A. Arato and E Gebhardt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978 [1969]), 500.

Chapter 4. John Coltrane and the Development of a Radical Black Aesthetic

> Even out of so-called individual works it is a 'We' that speaks and not an 'I'—indeed all the more so the less the artworks adapt externally to a 'We' and its idiom.[260] (Adorno)

Introduction

As compared with Highlander and Dylan, Coltrane's relationship with the political movements of the 1950s and 1960s is considerably more oblique. Concerned as he was with the autonomous development of musical material, Coltrane's aesthetics cannot easily be said to be *about* the civil rights movement or the counterculture (at least not in any obvious sense). Although refusing to discuss these political movements in any explicit sense, Coltrane's music can nevertheless be understood as providing an implicit political commentary on the civil rights movement and the counterculture. In order to understand the politics of Coltrane's music it is necessary, I argue, to consider his relationship to the handed down musical materials of bebop, hard bop, and to that of jazz more generally. Thus, what is proposed in this chapter is a materialist reading of Coltrane's music, where the music itself becomes the objective bearer of political meaning.

It is often said that time domesticates even the greatest musical innovations. From Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*; Louis Armstrong's *Hot Five* to Charlie Parker's *Savoy and Dial Sessions*—through the eyes of the present, it is easy to forget their once revolutionary status.[261] And yet in spite of this powerful historical tendency, to this

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[260] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 167.
[261] For a thoroughgoing critique of the complex and interdependent relationship between the old and the new, see Carl Dahlhaus. '"New Music" as Historical Category.' In *Schoenberg and the New Music*. Translated by Derik Puffett and Alfred Clayton. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1-13.

day there is something in John Coltrane's music which is peculiarly resistant to taming. Particularly throughout his later (post-1950s) years, his music is often painful to listen to, not just because of the seeming independence of the individual performers or the squealing overtones which colour his solos, but because of the sheer emotional and intellectual intensity of his playing. As Amiri Baraka has stated, watching Coltrane live was 'more than a little frightening; like watching a grown man learning to speak.'[262] Compositionally too, Coltrane pushed jazz into territories hitherto unexplored: stretching the harmonic language of bebop to breaking point in *Giant Steps* (1960); exploring the limits of modalism in his interpretation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's saccharine show-tune, *My Favorite Things* (1961); and experimenting with collective improvisation in *Ascension* (1965). If time is a domesticator, then Coltrane has always been one second ahead.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the ways that Coltrane's music might be said to have taken on the character of what Adorno called the 'autonomous work of art' in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Building upon the 1999 essay by Nick Nesbit entitled 'Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane, and Jazz,' this chapter aims to provide a critical theory of Coltrane's aesthetics, examining the ways that dominant socio-political tendencies became objectified within Coltrane's music through his interaction with the historically formed musical material.[263] Unlike Nesbit, however, this study provides an account of musical autonomy that places greater emphasis on the precarious nature of this category in African American music. Indeed, because of the economically disadvantaged status of Black musicians, the idea of an autonomous—anti-commercial—aesthetic, subject only to its own dialectic of form and material, is a difficult concept to reconcile with jazz.[264] Consequently, I examine the persistent

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[262] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music: Essays* (New York; London: Akashic, 2010), 70.
[263] Nick Nesbit, "Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane and Jazz," *Telos* 116 (1999).
[264] Critics of the autonomy thesis include *Amiri Baraka, Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963); Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997); and Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003).

conflicts that arose in the development of an autonomous musical language in jazz—in particular, the ways that Coltrane was forced to adopt a conciliatory attitude toward the 'official' jazz establishment in order to maintain his position as commercial artist, even as his music was developing beyond commercial acceptability.

Moreover, whilst Nesbit has derived the social content of Coltrane's works through the idea of double-consciousness—in which African American composers are seen as mediating two traditions, 'one blues based [Black]… the other technocratic [White]'[265]—it is argued in this study that the idea of 'blackness' as it existed in the 1960s was no longer simply bound up with African and American (African-American) traditions, but had become expanded to include colonial and former colonial identities. Although this found limited form in the expression of Afrocentrism and Black Nationalism, it is perhaps best expressed by Robert L. Allen's 1969 conception of internal colonialism, where the situation of African Americans in the US is understood in the similar terms as colonial countries. It is argued that Coltrane's attempt to combine without reconciling the contrasting traditions of jazz and Indian music was the expressive form of this expansive conception of African American identity. This indirect commentary on the trajectory of the civil rights movement is in tune with Adornian conception of musical autonomy, where political realities appear only insofar as they are refused explicit statement. By mediating subjectivity within the collective musical material, Coltrane went beyond individual commentary on the political movements and expressed a condition that pertained more closely to universality.

This chapter has two main sections. The first, 'Jazz and Autonomy,' is concerned primarily with exploring the ways in which jazz can be understood as an autonomous work of

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[265] Nesbit, "Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane and Jazz," 92.

art.[266] Whilst it is concluded that an Adornian conception of autonomy may have a certain resonance with Coltrane's aesthetics, as Fumi Okiji has pointed out, to date, all of the studies which have sought to marry this concept to jazz have failed to provide the 'historical context' of jazz's 'emancipation from social function.'[267] Since such a context serves as a prerequisite to autonomy, Section 2, 'Coltrane's Radical Aesthetics,' is committed to examining his music in the context of the mid-to-late 1950s and early 1960s. It is argued that the social content of Coltrane's music can be understood as expressive of Black double-consciousness, before expanding to include a broader notion of Black identity.

1. Jazz and Autonomy

Autonomy or Not Autonomy

There has been no shortage of critics that have sought to attribute autonomous characteristics to jazz, particularly when speaking of the proliferation of jam sessions in the post-WWII period which led to what we now know as bebop. Martin Williams writes that, after the birth of bop, jazz became 'a music to be listened to, as many of its partisans had said it should have been all along.'[268] This change in reception has been characterised in terms similar to that of European art music, as the development of 'an autonomous art, transcending its sometimes squalid social and economic setting, and taking its place in American culture as a creative discipline of

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[266] Recent literature that is cited in the section: James Buhler, "Frankfurt School Blues: Rethinking Adorno's Critique of Jazz," in *Apparitions: New Perspectives on Adorno and Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Berthold Hoeckner (New York; London: Taylor & Francis, 2006); Robert R. Maclean, "After Modern Jazz: The Avant-Garde and Jazz Historiography" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2011); Nesbit, "Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane and Jazz."; and Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).
[267] Fumi Okiji, "Jazz and the Critical Potential of Heteronomous Expressive Form" (PhD Diss., Royal Holloway, 2015), 6.
[268] Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 137.

intrinsic integrity.'[269]   Similarly, Eric Lott has written that bebop was 'one of the great modernisms. Its relationship to earlier styles was one of calculated hostility,' although he concedes a certain political function in that the music 'attempted to resolve at the level of style what the militancy combatted in the streets.'[270] Critics of the autonomy thesis are just as many, however. According to Guthrie Ramsey, 'the cultural politics of African-American music has developed within powerful ideologies surrounding race. For that reason, the principle of artistic autonomy could not develop within Black culture in the same way as it had with regard to the Western art music tradition.'[271] DeVeaux is similarly critical, arguing that '[w]ith bebop, we are repeatedly told, jazz took an irrevocable step' and that '[i]n its wake, all of jazz must be properly understood as an autonomous art, governed by its own laws and judgeable only by its own criteria.' For DeVeaux, the historical record does not support this thesis.[272]

In many respects it is understandable that the idea of autonomy has been met with so much friction in jazz circles. As Guthrie suggests, the association of autonomy with the privileged status of western art seems to conflict with the bitter reality faced by most African Americans, who made up the vast majority of jazz musicians in this period. However, rather than argue against its opponents, I would like to suggest that the definition of autonomy in the aforementioned studies differs significantly from the one employed here. For many writers, including the prominent jazz scholar Guthrie Ramsey, autonomous music has been defined against heteronomous social function, as 'self-contained artifacts shaped according to abstract principles.'[273] However, the concept of autonomy provided here builds upon that articulated by Theodor Adorno—himself a controversial character in studies of jazz.

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[269] Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 545.

[270] Eric Lott, "Double V, Double-Time: Bebop's Politics of Style," *Callaloo,* no. 36 (1988): 602 and 599.

[271] Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, 103.

[272] DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*, 443.

[273] Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, 109. Guthrie's definition of autonomy draws explicitly upon the 'new musicology,' the practitioners of which seek to reveal 'the social and political functions

For Adorno, autonomy is understood to mean the negation of social function—whether commercial, propaganda, or protest. Unlike Guthrie's simple 'apolitical' characterisation of autonomy, Adorno's definition describes the autonomous work of art through its political negativity, that is, the appearance of politics through its conspicuous absence. In his 2001 book *Sustaining Loss*, Gregg Horowitz has provided one of the more lucid explanations of this complex issue:

> [i]f autonomy in art is the work's refusal to let anything outside itself determine its form, then the autonomous work is just the *appearance* of that refusal. The work of art thus appears as nonreconcilliation with the world of external determination only by reproducing or representing the world as deprived of its determinative powers. But this of course entails that the work is bound *irredeemably* to what does not determine it; it is constrained to show what does not constrain it. For the work's power of negation to appear, it must visibly negate something and can only appear as the negation of that thing. Thus, for the work of art to be autonomous, it is bound to show what it is not bound by and so reveal itself as incapable of escaping from the world it seeks to transcend.[274]

It should be evident from this quotation that this particular conceptualization of the autonomous work of art is not simply 'not political.' A large part of Adorno's project was, as he states in *Negative Dialectics*, '[t]o use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity.'[275] For Adorno, music is autonomous when it is concerned solely with the working out of its own internal dialectic of form (*Form*) and material (*Inhalt*). However, as he suggests, the individual artist does not sit God-like over the musical material, but brings

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of serious music,' thereby unravelling the autonomous work of art by revealing its historical contingency. However, it has long been understood that the idea of autonomy as meaning that 'music has no meaning, and no political or social significance' is a misrepresentation, a 'straw man' as Charles Rosen puts it, which nobody 'except perhaps the nineteenth-century critic Hanslick, has ever really believed.' Charles Rosen, "The New Musicology," in *Critical Entertainments: Music Old and New* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press., 2000), 264.

[274] Gregg Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life* (Stanford, California.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 44.

[275] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, xx.

their experience—musical, political, and otherwise—to bear on the music, which is itself collectively formed and, importantly therefore, also political.

Fortunately, in recent years a number of theorists have set Adorno's definition of musical autonomy in a more constructive dialogue with jazz history. Foremost amongst these is James Buhler, who, in a 2006 article entitled 'Frankfurt School Blues' provides a critical re-appraisal of Adorno's jazz essays.[276] Buhler is pessimistic, however, that jazz—a music which he sees as irrevocably tied up with the machinations of the culture industry—fits the criteria of an autonomous work of art. However, although providing a staunch defence of Adorno's aesthetic theory against false accusations of racism, eurocentrism, and superficiality—as well as providing a number of insights into how an autonomous jazz might appear—Buhler's essay is conspicuously light on references to jazz in concrete circumstances. The result is an account which is robbed of any immanence, effectively ruling out the possibility of autonomy before the project gets underway. Nick Nesbit, on the other hand, has provided us with a study which is both more optimistic about the prospects of autonomous jazz—claiming that, on occasion, jazz has exhibited the properties not of a 'commodity' but a 'musical-aesthetic object'[277]—and more nuanced in its understanding of jazz aesthetics. In particular, Nesbit argues that John Coltrane, particularly in his later works, exemplifies this autonomous strain of jazz: 'Coltrane consciously appropriated and redirected the currents of European modernism to… the "vernacular imperative" of African American culture.'[278] Although Nesbit makes a convincing case for an autonomous form of jazz, and one on which I build in section 2, he neglects, as Fumi Okiji has recently pointed out, to provide a historical context for jazz's emancipation

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[276] Buhler, "Frankfurt School Blues: Rethinking Adorno's Critique of Jazz."
[277] Nesbit, "Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane and Jazz," 82.
[278] Ibid., 96.

from social function.[279] Without this, the very idea of autonomy is unsustainable. It is with this account that the rest of this section is concerned.

Coltrane's Early Development: Racism and Resistance

Although already having worked alongside such jazz luminaries as Dizzy Gillespie, Earle Bostic, and Johnny Hodges, Coltrane first came to prominence through his work with Miles Davis from October 1955 to April 1957 and Thelonious Monk from July to December 1957. During this period, most African-American jazz musicians were involved with the hard bop scene. Coltrane was no exception. According to David Rosenthal, hard bop was an attempt to assimilate elements of rhythm and blues—the dominant form of Black music in the early 1950s—into the bebop tradition.[280] Others have seen the emergence of hard bop as a form of reaction to the impassive white-dominated cool jazz of the same period.[281] No doubt both of these theses contain a degree of truth. Hard bop certainly drew upon popular forms as a way of breathing life back into the bebop tradition, as well as reopening the jazz avant-garde for the benefit of Black musicians. However, if this latter point was true for a time, its success was not sustained. Despite the preponderance of African-Americans in hard bop, Blacks were grossly underrepresented at the major labels; Miles Davis even referred to himself as the 'company nigger' whilst at Columbia Records. As with earlier forms of jazz, the industry was run and owned almost entirely by white businessmen for the benefit of (mostly) white musicians.[282]

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[279] Okiji, "Jazz and the Critical Potential of Heteronomous Expressive Form," 6.

[280] David Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black music, 1955-1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24.

[281] See Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, 249.

[282] In a much-quoted statement Rex Stewart, a prominent trumpeter who joined Duke Ellington's band in 1934, clarifies the way that race and commerce intersect: 'Where the control is, the money is. Do you see any of us [black musicians] running any record companies, booking agencies, radio stations, music magazines?' Quoted in Nat Hentoff, *Jazz Is* (New York: Avon, 1978), 247. Also see Ellis Cashmore, *The Black Culture Industry* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997); Kofsky, *Black Music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz*; Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*; and Leslie B. Rout, "Reflections on the Evolution of Post-War Jazz," *Negro Digest*, no. February (1969).

The 1950s was a difficult, though ultimately crucial, stage in the struggle for African-American civil rights. Whilst around the time of the Second World War the association between racism and the Axis forces made it 'unfashionable to profess white-supremacist sentiments in public',[283] with the Cold War raging the 1950s were not so forgiving. Pervasive anti-communism provided white racists with powerful tool to resist desegregation. Thus, for example, the authorities (in particular, the FBI) were more concerned with the alleged communist sympathies of the anti-lynching groups, such as the American Crusade Against Lynching (ACAL), than with lynching itself.[284] By characterising the struggle for desegregation as a communist conspiracy the establishment quietly give its support to continued racism. With his characteristic humility, it is hardly a coincidence that Coltrane should have climbed to fame in this context. Whilst music may have provided one of the few ways in which African-Americans could achieve a degree of success, this success was almost invariably bought in exchange for political silence. For Black musicians the association between anti-racism and communism presented an obstacle to free expression: to openly object to the racist status-quo was to be labelled a 'Commie', and was to risk expulsion from the music industry.[285] Coltrane was relatively silent on political issues.

Because of the widespread racism in the music business, Black musicians were often forced to find other means to resist white hegemony. Not unlike the context of the post-war jam sessions, political anger was frequently redirected toward aesthetic experimentation.[286] However, the white industry owners were on hand to ensure that these developments did not

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[283] Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, 219.

[284] See Jordan Goodman, *Paul Robeson: A Watched Man* (London; New York: Verso, 2013), 175. This is also reflected in their treatment of anti-segregationists as against the Klan. Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 247.

[285] Although the pressure to stay quiet was immense, there were, of course, many notable exceptions: Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Archie Shepp, and Clifford Thornton, to name just a few.

