

Forces of Chaos and Anarchy:  
Rock Music, the New Left and Social Movements, 1964 to 1972

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## Abstract

This dissertation engages an unresolved debate on the ‘rock aesthetic’ in *New Left Review*, between Perry Anderson and David Fernbach while pointing toward a new dialectical social theory with which to analyze cultural form in general and music in particular. The debate was in the first instance methodological, formal/technical vs. lyrical contextual analysis. Within this methodological debate we see inscribed the misunderstanding the sixties New Left had of the sixties counterculture, and thus the conditions of possibility for a missed encounter. Rock music was neither a direct instantiation of the times, as Anderson implies, nor was it an entirely new form that must be schematized *sui generis* with a new set of axioms, as suggested by Fernbach. Indeed, it was both and then some. In engaging this debate, I use canonical figures of the era as my primary case studies as well as what I call my excursions – miniature analyses that capture the broader point I am making in my cognitive mapping of the cultural production of the long sixties. From this project’s standpoint, it was the Left that missed an encounter with the counterculture, not the counterculture that missed an encounter with the Left.

To continue this engagement, I have deployed what I have called a theory of the missed encounter. I engage what could have taken place, that is to say, if the implicit metaphysical and practical connection between rock music culture and the Left had been consummated, by examining why this could not have taken place, why there was a missed encounter. As against the more commonly theorized Popular Front and Punk eras which I stipulate as consummated encounters, the sixties, aesthetically and politically – did not coalesce in the same sense. The Missed Encounter, for me, is a heuristic, a point-of-departure. I presume, thus, with my own analysis that once one goes beyond mythology, a missed encounter is readily apparent. The purpose of my rethinking of the rock music canon is not positivist proof of a missed encounter, rather it is to formulate the ‘sixties question’ through the premises of its existence.

## Dedication

This project is dedicated to my union, CUPE Local 3903. I learned as much, if not more from my involvement in 3903 than I did from any other aspect of my post-graduate education. 3903 at its best acted, and continues to act as the tip of the spear for progressive forces at York University. My graduate education was “interrupted” twice by strikes, including a long and protracted one less than two months into my Masters. These “interruptions” showed how student-workers and contract faculty are able to fight back against the neoliberal austerity agenda. I also learned from the *many* mistakes I made, and we made, in our years of internal and external struggle. These lessons shape me as a human being.

Alienated capitalist society brings the individualization of collective problems. CUPE 3903 at our best suggested and implemented collective solutions to what many would like us to see as individual, atomized problems, from the mundane to the deadly serious. The material, emotional and indeed spiritual benefits of being a union member cannot be exaggerated. I cannot imagine how I would have been able to sustain a material existence if not for CUPE 3903. I also cannot imagine having undertaken this project if not for the union. Indeed, it was first suggested to me by fellow union members.

## Acknowledgements

There are too many people and institutions to thank, as I like to think I have learned something from everyone who I have encountered through the years. First and foremost, I must thank my family. My parents, Richard Cummings and Joanne Cummings cultivated a sense of wonder and possibility in me at a very young age, and have supported my circuitous route to the position I am in to this day. From the mundane to the urgent, this entire project was helped immensely by my parents. My brother and sister and their partners, Daniel Cumming, Tova Rose, Angie Shiffman and Adam Shiffman have been coaches, friends and interlocutors throughout the years of work I've put into this project. I would be remiss if I did not mention my niece Izzy and nephews, Evan and Tyler.

My doctoral supervisor, Shannon Bell cannot be thanked enough. Through our many years of work together, Shannon has been everything an academic supervisor should be: supportive and humane, inspirational and demanding in all the right ways. Going back to my Masters, Shannon has challenged me to think outside of orthodoxy, and this project itself started out as a graduate term paper for her "Aesthetics and Politics" seminar. Greg Albo is one tough – but kind editor, and his commitment to methodological rigor and innovation has made this project more than merely a work of cultural analysis, but serious comparative political science. Scott Forsyth was present at a Historical Materialism panel some years back at which I first presented some of the ideas contained in this work, and asked me some sharp questions. His sharp questions and cultural-theoretical pointers, in particular engaging the Popular Front and Punk eras, helped make this project a great one.

I also would like to give special thanks to David McNally, who acted as my Dean's Representative and who was involved in this project from the start, and indeed helped formulate the 'hook' of the project. Important acknowledgement must be given to my external examiner Will Straw for his exquisite and challenging questions, and as well to John McCullough, for his innovative suggestions, ones that I will keep in mind as I continue this unbroken chain of a project.

As far too many other individuals have played a part in this project to name, I'd like to focus on those who have played a very direct role – of which there are indeed more than a few. First and foremost, my colleagues at Red Wedge of whom there are too many to name, for as we like to say, "rekindling the revolutionary imagination". I'd like to thank Lindsay Springer for her close-edit of this dissertation. I'd also like to thank Neil Braganza, Tobin Haley and Alex Levant, alongside my siblings, for attending and supporting my doctoral defence. Finally, I'd like to thank Melissa Rakestraw, Jeremiah Gaster, Nicole Leach, Sharmeen Khan, Bill Crane, Colin J. Campbell, Toby Manning, Neil Davidson, Tom Laughlin, Kate Doyle Griffiths, Sebastian Budgen, Sarah Gray, Katherine Factor, Richard Seymour, Megan Kinch, Tracy Supruniuk, Panagiotis Sotiris and Charlie Post for their support of this project, whether by way of discussion, reading it or editing me and shaping me as a writer and an intellectual.

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### Special Note to Readers:

In addition to the Spotify playlist embedded below, throughout this project, there are embedded hyperlinks that will take the reader to YouTube or other public domain videos of performances and/or audio recordings of the linked song or album. These are accessible when reading from a computer or tablet. The specific songs and albums chosen, both for the music linked within the text and for the longer playlist, have been specially curated to enhance the narrative. I do suggest, when available, that readers access higher quality sound files, preferably from vinyl LPs, Compact Discs or High-Resolution downloads. Especially for music recorded in the “analogue” era, the dynamic range – the range between loud and quiet – is far superior to “brickwalled” or compressed digital sound.

However one listens, the reader is strongly encouraged to at least listen to the songs that are subject to in-depth lyrical or historical analysis. My placing of the music within the text itself is influenced by the work of John Berger, whose work on visual art would not be understandable without unmediated exposure to the historical material. It should be noted that some artists – notably The Beatles and Bob Dylan, keep much of their published output off YouTube and other free websites; thus, there are fewer embedded songs, unfortunately, from either of these two key artists. Music deserves the same unmediated attention, and this is a key goal for this project.

Spotify Playlist “[Forces of Chaos and Anarchy](#)”



# **Part I: Theory of the Missed Encounter and the Social History of Cultural Production**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Left Is Where I Always Turn**

#### **1.1 Life During Wartime**

A song written by a communist echoed across the gigantic football stadium, beaming out across the televisual live-streaming fibre-optic cables and airwaves to near and far. Millions, perhaps billions, familiar with the melody from one time or another, sang or even hummed along at least to the chorus. Here I speak of Lady Gaga at the 2017 Super Bowl, who performed Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" along with some numbers that may have been a little queer for US Vice President Mike Pence, who was sitting in the crowd. In the year leading up to the Super Bowl, a certain Donald Trump was elected President, confounding much of the liberal intelligentsia.

One could hear foreboding warnings of Trump, along with a new sense of cultural resistance in the preceding year. The Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn campaigns brought out a great deal of support from cultural workers, and indeed, in particular in the case of Sanders, by way of musicians as varied as Phish's Jon Fishman and Run the Jewels' Killer Mike; musicians played key roles in their campaigns. With the growing sense that Trump had a fighting chance for the presidency, ominous but stalwart tones came in, and while television comedy continues to dedicate itself to making fun of Donald Trump's apparent stupidity and recklessness, popular music provokes listeners to dig deeper at the foundational assumptions that produced Trump in the first place. Particularly salient in this regard were LPs from veteran acts like New York hip-

hop group A Tribe Called Quest and the neo-psychedelic rock band Flaming Lips. Building upon the cycle of social movements in the last half decade, from Occupy to #BlackLivesMatter, popular music, at least at the level of connotation, seems to have turned left.

The conjuncture, thus, seems all of a piece with early 1969, upon the election in the United States of the arch-reactionary Richard Nixon. Like Trump, Nixon had called upon the ‘silent majority’ to defeat ‘coastal elites’. Like Trump, Nixon had used racist dog-whistle politics in the face of the growing strength of social movements. As with Trump, popular musicians seemed uniformly opposed and prepared to play an historic role in opposition, as part of the millions of Americans who intuited revolution around the corner. Grace Slick of the Jefferson Airplane, who had gone to high school with Nixon’s daughter Patricia, was actually, during this period, invited to the White House, and was to bring the rabble rouser Abbie Hoffman as her ‘date’. They planned to ‘dose’ the punchbowls with strong LSD.<sup>1</sup> That year, in response to the growing desperation of the popular masses against the Vietnam War, the Jefferson Airplane put out their LP *Volunteers*, combining a foreboding of dystopia on “Wooden Ships” with outright calls for revolution on the title song as well as “[We Can Be Together](#)”. The latter song’s lyrics provide the title to this project, “Forces of Chaos and Anarchy”.<sup>2</sup>

What were these “forces of chaos and anarchy” as imagined in Paul Kantner’s lyrics? The objective of this project is to discern the meaning of these forces, and why, in the grand scheme of things, they did not prevail. They did, however, make history, but not in a manner – as it were – of their own choosing. Put simply, the purpose of this theoretical inquiry is an examination of what I will be calling the Missed Encounter<sup>3</sup> between the far Left and social

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<sup>1</sup> Pollack (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Jefferson Airplane (1969), “We Can Be Together”.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of ‘Missed Encounter’ is used by Bolivian social theorist Álvaro García Linera to demarcate the missed encounter between of Marxism indigenous-based “Indianismo”. Feldman (2015).

movements on the one hand, and rock music and the sixties counterculture on the other. From today's vantage point, the apparent lock-step development of canonical classic rock music and the sixties New Left appears to have been a near-miss, something that overlapped but never quite congealed. This is the point of departure here – not proving, in an empiricist sense, that there was a “Missed Encounter” but ‘reading history backwards’ in order to move beyond this appearance. As Tony Smith points out, “only the nature of the object being investigated can determine which level of generality is appropriate”.<sup>4</sup> From the cosmos right down to the minutiae of a three minute song, we will be subtly moving between levels of generality in this project, but always for the purpose that as we analyse the object of inquiry, our understanding of this object will expand, and thus shift our modality of analysis.<sup>5</sup> It is worth pointing out at this point that it is a near-obvious contention that I'm making, that is to say, that the ‘rise and fall’ of classic rock, from its origins with Bob Dylan going electric to its degeneration in the early seventies and subsumption of local music scenes by big business, occurred contemporaneously with the rise and fall of the New Left, from its origins growing out of the civil rights, student and antiwar movements, to its degeneration, whether in the form of an apolitical turn, towards ultra-leftism or ‘working within the system’. With some exceptions on either side of the chronological

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<sup>4</sup> T. Smith (1993).

<sup>5</sup> The means with which I am deploying the heuristic concept of “missed encounter” lie somewhere in between the use of counterfactual reasoning in historical sociology, and the notion of ‘suppressed alternatives’, tracing out a retroactively intelligible path not-taken. These paths not-taken equally include political and cultural praxis on one hand, as well as interpretation and theorization on the other. Hence, by examining, by implication, these paths not taken and why they were not taken, that is to, say, the Missed Encounter, we can thus illuminate the paths that *were* taken. This process allows us to reasonably think through, under the empirical and analytical parameters established, alternative outcomes as well as the specific instance in which an alternative set of decisions might have led to a different outcome. Thus, the heuristic of Missed Encounter is in keeping with the dialectical approaches taken to the examination of the material itself, as regards to both historiographical and sociological categorizations. In turn, it is from said categorization, as will be seen, that the processes of abstraction begin.

cognitive map, this occurred between 1965 and 1972, or what Toby Manning calls “the long 1960s”.<sup>6</sup>

It was here that these forces hit their limits, and were unable to turn said limits into barriers over which they could transcend space and heroically leap. While there were flirtations, a fling of sorts, brief encounters that went beyond merely casual, the coalescence, the swerve of these forces ended up blowing over. This was what I will be calling a Missed Encounter. All the potential seemed to be there for a socio-cultural coalescence, a synthesis that would preserve and transcend the elements of both to create an authentically politico-aesthetic constellation. This was not ‘meant to be’; however, given the ‘inherent vice’,<sup>7</sup> the internal contradictions and limitations to both forces, primarily in both contexts due to a divorce from working class concerns in a traditional sense. Yet these limitations were historically specific. In order to allow us to understand the contradictory legacy, both of the sixties far Left and of sixties music, we have to engage in direct analysis of cultural and historical material. Indeed, some elements, in particular of the aesthetic side of the equation, retain a legacy worthy of celebratory and honest engagement, as takes place in the second half of this project.

## **1.2 Dropping Science**

In addition to the dialectical procedures as suggested in the work of Bertell Ollman, the skeletal structure of this project rests upon the three steps of what Paul Paolucci has theorized as “scientific dialectics”.<sup>8</sup> Paolucci and Ollman are part of a constellation of dialectical theorists that would also include Derek Sayers, Patrick Murray and Fred Mosley, that have not primarily

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<sup>6</sup> Manning (2016).

<sup>7</sup> Title taken from Thomas Pynchon’s novel and Paul Thomas Anderson’s film. I owe the metaphor to Steve Maher.

<sup>8</sup> Paolucci (2007), 172.

been deployed in the realm of cultural analysis. Rather the impact of their work on method has been primarily in the realm of the incorporation of dialectical analysis into mainstream social scientific practice or “political science”. This strikes one as odd, given the first generation of Marxist thought’s interest in culture – Lukács, Trotsky and so forth – and also telling in regards to the paucity of historical materialist analysis of rock music. It strikes me as necessary to incorporate this model of analysis to analyse culture in the sense that it was analysed before the so-called “cultural turn” and advent of “cultural studies”.

Paolucci identifies three simultaneously occurring dialectical procedures within Karl Marx’s work that allow one to traverse different levels on a ladder of abstraction. The first step begins with the identification of the object of inquiry in its multidimensional qualities, that is to say, music and politics in the long sixties. Thus, given this ‘long view’ perspective, there is the abstraction of specific forms – genres of music, political tendencies and the like. From these abstractions we are thus able to engage in concrete analysis of actual, tangible historical material – music in and of itself, political actions and theorizations, the conjuncture as a whole. This, in turn, leads to provisional explications, detours through various artists, political actors, forms of music, events as such, before arriving, finally, at the case studies.

Travelling down this broad path, thus, we find ourselves establishing the right models of differentiation, either of political tendencies or genres of music. Of value is the concept of ‘configuration’, deriving from the work of Alain Badiou. In Badiou’s framework, a configuration “is not an art form, a genre, or an “objective” period.. .. it is an identifiable sequence, initiated by an event, comprising a virtually infinite complex of works”.<sup>9</sup> Here we can

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<sup>9</sup> Badiou (2005), 13. The quotation around “objective” is in Badiou’s original text. Badiou’s work, while situated conspicuously as “Communist, but not Marxist” is not inconsistent with the more traditional dialectical analysis being deployed. “Configuration” implies and has inscribed within it, conceptually, the allowance for contingency of countervailing forces playing out. It is not a ex-posto-facto concept like ‘genre’.

say that the abstraction of configuration may well be form, genre or period; yet, the fluidity and openness of this means of categorization allows us to identify events that initiate, or set in motion a chain, either contingently or as part of another chain, any of the configurations under analysis within these pages. Implicit here is the concept's modularity, its allowance for geometric as opposed to arithmetic growth.

Occurring contemporaneously with this procedure, as per Paolucci's framework, is the identification of the necessary internal relations, the determinations contained within the object of inquiry. This proceeds by way of abstraction of various degrees of cultural and political affiliation, ranging from member/participant, be it in a movement, a band, a party, a community. From this set of abstractions, there is specification of the actuality, or lack thereof, of this set of filiations. From here, we thus identify the 'weak links' or inherent vice, the internal contradictions that lead to what has already been retroactively presumed to be a Missed Encounter. This allows us to move from this concretization of the Missed Encounter by way of comparison, in both structural and processual lenses.

This procedure, as opposed to finding discrete configurations within the overall historical material, is more concerned with their relational quality. This allows for not mere speculation as to affinity or organic connection within the metaphysical realm, but specifies the actuality of a given musician or social movement/party within the context of its actual practices, and how these practices brought together, in a 'really existing sense', diverse forces. As will be seen, strikingly similar diagnoses of the limitations of sixties art and politics come from a variety of directions, that is to say, the critique of ultra-leftism and the "retreat from class" as articulated at various points by John Lennon, Ellen Meiksins Wood, Pete Townsend and Irving Howe. Thus, the

Missed Encounter is inscribed in a variety of cultural and political practices, and apparent in a retroactive sense, or as we shall see, within the context of reading history backwards.

Finally, in terms of inquiry, but coming out front in terms of explication, there is a theorization of what is being referred to as the lock-step quality of the contemporaneous development of music and social movements in the long sixties. Having identified discrete configurations, while simultaneously, in a different register, asserting their relationality, we now can specifically see the reality of the lock-step or contemporaneous quality of the development of music and politics in the long sixties. Was the connection seen to participants at the time? What was epiphenomenal to this constellation, and what was necessary, both in historical and conjunctural terms?

The important aspect to this last procedure is it is equally concerned with divergence as it is with convergence, as divergence or contradiction is often where one glimpses the reality of a phenomenon. Truth is often discovered by accident within the context of this procedure. Yet as opposed to taking the contemporaneity of development, the lock-step quality, as a point of departure, it is, rather, more often than not, merely an appearance for our purposes. To rethink this appearance, and its component parts, its anomalies and contradictions, is a key to formulate an historical materialist analysis of the long sixties. Yet this then begs the question, what do we mean by the ‘long sixties’?

### **1.3 Unbroken Chain**

Toby Manning’s phrase “the long sixties” is apt, when we engage in the dialectical practice of *extension*. Bertell Ollman provides Marxists with three primary means with which to

engage in abstraction,<sup>10</sup> or, as Tony Smith puts it, for Ollman, and for dialectical analysis in general, “the world is made up of systems, each of whose parts is internally related to the others. These systems are in process; their nature is fixed by the past from which they came and the future towards which they are going”.<sup>11</sup> All three are put to use in this project: that is to say, the practice of extension, or spatial-temporal framing; the notion of generality and how to move between levels of generality; and finally, the adaptation of vantage point, or what Georg Lukács has called a “critical standpoint”.<sup>12</sup>

The practice of dialectical social analysis is not a mere fallback with which to cut loose from a conservative and linear approach to cultural analysis, but it allows for a ‘playfulness’ within the fractal spiral of cultural practices. Karl Marx, in the controversial *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, published later as part of the *Grundrisse*, refers to these practices as to engage in rational abstraction, that is “in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition. Still, this general category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations”.<sup>13</sup> There are multiple modes of abstraction at work at various levels of generality in this project, yet all attempt to be rational abstractions.

The first and primary means of rational abstraction is the practice of extension, of identifying the method of inquiry in a spatial and temporal sense, that is to say, spatially, here we are speaking primarily of the United States and United Kingdom. Even more particularly, we are speaking of London, Liverpool, New York, the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles. It must always be kept in mind, however, that even for one writing about culture or political praxis

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<sup>10</sup> Ollman (1976); Ollman (2003).

<sup>11</sup> Smith (1993).

<sup>12</sup> Lukács (1971), 149-161.

<sup>13</sup> Marx (1973), 85.



in the Bay Area, this set of activities does not occur in a spatial vacuum. This praxis can't be isolated from the configurationally similar praxis in one of the other aforementioned cities, not to mention Prague, Canberra, Cairo or Kandahar. Temporally, we are speaking of the sixties, but using temporal markers implied by the common sense understanding of the sixties, that is to say, the "long sixties", starting, roughly, around the fall/winter of 1963 and 1964, and lasting well into the seventies, but most commonly 1973. It is worth noting that after-effects, aesthetically and politically could be felt well into 1973 and 1974, from the oil shock and Watergate to the continued resilience and even 'comeback' of some of the artists under investigation.

Thus, the object of analysis, in its scaffold form, can be envisioned like two lanes on a highway, in which two cars are roughly travelling the same speed, and sometimes come close to being able to be right side-by-side, at other points, almost get into serious, even fatal collisions. Yet most of the time, one is ahead of another. Yet before we can even arrive at how and why these cars swerve, like atoms, we must identify the topography of this highway, its onramps and offramps. As Smith points out, analysis here must be "extensive enough to allow the relevant internal relations and dynamic processes to be grasped, yet not so extensive that irrelevant considerations enter the picture".<sup>14</sup> The trick here is not merely the former, what qualitative differences and similarities arise out of quantitative shifts. It is also to identify precisely what considerations are irrelevant, and then, in turn, question their irrelevancy.