[286] In a 1969 article on the 'Evolution of Post-War Jazz', Leslie B. Rout argues that the primary motives behind the bebop revolution was the 'creation of a music that whites could not play.' Rout, "Reflections on the Evolution of Post-War Jazz," 93.

get too far. Indeed, in a 1961 interview Coltrane attributed his relatively slow development to the commercial pressures which dominated on the jazz scene: 'I stayed in obscurity for such a long time, because I was happy to play what was expected of me, without trying to add anything. I saw so many guys get fired from bands because they tried new things that I was somewhat discouraged to try anything else.'[287] As a result of this, writes jazz critic Barbara Gardner, 'there was little individuality or personal creation in his early playing.'[288] Thus, although aesthetic experimentation enabled Black musicians to experience and develop some limited sense of freedom, the white industry owners restricted the economic viability of this form of music to all but a privileged few. Black jazz musicians were frequently forced to cut their teeth with the more exploitative independent labels. Many spent a lifetime cutting their teeth.

Despite commercial pressures (and accusations to the contrary), the struggle to find an individual voice is readily apparent throughout Coltrane's early development. Indeed, Jimmy Heath, a fellow bopper and friend who played in a band with Coltrane throughout the late 1940s, described Coltrane's as having that 'eruptive feeling' of Charlie Parker, whilst avoiding clichéd references.[289] As Kahn has written, the 'proclivity for quoting… recognizable melodies or other well-known patterns' was one of the most deeply entrenched jazz habits of the time;[290] Coltrane's allusions, by contrast, took a more oblique form. From a 1958 interview with August Bloom, Coltrane describes the underlying logic of his early musical identity:

> The main thing was trying to… see just how things were, you know, see how—
> [*unintelligible*]—we have a guy here who plays altogether different, you know,
> you say, 'Well that's so-and-so, I know him anywhere.' Then you hear
> something else you say, 'That's so-and-so, yeah, I know *him* anywhere.' Then
> you sit down and maybe you can see where, try to see where they both came

[287] François Positif, "John Coltrane: An Interview," *Jazz Hot* (1962).
[288] Barbara Gardner, "Jazzman of the Year: John Coltrane," in *Down Beat's Music 1962--The 7th Annual yearbook* (1962).
[289] Quoted in Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 64.
[290] Ashley Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Creation of John Coltrane's Classic Album* (London: Granta, 2003), 11.

from, you know, and you find maybe they came out of the same tree somewhere along the line. So I start lookin' at jazz like that, too, you know, collectively, lookin' at the whole thing.[291]

Coltrane frequently restated this genealogical understanding of jazz throughout his early career. From a 1961 interview for *Down Beat* with Barbara Gardner, Coltrane recalls his search for a sound in the late 40s and early 50s: 'At that time, I was trying to play like Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray.' Later, however, Coltrane came across Sonny Stitt: 'He sounded like something between Dexter and Wardell, an outgrowth of both of them. All the time, I thought I had been looking for something and then I heard Sonny and said, "Damn! There it is! That's it!"' Gardner goes on to note how this discovery reoriented Coltrane toward combining Lester Young and Charlie Parker.[292]

By his later (post-addiction) years, Coltrane's musical philosophy had moved beyond the simple multiplication of jazz styles. Throughout the 1960s Coltrane plunged ever deeper into the musical universe, drawing upon a wide range of influences from Sidney Bechet to Eric Dolphy, Indian classical music to the European avant-garde: 'I want to cover as many forms of music as I can put into a jazz context and play on my instruments,' he stated in a 1960 interview.[293] Though many critics derided these changes,[294] those who were more sympathetic to his stylistic development celebrated his *individuality*, his unique artistic vision. In a 1961 article, the French jazz critic J.-C. Dargenpierre described Coltrane as a 'Modern Faust', 'one of the most individualistic musicians around.'[295] In 1962 Jean Clouzet and Michel Delorme observed with pleasure Coltrane's 'total plunge into his own depths… his interior landscape.'[296] When asked to define jazz in a 1966 interview, Coltrane himself echoed this

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[291] DeVito and *Coltrane, Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews*, 24.
[292] Gardner, "Jazzman of the Year: John Coltrane," 66-67.
[293] Cuthbert O. Simpkins. *Coltrane: A Biography* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1975), 118.
[294] It is no coincidence that the deepening of Coltrane's well of influence coincided with accusations of 'anti-jazz' from some of the more conservative critics.
[295] J.-C. Dargenpierre, "John Coltrane: A Modern Faust," *Jazz Magazine* (1962).
[296] Jean Clouzet and Micheal Delorme, "Interview with John Coltrane," *Les Cahiers du Jazz*, no. 8 (1963).

sentiment, stating that 'we just try to express what we individually feel. To me, it's the music of individual expression.'[297]

Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, Coltrane's music drew upon an increasingly vast range of musical materials – an account of which I provide in the following section. It is at precisely the moment that Coltrane immerses himself in the collective well of music history that his individuality really begins to emerge. The following sections provide an account of the development of this aesthetic, paying particular attention to the constraints with which he constantly had to do battle.

2. Coltrane's Radical Aesthetics

The Prestige Years: 1957 to 1959

Although Coltrane undoubtedly produced much that was of value prior to 1957 (particularly in his work recorded over two dates in 1956 with the Davis Quintet, *Cookin'*, *Relaxin'*, *Workin'*, and *Steamin'*), it is widely considered that, musically speaking, getting clean was the start of his steep musical ascent. The catalyst for this change was his dismissal from the Miles Davis group in 1957 for turning up high (and late) to performances, drinking between sets, and, allegedly, eating bogeys on the bandstand. After returning to Philadelphia, Coltrane, so the story goes, 'detoxed the cowboy way, shutting himself at home and going cold turkey.'[298] From the tyranny of drugs, Coltrane turned his attention to his musical development and in 1957 Coltrane signed to Prestige Records on a three album a year deal, with each album paid at a paltry $300 (roughly $2,500 by 2015 standards) to be divvied up amongst the musicians.

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[297] DeVito and Coltrane, *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane interviews*, 266.
[298] Ben Ratliff, *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), 35.

During this period of sobriety, Coltrane's experimentation with new sounds began to accelerate quickly, eventually resulting in his first album as a bandleader, *Coltrane* (1957). Even at this stage of his development, many of Coltrane's later preoccupations can be seen in embryonic form; in particular, Coltrane's own composition 'Straight Street'—an obvious reference to getting clean—combines the angular chord progressions that typified his more advanced material.

Figure 1*: 'Straight Street' (1957), bars 2-4.*[299]

Proceeding by way of II—V7—I progressions ascending in minor thirds (A—C—Eb), 'Straight Street' provides early indication of Coltrane's fascination with third relationships, particularly as evidenced in his genre-defining 1960 release, *Giant Steps*.

One of the notable features of Coltrane's compositional style in this period is the way that it seems to be constantly in search of something, without ever quite realizing it. This lack of resolution has frequently been misidentified as unpreparedness, anger, or excessive difficulty. Indeed, Miles Davis has expressed confusion at these accusations, arguing that Coltrane's improvisational approach consists of exploring the number of ways a particular set of five notes can sound over a given chord: 'It's like explaining something five different ways',

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[299] My own transcription.

he states.[300] Coltrane's exploratory approach to improvisation is also confirmed in his own comments around this time. In a 1960 interview, when asked if he felt angry Coltrane responded that 'the reason I play so many [notes is because]… I'm trying so many things out at one time, you see, like I, I haven't sorted them out. I have a whole bag of things I'm trying to work through and get the one essential'.[301]

The clearest example of this exploratory approach came later in 1957 with the recording of Coltrane's second solo album, *Blue Train*. In terms of the trajectory of 1950s jazz, this record is interesting primarily because of its liminality—its situation on the threshold of a new aesthetic—and its unapologetic (and unreconciled) portrayal of two distinct artistic traditions. The solo on the opening track, 'Blue Train', is a case in point:

Figure 2*: 'Blue Train' (1957), bars 1-18.*[302]

[300] Quoted in Eric Nisenson, *Ascension: John Coltrane and his Quest* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 53.
[301] DeVito and Coltrane, *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews*, 55.
[302] Eric Dannewitz, "Blue Train," http://pop-sheet-music.com/Files/5bbae5f335e7cadc2ebb5d4bcea757fe.pdf.

The frequent 'blueing' of notes—an African American musical trait—such as can be seen in the low A♭ (minor third) appoggiatura in bar 8 and the flatted 7 (E♭) in bar 16 (suggesting a mixolydian turn), sits alongside a harmonic technicality reminiscent of the western classical tradition (vertical arpeggiation of sixteenth notes that superimpose a rapid series of distinct chord substitutions upon the slower underlying V—I progression). However, unlike the saccharine positivity of the culture industry which tried to harmonize such contrasting traditions (especially as seen in the work of George Gershwin), Coltrane holds the contradictory musical elements in stark relief: a monument to social aporia.[303] As Nesbit notes, these two divergent traditions can be brought together within the framework of W. E. B. Du Bois's 'double-consciousness.' According to Du Bois, double-consciousness is the uniquely African American condition whereby 'one ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.'[304] Mediating between the unreconciled traditions of vernacular blues and the highly 'rationalised harmonic structures and functions of western harmon[y]', 'Blue Train' exemplifies the contradictory condition of African-Americans at the time: both African and American, part of a whole, but a whole divided.[305]

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[303] Nesbit, "Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane and Jazz," 94.
[304] For Nesbit, 'Blue Train' derives its power through its pervasive double-consciousness – that is, its simultaneously African vernacular and American technocratic dimensions. DuBois writes, 'he does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world.' W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (A.C. McClurg & Company: Chicago, 1903), 2.
[305] Nesbit, "Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane and Jazz," 93.

Giant Steps

Giants Steps (1960) was Coltrane's fifth release as a bandleader, but the first that was made up entirely of his own compositions. It also stands as the logical conclusion to Coltrane's experiments with hard bop. From an Adornian perspective, it has been suggested that this album marked the moment when form and material are finally brought into violent confrontation with one another. Thus, Nesbit writes that 'each composition becomes the ground not simply for thematic invention lain upon an inherited form, but in which form itself is constantly called into question and becomes thematic material.'[306] In the case of *Giant Steps*, this conflagration was brought about by his 'sheets of sounds' approach and his experimentations with harmony. However, as will become clear, the tension between Coltrane's aesthetic radicalism and a conciliatory attitude toward the music industry as whole is still evident in his music during this period.

The term 'sheets of sound' was first used to describe Coltrane's unique improvisational style by Ira Gitler in the liner notes for Coltrane's 1958 recording, *Soultrane*.[307] Fast scalic runs and arpeggios intimately describing the underlying harmonic movement, and often grouped into unusual patterns such as quintuplet and septuplet semiquavers, the sheets of sound technique stretched conventional notions of melody to near breaking point. Although hard bop is usually described as compositionally 'vertical' because of the way that melody is derived from the chord progressions, Baraka has described the simultaneously harmonic and melodic effects of Coltrane's approach: 'The notes that Trane was playing in the solo became more than just one note following another. The notes came so fast, and with so many overtones and

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[306] Ibid., 95.
[307] John Coltrane, *[Liner Notes] Soultrane* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Prestige, 1958).

undertones, that they had the effect of a piano player striking chords rapidly but somehow articulating separately each note in the chord, and its vibrating subtones.'[308]

To provide himself with the expansive melodic resources necessary for the sheets of sound approach, Coltrane utilized what he called the 'three-on-one chord approach' taught to him by Thelonious Monk, where each chord could be arpeggiated as three different chords. With this method a C7 chord could be interpreted as C7, E♭7 (containing a flat third (sharp nine) and flat ninth), or G♭7 (sharp eleventh and flat ninth). Third relations, once again. In addition to this small-scale melodic technique, the main chordal movement in the opening track, 'Giant Steps', divides the octave into equal parts, cycling through major thirds (E♭, G, B, E♭) using the Dominant 7 (preceded by the supertonic—the dominant of the dominant) to ease each transition. Thus, in ascending form: Fm^7, Bb7, Eb^7; Am^7, D7, G^7; $C\#m^7$, F#7, B^7; Fm^7, Bb7, Eb^7:
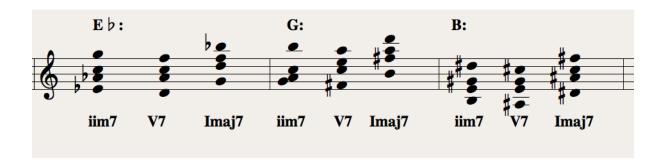

Figure 3: 'Giant Steps' (1959), harmonic reduction of main riff.

Combined with the possibilities afforded by the 'three-on-one' approach, Coltrane's musical language had begun exceed even the most sophisticated harmonic conventions of hard bop.

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[308] Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, 57.

With its blistering speed (♪=350), the third track, 'Countdown', comes close to exploding the harmonic language altogether.[309] 'Countdown' partially follows the harmonic structure of Miles Davis's 1956 'Tune Up' (from *Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*). Each four bars follow a simple II - V7 – I - I structure, whilst the key centre, on completion of the four bar sequence, descends progressively in whole tones (D, C, Bb). But within these progressions, Coltrane employs the 'three-on-one' technique to create a mini sequence of V7 – I progressions, descending in major thirds. This is done by stretching the interpretation of the existing chords close to breaking point. Thus, the opening:

Figure 4: 'Countdown' (1959), bars 1-16.[310]

Whilst the consistency between Coltrane's larger scale form (guided by movements in thirds) and the smaller three-on-one approach is striking, the integration of melodic detail within the composition's form is far from absolute. The larger scale movement in thirds is, of course, unusual insofar as conventional harmony goes, though with important precedents in the symmetrical scales of Olivier Messiaen and Bela Bartok's 'axis system' (such as can be heard in *Turangalîla-Symphonie* and *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, respectively);[311] but when this principle is applied to the more local features of the music (as with the three-on-one writing), the material begins to throw up melodies which the larger scale form cannot assimilate. Indeed, the chromaticism produced by this rigorously pursued logic seems to go beyond what the overarching form determines, where extremes in harmonic invention lead to melodic patterns which violate existing principles of harmonic writing. Adorno writes that '[i]n artworks, the criterion of success is twofold: whether they succeed in integrating thematic strata and details into their immanent law of form and in this integration at the same time maintain what resists it and the fissures that occur in the process of integration.'[312] With the melody straining at the leash of even the most complex harmonic writing, it is no coincidence that after the release of *Giant Steps* Coltrane began to move beyond the hard bop idiom and toward a more modal approach. It is revealing that this move has been described as the 'emancipation of the jazz improviser'[313]—emancipation in this case can be usefully understood through the Hegelian concept of sublation (*Aufheben*) because of the ways in which harmonic complexity is both negated, and preserved in the form of its absence.