It is nevertheless, useful, heuristically, to envision the Left and sixties cultural production to be these two cars on the highway, travelling within, as noted above, the appearance of lockstep, abstracting away what can be seen from a closer vantage point, the potential accidents, encounters, dead ends and pit stops. As will be expanded upon, this will situate the beginning of

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<sup>14</sup> C. Smith (2001).

the journey as, on one hand, the formation of the Students for a Democratic Society in the United States, and the founding of *New Left Review* and other anarchist, communist and Trotskyist initiatives in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, we have the concatenation of hybridizing musical forms contingently combining to constitute what we now see as rock music on both sides of the Atlantic. The equivalent in this case would be variously, the Beatles performing on the Ed Sullivan show; Bob Dylan going electric; the Acid Tests in the Bay Area. All of these latter points seem inexplicably intertwined with the former. Both were concerned as much with authenticity and integrity as they were with substantive and qualitative impact.

As the journey picked up speed, we can thus set off the marker of 1968. In some parts of the world, notably Paris and Prague, there occurred an uptick in genuine militancy, militancy outside of the control of social democratic or communist officialdom. Yet this militancy, for those in English-speaking countries in particular, one could only gaze at these events, bewildered why a similar turn was not occurring on the homefront.<sup>15</sup> This in turn is inextricably intertwined with the psychedelic shift in rock music, not merely in the popularization of drug use – after all, many artists and fans did not partake at all – rather, it is a shift from an aesthetic of figurative and linear art to fractal, chaotic, experimental, affective practices. In 1967 and 1968, the era of militant – and in some places (Vietnam, South and Central Africa) military – struggle against capitalism and imperialism, this could not be discursively framed in a simple four chord song with a verse/chorus/verse structure. Rather it had to be implied sonically, by allusion, by double meaning, a practice common in what we now know as classical music.

Finally, this lock-step journey enters into a period of entropy, with the aforementioned ultra-left or ‘work within the system turn’ in the United States can be, as will be seen, strongly

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that in spite of this relative lack of militancy, the anti-war rallies in England were unprecedented. See Ali (2005).

differentiated from the relative sobriety of the British Left. Likewise, the shift in British rock music and British artists, even those living in the United States, towards a sense of reflectiveness and attempting to continue to use music to interpret what they could clearly see as a failure. John Lennon, as will be seen, was quite scathing about the failure of the Beatles. One can take Lennon further and be quite scathing about Lennon's treatment of women. In the United States, however, rock music degenerated, overdetermined by the growth of hippie capitalism into a 'lifestyle' divorced not merely from radical politics but from any sense of Bohemianism aside from a joint or a psychedelic tapestry. In the United States, unlike in Great Britain, it is those artists, who, either by disavowal, in the case of Bob Dylan, or continuing Sisyphean labour of culture, as in the case of the Grateful Dead, that we can illuminate the rule by discovering the exceptions.

Thus, from the vantage point of the end of the era, we see all the presuppositions, aesthetically and politically for the period of political and cultural degeneration that occurred through the seventies. Such degeneration provoked aesthetic and political responses from both the right and left, culturally and politically speaking, but always with a degree of distance. This degeneration led aesthetically, to punk on the one hand and singer-songwriter 'easy listening' 'California rock' on the other. Or to put it in slogan form: "Neither the Damned nor the Eagles". Politically speaking, it marked both the disintegration of a 'movementist' left that had largely rethought class, but also did not adequately consider issues around sexuality, gender, race and ability – issues that started to be considered by those who remained on the Left. To put it simply, the highway became two highways, and what appeared to be two cars, became four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so forth.

The fluidity of the long sixties, configurationally speaking, is that, on a grand level of generality, an operative one, as it were, nothing was irrelevant. It was the age for which Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village”<sup>16</sup>, and like capitalism being the first set of social property relations that contained internal tendencies towards universalization, so too did the growth of American popular culture. It was an age in which even geopolitical boundaries didn’t stop the Stones from playing a one-off gig in Warsaw to screaming members of the Polish Communist Party youth who ostensibly were never supposed to have even heard their records.<sup>17</sup> Thus we need to fill in the primary contradictions, what is it that, even in 2017, captures our imagination and often political enthusiasm. Why do generation after generation of young people listen to the Beatles and the Grateful Dead? Why is it the anti-war movement of the Vietnam era that provides an unspoken template to nearly all protest politics? The answers cannot be articulated in simple matter of fact terms – the questions themselves, assume what needs to be explained.

In point of fact, now that we have established the lock-step singular highway movement of rock music and far Left politics, we must stipulate, from our vantage point, that this was a Missed Encounter. This is not a mere counterfactual, a Phillip Roth novel about the Nazis winning the war, or a “What if Lincoln Lived” potboiler. Rather, like J.P. Marot’s work on early Soviet economic development and the failure of the right-opposition and left-opposition to have an ‘encounter’ against Stalinism in the twenties, the purpose here is to illuminate what could have taken place by examining what did not take place.<sup>18</sup> This is rather that we can look back

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<sup>16</sup> McLuhan (1962).

<sup>17</sup> Wyman (1990), 381.

<sup>18</sup> Marot (2013); Cummings (2013). In my review of Marot’s book for *Socialism and Democracy*, I write that “Bukharin proposed slowing industrialization in the cities – an approach that, in Marot’s view, might have prevented the rise of Stalinism. Yet Trotsky and the Left Opposition, while opposing the twists and turns of the party leadership, refused to make common cause against Stalin. The great risk, according to Trotsky’s analysis, was capitalist restoration. Yet it was not quite so simple. Not for the first time, Bukharin seems to have had the more

and see all the ingredients present for an encounter, ingredients that may not have been visible at the time. The question being raised is not so much the ‘what’, as ‘Missed Encounter’ is not a catch-all abstraction, but rather, a heuristic. It is a rational abstraction, like ‘capitalism’, ‘class’, ‘wage-labour’ and the like. Rather, it is how this encounter was missed, and how in illuminating this dialectic of lock-step movement and missed opportunity, we can provide a Marxist analysis of the long sixties that can encompass both art and politics on their own terms.

As Marx once said, “history does nothing”.<sup>19</sup> To merely present the information, as do many political and musical chroniclers, scribes and writers of liner notes, will miss the forest for the trees. Marx continues, “‘history’ is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims”.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of historical materialism is to provide an analysis of what collective forces are shaped by people pursuing their aims and how those aims, in turn, shift the people pursuing them, the primacy of self-transformation and collective transformation. By providing a model of extension, we can thus specify the heuristic, the “McGuffin” at work here, that of the Missed Encounter.

#### **1.4 Missed Encounters and the Long View**

To substantiate what I mean by Missed Encounter, it is not that I am implying that if only there was a proverbial match-up of objective and subjective factors, the revolution would have swept away the muck of the ages. Rather, it would be something in which, in actuality, as

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correct analysis. Trotsky’s mistake, which aligned him with Stalin’s approach (if not his methods), lay in theorizing a capitalist-grounded class differentiation among the peasants. Thus, liquidating the Kulaks and collectivizing what were thought to be capitalist property relations was the wrong answer to the wrong question, and its results are well known.”, 184-185. This is a paradigmatic Missed Encounter.

<sup>19</sup> Marx (1845).

<sup>20</sup> Marx (1845).

opposed to historical mythology, an encounter between art and politics is consummated beyond mere flirtation. Rather it is that on a specific ‘long view’ level of generality, one would expect to see, given the determinations at work within the conjuncture in question, more than merely an elective and affective affinity between cultural producers and the radical Left. Yet the level of generality that one would expect to be able to engage in a long view from, must sometimes be escaped, and one must peer into the hidden abode of conjunctural isolation and discrete epochal comparison.

As will be seen, the two comparative extensions, or conjunctural analyses, of this thesis are periods that are themselves internally related, within this ‘long view’ level of generality, yet need be isolated to be taken on their own terms. The first is that of the Popular Front era, particularly the ‘Cultural Front’ in the United States, which was rooted in – but cannot be reduced to – Communist International (Comintern) cultural policy.<sup>21</sup> The prefigurations of what Michael Denning calls “the labouring of culture”,<sup>22</sup> and of the breaking down of barriers between affector and affectee, performer and audience, writer and reader, at the very least were ideas formulated by the Cultural Front.

The second comparative extension is that of the late seventies into early eighties, the punk and post-punk era. Unlike the Cultural Front, which was dependent upon a dialectical interplay between various discrete forces from below, from photography to proletarian novels, from big band jazz to experimental filmmaking, and from above, that is to say, the Communist Party, and, to an extent, the International Workers of the World, the anarcho-syndicalist trade unionists more commonly known as the “Wobblies”,<sup>23</sup> the punk era was at first a primarily

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<sup>21</sup> Claudin (1975), Denning (1997), Lukács (2014), Davidson (2017).

<sup>22</sup> Denning (1997), 151.

<sup>23</sup> Buhle (2014)

artistic reaction to the degeneration of rock music, which had become bloated and detached. Punk became attractive to Leftists, and in turn, punk culture incorporated Left politics, and the punk aesthetic continues to inform modern anarchism.

From the long view vantage point, both the punk era and popular front era succeeded where the sixties' Left failed. Take the question of organization, where there is little doubt that there was more success in the Popular Front and Punk era than in the long sixties. Whether this was in the form of the coalescence of the CIO and large Left-led unions in the Popular Front era, let alone the growth of the organized (and disorganized or 'fellow travelling' Left), or within the growth of social movements, anti-racism, feminism, queer and anti-nuclear, from within the punk community, this eclipsed the fragmented, implicitly horizontalist and sometimes Blanquist<sup>24</sup> common-sense of the sixties, as will be seen, what Ellen Meiksins Wood calls the "retreat from class".<sup>25</sup>

Cultural development of course is non-coincidental with political development – thus, on the level of cultural innovation, it can be argued, at least within the realm of music, that the long sixties made more of a cultural contribution. What is more, unlike the various forms that came out of either the thirties, or especially the punk era, at least some of the art – primarily improvisational music – coming out of the long sixties, had a built-in inoculation against being instrumentalized against the social forces from which it has a point of origin. There has always been a Nazi layer within the broad punk community, yet one would have to search quite far to find a jam-band full of white supremacists. As will be argued, reactionary improvisation is oxymoronic.

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<sup>24</sup> On Blanquist politics, or the work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary August Blanqui, see D. Greene (2017). Blanquism, which also informed Mikhail Bakunin, and arguably Che Guevara's 'focoism', is a view of elites that deliberately separate themselves from their constituency, revolutionary conspirators or secret societies.

<sup>25</sup> Wood (1986).

The breadth of cultural development in the era of the Popular Front is astounding, yet is often only known through retroactive reconstruction by historians engaging in rediscovery. It is questionable as to whether the various cultural producers who are now, in the works of Michael Denning or Paul Buhle, conceived of as part of the Cultural Front, saw themselves as part of a specific constellation as did either the punk milieu of the seventies or the rock music of the long sixties. As opposed to seeing themselves as part of a 'resistance', one can plausibly make the point that they imbibed the egalitarian and anti-fascist, pro-union common-sense of the period, yet this was also inextricably connected with, at the very least, critical support of President Franklin Roosevelt. Their project was the defense of society, not being an adversarial culture of opposition. This is to make the point, in other words that the vast array of cultural producers working at the time are easily categorizable as a Cultural Front, as a social movement, yet this is overdetermined by common-sense as opposed to articulated radicalism.

Nevertheless, both the punk era and the Popular Front era have been conceived, articulated and have now entered critical-theoretical common sense as eras of consummated encounters due to the question of sustainable *political innovation*. In turn, it may well be suggested, in a certain register, that it is often the case that art that values didacticism over other forms of affective contagion will never attain the same stature as 'Art for art's sake' – yet as we will see, the very idea of 'sake' can be contested. The question, raised, but not answered, bubbling beneath the surface here is that of the efficacy of cultural analysis that overdetermines the outfront politics while paying scant attention to the context in which any given cultural object is embedded.

Part of this conceptualization of the punk era on the one hand and the Popular Front on the other, as eras of political innovation in comparison with the sixties, is the relative poverty and



paucity of analysis of the period. In turn, this is determined by the unresolved debate as to the method with which to analyse cultural production itself, whether isolated from its context or not. Put simply, on one side of this is a mode of interrogation that emphasizes lyrical analysis, at best a form of history-from-below that uses essentially the same critical tools as critical comparative literature studies. Lyrics crystallize a very specific moment, yet their lasting value, through this lens, is both their historicity and their timelessness.

The other side of this is a formal analysis, right down to technique, instrumentation and the like.<sup>26</sup> By way of this analysis of form, which will also provide framing for this project, analysis can examine the politics and cultural practices inscribed, as is the case in film studies, the jump-cut, the hand-held shot, the experimentation with the abyss staring back at the viewer. Indeed, with the emphasis on technical innovation within the long sixties, this is of vital importance. Yet a purely formal analysis will be unable to specify why, for example, the Grateful Dead or Velvet Underground had lasting and transformative legacies not shared by similar acts such as Quicksilver Messenger Service or The MC5, even if the latter two were much more politically committed. The objective of this inquiry is to preserve and transcend insights from both sides of this debate, a procedure that in itself raises more questions.

To analyse “Like a Rolling Stone” by Bob Dylan, for example, without emphasis as much on the instrumentation, production, length and so on, will be merely an analysis of a poem. The impact of “Like a Rolling Stone” was like Ginsberg’s “Howl” times ten, due to the fact that while perhaps not as original as “Howl”, it impacted millions of people who heard a six-minute

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<sup>26</sup> Formal analysis of rock music is prevalent in the voluminous popular literature, and has an appeal to fans in the sense that box-scores do to followers of baseball. Examples include Parke Putterbaugh, Jesse Jarnow and Rob Bowman. See Jarnow (2016). More successful means of incorporating formal analysis into full-fledged theorization, as pertains to music, include Kelley (2013) on Thelonius Monk or Amiri Baraka/Leroi Jones in his various works on blues and jazz music, e.g. Jones (1999).

work of impressionism on their transistor radios. One of the first critical engagements with rock music, either as formal or lyrical/historical analysis, comes in a debate in the pages of the *New Left Review*. The “rock aesthetic” debate was conducted between the historian and social theorist Perry Anderson, writing under the pseudonym of Richard Merton, emphasizing the lyrical component –yet at a loss when describing the affect; and the eminent Marx translator David Fernbach, writing pseudonymously as Andrew Chester, emphasizing form, yet at a loss in theorizing mediation between form and conjuncture, thus, politics and the socialist project that is meant to be implied in any Marxist or dialectical analysis.<sup>27</sup>

As will be spelled out further, during the epoch under analysis, millions of young people literally thought the revolution was around the corner.<sup>28</sup> As well, many of the cultural producers who will be engaged were, at the very least, making a conscious attempt to innovate in a sense that had an impact on the social whole. These cultural producers, however, while in practice often quite political if we are to define aesthetic rebellion and experimentation as political, often eschewed being pigeonholed as political artists. This was often for the reason that artists felt used by political forces beyond their control, forces seen as top down. Dylan, as will be seen, felt instrumentalized by the old, cultural front-affiliated folk music movement. For better or for worse, this attitude of wielding culture as a tool, as opposed to a component part of an infrastructure-of-dissent, was prevalent amongst much of the social movements at the time. The latter point shows a tremendous misunderstanding on the part of the movements in regards to what was seen to be ‘political’. For many artists, what was seen as a ‘political’ position, such as

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<sup>27</sup> The Anderson/Fernbach debate, occurring from 1968 to 1970 in *New Left Review*, will be spelled out in greater detail in the following chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Hawkins-Sisson (1985), 35.

participation in the anti-war and student movements, or supporting the Black Panther Party, transcended 'politics'. It was simply what one did; it was the cultural common sense.

The Left thus, in many ways, both underestimated and overestimated its hegemonic status within the broader counterculture. It underestimated its hegemony insofar as the degree to which broadly progressive and even radical ideas were becoming common sense, even if in an uneven fashion. This is to say that as opposed to trying to learn from the hippies, the far Left tried to teach them, which, if anything, made both camps look silly. If anything, the youth culture was skeptical. They saw the hypocrisy of their parents' worldview. They perceived a generational social rejection of their lifestyles, drinking away while pooh-poohing the use of cannabis, cheating on their spouses while inveighing against 'free love'. This rendered them suspicious of some of the social movements even if sharing their ideas.<sup>29</sup> The overestimation of hegemony came in the form of an assumption of legitimacy, as an implicit though all-too-present vanguard. The assumption, without declaration, of the New Left as a vanguard, without any party or organizational form, made it seem unaccountable, which indeed, to a degree it sometimes was. While implicitly rejecting a caricatured version of 'vanguardist' communist politics, many of the social movements acted as if they believed themselves to be seen as an authentic vanguard.

This proverbial 'dialogue of the deaf' between radicals and cultural producers is precisely what allows this period to be labelled a Missed Encounter. All of the ingredients for a consummated encounter were present. How these ingredients were present and what constituted their component parts will form the bulk of this project. As well, it is not as if there were no connections, explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious, between these social forces. Rather, the point is that they never became one phenomenon, in the sense that, for example, an

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<sup>29</sup> Wolfe (2008).

engagement with French politics and theory from the sixties and seventies would be impossible without engaging French cinema – and vice versa. Histories of sixties music, as well as sixties social movements only make reference to the other in passing, or when there is something very specific, and this is usually an exception, not a rule. Historical social theory, for the most part, upon first glance does not glimpse mutual determination, rather, merely correlation.

Correlation, as the saying goes, is not causation. Conjuncturally speaking, cultural production is a necessary ‘internal relation’ within the totality of the social reproduction of capitalist social property relations in general, and was perhaps as determinant as it has ever been during the period under analysis. Musicians moved from a didactic folk-music derived ‘from above’ aesthetic to one that crystallized the complications and contradictions and beauty of the era, dizzy with possibility. Likewise, Left activists, primarily youth as opposed to the traditional Left constituency of the labour movement, naturally gravitated towards the countercultural milieu and became, in a sense, a constituency as it fostered an alternative common sense. Cultural rebellion was political in and of itself, with the constitution of new subjectivities, new wants, new means of presentation of the self. Outright traditionally oppositional politics, thus, had to appeal to this new subjectivity.

### **1.5 Structure and Process**

This project will proceed with laying the groundwork as to how to conceive the music of the era in relation to the political dynamics, that is to say, using a long view vantage point to examine how the configurationally specific cultural production has the capacity to crystallize the specific historical moment. As the International Relations scholar Robert Cox once said, “theory

is always for someone and for some purpose”<sup>30</sup> and one can say the same for art in general, and for music in particular, regardless of any ostensible intent on the part of the artist. Yet in order to do so, this thesis engages in a rational abstraction to establish a varying set of vantage points from which to interpret the historical material itself. In doing so, this study reads history backwards using the present vantage point to examine, on a broad, long view level of generality, what tendencies in the past led to the present conjuncture, culturally, and what, in turn, portends in the present to the future. The various temporal extensions, notably the case studies constitute events, seen as a specific confluence, and thus concrete and specific with the generalities stated here. Presented at first are a set of determinations that are less specific in their content, but no less important in shaping the event itself. As with Marx and much of the classical Marxist tradition, examine history from a projected socialist future, if we are to assume, as we should, that socialism is not only desirable but also necessary for the survival of the species.

Yet the vantage point and concepts deployed can even shift methodologically whilst retaining contemporaneity and historic specificity. A various set of procedures will be deployed, isolating on one hand the ‘use value’ or form and content of art to examine the question or ‘sake’ of art in general. The primary model for this endeavour, as introduced in the first of a series of theoretical chapters, will be that as derived from Neal Wood and Ellen Meiksins Wood, what they have referred to as the Social History of Political Thought (SHPT). The great virtue, of the Woods’ method is that it provides a glimpse of that space that captures both historic-specificity and relative degree of relevance. To the Woods, political and social theory is always about ‘who rules’ and ‘how’ and, in turn, it could be in support of the status quo, opposed to it on behalf of

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<sup>30</sup> Cox (1981), 129.

deposed ruling classes or disempowered popular classes.<sup>31</sup> This set of axioms, as applied to music is only retroactively intelligible, and this project constitutes a preliminary attempt at developing a ‘Social History of Cultural Production’.<sup>32</sup>

I adapt the Woods’ framework to the study of popular music, yet in so doing, require a different set of building blocks than do the Woods in their analysis of thinkers from the Pre-Socratics to 20th century socialism. I draw on theorists outside of the traditional Marxist tradition, notably Louis Althusser, but also Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou; those who may not have the Woods’ approval, but on the level of the analysis of ‘affect’ they are useful, if incomplete. In developing my case for the ostensible ‘sake of art’, a play on the expression ‘art for art’s sake’, I draw on Meiksins Wood’s brief but telling portrayal of the early Christian theologian Pelagius.<sup>33</sup> Just as the Woods show the fundamentally anti-democratic qualities of Plato and Aristotle, she emphasized the court-religion quality of St. Augustine’s demarcation of the City-of-God and City-of-Man, and the concomitant doctrine of original sin and implicit injunction against pleasure and joy. Pelagius rejected the demarcation of heaven and earth, and as well, original sin, and his legacy, as will be seen, continues to haunt Christian theology like the spectre of communism. Expanding upon the exceptional work of Harrison Fluss,<sup>34</sup> I argue that rock music was an essentially Pelagian project, nearly explicit in its metaphysical aim of a promise of Earthly redemption. In a sense, Marxism itself, and engagement, as in this project, in Marxist theory, shares such a demystifying purpose. I will spend some time expanding on this reading of Marxism as a project of demystification-of-the-concrete. I thus situate Marxist

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<sup>31</sup> Wood, Wood, N. (1977). I will be citing both Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood throughout this project, but with Ellen Meiksins Wood’s work appearing far more frequently. Henceforth, Neal Wood will be cited as “Wood, N.” Ellen Meiksins Wood will be cited as “Wood”.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Williams was a pioneer of this approach, e.g. Williams (2006).