Characteristic of Coltrane in this period, is a tension between aesthetic radicalism and a high level of self-consciousness. Indeed, Nat Hentoff writes that 'Coltrane is exceptionally

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[311] For a more substantial analysis of Messaien's scalic systems, see Thomas Barker. "The Social and Aesthetic Situation of Olivier Messiaen's Religious Music: Turangalîla-Symphonie," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* (2012): 53-70.
[312] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 8.
[313] Karlton E. Hester, *The Melodic and Polyrhythmic Development of John Coltrane's Spontaneous Composition in a Racist Society* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 55.

conscientious in his attitude toward audiences.'[314] Given the real world consequences of alienating the white music establishment, this tension served an invaluable function for Coltrane. Whilst radical figures in the western classical tradition often had the protection of state subsidies and the esteemed status of artistry, similar jazz musicians were accorded no such courtesy, their music held in relatively low regard by white society writ large. Because jazz provided one of the few ways in which African-Americans could escape poverty, industry demands were felt particularly keenly by Black musicians. After all, if a white musician was not content, they could always pursue a different line of work: to paraphrase DeVeaux: jazz chooses Black musicians, but white musicians choose jazz. Thus, in a 1958 *Downbeat* article by Ira Gitler, Coltrane describes his sheets of sound approach somewhat apologetically: '[n]ow it is not a thing of beauty, and the only way it would be justified is if it becomes that. If I can't work it through, I will drop it.'[315] Similarly, in the liner notes for *Giant Steps*, Hentoff quotes Coltrane as saying that 'I'm worried that sometimes what I'm doing sounds like just academic exercises, and I'm trying more and more to make it sound prettier.'[316]

That Coltrane spoke apologetically of his music at this time, urging patience with his audience and his critics, is a testament to the precarity of most jazz musicians, particularly those of African descent. As a consequence of this pressure, Coltrane continued to justify his experiments only on the promise that they would eventually yield more positive—beautiful—results. This conciliatory approach was well founded, as Gardner writes: 'Coltrane found that to be different and distinctive… was to inspire, most often, the wrath of those writers and listeners who complained loudest about the clichés and imitation existing in tenor playing at that time.'[317] Within his music, this tension is evident in the way that Coltrane remained

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[314] Nat Hentoff, "John Coltrane: Challenges Without End," *International Musician* (1962).
[315] Quoted in Nisenson, *Ascension: John Coltrane and his Quest*, 64.
[316] DeVito and Coltrane, *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews*, 51.
[317] Gardner, "Jazzman of the Year: John Coltrane."

attached to musical material which had long been assimilated to the jazz culture industry—the

third track on *Giant Steps*, 'Cousin Mary', exemplifies this. Harmonically, the track is built

upon the twelve bar blues (beginning from Ⓑ, it is divided as follows: F7 = 4 bars, B♭7 = 2

bars, F7 = 2 bars, B7 = 1 bar, B♭7 = 1 bar, and F7 = 2 bars), oscillating between B♭ and E♭7 (I

and IV chords). The interest in the song's harmonic movement is derived primarily from the

tritone substitution (E7) in place of the dominant.

Figure 5: 'Cousin Mary' (1960), bars 25-40.[318]

The structure is exceptionally simple, and makes little attempt to deviate from the accepted

jazz repertoire; the tritone substitution used in the context of the twelve bar blues was a well-

worn feature of jazz harmony, with precedents going as far back as 1939 with Coleman

Hawkins' 'Body and Soul'. Although carried by Coltrane's highly distinctive melodic voice,

melodically 'Cousin Mary' is hardly more adventurous, and is based mainly upon the 'riff'—

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[318] My own transcription.

an admission that Coltrane himself makes on the liner notes—thereby evoking earlier forms of jazz bop and even swing.

It is difficult not to see *Giant Steps* and its hesitant gestures toward musical autonomy as somehow analogous with the broader political movement of the times. Released the year of the student sit-ins (1960) and the year before the Freedom Rides (see Chapter 2), *Giant Steps* emerged at a time when the civil rights movement was becoming increasingly fraught by class and generational differences. Whilst much of the Black bourgeoisie urged patience and conciliation, for the poorer parts of the African-American communities (particularly in the South) racism was a daily reality which could not be written away in the courts. In practice, this tension resulted in different strategies, with the NAACP operating chiefly from a legal perspective and the SNCC, CORE, and, to a lesser extent, the SCLC opting for direct action, with sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration helping to establish *de facto* desegregation.[319]

As an entertainer, who stood to gain a lot by appeasing the white establishment, Coltrane would seem to be situated with the more secure elements of the civil rights movement. However, as an artist, who sought to balance the demands of the music industry against those of the historical musical material, his livelihood was inherently unstable. The similarities between Coltrane's attitude and the civil rights movement as a whole is more than mere coincidence, but rather attests to the contradictory class status of African-American musicians. Coltrane's privileged social status was conditional upon his consenting to a racist industry that violated his artistic vision. For the most part, Coltrane was able to gain the support of critics for *Giant Steps*; however, by the time they had caught up with him, Coltrane had burrowed still

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[319] The role played by violence in these struggles was similarly conflicted. Of those who favoured direct action, some were of the mind that resistance must be non-violent – so that white America would see the inhumanity of racism – others, however, such as Robert F. Williams, advocated armed self-defence. In the early 1960s, it was the idea of non-violent resistance that won the day.

deeper into the problems of musical material. If the white establishment was offended by Coltrane the reformist, they were outraged by Coltrane the revolutionary.

Kind of Blue

The release of Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* is widely considered to be one of the most significant moments in twentieth century music. As well as marking a step in Davis' transition from hard bop to modal jazz, *Blue* also exemplifies Coltrane's change of direction. If, by stretching jazz harmony to breaking point, *Giant Steps* was the concluding statement on hard bop, *Blue* was the sublation of this tension, taking harmonic technicality to its extreme opposite (simplicity) and reorienting the material toward the development of melodic gestures. The fact that *Blue* was recorded before *Giant Steps* and yet in many senses provided the blueprint for Coltrane's later preoccupations, is a testament to his concern to fully explore the dialectic of form and material before moving on.

Whilst most hard bop musicians worked either from completed scores or, more usually, chord charts, Davis' approach on *Blue* was far less prescriptive. Each composition on *Blue* represented a compilation of 'modal sketches,' in which the performers were provided with a series of scales that defined the parameters of their improvisation. Gone were the days when the jazz musician was tied to the riff: by simplifying the harmonic structure, Davis significantly loosened the constraints upon improvisation. However, this newfound freedom was not without its own set of problems. According to Porter, the challenge in modal jazz was 'to make coherent and interesting music with a minimum of harmonic guidelines.'[320] For Coltrane, this looser approach enabled him to take his harmonic interests to a new level—without, as some have

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[320] Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, 161.

suggested, abandoning them altogether.[321] Speaking of his own performance on 'So What?'

Coltrane states:

> In fact, due to the direct and free-flowing lines of his [Davis's] music, I found it easy to apply the [three on one] harmonic ideas that I had. I could stack up chords—say, on a C7, I sometimes superimposed an Eb7 up to an F#7, [resolving] down to an F. That way I could play three chords on one. But on the other hand, if I wanted to, I could play melodically. Miles' music gave me plenty of freedom.[322]

In practice Coltrane was rarely this prosaic, however. Providing one is willing to entertain a more expressive approach to melodic improvisation—where phrases frequently resist assimilation to the larger scale form—the logic behind Coltrane's solo on 'So What?' is fairly easy to intuit. Thus, as Porter writes, Coltrane 'comes across an idea, works with it for a while, and then derives his next idea from it.'[323] This improvisational technique naturally produces more ideas than a single solo can sustain, pointing beyond its own closed system. In many respects, the technique is a microcosm of Coltrane's aesthetic trajectory as a whole: pick up an idea, develop it, and then, in developing this idea, arrive at a new idea to be further developed. Coltrane's conclusions were never simply conclusions, but always also the basis for new questions.

Whilst many musicians, even some of the most revolutionary, tended to settle into a style after a period of experimentation, Coltrane was always restless, always searching for something new. Because of this protean characteristic, the music industry often failed to keep pace with his latest developments: Coltrane's own recordings often appeared 'out of date' just

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[321] Lewis Porter and Barry Kernfield have argued that modal jazz is not an appropriate term for 'Kind of Blue', given that analyses of Coltrane's and Davis' solos reveal a dependence upon chords and tonality. Ibid. p.159. Barry Kernfield, "Adderly, Coltrane, and Davis at the Twilight of Bebop: The Search for Melodic Coherence (1958-1959)" (PhD Diss., Cornell University, 1981), 128-174.
It will also be noticed that the roots of these chords (C7, Eb7, F#7) move in minor thirds, which collectively describe diminished chord, suggesting, again, Coltrane's ongoing concern with third relationships.
[322] DeVito and Coltrane, *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews*.
[323] Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, 65.

months after their release.[324] Thus, by 1960, Kahn writes that when Coltrane flew over to France for what was to become his swansong with the Miles Davis Quintet, his frenetic soloing polarized the audience: 'On the recording made that evening, one can easily hear the crowd growing restless during the saxophonist's solos… For the first time, most Parisians were witnessing the raw, boundless intensity that would guide the rest of Coltrane's career'.[325] Given that France generally provided more hospitable environment for experimentalism than the US, the anger amongst the audience demonstrates how far Coltrane was pushing the material at this time.

Whilst previously he had expressed some concern about losing his audience, by 1960 Coltrane was expressing a growing desire to push on, irrespective of the consequences. Thus, journalist Frank Tenot reported on Coltrane's French debut in the following terms: 'People were very surprised why there was no John Coltrane like on *Kind of Blue*. So, part of the audience thinks that Coltrane doesn't play too well, that he was playing the wrong notes, involuntarily.' After going backstage to speak with the saxophonist after the show, Tenot explained to Coltrane that '[y]ou're too new for the people… you go too far.' Coltrane just smiled and said, 'I don't go far enough.'[326]

My Favorite Things and Live! at the Village Vanguard

Released in March 1961, *My Favorite Things* was an instant hit and catapulted Coltrane to huge success; based upon Rodgers and Hammerstein's catchy show-tune, no other record that Coltrane released went further toward bridging the divide between popular and serious music. *Things* was the first Coltrane-led recording in the modal jazz idiom, and was notable for

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[324] This was also compounded by the aforementioned tendency of independent labels to release his material out of chronological order.
[325] Kahn, *A Love Supreme: The Creation of John Coltrane's Classic Album*, 4.
[326] Ibid., 5.

Coltrane's use of the soprano saxophone—allegedly given to him as a gift by Miles Davis. The pinched, nasal quality of the soprano saxophone, reminiscent of the Arabic mizmar—'the sinuous wail of a snake charmer', according to one *Newsweek* writer—lent itself particularly well to the long rāga-like solos and the eastern modes with which Coltrane was experimenting.[327] For Kofsky, Coltrane's transition to the soprano was crucial in opening up new musical possibilities: 'the soprano… reinforced Coltrane's interest in making use of musical ideas from West Asia and Africa, for much of the improvised music of these regions is not only grounded on drone notes and scales (as is certainly true of Indian rāga), but permeated by variations of short patterns as well.'[328]

Before setting out to examine the ways that Coltrane incorporated elements of Indian music, it is necessary to make something of a disclaimer. Coltrane was in no way rigorous in the way that he went about studying Indian classical music. As Carl Clements has pointed out in a recent article entitled 'John Coltrane and the Integration of Indian Concepts in Jazz Improvisation': 'Coltrane's music does not seem to exhibit a literal use of Indian rāga… Nonetheless, elements of Indian music are evident in much of his later playing, composition, and conception.'[329] This has also been confirmed by the Pakistani-American jazz guitarist Rez Abbasi, who argues that whilst the theoretical aspects of Indian music are not strong in Coltrane's music, 'what he did bring from India to jazz goes beyond theory. It is the nurturing of ideas and intent behind the notes. He started to really practice patience on the bandstand and that is an integral part of Indian music.'[330] As a consequence of this, a certain interpretive and creative latitude must be afforded when looking for Indian influences in Coltrane's music.

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[327] DeVito and Coltrane, *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews*, 91.
[328] Kofsky, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, 313-314.
[329] Carl Clements, "John Coltrane and the Integration of Indian Concepts in Jazz Improvisation," *Jazz Research Journal* 2, no. 2 (2009): 156.
[330] Quoted in ibid., 171.

Coltrane's interest in West Asian and African music is well documented, but of particular influence on his music was Ravi Shankar, a towering figure in Indian classical music who played a pivotal role in its popularisation in the US.[331] Born in 1920 into a Bengali family in India, Shankar was a sitar virtuoso and composer who studied under the esteemed multi-instrumentalist Allauddin Khan. Having previously come to the US in his youth as part of a dancing troupe, it was not until 1956 that Shankar returned and became known as a soloist. Shankar is widely credited with introducing elements of Indian classical music into western popular music, most notably through The Beatles (George Harrison, in particular). His music also played a significant role in inspiring the minimalist movement through composers such as La Monte Young, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, the latter of whom worked with him directly.

It is not clear when Coltrane first encountered Shankar's music—although Coltrane's experiments with modalism go as far back as 1959; the first documented case is an interview early in 1961: 'When I hear his music,' Coltrane described, 'I want to copy it—not note for note, of course, but in his spirit. What brings me closest to Ravi is the modal aspect of his art.'[332] It is no coincidence that Coltrane's interest in West Asian music came prior to the first release of *Things*, which itself is cut through with Shankar's influence.

The titular track of *Things* is composed of a simple vamp between two tonics—C# minor and C# major—with Coltrane and pianist McCoy Tyner taking turns to solo. Whilst the track clocks in at nearly 14 minutes—a long time for such harmonically static music—the interest lies primarily in the way the melodic material decays over time; that the once familiar theme is twisted and distorted until it is barely recognizable as such. Writing for the French *Jazz Magazine* in 1962, Dargenpierre describes Coltrane's performance as like that of a

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[331] Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 170.
[332] Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, 211.

'modern Faust or Prometheus', burying himself in the formal and technical (objective) material only to emerge with a stronger individual (subjective) voice.[333]

Whilst the recorded version of 'Things' was showered with praise, its reception on the road was more conflicted. In a review written for *Downbeat*, John Tynan exemplified the conservative reaction to Coltrane's new direction, describing it as 'musical nonsense being peddled in the name of jazz' and 'a horrifying demonstration of what appears to be a growing anti-jazz trend.'[334] Leonard Feather also picked up on the 'anti-jazz' theme, in a series of critical essays that castigated the jazz avant-garde as a whole, including Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Sun Ra, Charles Mingus, and Ornette Coleman. If American critics were renowned for their conservatism, Coltrane faired only marginally better in Europe. Just eight months after the release of 'Things', English jazz critic Bob Dawbarn expressed 'bewilderment' at Coltrane's soloing whilst on tour with Dolphy—'[t]ake your two… solos on "My Favorite Things." The first I found reasonably easy to understand. The second I couldn't follow at all.'[335]

On April 12 1962, shortly after the release of *Live! at the Village Vanguard,* the editors at *Down Beat* provided Coltrane and Dolphy with the opportunity to answer their detractors. Although their music was unapologetic, Coltrane maintained a certain conciliatory attitude toward his critics, admitting that '[q]uite possibly a lot of things about the band need to be done. But everything has to be done in its own time.'[336] In a further effort to counter accusations of bias and aesthetic philistinism, two weeks later *Down Beat* published two contrasting reviews of Coltrane and Dolphy's new release. On the one hand, Peter Welding described it as 'a torrential and anguished outpouring, delivered with unmistakable power, conviction, and near-demonic ferocity.' On the other, Ira Gitler stated that 'Coltrane may be searching for new

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[333] Dargenpierre, "John Coltrane: A Modern Faust."

[334] Quoted in Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, 193.

[335] Bob Dawbarn, ""I'd like to return to Britain -- and I'd like to play your clubs" John Coltrane tells Bob Dawbarn," *Melody Maker*, (November 25 1961).

[336] Don DeMichael, "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics," *Down Beat*, (April 12 1962).

avenues of expression, but if it is going to take this form of yawps, squawks, and countless repetitive runs, then it should be confined to the woodshed.'[337]

One of the most notable features of 'Things,' both on the eponymously titled album and the live versions, was its incorporation of disparate musical elements, without, however, forcing them into reconciliation. On the one hand, 'Things' was based upon the popular show-tune from *The Sound of Music* which had been running at Broadway since 1959. Typically, Coltrane would begin the song by stating the theme in a way which, although allowing for short sixteenth note embellishments, never drifts too far from the Rodgers and Hammerstein version:

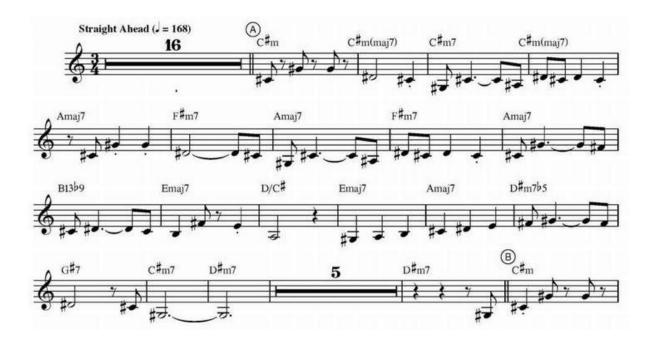**Figure 6**: 'My Favorite Things' (1961), bars 1-41.[338]

After sixteen bars of the original theme, however, the vamp then shifts from C# minor into C# major. The mood in this section is looser and acts as a counterpoint to the main theme, with

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Coltrane beginning to make use of the fast scalic runs and the three-on-one chordal approach for which he had become known. More than just repeating his previous experiments with the 'sheets of sound', however, there is a clear Indian influence in these sections—in particular, from the improvisatory techniques associated with the Indian rāga.