<sup>33</sup> Wood (2008), 159-161.

<sup>34</sup> Fluss (2015).

politics and rock music as part of the same demystifying and illuminating historical sweep of a Pelagian tendency.

Whether we are to refer to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the bourgeois revolution or many other such conceptualizations of the last few hundred years, it seems quite clear that there was a vast shift in the social function and thus content of art, in particular since the full subsumption of the globe under the rule of capital, a project only recently completed with the eclipse of authoritarian bureaucratic-collectivist 'communism' and the transition to capitalism in China. The Woods' and Robert Brenner's specification of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England, in particular, is meant to highlight how a series of contingent events coalesced to establish a set of competitive imperatives that would lead to a logic-of-process that is what we now know as capitalism. The implication is what allows them to see John Locke as a prototypical capitalist thinker even before the emergent social property relation was even broadly recognized.

While the minutia of, for example, the open field system or the role of the Black Death is of no doubt great empirical and pedagogical value, in specifying the origin of capitalism, it is capitalism itself, and how it came to subsume the planet that is of concern to the Woods and others within so-called Political Marxism. Thus they are reading history backwards in a sense where the exceptions are as important as the rules, engaging in rational abstraction. There is a rejection here of 'stagist' or whig models of historiography, those often attributed to Marxism, whether in the form of Stalinism or G.A. Cohen's analytical schemas. Whether or not they would use the term, Political Marxism assumes an uneven and combined development (UCD) of capitalist social property relations, yet, unlike more orthodox understandings of UCD, both the uneven and combined aspect of what is under analysis is only retroactively intelligible.

Through this lens, measures of qualitative assessment, that is to say, what constitutes ‘good music’, and the possibility of the creation of a critical-theoretically informed rock music canon, will be explored; always keeping in mind the shaping of taste and sensibility by class societies. The key here is examination of music that is neither reducible to nor deducible from its context, yet its “charm”,<sup>35</sup> to use Marx’s expression, is enhanced by examination of the variation of connection between political and cultural development. Thus, in following the Woods’ method, less engagement will be made with the countless other ‘readings’ of the cultural and historical material in question, often flawed and essentially akin to advertising copy, or promotional material and liner notes, than with engagement with the material itself, as well as engagement in formal/technical analysis. The former will be engaged with throughout the first half of the dissertation, to explicate examples and develop the theory, as well as constituting the great bulk of the second half, the case studies. The latter will be developed by way of engagement with scattered discussion and debate that took place at the time, and since, whether by *Village Voice* rock critics or *New Left Review* editors, as to the very possibility of a “rock aesthetic”. Continuing with attempts towards developing my theorization, I expand upon what I call the ‘reality of appearances’ in Marx and Hegel as well as in music, for example the use of negative space in improvisation. I conclude with a concretization of what I see as a 21st century Marxist theory of cultural production in a *general* sense.

Moving on to historicization in the following chapter, I provide an extended engagement and update of Walter Benjamin’s theorization of art in an age of mechanical reproduction. In particular, I attempt to unpack Benjamin’s idea of a progressive mode of distraction. Alongside Benjamin, I develop the theory by drawing on classical Marxist thinkers like Leon Trotsky,

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<sup>35</sup> Marx (1973).



cultural critics like Dwight MacDonal and Robert Christgau, as well as critical theorists such as Raymond Williams and Theodor Adorno. It is here I finally arrive at my theorization of the Missed Encounter. Drawing on Althusser's later work on what he called 'Aleatory (or contingent Materialism)',<sup>36</sup> as well as Althusser's reading of Machiavelli, I provide a model for which I see the concretely Missed Encounter between music culture and the far Left.

Finding Althusser's 'process without a subject' reading of historical phenomena and theoretical anti-humanism insufficient, the process is made intelligible by way of Ollman's "philosophy of internal relations" and Ernest Mandel's concept of "parametric determinism".<sup>37</sup> While on one level of generality, an approach, such as Althusser's, emphasizing the significance of contingency is useful, like the work of Wood and Brenner, in its anti-teleological approach, the 'subject' must be brought back in, lest we reduce social relations to automaticity.<sup>38</sup> By engaging in an extension that establishes parameters that determine and are determined by subjects through their everyday relations, struggles, experiences and the like, the process is brought back to life on a different level of generality. The contradiction between using classical humanist Marxists like the Woods, Mandel and Ollman and cold rigorous structuralists like Althusser relates to my ongoing concern of examining both the "cold stream" and "warm stream",<sup>39</sup> to use Ernst Bloch's phrases, of the phenomenon under examination. Indeed Bloch's presence and the parallel streams run through the project, diverging and intersecting. Having established this, I provide a preliminary analysis of some concrete connections between specific cultural producers and social movements, in the United States and United Kingdom.

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<sup>36</sup> Althusser (2006).

<sup>37</sup> See Althusser (2006); Ollman (1976); Mandel (1986).

<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting the sometimes disavowed affinity between Political Marxism and Althusserianism in their common opposition to teleology, the emphasis on the separation of the economic and the political and the emphasis on the important determinations of the cultural-ideological fields.

<sup>39</sup> Bloch (2006); Moir (2014).

The next chapter arrives at the aforementioned comparative engagement with the Popular Front and the Punk eras, both conjuncturally and historically. The following two chapters, respectively, offer a genealogical set of excursions through the social history of rock music in the long sixties, its epochal developments and its degeneration, and the similar process in regards rise and fall of the social movements of the time. In this segment of the project, a descriptive and chronological/analytical idiom and set of procedures is put to work. This all leads into the second half, in which I provide case studies, using my fully developed model, of the Grateful Dead, British rock music, and finally, Bob Dylan, before concluding with a concretized set of determinations; yet remaining open for further inquiry and continuation. It bears emphasis that the approach taken here, both in a general and specific sense, has never sufficiently been applied to rock music in general, or sixties rock music and politics in particular. The aim, thus, is opening a conversation that it is hoped will be continued, and will open up new vistas in discussing the role of music and politics, moving beyond descriptivism on the one hand and empiricist sociology on the other.

The 'long view' vantage point taken in the first few chapters will shift to the vantage point, variously, of my own subject-formation as an aesthete and Marxist, though this project is by no means autobiographical. Yet we move from this broad level of generality, down to, as noted, the conjuncture at play, and thus adapt a vantage point that presumes the logic of process within the conjuncture itself. This is to avoid teleology. A comparison can be made with the act of listening to the first record by an artist and while recognizing that elements of their sound and technique that would arrive in subsequent projects may seem implied, to appreciate and understand, for example, *Bleach* by Nirvana, to name a dynamite debut record, one must detach oneself from knowledge of their subsequent *Nevermind*. It is only in this act of abstraction that

one can arrive at a concrete analysis that in turn, can allow one to see the lineages of later work by any given artist.

While much has been written on these icons, as noted, this Marxist standpoint has never been brought to bear, and I pay special attention to the sonic, rhythmic and lyrical development as crystallizations of the long sixties. The purpose of examining these three, beyond obvious personal knowledge, is that they alone were able, paradoxically by ostensible disavowal, to successfully carry the zeitgeist beyond their times. Paradoxical and contradictory in their politics, the artists under analysis in the case studies deserve their status as exemplars, and it is my hope that I provide grist for further inquiry. In addition to the Dead, UK rock and Dylan, the preceding chapters also contain extended analyses of others who have made serious sonic and aesthetic impact, notably the aforementioned Jefferson Airplane, the Velvet Underground and the Beach Boys.

## **1.6 What's the Use**

There are three primary purposes to this project. The first, to be clear, is political. There is a great deal of misunderstanding of the relationship between politics and art in general, politics and popular culture on another level, and politics and music in particular. I intend to provide analysis of what is generally seen to be the foundational years of the development of a cultural form that does not merely interpret it, but attempts to change and draw out the politics. Alone among 20th century cultural movements, rock music has not been sufficiently theorized by Marxism.<sup>40</sup> Finally, on the political point, there is an objective in 'reclaiming' the rock music of

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<sup>40</sup> There have, to be sure, been some attempts at Marxist analysis of rock music as part of a broader frame of analysis of a given conjuncture, e.g. the film theorist David E. James (1996) or the journalist Andrew Kopkind (1993). Mark Abel (2014) provides an analysis of 'groove' that can obviously inform any Marxist theorization of rock music. Greil Marcus and Robert Christgau do not hide their affinity with Marxism and it certainly shows in their work.

this era for the radical Left and focusing on cultural and political radicalism in so doing. The predominant ‘common-sense’ understanding and analysis of rock music of this time, in particular, American rock music, was connected by liberal historians as a continuation of the project of ‘Americana’. These historians, notably Sean Wilentz,<sup>41</sup> often ignore the roots of Americana, in socialist and anarchist ‘folk music’, in slave music, in the working classes and sub-altern classes of the American south.

Beyond this, to widen the scope, is the point that there has never been a Marxist theorization of rock music. There have been references made, but never in a sense that shows enthusiasm towards the form, such as with, for example, Fredric Jameson on science fiction and conspiracy film, or Ernest Mandel on detective novels. It is only with this enthusiasm that analysis can really be fruitful. While this is not unrelated to the explicitly political purpose mentioned above, it also relates to expanding the vocabulary of Marxist cultural analysis, to move towards what I and others affiliated with the *Red Wedge* collective call the “Popular Avant Garde”.<sup>42</sup> All too often, writing about rock music in a critical register either focuses explicitly on performance at the expense of context, or, on the other hand, engages more in sociological analysis of musicians and their fans, from an ‘academic’ safe distance.