A rāga is similar to a mode in Western music, though it is more rhythmically complex, with repeated or out-of-sequence notes. According to Richard Widdess, a 'rāga provides the melodic material for the composition of vocal or instrumental melodies and for improvisation.' There are many different kinds of rāga, he continues, each 'characterized by a variety of melodic features, including a basic scale (perhaps with additional or omitted notes), grammatical rules governing the relative emphasis of different scale degrees and the sequence of notes in ascending and descending contexts, distinctive ways of ornamenting or pitching particular notes, and motifs or formulae from which complete melodies or improvisations can be constructed.'[339]

To be sure, Coltrane's use of rāga is limited—primitive, even—but the use of modes in irregular clusters of notes, high levels of ornamentation (with frequent bending, particularly on the *Live* recording, and appoggiaturas), and the stepwise motion of his runs shares a lot with Indian classical music (see Figure 7.).[340]

[339] Richard Widdess. "Rāga." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48150.
[340] Compare these features with David B. Reck's similar description of 'Devi Niye Tunai': the 'melody differs greatly from tunes of Western classical or popular music: Its lines are sinuous and complex, marked by subtle bends and slides, with intense ornamentation in sharp contrast to the "plain" notes of most Western music.' David B. Reck. "India/South India." In Worlds of Music, edited by Jeff Todd Titon (New York: Schirmer, 2009), 280.

Figure 7: 'My Favorite Things' (1961), 9:00 min.[341]

As the song progresses, the contradiction between these two oscillating sections (C# minor—C# major) becomes increasingly stark, and, following a lengthy piano improvisation by McCoy Tyner, the short sixteenth-note flourishes which were heard in the opening passages begin to expand in scope, eventually interrupting and distorting the syrupy show-tune.[342]

As well as drawing upon the melodic aspects of the Indian rāga as a source of influence, the persistent C# which is implied throughout the entire piece is suggestive of a drone note. The function of the drone is to provide a persistent harmonic base on which to build the rest of the music, and is usually played on the tambura, the ottu, the ektar, or the dotara. In the case of

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[341] Ibid., 288.

[342] Although there are no notated versions of Coltrane's live performances of this song—and it is beyond my own expertise to provide one—to see how this song developed from its inception, I would suggest listening to Coltrane's *Newport '63* and an unreleased Belgium 1965 performance of the song, which has fortunately been made available through Youtube. John Coltrane, "The John Coltrane Quartet My Favorite Things, Belgium. 1965," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kPXw6YaCEY.

Things, the drone is not played on any single instrument, but implied in the unmoving tonic which persists throughout the duration of the song. (Interpreting a stable tonic as a kind of drone certainly stretches the understanding of a drone, especially as conceived in Indian music, but, as previously stated, interpreting the influence of Indian music in Coltrane's aesthetic requires a degree of interpretive latitude.)

That Coltrane should have begun to reach out to other national music traditions at this time in many respects foreshadowed the civil rights movement's growing concern with the global anti-colonial and Pan-Africanist movements which began to take centre stage around the middle years of decade. Indeed, in March 1964, when Malcolm X returned from a trip to Africa and the Middle East, he formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity, and on May 29 gave a speech at the Militant Labor Forum arguing that Black America needed to look to examples in China, Cuba, and Algeria in order to throw off their oppressors. He stated: 'The next thing you'll see here in America… [is] the same things that have taken place among other people on this earth whose condition was parallel to that of the 22 million Afro-Americans in this country.'[343] Throughout his talk, Malcolm X explicitly cited anti-colonial movements from China, Cuba, and Algeria—perhaps only excluding India because of its association with nonviolent struggle (which he was arguing against in this speech). Also in the same year, members of SNCC John Lewis and Donald Harris made an extended journey across Africa, which included visits to Guinea, Zambia, and the newly independent Ghana. The idea of African American identity was becoming increasingly tied up with the global struggle against colonial domination, and, consequently, Coltrane's unreconciled juxtaposition of stylistic devices from American popular music and Indian classical music can be understood in this context.

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[343] Malcolm X, "Malcolm X speaks at the Militant Labor Forum. May 29, 1964," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mvU7OcYsNo.

Conclusions

Because of its apparent political quietism, Coltrane's music is more difficult to reconcile with existing sociological understandings of the relationship between music and politics than Highlander and Dylan. It is also more difficult to situate within the political movements of the 1950s and 1960s. In examining his music, therefore, I have drawn upon ideas of aesthetic autonomy, particularly those expounded by Adorno, which see music as political because of the social mediation of its material as well as the social mediation of the artist who works upon this material. For Adorno the radicalism of music is measured precisely to the extent that it refuses political function: both hermetically sealed and socially mediated, autonomous music becomes a form of unconscious historical writing, where dominant socio-historical tendencies become objectified within its form.

By drawing upon the traditions of African American, European classical, and Indian music, Coltrane's aesthetics expand our understanding of the counterculture and the civil rights movement beyond their usual boundaries, both geographical and in terms of their central ideas.[344] This confirms a truism about these two movements, because geographically the counterculture was never really confined to the US at all, but was seen across many countries— particularly in Europe—throughout the 1950s and 1960s. It was also not unique to capitalist societies, with significant movements taken place in the planned economies of Eastern Europe, such as in Czechoslovakia. Similarly, as suggested throughout Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes*, the civil rights movement cannot be properly understood without seeing it in the broader context of the colonial uprisings across the globe.[345] Indeed, as Allen has argued, the

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[344] I have favoured using the term 'central ideas' rather than 'ideological' because of the latter's multiple definitions, i.e., 'beliefs', 'political ideology', 'false consciousness', etc.
[345] See Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'Part II: The Golden Age,' in *The Age of Extremes*, 225-402.

civil rights movement should in fact be thought of as a form of opposition to colonialism, albeit one internal to the borders of the US.[346]

Hobsbawm's study is particularly pertinent on this issue because of the stress it places on the growing interconnectedness of the world in the twentieth-century, where the torch of political struggle in one country could ignite a revolution in others. One way of thinking about Coltrane's music might therefore be through the prism of globalization. In a different study, entitled 'The Nation and Globalization', Hobsbawm defines globalization as a 'state of affairs in which the globe is the essential unit of operation of some human activity, and where this activity is ideally conducted in terms of single, universal, systems of thought, techniques and modes of communication.'[347] This was certainly the intention behind treaties like the General Agreement on Tariffs (GATT) and its institutional successor the World Trade Organization (WTO), both of which provided a global framework for negotiating trade agreements and managing conflict resolution in the aftermath of the Second World War. However, Hobsbawm also recognizes the role of individual nation states and their constitutive communities in opposing these forces. Indeed, many of these smaller units have fundamentally different interests from global entities such as the GATT and the WTO and therefore come to be seen as 'troublesome or, at best, irrelevant.'[348] This is helpful in thinking through Coltrane's aesthetics because it illustrates the conflictual processes that take place in the ever closer union of globalization, i.e., that 'coming together', particularly within the existing political-economic set-up, is as much about conflict and estrangement as it is about unity. In this respect, Coltrane's music can be understood as an attempt to articulate the possibility of *real* global unity (utopia) through the portrayal of its extreme opposite. To paraphrase Adorno, Coltrane's music

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[346] Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*.
[347] Eric J. Hobsbawm, "The Nation and Globalization," *Constellations* 5, no. 1 (March 1998): 1.
[348] Ibid.

demonstrated the possibility of unified world by tearing the mask from the false community of big business and international finance.

Far from being a pipedream, there were important ways in which some semblance of a 'real global community' started to materialize in this period. As well as bringing international big business and global finance closer together, one of the themes of the 1950s and 1960s was an unstable but nonetheless real coalition between the forces of the oppressed across the world.[349] In Coltrane's music, I have argued that this is best understood as an expansive conception of 'Blackness' within the civil rights movement, which transcended national borders to include the so-called Third World and colonial countries. These tendencies were not, however, isolated to the experience of African Americans, but were also seen in the feelings of solidarity between White Americans, particularly amongst students and young people, and oppressed communities both in the US and the world over. A national form of this is evident in the interactions between the student movement (in particular the SDS) and civil rights organizations, but it also found international expression in the multiracial and multi-ethnic make-up of the opposition to the war in Vietnam, where individuals from a variety of backgrounds identified more with the people of Vietnam than with their own government (I take up the issue of the war in Vietnam in more detail in the following chapter). Written in the early 1960s, compositions like 'My Favorite Things' might be said to have anticipated and, perhaps in its own way, contributed to these developments.

Whilst Coltrane's music has been considered principally in relation to the civil rights movement, I argue that critical aesthetics in the counterculture are best understood through the music of Frank Zappa. Although on the surface these two musicians would appear to have little

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[349] For wide-ranging accounts of these worldwide insurgencies and the international solidarity that had begun to develop, see Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*; Harman, *The Fire Last Time*; and Isserman, *If I had a Hammer*.

in common, it is argued that they each represent individual responses to the status of handed down musical materials in a politically volatile period in US history.

Chapter 5. Frank Zappa and the Self-Reflexive Subject

> The more autocratically the I rises above entity, the greater its imperceptible objectification and ironic retraction of its constitutive role.[350] (Adorno)
>
> If it [the subject] were liquidated rather than sublated in a higher form, the effect would be regression—not just of consciousness, but a regression to real barbarism.[351] (Adorno)

Introduction

Zappa is perhaps distinct from the previous case studies in that he demonstrated a high level of control over the political implications of his use of musical material, in particular the ways that material can be used to jolt the listener into self-awareness. However, whilst Zappa may have been highly critical of what he perceived to be reactionary and conformist tendencies within the counterculture, the relationship of his music to the political movements of the period frequently went beyond what he himself declared to be it. Through a critique of Zappa's aesthetics (rather than just simply taking him at his word), this chapter brings his music into dialogue with the counterculture.

Of all the musicians to come out of the 1960s few were as musically and intellectually complex as Frank Zappa. Across his wide-ranging discography, Zappa and The Mothers of Invention (or The Mothers for short), drew upon an array of musical styles, from free jazz to doo wop, blues to psychedelic, avant-garde to surf music. However, what distinguishes Zappa from similarly eclectic musicians was his treatment of these influences, the way that he

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[350] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 176-177.
[351] Adorno, "Subject and Object," 499.

assimilated both what he loved and what he hated and represented them in all their contradictory glory. His contempt for the soporific love songs popular at the time, the perceived disingenuousness of hippie culture, the censorious nature of the music business—all were grist for Zappa's musical mill. In bringing together this tangle of musical influences, Zappa did not seek to overcome their many antagonisms, but to set them, unreconciled, in bold relief.

The critical dimensions of Zappa's music have generated considerable debate both inside and outside of academic circles. Whilst the more philosophically oriented have argued for his (variously) modernist, postmodernist, or avant-gardist credentials, others have concentrated on the sometimes tedious but always necessary job of musicological stock-taking, documenting the biographical and historical details of his music and its context.[352] Unfortunately, however, the gulf between these two approaches has rarely been breached, with critiques of his aesthetics remaining abstract from the specific concerns of the 1960s political movements and studies of the movements failing to draw upon the conclusions of the aesthetic projects.[353] The task of this present chapter is to go some way toward correcting this oversight. Specifically, this chapter sets out to situate Zappa's critique of 'commodity fetishism' concretely within the 'Freak Scene,' the 1967 Human Be-In, and Summer of Love in the same year. Drawing upon the critique of 'constitutive subjectivity' found in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* and his 1969 essay on 'Subject and Object', it is argued that the subversive power of Zappa's aesthetics was derived from his opposition to the hierarchical organization of his audience and the art-object. In taking this approach, I confirm the conventional wisdom that Zappa's music was implicitly (and often explicitly) critical of conformity, whilst also

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[352] See, respectively, Martin Knakkergaard, "Zappa and Modernism: An Extended Study of 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It," in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed. Paul Carr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013); Kelly Fisher Lowe, *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); .Jim Cotter, "Frank Zappa," in *Music of the Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde: A Biocritical Sourcebook*, ed. Larry Sitsky (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002); and Kevin Courrier, *The Dangerous Kitchen: The Subversive World of Zappa* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2002).
[353] Exceptions to this exist, of course. Perhaps the most exemplary example is Ben Watson, *Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play* (London: Quartet, 1995).

considering his engagement with its extreme opposite—what Paul Heelas has referred to as the counterculture's obsession with 'unmediated individualism.'[354] As suggested by the Adorno epigraph, the more the 'I' believes itself to be self-constituting, the more it opens itself up to objectification. Conformity and constitutive subjectivity are therefore seen as both enabling and presupposing one another.

This chapter is structured into two main sections. Section 1, 'Zappa's Radical Aesthetics,' is committed to situating Zappa's highly idiosyncratic critique of commodity fetishism within existing understandings of modernism, postmodernism, and the avant-garde. In doing this, this section begins with a somewhat immanent critique of Zappa's musical practices, paying particular attention to the way he interrogated the division between the audience and the art-object. Following this, I proceed to situate Zappa's critical aesthetics within a broader theoretical context. Drawing upon the aesthetic writings of Susan Sontag, Fredric Jameson, Peter Bürger, and Terry Eagleton, it is argued that because of the political tumultuous nature of the times Zappa's music, though sharing with postmodernist art a concern to blur the division between art and life, cannot be so simply reduced to such categories. In concluding this section, I look to Adorno's critique of the constitutive subject. By drawing upon his audience as musical material whilst retaining a conventional conception of artistic form, it is argued that Zappa sought to expose the subjective mediation of the art object as well as the objective determination of the subject. In doing this, he simultaneously aimed to expose the dangers inherent in ideas of unmediated individualism and passivity. Section 2, 'America Freaks Out', is concerned with contextualizing this understanding of Zappa's aesthetics. Beginning with a section on the 'Freak Scene', I develop a framework in which self-reflexive subjectivity can be situated. Following this, however, I look at the intersections of constitutive

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[354] Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford; Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell, 1996).

subjectivity and conformity at the Human Be-In and the Summer of Love in 1967. It is argued that the refusal to recognize the objective determination of the subject, resulted in conditions which made possible the most irrational aspects of the acid subculture, i.e., the desire to destroy the self ('ego death').

1. Zappa's Radical Aesthetics

Commodity Fetishism

The complex relationship between art and life is one of the central themes in Zappa's music.[355] Whether maintained in the form of parody,[356] speaking directly to the audience,[357] use of everyday (typically non-musical) sounds,[358] Zappa refused to let his listeners escape from the concrete experience of listening. The effects of these compositional techniques have been conceptualized in terms of their denial of 'nostalgia,'[359] or as a form of 'anti-fetishism,'[360] and stylistic comparisons have been drawn with musique concrète. In an article on Zappa and critical theory, David Wragg argues that Zappa's music negotiates the same tension which can be seen in Brecht's epic theatre, making clear the position of the audience in the process of artistic production.[361] More broadly, Martin Knakkergaard has related these techniques to the abiding principles of modernist aesthetics.[362]

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[355] 'Music is always a commentary on society', Zappa once remarked. Richard Kostelanetz and John Rocco, *The Frank Zappa Companion: Four Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 60.