Finally, related to these two purposes, is to bring political ideas back into general discussion and analysis of rock music. As will be seen, rock music was taken very seriously when it first appeared as a cultural form. The first rock critics wrote in the growing ecosystem of radical-Left publications in the late sixties, publications that were emulated in the more

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Reebee Garofalo is informed by a seemingly Marxist politics, but his analysis, while useful, does not seem, in the first instance, Marxist. Another way of making this point is that there have been Marxists who have written on rock music, there have not been, in the sense of other cultural practices, full-on theorizations beyond the aforementioned debate in *New Left Review*.

<sup>41</sup> Wilentz (2010).

<sup>42</sup> Billet (2017).

‘professional’ *Rolling Stone*, which at first featured some very serious analysis, from the likes of Lester Bangs.<sup>43</sup> Major Marxist theorists and translators debated the Rolling Stones, the Band, and Creedence Clearwater Revival in the pages of *New Left Review*. In other words, music aficionados were getting a dose of politics, and radicals were having their tastes shaped by those, like Willis and Robert Christgau, who sought to foster a Left-informed rock music canon.

Thus we return to the initial point of departure. There is great potential, in 2017 and beyond, for a re-acquaintance of an encounter between cultural producers and the radical Left. To identify the failures and detritus of the past, as well as successes, will help develop the right kind of art and the right kind of movements that can bring about transformational change. Emma Goldman famously once said that if she couldn’t dance, it wasn’t her revolution. In 2017, unlike 1917, most revolutionaries probably fancy a dance, here and there, and perhaps many people on the dance floor have thought-dreams of revolution. Perhaps, then, it is time for the dance to begin once again, not choreographed from above but guided by a sort of swarm-intelligence from below. The continuation of free and creative cultural production depends highly upon resistance, and resistance depends highly on free and creative cultural production. This time, let us be sure the encounter is not missed.

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<sup>43</sup> Bangs (1981).

## Chapter 2

### The Strangest of Places

#### 2.1 More from a Three Minute Record

Having laid out in the first chapter the presumptions underlying this project, it may be useful, momentarily, to take a step back to begin a chapter that will further situate the parameters within which this project is conceived. After all, the overdetermining vantage point of all theoretical practice is the self and the self is mediated by social relations, consciously and unconsciously. To lapse for a moment into auto-ethnography, as an historical subject, my own identity was largely formed within the “imagined communities”<sup>44</sup> that surround the Bataillean excess supplied by rock music, but equally as much through my immersion in Left politics, beginning with the alter-global social movements of the 90s, continuing for near two decades of anti-war, social justice and labour organizing. I have always made an intrinsic connection between music and politics in my own life. It would go without saying that I have strong affinity with the cultural production of this era and a suspicion at the romanticization of the politics of the times.

There is a mythology that posits not a missed encounter, but a blurred line, less lockstep than imaginary. This mythology, found in television shows like *The Wonder Years* or *Aquarius* depoliticizes, in different ways, both the music and the politics of the era. Everything is whittled down to the figure of the peace-sign-adorned hippie. As well, within some quarters of the Left, there is a peculiar fascination with the strains of ultra-leftism that the era produced. Yet in lieu of an encounter, there was a missed encounter. After all, previously great leaps in cultural

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<sup>44</sup> B. Anderson (1982).

production, at least in the bourgeois era (if not earlier), have had direct and organic links with radical politics: Picasso's anti-capitalism was the rule, not the exception among the cubists, but on the other hand, Mick Jagger's short-lived identification with the Trotskyist Fourth International was an oddity in the world of rock and roll. How this relates to my own subject-formation, as a member of the bourgeois intelligentsia won over to radical politics, is how I situate music as a key element in my own politicization. And this was likewise the case with many still-existing sixties radicals.

One of the unfortunate after-effects of this narrative, in terms of critical engagement, has been an assumption, best exemplified in the work of activist/cultural historian Reebee Garofalo, that puts the cart before the horse.<sup>45</sup> From the vantage point of the early 90s and the seeming waning power of social movements, Garofalo provides a substitutionist and reductionist account of how music and politics interact, and indeed, what constitutes 'the political'. Reflecting upon the growth of 'charity rock', such as Live-Aid and Amnesty International tours, while surprisingly decontextualizing how it was informed by the British 'Rock Against Racism' initiative, Garofalo's prevailing and stated assumption is that culture, and popular music in particular, have come to substitute for mass movements, and can even play politically didactic or pedagogical roles.<sup>46</sup>

While offering a caricatured portrayal of what he terms a "gloomy" disposition on the part of the Frankfurt School, the typology Garofalo offers up in regards to 'critical theoretical' accounts of culture is not inaccurate. As we shall see, Dwight MacDonald held almost precisely the view that Garofalo is critiquing, which is to say that there is no possibility of resistance through popular culture. Garofalo is also critical, quite correctly, of those that find liberatory

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<sup>45</sup> Garofalo (1992).

<sup>46</sup> Garofalo (1992), 16-18

potential only through audience ‘re-appropriation’ of culture.<sup>47</sup> To Garofalo, cultural producers are political actors in their own right, who have been empowered by historically specific forces to carry on the legacy of the sixties, by supporting progressive initiatives, boycotting South Africa, and most importantly, raising funds for progressive causes. In the sixties, in this framework, “music served as a cultural frame to what were more-or-less developed movements”.<sup>48</sup> This uncritically made assumption serves Garofalo to over-estimate the influence these movements had on the music of the period, thus imbuing cultural producers with independent, autonomous political power.

There is a truth to what Garofalo attempts to achieve, by providing a rigorous political economy-informed history of the development of rock music as a specific form that, due to historically specific factors within post-war capitalism, imbued producers with a relatively greater degree of power, to which the music industry was slow to adapt. Yet there is a datedness to Garofalo’s imbuing artists with so much power, writing soon after the end of Apartheid, in which the cultural boycott of South Africa no doubt played an important role. In the face of this seeming victory, Garofalo disagrees with Dave Marsh’s critique of “charity rock” and even implies that progressives can “influence” musicians to, in turn, it is implied, influence the masses. As, after all, there are no movements.

Yet Garofalo, while an exemplary cultural historian, does not seem to look beyond the surface, that is to say, his analysis of music and social movements is directly, and seemingly only, pertaining to articulated sentiment by musicians, either through lyrics or action. While not without some telling passages about, for example, the adaptation of instrumentation to Anglo-Saxon vocal music, the form of the music itself, as opposed to what is sung, acted upon or

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<sup>47</sup> Garofalo (1992), 18-19.

<sup>48</sup> Garofalo (1992), 16.



connoted, seems to not be taken into account. The point is, in order to analyse the politics of music, it important, but insufficient, to merely explicate surface connection. It is far more important to look beyond this ‘lock-step’ connection and examine what we are conceiving, contra Garofalo, as a Missed Encounter.<sup>49</sup>

In the last instance, this is due to Garofalo’s standpoint, writing in the early nineties, at a time of waning movements and with seemingly little faith in creative self-activity in regards to politics, a perspective that seems ill-suited to his exquisite analysis of creative self-activity in regards to cultural production. Not only eschewing any and all metaphysics or examinations of affect, Garofalo replaces a classical Marxist approach with one that situates rock as operating “inside and against” the ‘corporate agenda’, the masses are passive subjects for Garofalo, listeners of music, bodies in movement. Yet music makes bodies move! A standpoint of inquiry that is conscious of one’s own positioning and always critical of one’s own prevailing assumptions seems more apropos. This standpoint, as well, posits that it is people who make history, not forces outside of people’s control. Music is a capitalist product, to be sure.

Yet music’s commodity function operates in relatively autonomous simultaneity with the *function* of music within capitalist social property relations. It is not enough to merely establish a standpoint of inquiry; it is necessary to explain the development and resilience of this standpoint. In *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx refers to poetry and art as “spiritual production”.<sup>50</sup> The act of listening, on the subway or on the sofa or in the automobile, is not reducible to commodity fetishism. The meaning that music listeners imbue upon parcellized sound and the dialectic of familiarity and unfamiliarity, and thus, the act of collecting, effectively no different for the

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<sup>49</sup> Garofalo (1992).

<sup>50</sup> Marx (2000), 285.

moneyed consumer of physical ‘copies’ or the downloader from Pirate Bay, is captured well by Walter Benjamin.

Collectors are people with a tactical instinct; their experience teaches them that when they capture a strange city, the smallest antique shop can be a fortress, the most remote stationary store a key position. How many cities have revealed themselves to me in marches I undertook in the pursuit of books!<sup>51</sup>

Leon Trotsky made the claim (to which we will return) that there could be no proletarian art, but there could be, as it were “art from the proletariat”.<sup>52</sup> This art could spring forth the “warm stream”<sup>53</sup> of socialism, the spiritual nourishment. This implicit argument against the instrumentalization of aesthetics, in the style of the Proletkult, was made more explicit by E.P. Thompson, who wrote of William Morris and the romantic-Marxist aim to “implant, encourage and enlarge new wants in the present, and imbue the socialist movement with an alternative notation of value, before the rupture”.<sup>54</sup> It must be said at this point that the purpose of Karl Marx’s critique of political economy, or as Diane Elson puts it, his “value theory of labour”,<sup>55</sup> was not to ascertain the value of labour but why this content has assumed that form, why labour is expressed as value. The possibility of communism explicitly implies a new law of value, a common law manifested in social practice, in which value is collectively imbued on the production and reproduction of culture.

Prefigurations of this communism can appear in the practice of modern music appreciation. Writing under a pseudonym, Perry Anderson exclaimed in *New Left Review* that rock music, in its breaking down barriers between performer and audience could be conceived as

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<sup>51</sup> Benjamin (1968), 489.

<sup>52</sup> Trotsky (2005), 164-172.

<sup>53</sup> Bloch (2006), 205-210.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, E.P. (1976), 33.

<sup>55</sup> Elson (2015), 115.

the first truly communist art form.<sup>56</sup> Anderson was not alone among Marxist intellectuals in noticing this, and he carried on a debate with Marx-translator David Fernbach on the possibility of developing what Fernbach called a “rock aesthetic”,<sup>57</sup> a debate to which we shall return. In turn, one can examine the work of jazz musician and music theorist Ornette Coleman. It is easy to romanticize the best improvised music in a quasi-new age sense, that is to say the idea that some type of extra-human intelligence of a sort is channelled at “peak moments”. Indeed, many improvisational musicians, unable to fathom the affect they and their audience experience, take to this kind of belief. It is notable, thus, that Coleman, while sometimes having a foot in the milieu of “spiritual jazz” alongside comrades like Don Cherry and Charlie Haden, never took to such mystification. This mystification is redolent of conspiracy theory, that is to say, the repressed awareness of totality is mystified as conspiracy, like the suspension of disbelief engaged in by fans of professional wrestling.

This excess, this need for the affective escape, as noted, is spiritual nourishment. Nourishment, of course, is transhistorical. Yet how we relate to this nourishment varies conjuncturally. Giving a class analysis of my recipe for chicken wings, to use a crude example, will point out that chicken wings, like briskets of beef or pork ribs or lobsters (bottom feeders) were once cheap, working class and peasant food. This is all important. But it won't tell you how to cook chicken wings. A formulation of a recipe should keep in mind the origin of the consumption of a given food but even if it doesn't, it will still, presumably, taste good if the recipe is followed, along with some creativity. That creativity will certainly be enhanced by an

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Merton AKA P. Anderson (1968). I take Anderson to mean that communist art would involve the blurring of boundaries between artist and audience to the point at which both are equally important and active ‘movers’ in the process of live rock music concerts. While similar, it cannot, for example, be compared with simplistic notions of “Woodstock Nation” as Anderson seems to be speaking of process, not articulated politics.

<sup>57</sup> Andrew Chester AKA David Fernbach (1970).

analysis of the class origins of a given food (that indeed the best chefs usually have) but still doesn't give you their skill.

## 2.2 Waves and Encounters

We proceed from the presumption that the long sixties produced a missed encounter<sup>58</sup> between rock music and its surrounding counterculture on one side, and the Left, broadly understood as the social movements as well as socialist and anarchist organizations. This assumption, however, needs a certain explanation, as while it is a descriptive abstraction, there is a normative component, that is to say, to ascertain why the encounter was missed. From today's vantage point, the idea that there was some degree of separation between what we now see as an amorphous mass known as 'popular culture', on one hand, and the sphere of the political, on the other, would seem strange. Through both clever adoption of connotative aesthetics and sincere commitment to social justice, broadly 'left' politics is the exception, not the norm, among professional musicians and songwriters.<sup>59</sup> But in this era, there were two different tendencies, social milieux, class positions and so on that separated the forces from the outset.

What is an encounter? To a certain degree, in the first instance, an encounter is quite simply a consummated meeting that creates its own logic, with its own laws, its own tendencies and countertendencies. I use the word 'law' as opposed to pattern, deliberately. Often a pattern appears as law, but is subject to entropy. Capitalism itself developed out of contingent factors

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<sup>58</sup> When using the term generally I am not capitalizing "missed encounter". When I capitalize, it is to denote my conceptualization.

<sup>59</sup> This connection is worthy of a volume of its own, but roughly speaking, the heavily centralized star-maker scenery of the music industry started to splinter in the late nineteen eighties, and in the early nineties, two forms – what had been called "postpunk" but now "alternative" music, as well as hip-hop, eclipsed the old "rock" acts, or forced them to adapt. Placing a premium on authenticity, including political authenticity, rooted in Hip Hop and Punk's connection to social movements, this became common-sensical and many famous 90s musicians were participants and/or wrote songs for the global justice movement. This common sense has remained, alongside increasing proletarianization of musicians.

yet its necessary laws occur as necessity. You didn't have to be born yet you were so you must live. In order to ascertain why this was a Missed Encounter, one must first of all define what encounters would look like. This would be not merely a culture in which Leftists are playing music that impacts the masses, or that musicians are adopting Left politics – indeed, in 2017, many if not most of the important musical artists have left-of-centre politics, though not without some contradictions and anomalies. Rather, this would be a circumstance in which a given cultural configuration is permanently shifted by its encounter with political praxis, and in turn, praxis is permanently associated with and shifted by said cultural configuration. Historically speaking, cultural production, in pre-capitalist times was often associated in an exoteric sense with the dominant order, yet esoterically, was imbued with protest against said order. Architecture itself was protest, as was the homoerotic poetry of early Christendom.

The transition to a mature capitalism brought a formal separation (or 'differentiation') of the political and the economic and the historical manifestation of a 'sphere' outside of politics, the sphere of *civil society* or bourgeois society, in Hegel's terms.<sup>60</sup> The art that existed in this sphere was on one level, for the first time 'outside' of politics – it was no longer there to please the court or the aristocracy. Yet early bourgeois revolutionary art was intimately connected with the revolutionary movements on the European continent, notably France. Civil society, in its originary form was concretely a speaking space outside of the monarchy or nobility, church or military. Edmund Burke wrote fearfully of the secret societies springing up throughout the continent, international Freemasonry and Illuminism as a prototype for the Communist International.<sup>61</sup> Mozart's *Magic Flute* and Beethoven's *Fifth* and *Ninth Symphonies* were explicitly related to the French Revolution, the rise of an age of reason. It would be premature,

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<sup>60</sup> Wood (1995).

<sup>61</sup> Burke (1987).

however, to call this era one in which culture could encounter politics, as the two were intertwined as an anti-systemic force, as noted, cultural producers were subtle political resisters of monarchy and feudalism.<sup>62</sup>

Encounters of any sort between radical social movements, those known to be on what following the French Revolution became known as ‘the Left’, due to the seating arrangement, and cultural producers could only take place within a context in which the two forces were separated. Marx, in turning Hegel ‘right side up’, showed that the universality of civil society was a simulacrum. In reality, the collectivity of opposition was split, and as Boltanski and Chiapello show, two parallel oppositions to bourgeois society developed, congruent with the development of two discrete social milieus.<sup>63</sup> Certainly both of these critiques developed amongst those who would broadly be understood as working-class, people without direct access to the means of subsistence. Yet the traditional working class or ‘social’ critique and the Bohemian ‘aesthetic’ critique, in Boltanski and Chiapello’s conceptualizations, were thrust in different directions. Concretely speaking, this certainly meant alliances occurred, such as in the Paris Commune or the Risorgimento. These alliances, if sustained and allowing for reciprocity, without instrumentalization, be it the aestheticization of politics or the politicization of aesthetics, became encounters. These encounters were able to gain strength, mutually. If one was political, one adapted a particular aesthetic, if one had come to that aesthetic from another direction, one became political.

In his late work on ‘aleatory materialism’, Louis Althusser explicates a philosophy of the encounter, a theoretical tradition that has been unknown, like Marx’s burrowing mole, and has existed from antiquity to the present, from Lucretius to Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx and

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<sup>62</sup> Israel (2012); Van Der Pilj (1991).

<sup>63</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello (2006).

Heidegger among many others. Althusser emphasizes, not incorrectly, that this is an “almost entirely unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy: the materialism of the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take”.<sup>64</sup> This is counterposed to the mechanical materialism of rationalism, which, in Althusser’s take, some attribute to Marx and Lenin. Harkening back to the atomist cosmology of the “swerve”, Althusser declares the “swerve” – the random swerving of one atom into another, thus the manifestation of matter, as originary. Or to be more precise, Althusser makes the declarative point that origin in and of itself is outside of philosophy properly speaking. Instead, one must seek out the moment in which a swerve becomes an encounter not a “Brief Encounter”, Althusser seeming to be referencing the Noel Coward screenplay, but a “lasting encounter that become the basis for all reality, all necessity, all Meaning, all reason”.<sup>65</sup> The atoms are actually only atoms insofar as they encounter other atoms, having not passed from abstraction to materiality. This is a crystallization, where random raindrops solidify into ice, which in turn crystallizes.

A demonstration of this “entirely unknown tradition” is best spelled out in Althusser’s reading of Machiavelli. The conditions of possibility exist for what Althusser takes, rightly so, to be Machiavelli’s specific political project, of creating a unified Italian nation-state. On a broader sense, Machiavelli as exemplar seems predicated upon a stipulation that knowledge of the reality of contingency is only operationalized in an extra-philosophical, indeed, political sense. Machiavelli posits “an atomized country, every atom of which was descending in free fall....it was necessary to create the conditions for a swerve, and thus an encounter, if Italian unity was to take hold”.<sup>66</sup> None of the component parts, city states, papal state, what Perry Anderson has

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<sup>64</sup> Althusser (2006), 167.

<sup>65</sup> Althusser (2006), 167.

<sup>66</sup> Althusser (2006), 171.

called “parcellized sovereignty”,<sup>67</sup> was in any position to swerve on its own. The theorized prince is intentionally not named, nor is his place of origin on the Italian boot stipulated, and this is intentional. The necessary pre-condition for this swerve that would become an encounter is contained in having the virtue to tame fortune. And this governance must concretize itself, fully aware that necessity is growing out of contingency, and this governance must be equally reliant upon the lion and the fox. Althusser joins Leo Strauss in pointing out that this was a permanent shift in conceiving the political, which had previously been scholastic, Aristotlean.<sup>68</sup>

Althusser posits that a “successful encounter, one that is not brief, but lasts, never guarantees that it will continue to last tomorrow” and is in a permanent process of potential degeneration.<sup>69</sup> The original encounter was that which contingently led to the transition to capitalism. As George Comninel has pointed out, if a meteor were to have fallen in 14th century England, then perhaps the world would never have developed capitalism.<sup>70</sup> A missed encounter, in this reading, is when all the elements are there for the potentiality of the type of encounter that would set in motion its own laws and be a *fait accompli*, even if those laws only hold for a limited period of time. It is here we see the specificity of the missed encounter between aesthetics and politics in the sixties. Like the disconnected and atomized principalities of early modern Italy, in which there existed the potentiality for an encounter that would instantiate a nation state, there were the prefiguring elements to both a revolutionary movement and revolutionary aesthetic form in the era in question, yet these elements were equally atomized, their connections fleeting and their misunderstandings, many. They appealed, in the last instance, to a different social type. It seemed for a moment, to those, like Christgau, who straddled both

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<sup>67</sup> Anderson (1976).

<sup>68</sup> Strauss (1978).

<sup>69</sup> Althusser (2006), 174.

<sup>70</sup> Comninel, (aphorism used in Graduate Seminar, 2008).



worlds, that an encounter was on the horizon. Hunter S. Thompson memorably wrote, in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, in regards to being in the San Francisco intelligentsia:

There was madness in any direction, at any hour. If not across the Bay, then up the Golden Gate or down 101 to Los Altos or La Honda... You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning... And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail. There was no point in fighting... on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave... So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark... that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.<sup>71</sup>

### **2.3 Parameters of the Encounter**

The following, thus, will provide a provisional theorisation of the “high and beautiful wave” as it appeared to Thompson, the failure of the actual instantiation of the “we” that “were winning” in Thompson’s words. Travelling between worlds with his briefcase of party favours but equally at home on a picket line or with a Hell’s Angel, Thompson made the mistake, as did many intellectuals, of seeing all the component parts that could make a sort of psychedelic united front, yet failed to see the lack of connection, indeed sometimes outright hostility between these parts. In order, thus, to analyse why there was a missed encounter, the moment where “the wave rolled back”, the connections must be made. It is here that Althusser is – by necessity – insufficient. Althusser’s concept of the encounter, to be operationalized must hearken, as noted, to its uses – by Machiavelli and Marx in particular. For both, encounters – either historical or conceptual – need not only be understood in their operationalization, but also insofar as they have a definitive purpose – an explication of a law of surplus value, the instantiation of an Italian state.