[356] See *Cruising With Ruben & the Jets* (1968).

[357] See 'The Duke Regains his Chops' on *Absolutely Free* (1967).

[358] See 'America Drinks and Goes Home' on *Absolutely Free*.

[359] Courrier, *The Dangerous Kitchen: The Subversive World of Zappa*, 13.

[360] Arved Ashby, "Frank Zappa and the Anti-Fetishist Orchestra," *The Musical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (1999): 559.

[361] Wragg, "'Or Any Art at All?': Frank Zappa Meets Critical Theory." Brecht himself has written of the same phenomenon after watching the Chinese actor Mei Lanfang perform in Moscow in the spring of 1935: '[t]he audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place.' Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wrang, 1992 [1964]), 92.

[362] Knakkergaard, "Zappa and modernism: An extended study of 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It," 169.

At one minute 24 seconds, the Mother's 1968 track 'Are you Hung Up?' from *We're Only in it for the Money* provides an indication of some of Zappa's approaches to recorded composition. The song begins with distorted electronic signals and a stuttering Eric Clapton soliloquy, before morphing into the delay-drenched whispers of Scott Kellgren (the sound engineer working on the album) threatening to erase all of the Zappa master-tapes. Following this, the listener is treated to a melodious electric guitar lick, thus giving the impression that the preceding section was simply the preamble before the opening theme, but no sooner does the melody begin than it is interrupted by a monstrous roar (MOAAHHH!). Jimmy Carl Black then introduces himself as the 'Indian of the group,' laughs, and the song is over. The juxtaposition of these contradictory elements and the use of meta-material (material which is *about* the material), violate aesthetic distance by constantly jolting the listener into consciousness. Similar compositional techniques can be seen across much of Zappa's early music, including 'The Duke Retains His Chops' from *Absolutely Free* (1967), where Zappa breaks the fourth wall by speaking directly to the listener about the music—'this is the exciting part. This is like the Supremes; see the way it builds up? Do you feel it?'—and 'The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny'—a haunting atonal assemblage of orchestral effects, electronic and 'found' materials, and reverb-laden laughter.

A different example of these techniques can heard in Zappa's 1971 musical surrealist film *200 Motels*.[363] Like 'Are you Hung Up?', *200 Motels* makes generous use of discontinuous and contradictory musical material, albeit on a much larger scale. The film begins with a fanfare on wind, brass, and voice entitled 'Semi-Fraudulent/Direct-From-Hollywood Overture', an obvious parody Hollywood film music, before descending into a chaotic avant-gardist battle between various percussive and electronic effects, as well as staccato trumpet. The music gradually subsides allowing space for approximately two minutes of dialogue, before the

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[363] Frank Zappa. *200 Motels* (England: Tony Palmer Studios, 2009).

Mothers' begin *Mystery Roach*, a smutty rhythm and blues piece in Emajor. The film proceeds in this loose sequential fashion (music – dialogue – music – dialogue), drawing upon influences ranging from bluegrass ('Lonesome Cowboy Burt'), rock 'n roll ('Magic Fingers'), film music ('Centerville'), and atonal music reminiscent of the Second Viennese School ('A Nun Suit Painted On Some Old Boxes'). What 'Are You Hung Up?' achieves in less than two minutes, *200 Motels* stretches to over one hundred.

But perhaps one of the more striking things about *200 Motels* is that it explicitly acknowledges the role of meta-material in the construction of Zappa's aesthetic. In a track aptly named 'He's Watching Us', a dialogue between Mothers members including Mark Volman (guitarist, vocalist), Jeff Simmons (bass, guitar, vocalist) and Ian Underwood (woodwind and keyboards) describes Zappa's voyeuristic tendencies:

> Mark: You should be careful talkin' about that stuff.
>
> Jeff: Why, does he [Zappa] listen?
>
> Ian: He always listens. He always watches and listens to all the guys in the band. I've been in the band for years, and I know. He always listens.
>
> Jeff: That's how he gets all his material! It isn't s'posed to be natural, friendly, good-natured, humorous, ha-ha-ha-ha!
>
> All Mothers: Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha, YEAH, WELL FINE!
>
> Jeff: . . . and then he rips it off, and he sneaks off into a secret room someplace, and boils it in ammonia, and he gets it perverted, and THEN he brings it back to us at rehearsal and makes us play it!

The film plot does not follow a conventional narrative form, and this is also reflected in the development of the music, but a common theme in the film material is the actors', in reality the Mothers, concern that Zappa is secretly recording them to use their conversations as material. The confusion evoked in this process is exploited by Zappa to draw the audience into a more critical relationship with the material.

Taking this music to the stage, audience participation became one of Zappa's principal concerns. In this respect it is important to note that Zappa differs from Brechtian Epic Theatre. Zappa was not just interested in visual and acoustic effects to the extent that they set the audience thinking, but used this technique to include the latter in the physical process of creation: Zappa's performances involved the audience on a more somatic level than Brecht. During their residency at the Garrick Theatre from 1967 to 1968, audience members were frequently invited onto the stage to perform in some skit. In one instance, three uniformed marines were called onto a stage and asked to destroy a baby doll as if it was 'gook baby'— much to the audiences' horror, they savagely tore it apart.[364] There were even times when, because of poor attendance, The Mothers spent the evening dutifully waiting on the audience with wine and conversation, or invited the audience to give the performance whilst The Mothers sat in the stalls. All this as part of the performance.

Even during those rare times when the music was fairly 'straight,' audience participation served to subvert this through what Richard Hand has referred to as the 'Bakhtinian carnival grotestue' atmosphere, where the audience would 'wear costumed, face paints and masks… [and] all participate in a unified carnival mood.'[365] Examples of this can be seen early in Zappa's career in the live section of his 1987 movie *Uncle Meat* which samples sections of The Mothers 1968 performance at the Royal Festival Hall in the UK.[366] However, the effect of the audience in Zappa's performances was also evident in more subtle ways. For some years, Zappa had been developing hand gestures as a way of conducting the group: 'We have these signals which I make with my hands, which indicate that the members of the group

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[364] See Frank Kofsky, "Frank Zappa: The Mothers of Invention.," *Jazz & Pop,* 1967.

[365] Richard J. Hand, "Zappa and Horror: Screamin' at the Monster," in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed, Paul Carr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 21.

[366] Frank Zappa. *Uncle Meat* (Oak Forest, Illinois: MPI Home Video, 1987).

are supposed to make certain noises with their mouths.'[367] The hand gestures were used to initiate sudden changes in time signature, key, or even to change song. At times these gestures were even used to conduct the audience itself.[368]

Far from being isolated to the audiences' role in artistic production, Zappa also directed this critical attitude at the relationship between artist and art-object. This approach is exemplified by Zappa's so-called 'Project/Object' scheme. Project/Object, Zappa writes, 'is a term I have used to describe the overall concept of my work in various mediums. Each project (in whatever realm), or interview connected to it, is part of a larger object for which there is no technical name.'[369] The object, in other words, is the sum of all the material (musical and non-musical) that goes toward constituting each project. Bearing this in mind, David Walley has suggested that what distinguishes Zappa from many other artists is that he does not just *produce* his art, but that he *is* his art.[370] Zappa's relationship to his musical material also suggests a large degree of syncretism between these two spheres. Identifying as an 'anthropologist,' 'reporter,' and 'observer,'[371] much of Zappa's material was amassed by secretly recording those around him for use in his *Project/Object* scheme (see Zappa's 1967 recording *Lumpy Gravy* for the most extensive use of this material).

A further characteristic of Zappa's aesthetic philosophy, which confounds the division between art and life, is his conception of the 'big note'. In a 1968 article in *Life Magazine*,

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[367] John Bryan, "Frank's Favourite Topic: Creeps Are The Backbone Of This Country," *Open City* (December, 1967): 22-28.

[368] 'Zappa Conducts the Audience.' Last modified September 29, 2010. http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xf0d20_zappa-conducts-the-audience-1973-au_music

[369] Zappa and Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 139.

[370] David Walley, *No Commercial Potential: The Saga of Frank Zappa* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996). In an article on Zappa and critical theory, David Wragg has also remarked that Zappa 'comes across as the rational observer; as the outsider looking in on LA culture, and American society generally. See Wragg, "'Or Any Art at All?': Frank Zappa Meets Critical Theory," 211.

[371] See Zappa and Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 143; Pauline Butcher, *Freak Out!: My Life with Frank Zappa* (London: Plexus, 2011), 137; Nick Awde, "Zappa and Satire: From Conceptual Absurdism to the Perversity of Politics," in *Frank Zappa and the And,* ed. Paul Carr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 89; and Michel Delville, "Zappa and the Avant-Garde: Artifice/Absorbtion/Expression," in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed. Paul Carr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 193.

Zappa states that '[e]verything in the universe is composed basically of vibrations—light is a vibration, sound is a vibration, atoms are composed of vibrations—and all these vibrations just might be harmonics of some incomprehensible fundamental cosmic tone.'[372] Paul Carr has compared Zappa's theory with contemporaneous developments in the hard sciences, specifically, Robert Wilson and Arno Penzias's 1965 discovery that 'residual sound related to the Big Bang was still apparent in the universe.'[373] Thus, Zappa's aesthetic philosophy suggests an atemporal conceptualization of sound which is neither reducible to, nor separable from its individual manifestations. In the context of his Project/Object scheme, the 'big note' would seem to act as some form of transcendent totality, which effectively consumes Zappa's 'object'—and everyone else's— within itself: the 'Big Note' as the total 'Project.' Art and life appear to be quite indivisible from this perspective.

Against this, Zappa has suggested that whilst his musical material may be broad, it remains conventionally objective and, as such, remains in tension with the sphere of everyday life. He discusses this in terms of artistic 'framing:'

> The most important thing in art is *The Frame*. For Painting: literally; for other arts: figuratively—because, without this humble appliance, you can't know where *The Art* stops and *The Real World* begins.
>
> You have to put a 'box' around it because otherwise, *what is that shit on the wall*?
>
> If John Cage, for instance, says, '*I'm putting a contact microphone on my throat, and I'm going to drink carrot juice, and that's my composition*,' then his gurgling qualifies as *his composition* because he put a frame around it and said so. '*Take it or leave it, I now will this to be music*.' After that it's a matter of taste. Without the frame-as-announced, it's a guy swallowing carrot juice.[374]

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[372] Frank Zappa, "The Oracle has it all Psyched Out," *Life Magazine* (June 28, 1968): 84.

[373] Paul Carr, "The Big Note, Xenocrony and All Things Contextual: Frank Zappa and the And," in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed. Paul Carr (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 6.

[374] Zappa and Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 140.

Thus, even as Zappa drew upon his audience for musical material, he held them at bay through a fairly conventional—modernist—concept of artistic form. However, as can be seen from his conception of the Project/Object and the Big Note, the line between his art and the everyday was often hard to maintain. This tension is of considerable importance because of the shifting ground of US artistic culture in the late 1960s, where the relationship between aesthetics and politics was becoming increasingly blurred. Whilst Peter Bürger has seen the breakdown of this tension as the return of aesthetics to their rightful place in everyday life, Fredric Jameson (*pace* Adorno) has argued that this homecoming in fact signalled an assimilation of art to the commodity form, which was increasingly coming to dominate everyday life. It is to this problem that I now turn.

Critique or Affirmation? Zappa, Postmodernism, and the Avant-garde

The question of whether Zappa's aesthetics should be understood in modernist, postmodernist, or avant-gardist terms has dominated debates on the political meanings of his music. Examining three early Zappa recordings, Borders argues that 'it should be obvious that his musical borrowings and uses of collage and quick-cut techniques were never ambivalent—they always had a point.'[375] For Borders, this intentionality differentiates Zappa from ahistorical, 'ironic detachment, and playful depthlessness' which has become a characteristic of postmodern art. For Lowe, on the other hand, Zappa's emphasis on musical quotation and the way he 'calls attention to the very constructedness of the music' suggests a certain affinity with the postmodern work of art.[376] Contra Borders, Lowe thereby instantiates a critical postmodern aesthetic. Michel Delville and Andrew Norris takes a different stance, arguing that for anyone familiar with the 'aural collages' of *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free*, Zappa cannot be

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[375] Borders, "Form and the Concept Album: Aspects of Modernism in Frank Zappa's Early Releases" 119.
[376] Lowe, *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa*, 119.

considered as a simple manifestation of the modernist cult of irony or its hypothetical extension into postmodern eclecticism, quotation, and pastiche.'[377] In this latter case, Zappa's maximalist aesthetic projects an image of space and time where it is 'no longer possible to see one thing in terms of another.'[378] If Zappa resists easy assimilation to any of these categories, it is because of the politically tumultuous nature of the times in which the very idea of the critical artwork was being thrown into question.

In a 1965 article entitled 'One Culture and the New Sensibility,' Susan Sontag argues that historically the dominant model for understanding art was as a form of education and social criticism. However, she claims, with the advent of industrialization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the introduction of 'invisible' (electro-magnetic) technologies such as the radio and television in the twentieth century, art underwent a radical adaptation in its social function: 'Art, which I have characterised as an instrument for modifying and educating sensibility and consciousness, now operates in an environment that cannot be grasped by the senses.'[379] Art, for Sontag, is inseparable from its mode of technological mediation. From a sensory society whose inner workings can be looked upon, or held in one's hand, the world was transformed into one of extrasensory enigmas, into the 'aperceptual'. Whilst the older models measured art in terms of its difference from life, Sontag argues for a *new sensibility* which considers the congruities: '[t]he new sensibility understands art as the extension of life'.[380] According to Sontag, one of the consequences of negating the tension between art and life has been a lessening of art's critical faculties, and the removal of the traditional barriers

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[377] Michel Delville and Andrew Norris, "Disciplined Excess: The Minimalist/Maximalist Interface in Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart " *Interval(le)s* 1, no. 1 (2004): 5.
[378] Ibid., 14.
[379] Sontag, "One Culture and the New Sensibility," 301.
[380] Ibid., 300. Daniel Bell also speaks of a new sensibility in this period: Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).
Indeed, this conception of negating the distance between art and life also corresponds to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

between a high (unique) and low (mass produced) culture.[381] In this respect, Sontag's conclusions share much with those of Jameson.

In his seminal analysis of postmodernism, Jameson seeks to historically situate the negation of modernity's critical capacities, arguing that the protestations of modernist art were silenced by their own acceptance within the academy—a critical, though ultimately similar, conclusion to Sontag's.[382] Amongst other things, Jameson considers postmodernism as the institutionalization and, thus, the negation of modernist dissent: '[n]ot only are Picasso and Joyce no longer ugly; they now strike us, on the whole, as rather "realistic," and this is the result of a canonization and academic institutionalization of the modern movement generally that can be traced to the late 1950s.'[383] Whilst for Sontag art has become the expression of our own incomprehension, for Jameson its critical character has been negated through its assimilation to the academy and the aestheticization of the everyday. Although disagreeing on the political implications of this change in function (Sontag optimistic, Jameson not so much), both share a common concern with the negation of the critical work of art.

Although the suggestion (*pace* Walley and, to a lesser extent, Delville) that the lives of Zappa and his audience were no longer at odds with the art-object is consonant with Sontag's conception of a new sensibility, as we have seen this would fail to take into account his critique of commodity fetishism and interrogation of the relationship between artist and art-object. In this respect, Zappa's art is perhaps more in tune with the politically committed avant-garde described by Peter Bürger. For Bürger, the avant-garde sought to relieve high art of its isolated

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[381] In many respects Sontag's association of 'Enlightenment-style reason' with forms of 'authoritarian rationalism' foreshadowed the post-structuralist (and postmodern) theory which was to dominate academic culture in the coming years. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 [1979]).
[382] For an analysis of the intersections between Sontag and postmodern/post-structuralist theory, see Sylvia Harrison, *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Modernism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 78.
[383] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 4.

status, to make it available (as a political utility) to the everyday, to 'sublate art into the praxis of life.'[384] Writing in 1985, Terry Eagleton has further differentiated between an avant-gardist art which sought to 'erase the frontiers between culture and political society and return aesthetic production to its humble, unprivileged place within social practices as a whole' and a *postmodern* synthesis of art and life, in which the avant-garde's 'utopian desire for a fusion of art and social praxis is seized, distorted and jeeringly turned back upon them as dystopian reality.' According to Eagleton, one of the more significant developments in the consumer phase of capitalism (circa. 1940s onwards) was the inversion of its own logic with respect to the role of art, i.e., 'that if the artefact is a commodity, the commodity can always be an artefact.'[385] Perhaps the most striking example of this development can be seen in the work of Andy Warhol and his 1962 representation of *Campbell's Soup Cans*, where art itself is modelled upon a commodity 'which is already invested with aesthetic allure, in a sealed circle': commodity and art as one.[386] With regard to the new sensibility, Warhol's *Soup Cans* is so literal as to defy all interpretation—the art-object is, Sontag writes, 'so what it is.'[387] At the other end of this spectrum, Sontag argues, are the aleatoric compositions of John Cage (such as can be seen as early as 1951 in his *Music of Changes*), where the category of art is emptied of meaning to such an extent that it is now free to appropriate and be appropriated by the commodity form. Cage's compositions are so abstract, so devoid of content, as to have the same silencing effect.[388] There is a flickering similarity here with Delville's very literal interpretation of Zappa's maximalist aesthetic.

There are, of course, important ways in which Cage's music can be understood as politically provocative and critical in its implications. Whilst it is not the purpose of this present

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[384] Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 51.
[385] Terry Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism," *New Left Review* 1, no. 152 (1985): 61.
[386] Ibid., 62.
[387] Susan. Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001 [1966]), 301.
[388] Harrison, *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Modernism*, 175.

study to look in detail at Cage's music, it is important to note the similarities between Cage's aesthetic philosophy and that of Sontag because they both demonstrate certain critical tendencies that arise, paradoxically, through the negation of criticism. For example, in 1957 Cage wrote: 'New music: new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of words.'[389] The quote, taken from his book on *Silence*, is eerily reminiscent of Sontag's 'new sensibility', in that it implies a shift in both musical content and, concomitantly, our perceptual processes toward a position of neutrality, in which the listener surrenders their critical capacities, stops looking for meaning, and just appreciates music for what it is: sound. Hobbs has described this philosophy as 'focused on celebrating the moment', a kind of aesthetic 'mindfulness'.[390] Insofar as this approach is critical, it is as a postmodern critique of forms of logic (specifically categorical logic) that seek to impose order on that which is, by its very nature, chaotic. Seen from this perspective, the 'quiet mind' is not a stupid mind, but one which opposes the dominant regimes of thought. Nevertheless, in the case of Cage *and* Sontag the role played by the artist in subjectively mediating the objective musical material is all but negated, even if this is intended to be a socially critical act. Art and life are collapsed into one another, utterly, and this is something that they would not deny.

Zappa's music, by contrast, sought to endow the everyday with a critical self-reflexivity; the extent to which Zappa himself collapsed the distinction between art and life altogether is, as we have seen, debateable. As Wragg has argued, Zappa 'does not look for the abolition of art' and that 'an attack on art in concrete social circumstances is not an attack on art per se.'[391] Though sharing a common concern with traversing the distance between art and life, Zappa's music was in many respects opposed to the ideas of the new sensibility: whilst

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[389] John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 10.
[390] Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant Garde*, 183.
[391] Wragg, "'Or Any Art at All?': Frank Zappa Meets Critical Theory," 214.

Zappa sought to integrate a critical attitude into his artwork, and thereby connect it with the everyday, the new sensibility aimed to silence critical mind. Indeed, Ben Watson defines Zappa's music precisely *against* the more 'accepting aesthetic' of his contemporaries in the Black Mountain School project: 'Zappa's paranoid listener actively traces the chaotic "live" portions of his music for clues, a very different response to the "quiet mind" hoped for by John Cage.'[392]

Similarly, the tumultuous political conditions of the time would also seem to challenge the idea of any widespread new sensibility. Following King's assassination in 1968, the ranks of the Black Panther Party swelled beyond recognition. At one point, J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI reported to President Richard Nixon, recently elected by the so-called 'silent majority', that according to an opinion poll '25% of the black population has great respect' for the Black Panther Party, 'including 43% of blacks under 21 years of age.' Continued state repression under Nixon's paranoid ultra-conservative administration also contributed toward a growth in such organizations, though later their fragmentation. By 1970, as news of America's invasion of Cambodia was announced, the anti-war movement saw its largest numbers yet as 500,000 people marched in Washington and 300,000 on San Francisco. Police repression was severe at many of the demonstrations, which itself became a pivotal issue for mass protest: after four students were murdered by the National Guard at an anti-war protest at Kent State University, it was reported that as many as 4 million university, high school, and junior high school students demonstrated against state repression the following weekend.[393] *Business Week* summarized the issue: '[t]he invasion of Cambodia and the senseless shooting of four students at Kent State University in Ohio have consolidated the academic community against the war, against

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[392] Ben Watson, "Frank Zappa as Dadaist: Recording Technology and the Power to Repeat," *Contemporary Music Review* 15, no. 1-2 (1996): 119.

[393] Fred Halstead, *Out Now!: A Participant's Account of the Movement in the United States Against the Vietnam War* (New York; Montreal: Pathfinder, 2009).

business, and against government. This is a dangerous situation. It threatens the whole economic and social structure of the nation.'[394] Furthermore, outside of the student and black movements, labour militancy was reaching unusually high levels with more strikes in 1969 and 1970 than in any year since 1946.[395] According to Elbaum, 'by early 1971, public opinion polls were reporting that upwards of 3 million people thought a revolution was necessary in the US.'[396] If the 'quiet mind' predominated, it was only to shut out the alarm bells of revolution.

Given these contexts, I would like to suggest at this point that Zappa's reconfiguration of the relationship between performer and audience, artist and art-object, even at times art and life, might be more usefully seen as a means for constructing *meta*-material, rather than the collapse of aesthetics into everyday life. In doing this, Zappa turned the subject into an object of critical reflection.

The Self-Reflexive Subject

In situating Zappa's critique of commodity fetishism within a historical and theoretical context, I have foregrounded the ways that form and content in Zappa's music interacted with the experience of the art object. Although Zappa's music may usefully be considered politically committed, his approach was highly idiosyncratic. Whereas the primary goal of Brecht's Epic Theatre was to alert the audience to the artificiality of the performance, thereby provoking critical engagement with the content of his plays, Zappa, I have suggested, although making use of some of the same techniques often with the same objectives, was concerned with exposing the syncretic relationship between the audience (subject) and the performance (object). In exploring this latter issue, Zappa was fairly typical of the post-war avant-garde,

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[394] Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*, 1.
[395] Ibid., 2.
[396] Ibid.

developing what Stuart Hobbs refers to as 'an aesthetic based on… materials from everyday life.'[397] However, even as Zappa drew upon these materials, he managed to maintain a critical relation to this social content. This critical distance was made possible by a more or less conventionally modernist concept of artistic form, where the art-object is clearly defined against the everyday.

Whilst the idea of drawing upon the everyday for material and simultaneously holding it at bay through the artistic 'frame' could also be said of Warhol's *Soup Cans*, there is an important distinction between the two approaches. Whereas Warhol was concerned with affirming the distinction between subject and object, Zappa is concerned with, momentarily at least, subverting this relationship. In Zappa's art, a subject is not *only* a subject, but, as material, also an object; on the other hand, the art-object, because of the subjective nature of its material, cannot simply be understood as an object. An example may help to clarify this issue. When Zappa calls the audience up onto the stage to participate in some skit, the audience enters into the frame of the artwork; in doing so, they are forced to confront their own role in making up the objective musical material, i.e., the material's subjective nature. Simultaneously, the audience is forced to viewed themselves as an object, as constituting a part of the work of art. The same might also be said for Zappa's secret recordings of his bandmates, where The Mothers' themselves become the objective material, thus exposing the subjective nature of the material and, simultaneously, the objective nature of themselves. This differs drastically from *Soup Cans* (and other similar works of art such as *Music of Changes*), which places subject and object in opposition to one another—indeed, as Sontag herself makes explicit, the *Soup Cans* are so literal as to need *no interpretation*. The thinking subject is simply not required.

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[397] Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant Garde*, 60.

The problem with Sontag's argument is that whether we speak of Warhol's *Soup Cans* or cans of soup more generally, objects do not reveal themselves to us so easily. Behind the illusion of immediacy, objects conceal a subjective dimension. As Peter Dews argues in his 1987 critique of post-structuralist thought, 'it is necessary to maintain both that there is something *given* in experience, and that there is nothing given *immediately*.'[398] Some clarification of this paradoxical understanding of 'subject and object' can be found in Adorno's essay of the same title:

> The separation of subject and object is both real and illusory. True, because in the cognitive realm it serves to express the real separation, the dichotomy of the human condition, a coercive development. False, because the resulting separation must not be hypostatized, not magically transformed into an invariant…. Though they cannot be thought away, as separated, the *pseudos* of the separation is manifested in their being mutually mediated—the object by the subject, and even more, in different ways, the subject by the object.[399]

In reality, although not in practice, the subject is both subject and object: the one that *does* and the thing that is *done unto*. Indeed, for the materialist Adorno, in most important respects the determinative powers of the object exceed that of the subject.[400] Zappa's music was critical inasmuch as it exposed this tension, positioning the audience as both subject and object.

So the question is, how is all of this pertinent for a study of the counterculture? For Adorno, the importance of recognizing the tension between subject and object lies in the loss of real individuality when it goes unacknowledged. To believe that reality is constituted by the thinking subject is to conceal the determinative role played by the object. Indeed, for Adorno, the object's power to determine the subject is precisely equal to the extent that these powers

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[398] Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), 50.
[399] Adorno, "Subject and Object," 498-499.
[400] In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno writes, '[n]ot even as an idea can we conceive a subject that is not an object; but we can conceive an object that is not a subject. To be an object also is part of the meaning of subjectivity; but it is not equally part of the meaning of objectivity to be a subject.' *Negative Dialectics*, 183.

are believed not to exist.[401] Real individuality becomes unrealizable because the shaping role of objective reality is rendered invisible: gone unseen, the object is free to do its work upon the powerless subject. By contrast, Adorno goes on to argue that the much hoped-for reconciliation between subject and object cannot be brought about through the object itself, because if the subject 'were liquidated rather than sublated in a higher form, the effect would be regression… to real barbarism.'[402] For Adorno, such a position (reminiscent of Sontag's new sensibility) represents a failure of the thinking subject to engage in constructive dialogue with the object, allowing itself to become mastered by it and consequently signalling an abandonment of subjectivity. Whilst these two positions appear to be mutually exclusive, their common resolution in the subject's death provides the key to understanding their relationship: the assertion of the constitutive subject provides the preconditions for conformity and vice versa.

Because of the prevalence of ideas of constitutive subjectivity and conformity in the counterculture in the late 1960s, this framework is immensely useful for situating Zappa's aesthetics. On the one hand, there were sections of the movement, which emphasized the primacy of the subject (particularly those associated the 'New Age', theosophy, and the acid subculture), treating the individual as if they were not socially mediated. On the other, were those that emphasized the primacy of the object, and called for the silencing of the individual ego—even, at times, its destruction. The following section is committed to placing Zappa's aesthetics within these contexts: first by looking at Zappa's music in the context of the Los Angeles Freak Scene, where intentionality and critique were highly valued; and second, by examining the 1967 Human Be-In and the Summer of Love as case studies, where elements of conformity and constitutive subjectivity—concepts that are seen as intimately bound up with one another—abounded.

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[401] Ibid., 176-177.
[402] Adorno, "Subject and Object," 499.

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2. Zappa and the Freak Scene: The Self-Reflexive Subject in Context

As with all groups within the counterculture, the Freak Scene resists easy definition.[403] Sociologists such as John Howard have characterised 'freaks and heads' as a subset of the hippies, who unlike the 'visionaries' (another subgroup interested primarily in building alternative forms of social organization), were concerned more with experimentation with drugs.[404] The Weather Underground (a militantly leftist, direct-action activist group which emerged out of the SDS), on the other hand, identified itself with the freaks, stating in a 1970 communiqué that '[f]reaks are revolutionaries and revolutionaries are freaks.'[405] Zappa himself exemplifies this contradictory scene, embodying a spectrum of social attitudes ranging from extreme libertarianism to outright authoritarianism.[406]

Diversity notwithstanding, the Freak Scene did share a common concern with extreme and marginal identities—whether in drugs, sexuality, music, fashion, or politics—radical individuality, and a rejection of the more moderate and conformist aspects of the counterculture. Pamela Des Barres, a Mothers associate who performed as part of Girls Together Outrageously, has suggested that the distinction between freaks and hippies lay in the

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[403] Unlike the New Left, for whom the Port Huron Statement was arguably one of the founding documents (even if it was later to be rejected), the idea of a political manifesto was anathema to the Freak Scene. Indeed, if it could be defined at all, it would be through its lack of manifesto – a suggestion echoed by Richard Kostelanetz, ed. *Beyond Left and Right: Radical Thought for Our Times* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1968).

[404] John Robert Howard, "The Flowering of the Hippie Movement," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 382, (1969): 48.

[405] This statement was released by the then Weather Underground leader Bernadine Dohrn as a 'Declaration of a State of War' against the US government after the chairman of the Illinois branch of the Black Panther Party, Fred Hampton, was murdered by the police. Peter Doggett, *There's a Riot Going On* (Edinburgh; New York: Canongate Press, 2009), 366.

[406] See for example his rigorous, career-long defence of the right to free-speech on the one hand, and his complete disregard for the struggle for women's rights on the other. See *Butcher, Freak Out!: My Life with Frank Zappa*, which in many respects can be read as a narrative history, documenting the tensions between sexual liberation and women's liberation in the 1960s.

intention: 'a hippie was sort of the unwashed, unkempt kid…a freak was someone who put a lot of care and attention into their appearance, wanting to stand out instead of blend in.'[407] This corresponds with Zappa's definition of 'freaking out… [as] a process whereby an individual *casts off* outmoded and restricted standards of thinking, dress and social etiquette in order to express CREATIVELY his relationship to his environment and the social structure as a whole' [my italics].[408] By contrast with the perceived passivity of the hippies, freak culture is defined in highly intentional, considered, and creative terms—*casting off* rather than *dropping out*.[409]

As suggested by Zappa's definition of 'freaking out', however, the Freak Scene was more than just subjective expression; rather, in relating the individual to the total 'social structure,' the freaks also contained a strongly *historical* and *contextual* impetus. Further evidence for this can be seen in Zappa's observations on musical experimentation, where he frequently remarked on the interdependence of rules and deviation: '[i]n order for one to *deviate successfully,* one has to have at least a passing acquaintance with whatever *norm* one expects to deviate from.'[410] The reason for this, as we have seen in the previous section, is that the individual can have no basis for discerning 'progress' or 'development' without some knowledge of the prevailing attitudes at any given time. As the quote at the head of this chapter states, '[t]he more autocratically the I rises above entity, the greater its imperceptible objectification and ironic retraction of its constitutive role.'[411] The subject becomes an object precisely to the extent that it believes itself to be unmediated.

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[407] Michael Walker, *Laurel Canyon: The Inside Story of Rock-and-Roll's Legendary Neighborhood* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2007), 29.

[408] In the liner notes for Frank Zappa, *[Liner Notes] Freak out!*, (Salem, Massachusetts: Rykodisc, 1995).

[409] The Hippie Dictionary defines 'freaks' in more general terms. It reads: 'freak [is] a self-denigrating term used by hippies to describe themselves. Early on, the hippies counterculture was described as "a freak of society" by the straight culture, so, in defiance, hippies adopt the word freak and used it themselves.' John Bassett McCleary and Joan Jeffers McCleary, *The Hippie Dictionary: A Cultural Encyclopedia (and phraseicon) of the 1960s and 1970s* (Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 2004). Although this definition may be accurate, the one provided in this study is limited to a particular form of 'freakhood' suited to Zappa.

[410] Zappa and Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 185.

[411] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 176-177.

With its aspirations for a more deliberate style of living, it is no coincidence that Zappa's Freak Scene was rooted in the contradictory furnace of southern California. On the one hand were the wealth, pretensions, and plastic glamour of Hollywood's elite which Zappa decried on his 1967 release *Absolutely Free*:

> I hear the sound of marching feet
> Down Sunset Blvd. to Crescent Heights,
> and there, at Pandora's Box, we are confronted with
> a vast quantity of PLASTIC PEOPLE.

Zappa makes it clear that he is talking to his audience with the following closing lines:

> Go home
> and check yourself.
> You think we're singing 'bout someone else?[412]

On the other hand, however, was the prejudice and rampant inequality experienced by many across LA as a whole, particularly African-Americans. Indeed, as evidenced by the 1965 Watts Riot, where unemployment and police racism resulted in six days of violent demonstrations, leaving 34 dead, 1,032 injuries, and over $40,000,000 in property damage, racial tensions in LA were particularly severe.[413] For Zappa's Freak Scene, conformity and rebellion sat side by side.

In 1967 Zappa and The Mothers ventured eastwards for a residency at Greenwich Village's Garrick Theatre. That Zappa found a temporary home in New York is hardly surprising given its similarities with the political climate of LA. Although against LA, New

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[412] 'Plastic people' is a common theme across Zappa's early music, and is a clear reference to conformity and materialistic culture – things which were abundant in Hollywood.
[413] In a 1965 song entitled 'Trouble Every Day' (not released until 1966 on *Absolutely Free*), Zappa was clear in registering his sympathy with the black movement as a whole: 'I'm not black, but there's a whole of times that I wish I could say I'm not white', he sang.

York is sometimes characterised as one of the more moderate centres of cultural bohemia, Mark Jacobson (a former writer for Greenwich's own *The Village Voice*) has questioned this view in a 2007 article for *New York Magazine*. Recounting his experiences of the 1967 Summer of Love, Jacobson writes that the 'rhetoric of naturalism' was far more difficult to sustain in New York, where '[t]he brutish everyday ingressed from every angle.' For Jacobson, New York hippies were 'obnoxious' and critical, in contrast with the San Francisco hippies which he depicts as 'clean, white, blond, and tongue-tied.'[414]

Although arguably true of the early 1960s, this squeaky-clean assessment of the San Francisco hippies obviously conceals a good deal of complexity, particularly by 1967. The following section is committed to understanding the ways that constitutive subjectivity and conformity mutually presupposed one another within the San Francisco hippie scene in the Human Be-In and the Summer of Love.

Constitutive Subjectivity and the Human Be-In

One of the most significant countercultural events of the 1960s was the Human Be-In which took place in Haight Ashbury's Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967. The Be-In was a celebration of love, drugs, communality, and personal empowerment, and was designed to 'send a message throughout the world that a new dawn was breaking and the time had come for all good men and women to abandon their exploitative posture toward the earth lest apocalypse spare them the task.'[415] A variety of countercultural gurus, including the psychedelic doctor Timothy Leary, the poet/activists Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, and the Marxist political organizer Jerry Rubin, were invited to speak at the event. Indeed, the Be-In

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[414] Mark Jacobson, "Long Hot Summer of Love," *New York Magazine* (June 25, 2007).
[415] Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1992).

consciously courted a diverse range of groups—activists, hippies, freaks, and other parts of the 'hip' community—with the express purpose creating a dialogue across the radical Left. As one of the organizers Alan Cohen explains, 'I had become concerned about the philosophical split that was developing in the youth movement.'[416]

In an article printed one week before the event was set to take place, the *Berkeley Barb* explained the reason for factionalism in the counterculture. Although united by a common opposition to 'the establishment,' the movement was divided with how best to resist this hegemonic enemy: on the one hand, were the San Franciscan hippies who had junked the 'word game' of politics in favour of 'non-verbal modes of expression.' On the other, were the Berkeley activists (many of whom had led the way in campus activism, the free speech movement, and the anti-war movement) who 'wanted to play the game because that's where the rest of society plays.'[417] In many respects, these two groups might be said to have been represented by Leary and Rubin (respectively).

Leary's contribution to the Be-In is widely remembered through his slogans: 'The only way out is in' and 'Turn on, tune in, drop out' were both coined for this event. [418] Once described by President Richard Nixon as 'the most dangerous man in America,' Leary was known for his therapeutic advocacy of LSD and was a highly influential figure in the liberation struggles of the late 1960s. Characteristically for Leary, he implored the audience to look within, to each start their own religion and, through the use of acid, seek an expanded 'Fifth Consciousness.' Never one to preach what he did not himself practice, Leary, believing himself to be a prophet, had recently founded the League for Spiritual Discovery, the commandments

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[416] Ken Wachsberger, *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011).
[417] "The Beginning is the Human Be-In," *Berkeley Barb*, (January 6 1967): 1.
[418] Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, "The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead," http://psychedelicfrontier.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/The-Psychedelic-Experience-A-Manual-Based-on-the-Tibetan-Book-of-the-Dead.pdf.

of which read 'thou shalt not alter the consciousness of thy fellow man' and 'thou shalt not prevent thy fellow man from altering his own consciousness.'[419] Ironically, this radically libertarian social philosophy, which emphasized the subjective nature of existence, was received tepidly by the audience at the Be-In.[420] According to Lee and Shlain, even 'the Pope of Dope's' radical vision did not go far enough for some, who posed the question: 'why invoke catechisms and commandments when the sheer fact of being alive in that corner of time and space was sufficiently intoxicating?'[421] Indeed, for those who had already done so, the call to drop out was moot; all that was left, was to Be.[422]

Despite his lukewarm reception, for the purposes of this chapter Leary comes closest to articulating the philosophy of the constitutive subject. Indeed, because of his bodhisattva-like orientation toward the 'straight world,' Leary provides a useful middle ground between the so-called 'enlightened subject'—who, believing itself (and others) to be self-constituting, no longer finds reason to state its beliefs—and the 'unenlightened.' This articulation found its most complete expression at a conference hosted by the *San Francisco Oracle* (an underground newspaper) shortly after the Be-In to discuss the relationship between the counterculture and the anti-war movement, with the aforementioned cast of Leary, Ginsberg, and Snyder in attendance, and with the addition of the New Age philosopher Alan Watts. Rubin was notably absented. Leary was emphatic on this relationship: '[t]he choice is between being rebellious and being religious. Don't vote. Don't politic. Don't petition. You can't do anything about America politically.'[423] Moreover, Leary proceeded to denounce those student activists who

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[419] Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 128.

[420] Ed Denson, "What Happened at the Hippening," *Berkeley Barb*, (January 20, 1967): 4.

[421] Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 128.

[422] It is perhaps for this reason that Leary's 'pitch' was widely understood to be at the 'straight world' rather than that of the hippies. See Warren Hinckle, "The Social History of the Hippies," *Ramparts Magazine*, (March, 1967): 19.

[423] Quoted in Timothy Leary, *San Francisco Oracle* 1, no. 7 (1967).

did not focus their energies on 'expanding consciousness' as 'young men with menopausal minds,' before climaxing with 'people should not be able to talk politics, except on all fours.'[424]

By contrast with Leary, Rubin's address at the Be-In was considerably more political, denouncing the war in Vietnam and warning of the 'dangers of doing nothing to stop it.'[425] In terms of reception, however, Rubin and Leary met a similar fate. For the politicos, Rubin's entreaties were common sense (and heard many times before)—hence, even sympathetic newspaper articles covering the event expressed a certain indifference toward his speech.[426] For the hippies, who had already switched off, presuming to tell others what was best was tantamount to heresy. Thus, in terms of its expressed goals, the Be-In was considered by some to be an abject failure, only serving to confirm pre-existing divisions within the counterculture. Writing for the Barb, Ed Denson states that '[n]othing happened at the Be-In, and the opportunity to gather all of those people was wasted,' and even goes as far as to describe Leary's proclamations as an embarrassment to anyone 'who was still pretty connected to society.'[427] One might add to this that Leary's preaching may have sounded similarly ridiculous to those who had already dropped out.

Although Rubin *et al.* did their best to emphasize the importance of political engagement for stopping the war, they might have also done well to point to the conformist elements of constitutive subjectivity. Of course, denying objective reality renders one powerless to effect change upon it—this was the charge that was most commonly levelled

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[424] Ibid. With respect to how pervasive the belief in constitutive subjectivity was, academic studies of countercultural spirituality have frequently stressed the centrality of 'unmediated individualism' to the hippie counterculture. As the sociologist of spiritualism Paul Heelas explains, a common feature of the hippies and the burgeoning New Age movement was the belief that 'perfection' can only occur 'by moving beyond the socialized self…thereby encountering a new realm of being.' Heelas*, The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, 19. Also see Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers, "The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981-2000," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (2007): 307.
[425] Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams,* 130.
[426] Denson, "What Happened at the Hippening" 4.
[427] Ibid.

against the hippies. Similarly, however, the inability to contextualize oneself which results from the refusal of reality, reduces the subject to a simple function of objective conditions. It is not for nothing that Warren Hinckle has written of a fascist tendency in Leary's philosophy and the hippie movement.[428] Thus, the flipside to the constitutive subject is the subject's death. This dialectical reversal is best exemplified by the Summer of Love.

Conformity and the Summer of Love

Although the Human Be-In might be said to have embodied some of the bucolic values described by Jacobson, by the summer of 1967 this was no longer the case; Lee and Shlain write, 'the early days of acid glory had receded into memory along with the pioneering spirit that once sustained the community.'[429] The Summer of Love brought over 100,000 people to the city, drastically altering the social makeup of the hippie communities. Many of these newcomers were more interested in 'blowing their minds' than with the more creative experiments of the early years. Martin and Shlain put this down to the media's misrepresentation of life in Haight Ashbury: 'They believed that it would be like the newspapers said, that somewhere at the other end of the rainbow was Haight-Ashbury, the Capital of Forever, where beautiful people cared for each other, where all would be provided and everyone could do their own thing without being hassled.'[430]

Released just one year after the Summer of Love, *We're Only in It for the Money* exemplifies Zappa's disdain for the unthinking tendencies in the hippie movement. Thus, on the second track 'Who Needs the Peace Corps?' Zappa reduces San Francisco hippies to a simple formula:

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[428] Hinckle, "The Social History of the Hippies."
[429] Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 178.
[430] Ibid., 178.

First I'll buy some bead

And then perhaps a leather band

To go around my head

Some feathers and bells

And a book of Indian lore

I will ask the Chamber Of Commerce

How to get to Haight Street

And smoke an awful lot of dope

I will wander around barefoot

You know I'll have a psychedelic gleam in my eye at all times

I will love everyone

I will love the police as they kick the shit out of me on the street

FREEZE HIPPY

I will sleep...

YES

I will go to a house.

That's, that's what I will do,

I will go to a house,

Where there's a rock roll band

Because the groups all live together

HERE'S JOHNNY

I will stay

I will join a rock & roll band

I'll be their road manager

And I will stay there with them

And I will get the crabs

But I won't care

More than just mocking these hippie conformists, however, Zappa sought to jolt them out of their complacency. David Ingram has described the use of a needle being drawn across a record in the 1968 recording of 'Nasal Retentive Calliope Music' as a means of drawing attention to

the unacknowledged technological mediations of hippie culture.[431] Just as the promiscuous sexual relations that characterised the Summer of Love presupposed significant advances in birth control and the treatment of sexually transmitted infections, for Ingram so did the music of 'naturalism' presuppose all manner of (presumably unnatural) technological requisites. Moreover, in revealing to the audience the constructed nature of the art object, by 'breaking the fourth wall' so to speak, Zappa's music sought to instil in the audience an awareness that the freedom offered up by the Summer of Love, if it was attainable at all, could only be constituted through critical self-reflexivity.

That Zappa should have levelled many of his criticisms at Haight Ashbury is perhaps understandable given the theme of 'ego death' espoused by such high profile figures as Leary and John Lennon throughout the Summer of Love (and beyond). Ego death is defined by Leary as 'complete transcendence − beyond words, beyond space-time, beyond self. There are no visions, no sense of self, no thoughts.'[432] Leary was known for his therapeutic advocacy of acid toward this end. As Lee and Shlain put it, Leary argued that LSD opened up a 'realm of unprogrammed beginnings where there was no distinction between matter and spirit, no individual personality to bear the brunt of life's flickering sadness.'[433] On the surface at least, ego death would seem to be opposed to the idea of the constitutive subjective—the former wishing to destroy the self and the latter to elevate it to the status of a God. In reality, however, these seeming opposites actually enable and presuppose one another. Indeed, in his book on *The Sixties*, Todd Gitlin has observed that one of the operative tensions of the counterculture was a paradoxical emphasis upon the limitless power of the individual and a kind of 'Taoist fatalism.'[434]

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[431] David Ingram, "'Go to the Forest and Move': 1960's American Rock Music as Electronic Pastoral," *49th Parallel* 20 (2006).

[432] Leary, Metzner, and Alpert, "The Psychedelic Experience: A manual based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead".

[433] Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 183.

[434] Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, 202.

Although often concealed behind a veneer of triviality and humour, the stakes involved in Zappa's critique of conformity were high. As the adventurous young flocked to the city, eager to taste the (depoliticized) libertarian images projected by the media, more cynical elements were not far behind: 'hoods, bikers, derelicts, conmen, burnouts, and walking crazies.'[435] Thus, ironically, violent crime soared during the Summer of Love, as did instances of venereal disease, hepatitis, and malnutrition (from appetite suppression—associated with amphetamines). The abandonment of subjectivity was something that Zappa consistently warned against throughout his early career, and, as clarified by one particularly vivid Communications Company leaflet circulating at the time, these warnings would have been well heeded:

> Rape is as common as bullshit on Haight Street. Pretty little sixteen-year-old middle-class chick comes to the Haight to see what it's all about & gets picked up by a seventeen-year-old street dealer who spends all day shooting her full of speed again & again, then feeds her 3000 mikes [micrograms] and raffles off her temporarily unemployed body for the biggest Haight Street gang bang since the night before last.[436]

Having abandoned their mind, many at the Summer of Love were powerless to resist these ugly tendencies.

In a 1967 article for *Ramparts Magazine* on 'The Social History of the Hippies,' Hinckle writes of 'a distinctly fascist trend… which can be recognized by a totalitarian insistence on action and nihilism, and usually accompanied by a Superman concept.' 'This strain,' he continues, 'runs, deeper and less silent, through the hippie scene today. It is into this fascist bag that you can put [Ken] Kesey and his friends, the Hell's Angels, and, in a more subtle way, Dr. Timothy Leary.'[437] Although Hinckle does not elaborate on what these

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[435] Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 186.
[436] Ibid., 186.
[437] Hinckle, "The Social History of the Hippies," 16-17.

particular fascistic tendencies are, it is not difficult to guess. In his authoritative book on the history of fascism, Richard Griffiths argues that the 'cult of the superman,' particularly as articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, was one of the guiding principles of much twentieth century fascism.[438] Sharing an extreme epistemological relativism and a profound distrust of rationality, this 'superman,' or Übermensch as Nietzsche puts it, bears a striking similarity with the unmediated individualism of the hippie counterculture, particularly that adumbrated by Leary. The individual is cast as a God-like figure: self-constituting and capable of controlling outside forces through sheer force of will. Moreover, these tendencies closely resemble those of Sontag's new sensibility and postmodernism more generally, which, on the one hand, rails against all claims to objectivity (rationalism), whilst simultaneously questioning the very idea of the subject.[439] The parallel between this conception of the postmodern and the simultaneous desire to deify or destroy the self in the acid counterculture is more than mere coincidence—it is a testament to their interdependence.

For the historian Richard Wolin, far from inheriting the mantle of the political left, postmodernism, with its abiding scepticism of truth and objectivity, in reality shares a great deal more with the opposite end of the political spectrum. One of the key figures in providing an (anti)intellectual basis for the growth of these ideas, Wolin suggests, is the psychoanalyst and guru of the New Age movement Carl Jung, himself heavily influenced by the work of Nietzsche. A contemporary of Sigmund Freud, Jung was an influential figure in the 1960s counterculture, in particular his work of the liberation of the id and the libido. Wolin writes, according to Jung '[s]cience was the epitome of Western rationalism: an arid intellectualism conducive only to libidinal stultification and mass neurosis.' Unlike Freud, who argued that

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[438] Richard Griffiths, *Fascism* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 13.
[439] For a thoroughgoing analysis of this nihilistic tendency in postmodern thought, see James Heartfield, "Postmodernism and the 'Death of the Subject'," in *The 'Death of the Subject' Explained* (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University Press, 2002).

'rational self-awareness… was the key to emancipation', Jung saw the rational ego as an 'obstacle to the goal of individual self-realization.'[440] Jung was an influential figure in the 1960s counterculture, and certainly played a significant role informing the idea of 'ego death' that was so prevalent in the acid subculture.[441] In a period of rising expectations because of the post-war economic boom, coupled with a spiritual void left by the growth of consumer society, the exploration of the id seemed to provide a necessary palliative. In reality, the exploration of the id meant the destruction of the ego.

Conclusions

In a 1996 article, Watson argues that '[q]uestions of propriety and property—the encounter of the individual with the social' are central to Zappa's music.[442] This quote certainly confirms many of the central themes of this chapter. To the extent that Zappa was concerned with the counterculture and the civil rights movement, it was because of the tendency of individuals to become swallowed by larger movements, for the 'I' to be destroyed by the 'We'. This concern is also implicit in the ways that Highlander activists used music that was supposedly collective in nature as a form of critical reflection on the idea of a unitary civil rights movement (see Chapter 2). However, the real contribution of Zappa's music to this dissertation is its critical implications for the opposite tendency, common within the acid subculture and the hippie movement, to position the subject as epistemologically prior to objective reality. Zappa's music, I have argued, is implicitly critical of this view, suggesting (*pace* Adorno) that the more self-constituting the individual believes itself the 'greater its imperceptible objectification and

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[440] Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism From Nietzsche To Postmodernism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 64.

[441] Jos van Meurs, "A Survey of Jungian Literary Criticism in English," in *Carl Gustav Jung Critical Assessments. Volume IV: Implications and Inspirations*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 297.

[442] Ben Watson, "Frank Zappa as Dadaist: Recording Technology and the Power to Repeat," 109.

ironic retraction of its constitutive role.'[443] In this sense, Zappa's music can be considered a form of critical reflection on the conclusions of Chapter 3, where Bob Dylan's attempts to throw off the shackles of collectivism were in reality an expression of the loss of real individualism.

Not unlike Coltrane, Zappa's music gravitated toward ideas of autonomy and critical self-reflection. But whilst I have argued that Coltrane developed a form of autonomous music through the accommodation (without integration) of a range of musical traditions, including Indian music, European classical music and jazz, Zappa's music, although also omnivorous in character, tended to work with materials handed down through the popular music industry, or what Adorno has referred to as the 'second mass musical language' of the culture industry.[444] The decision to place this material at the centre of his aesthetics—above, say, the language of the Second Viennese School (although he did also draw heavily upon these composers)— despite the fact that Zappa himself considered much of it to be worthless junk, is significant because it demonstrates a concern with the possibilities of a critical form of popular culture. As Paddison argues, for Zappa 'resistance did not lie in shrinking from the mass media, but in making things which operate through it and yet still maintain their irreducibly abrasive character. This is resistance in the heartlands of the commodity, a kind of revolution in Hollywood – "Tinseltown Rebellion".'[445]

Seen in the broader context of this dissertation and the relationship between music and politics, Zappa's music was undoubtedly concerned with ideas of the individual and autonomy. The fact that he achieved this through the material of popular music is important for the civil rights movement and the counterculture, which were themselves largely centred around

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[443] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 176-177.
[444] Quoted in Paddison, "Postmodernism and the Survival of the Avant-garde," 221.
[445] Ibid., 224.

popular music. Zappa's aesthetics were not, therefore, only a cautionary tale against uncritically throwing one's lots in with political movements, but also had a more positive message that, through critical self-reflection, the individual can live on in even the most hostile environment. Without being autonomous in the sense described by Adorno, Zappa's music should nevertheless be understood as a kind of advanced critical music with tendencies, reflected within the political movements of the time, toward a kind of critical utopia.

Conclusions

It has been argued throughout this dissertation that the 1950s and the 1960s represented a period in US history in which the development of a number of radical popular musics coincided with two different (though intersecting) liberation movements: the civil rights movement and the counterculture. Despite a number of important differences—not least those determined by political geography, issues of racial and class inequality, and various emphases on the material and spiritual dimensions of freedom—the civil rights movement and the counterculture each developed forms of music that were often political in ways that go beyond the existing categories in the literature on music and politics. In studying this music, I have elaborated the ways that radical popular musics in this period tended toward a form of aesthetic autonomy that, although appearing to reject political engagement, can be understood as political because of the socially mediated status of the musical material.

Autonomy and Utopia in the 1950s and 1960s

Implications

The 1950s and 1960s were characterised by unusually high levels of political commitment, and most studies of this period correspondingly examine music that was itself politically engaged. Neglected in this research, is music that is politically provocative and critical in its implications, but is not politically engaged in the sense of, say, Phil Ochs or Joan Baez. It is, of course, relevant and profitable to study some of the more politically outspoken musicians and performers involved in the civil rights movement and the counterculture, but to do so at

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the expense of some of the more radical artists is to misrepresent the spirit of the 1950s and 1960s. Far from being on the periphery of the political projects in this period, the desire for a fundamental transformation of society was an absolutely central concern. This concept of radical otherness, I argue, is better represented in the works of Dylan, Coltrane, and Zappa than those using music to comment on politics directly. In many respects, the now infamous story of Dylan stating (pejoratively) that Phil Ochs is 'not a folk singer' but a 'journalist' encapsulates some of these tensions.[446] Whilst Ochs was content to submit his music to the needs of the political movements, Dylan, and others, aspired to transform themselves, their music, their audience, in a way more in keeping with the goals of the civil rights movement and the counterculture. Their music was committed negatively to the idea of utopia.

One of the main tensions that has been noted between the civil rights movement and the counterculture is the different level of emphasis placed on material and spiritual fulfilment. For African Americans, who faced the effects of racial violence and segregation on a daily basis, it is to be expected that immediate demands for desegregation and an end to racist violence would be high on the agenda. Many of those involved with the counterculture, on the other hand, came from backgrounds of relative wealth and security—it would be expected, therefore, that their demands would go somewhat beyond those of immediate survival. But one of the interesting things about the 1950s and 1960s is that, in the case of music, this correlation is very far from being absolute. Although the chapter on Highlander demonstrates how music was used to fight for political change in the civil rights movement, Coltrane, an African American working within a virulently racist music industry, yet absolutely committed to exploring objective musical problems, stands as a towering counter-example to this thesis.

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[446] Marshall, *Bob Dylan: The Never Ending Star*, 142.

Even early in his career, when he lived from paycheque to paycheque, Coltrane was totally focused on the musical material.

The fact that there was no definite correlation between the physical threats faced by African Americans and politically committed music has broad implications for historical studies of the civil rights movement and the counterculture. In his 2005 book on the political movements in the 1960s, Gosse argues for an understanding of the politically committed elements of the New Left that goes beyond its association with white college students to include civil rights activists.[447] This is certainly something with which I would agree, and which is borne out by my research. However, the same can also be said of the counterculture. If there is no definite correlation between the civil rights movement and politically committed music, might we not conclude that the civil rights contained its own counterculture, associated with spiritual and intellectual freedom? Far from just being concerned to put bread on the table, civil rights activists were also fighting for roses.

Similarly, tensions between the individual and the collective are central to understanding the counterculture and the civil rights movement, and this has been a recurrent theme of this dissertation. But like the false association between, on the one hand, civil rights and political commitment, and, on the other, counterculture and autonomy, the ways that these tensions were played out are more complex than they first appear. The civil rights movement is supposedly built on more collective foundations, and the counterculture is associated with ideas of individualism. And yet, the tendency toward a kind of aesthetic individualism is still evident even in the most politically committed music. In the case of Highlander, material that was supposed to be collective in nature ending up becoming a site of conflict, where individual activists could work through their concerns about the larger movement. Although not

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[447] Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History*, 5.

'autonomous' in the Adornian sense of the term, Highlander activists were forced to confront the inability of music to say 'We' without also saying 'I'. Dylan's musical development is much clearer in this respect. For Dylan, the metaphorical 'We' in his early protest songs came to be seen as an oppressive force that posed a threat to individuality. A tendency toward a kind of aesthetic individualism is therefore evident in both of these musics. Although not always at the forefront of their political program, music associated the civil rights movement was sometimes as much concerned with the preservation of individual agency as that associated with the counterculture.

These tension are played out in a subtler way in the music of Coltrane. By silencing his own political voice and concerning himself mainly with the working out of musical problems, Coltrane's music, I argue, revealed more about the broader issues of the 1950s and 1960s than any politically committed artist ever could: because the politics of Coltrane's music appears through Coltrane's mediation of his own subjectivity within musical material that is socially, and therefore politically, formed, his music is socially critical in a way that supersedes his own political vision. One of the main arguments I have expounded about Coltrane's music was that it began to develop a notion of blackness that was not limited to African American identities, which itself can be understood as a response to an increasingly 'globalized' world. In other words, Coltrane's music attempted to articulate the possibility of a reconciled world through the demonstration of the unreconciled in the midst of the falsely reconciled. To the extent that Coltrane's music articulated the 'We' it was, I have argued, in a way that sought to make sense of a simultaneously integrated and fractured world.

Although Zappa's music is more difficult to reconcile with the notion of autonomy articulated by Adorno, it has nevertheless been considered as a critical advanced music concerned with ideas of individualism and social critique. In particular, Zappa's music was critical of both the idea of conformity and, conversely, that of the self-constituting subject. In

the context of the 1960s, with the growing power of the culture industry on the one hand, and the emergence of the New Age movement on the other, these criticisms could not have been more timely. It is particularly ironic that the post-historical dialectic thinkers associated with postmodernism have attempted to claim Zappa for their own purposes when Zappa himself was clear in the critical implications of his own music. Utopia for Zappa, I have argued, appears in the possibility of transforming society through the rejection implicit in the idea of a socially critical music. The unspoken teleology in this strategy should be enough to warn off postmodern thinkers.

Although the work of Adorno and other critical theorists are often hostile towards popular music, there is now a growing literature that claims that, in certain instances, popular music has developed radical tendencies in keeping with concepts espoused by critical theorists. Indeed, the 1950s and 1960s are now frequently identified as a period in which forms of popular music begin to exhibit properties associated with the work-concept. However, although there has been much excellent research showing how individual artists in this period became concerned with ideas of autonomy, there has been a tendency to focus on individual case studies. This has resulted in the false impression that concerns with aesthetic autonomy in the 1950s and 1960s were marginal issues, pursued only by a few isolated individuals. This, as I have argued, is not the case. One of the main contributions of this dissertation, therefore, has been to place the issue of autonomy, and its associated concept of a negative utopia, at the forefront of studies of this period—where, I believe, it belongs.

Problems and Omissions

In trying to develop research across such a wide variety of music, this dissertation suffers a number of problems: as is so often the case, the strength of this research is also its potential

weakness. Foremost amongst these issues, is the disconnectedness between the research methodologies applied to each case study (in some respects, this is a necessary consequence of casting a wide net across the period under question). Throughout this research, I have attempted to approach each case study with a fluid research model, uniquely adapted to the material being examined—one cannot, after all, apply the same research model to artists and institutions as diverse as Zappa and the Highlander Folk School. Although this has rendered some interesting results, it has certainly made comparative arguments far more difficult. When lost in the details, comparisons between the different chapters have sometimes felt like equating a rabbit with a lightbulb. The plus side of this, however, is that the common elements between these different artists and the underlying political movements, when they do appear, are all the revealing about the larger forces at work in this period. Without this approach, the concept of utopia, which in truth was raised relatively close to the dissertation's completion, would have remained in the shadows.

One of the ideas that has been implied in this dissertation without being properly addressed is the relationship between the artist's 'intent' and tendencies toward autonomy in their music. On the surface, this might seem like an old problem in aesthetic theory to do with the authority of composer, which has been repeatedly and decisively challenged by Marxist, contextualist, and post-structuralist thought. This is not the argument I want to review, however. Rather, what I mean to examine is the issue of authorial intent in the *specific* context of ideas of autonomy. There is often an implicit understanding that the meanings created in the exploration of ideas of autonomy and individualism are not necessarily *intended* by the composer but, rather, are a *consequence* of their subjective mediation of the musical material. In this dissertation, Coltrane certainly falls into this category. Zappa, on the other hand, does not. Throughout his career, Zappa demonstrated a high level of understanding about the critical implications of his music and, consequently, we might say that the was a strong level of *intent*

in the way that he went about writing music. This raises the question of whether or not autonomy can itself be understood as a form of political commitment when the composer's level of self-awareness is particularly high. Moreover, if the relationship between autonomy and political commitment was problematic in the 1950s and 1960s, today it is much more so, where musicians from a variety of genres are increasingly thinking about music in terms of a split between commercial exploitation and avant-garde authenticity. Indeed, Paddison argues that Adorno's concepts have to a certain extent now been internalized within elements of rock and jazz.[448] The divide between autonomy and political commitment may be harder to maintain these circumstances, and this problem would no doubt provide interesting future research.

Another issue that arises from this line of reasoning is whether or not politically committed music can itself draw upon ideas of autonomy in any substantial way. We have seen in Chapters 2 and 3 that Highlander and Dylan both expressed dissatisfaction with the constraints imposed by political commitment, and consequently sought to use music against itself. Although I am doubtful as to how much this corresponds with the ideas of autonomy articulated by theorists like Adorno, it does raise the question of whether or not activists are, at times, able to cast off the cloak of political commitment in a more substantial way.

In Summary

In concluding this dissertation, I suggest that sociological readings of the relationship between music and politics are insufficient for understanding radical popular musics in the 1950s and 1960s, which tended toward ideas of autonomy in ways not dissimilar from art music. This tendency has been understood as an attempt to articulate a kind of critical utopia, which itself

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[448] Paddison, "Postmodernism and the Survival of the Avant-garde", 223.

corresponds with the wider concerns of the civil rights movement and the counterculture to transform society. In this respect, I have argued that autonomous music better represents the spirit of 1950s and 1960s than does music that is politically committed. Typical of music sociologists, John Street argues that 'if musical pleasure and choice are purely private matters of personal consequence, they are not political. It is only when musical pleasure… spill[s] over into the public realm and into the exercise of power within it that it becomes political.'[449] It has been the contention of this dissertation, however, that there are political tendencies within the musical material that exist independently of the social relations in which the music constituted; by bringing these objective tendencies into dialogue with the artist's subjectivity, radical musics in the civil rights movement and the counterculture were able to express a latent social content that transcends the politics of the individual, thereby revealing some of the larger forces at work in the period.

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[449] Ibid, 1.

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