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<sup>71</sup> Thompson, H.S. (1971), 23.

Marx wrote that Hegel's mistake was "considering the real as the result of self-coordinating, self-absorbed, and spontaneously operating thought".<sup>72</sup> This could perhaps be applied to Althusser as well, replacing the cognitive with the atomic. While he is considering the real of the encounter, short of his astute observation of Marx declaring that whatever independent elements had to exist to instantiate the transition from feudalism to capitalism, it was predicated in the last instance upon an encounter between wealth and the direct producers, and that this encounter, these class struggles ended up with capitalist social property relations. This observation and reading of Marx is fleshed out in the work of those labelled 'Political Marxists', notably Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood.<sup>73</sup> In turn, it informs, as we shall see Wood's model of the social history of political thought. Althusser, stuck with the opposition to 'historicism' and a model of history as a 'process without a subject' reduces the reality of his own theorised "swerve" to a set of epistemological postulates, spontaneously operating elements.<sup>74</sup>

This is not at all, obviously to dispense with Althusser's framework, but for our purposes it must be expanded upon in a fashion that may do mischief to its original intent. To do so, avoidance must be made to fall into the opposing framework, such as that offered by Bertell Ollman and his "philosophy of internal relations" in which parts can't be analysed *sui generis*, but must be seen as "necessary internal relations".<sup>75</sup> Indeed both Ollman and Althusser don't stipulate what parameters bring necessity out of contingency or vice versa. What must be filled

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<sup>72</sup> Marx (1991), 101.

<sup>73</sup> While Wood in particular is strongly critical of the Althusserians, in particular the Post-Althusserians, the Political Marxist framework is remarkably congruent with Althusser's. As Charlie Post has put it (personal communication) "Political Marxism is Althusserianism without the French Structuralist *mishagas*". Richard Seymour (2017) draws out the connection.

<sup>74</sup> The opposition to historicism and the notion of "process without a subject" are spelled out in Althusser (1971), 107-126; Althusser (2006).

<sup>75</sup> Ollman (2003), 36-50.

in, in theorizing an encounter, and specifically theorizing encounters between art and politics, is the independent specificity of movements, broadly understood. These movements – artistic, political and so on – exist within a set of parametric determinants, to use Ernest Mandel’s phrase.<sup>76</sup> In turn, then the parameters that determine the swerving of the atoms are themselves determined by yet other parameters. It is insufficient to, like Althusser and most Marxists, merely fall back on the very economism that is trying to be escaped, to root everything in the capital/labour relation in the last instance. After all, the capital/labour relation is itself an historical phenomena. But one must always, as pointed out by Marx’s contemporary, the tanner and communist Joseph Dietzgen, remember that “anything that is torn out of its contextual relations ceases to exist”.<sup>77</sup>

This is to say that the model of the Missed Encounter being offered here is the potentiality for an encounter that would create its own laws, its own internal contradictions, its own parameters that would determine its production, reproduction and dissolution, and in turn, that potentiality is being blocked by a broader set of parameters. One cannot merely define these elements and identify their configuration; one must not merely identify their configuration, but also what militated against the success of an encounter, what led to the Missed Encounter. After all, an encounter being missed implies that the encounter was indeed potential, what was it that made it a potential encounter? This cannot be demonstrated by further abstraction, but rather by an exercise in historical materialism, and, in particular, a delineation of the relationship between aesthetics and politics as a whole.

To be schematic, the ‘raindrops’ that didn’t swerve in the period under analysis were, as a whole, the political Left and the cultural community. Even within those, there were a series of

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<sup>76</sup> Mandel (1994).

<sup>77</sup> Dietzgen (1928), 96, cited in Ollman (1976), 37.

silos. In the major cities that developed a music scene, only one – not accidentally working-class and heavily diverse Detroit – developed any overlap between the hippy counterculture and the far Left, with group like the MC5, and impresario/activist/drug dealer types like the enigmatic John Sinclair. A Maoist and founder of the White Panthers, Sinclair was a thorn in the side of the Detroit police, who arrested him for passing a joint he was smoking to an undercover cop. This was considered trafficking and Sinclair was handed down a ten-year prison sentence.<sup>78</sup> As will be seen, however, in subsequent chapters, there may have been swerves, there may even have been *brief encounters* but there certainly was not an encounter in a full-fledged sense, as theorized here. Thus it seems quite clear that what is under analysis here is a Missed Encounter.

Jacques Rancière, a student turned critic of Althusser, makes the point that “the arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them, bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible. Furthermore, the autonomy they can enjoy or the subversion they can claim credit for rest on the same foundation”.<sup>79</sup> To put it in another way, this is not the aestheticization of politics so feared by Walter Benjamin, nor is it the politicization of aesthetics warned against by Trotsky. It is a type of relative autonomy, in which art is not a purveyor of truth, yet operates on an ‘intraphilosophical’ plane, within a broader totality, and the interpretation of said totality, and the praxeology of shifting and revolutionizing it requires a relationship with the arts that is based on a very grounded form of connotation. When art connotes a certain set of politics, which in turn connotes a certain aesthetic, it is successful in a symbiosis that improves the independent quality of both through this intersection.

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<sup>78</sup> Wiener (2000).

<sup>79</sup> Rancière (2004), 19.

While there is a great deal of surface level connotation in regards to the politics of music of the era in question, it unravels. This is not to say, however, that there are not examples of individual pieces of music that connote a specific conjuncture, and vice versa. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards famously wrote “[Street Fighting Man](#)” as part of a social movement. When it was banned by the BBC they went straight to their Trotskyist friends at the *Red Mole* to print its lyrics.<sup>80</sup> It is impossible, even without knowledge of the specificity of the movements of the sixties, to hear this particular song – not merely its lyrics, but its decisive open-G tuning and play on the Civil Rights movement adopted anthem “Dancin’ In the Streets” (which ironically was later covered in a tacky, synth-laden 80s style, by Jagger dueting with the late David Bowie), and not hear an evocation of the movements of the time. In turn, when considering the specificity of the English far Left in 1968, looking over the pond at Chicago and at Paris and Prague, and feeling despondent at the weak state of the movements in general, one thinks of the Rolling Stones’ lyric from “Street Fighting Man”, “where I live the game we play is compromised solutions”,<sup>81</sup> a reference to the Left’s umbilical attachment to social democracy.

On the other hand, one can examine “[We Can Be Together](#)” by Jefferson Airplane, whose lyrics make up a part of the title of this project, (‘forces of chaos and anarchy’). This seems to be a song specifically referencing supporting political militancy, and it, alongside the album *Volunteers* upon which it appears, are remembered fondly across the New Left.<sup>82</sup> One hears these songs, with their country-blues guitar riffs and unison (singing together without harmony, a favorite of the social-realist folk music movement) vocals and it does evoke the Weather Underground, references the assassination of Fred Hampton, and declares solidarity with the

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<sup>80</sup> Ali (2005), 256, 300.

<sup>81</sup> The Rolling Stones (1968), “Street Fighting Man”.

<sup>82</sup> Brightman (1998).

Panthers. Yet these movements, as it turns out, were not helped by their uncritical adoption by certain layers within the Bay Area counterculture, which in turn, was misunderstood from the get-go by the far Left. The overlap led the Weather Underground and Panthers to trust the slippery figure of Timothy Leary, who the Weather Underground helped escape from prison and go to Algeria. A not inconsiderable amount of circumstantial evidence accumulated by *CounterPunch* editors Jeffrey St. Clair and Alexander Cockburn seems to indicate that Leary was working for the CIA to monitor the Panthers in exile.<sup>83</sup>

It is not as if the Bay Area Left and Bay Area counterculture had not attempted a meeting of the minds. From the very beginning Bay Area musicians, reflecting the *Zeitgeist*, played free concerts and spawned a culture in which ‘bootlegging’ or fans recording and circulating audio cassettes of the concerts was freely allowed. This reflects an intrinsic belief in music as something more than merely a commodity. Likewise, the Grateful Dead’s original bandleader and keyboardist, Ron (Pigpen) McKernan, an Irish-American, was nevertheless very close to the Black Panthers through his partner, and the Dead regularly paid benefits for them and, once they started drawing an income, helped to pay rent for their office spaces.<sup>84</sup> Yet the approach the far-Left took to the counterculture, including working musicians, was not one of symbiosis, but of instrumentalization. In turn, the artists, and in particular the Airplane, ‘bought into’ this instrumentalization and started to genuinely see themselves as a sort of youth culture equivalent of the early Soviet Proletkult movement, or even Brechtian Epic Theater on LSD.

It likely did bring a smile to people’s faces to hear their direct political experience reflected on record, and the LP entitled *Volunteers*, by the Airplane, in particular, is perhaps one of the great pieces of art of this period, encapsulating in its title track a radical Left-nationalist

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<sup>83</sup> Cockburn/St. Clair (1999).

<sup>84</sup> McNally, Dennis (2003).

standpoint, of the Left being “volunteers of America”. The tragedy, foreseen in “Wooden Ships”, co-written by band members Paul Kantner and Marty Balin with David Crosby, is poignant here, all the more so due to the tragic Missed Encounter. Notwithstanding an uncritical adaptation to the romantic-adventurist style politics of the movements of the time, the sense of defiance and revolutionary joy allows it to retain an inspirational charm that transcends its naiveté. The Grateful Dead, on the other hand, never attempted to be directly political with their lyrical content and did not take the micro-details of the politics seriously – indeed, Jerry Garcia later quipped that the “worst part of the sixties” was the politics. As dedicated acolytes of serious improvisational musicians, most notably John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner, they consciously attempted, in their own LSD-induced way, to channel the conjuncture, both tragic and “dizzy with possibility”.<sup>85</sup> The thematic disassociation that was common in the Grateful Dead improvisation was consciously both planned as accompaniment to psychedelic experiences and also, in terms of how it was seen, notably by Garcia and Phil Lesh, as a ‘statement’ on the United States in the late sixties. They were not, in the parlance of the time, ‘politicos’ but they were not mere hippies either, they were strongly conscious of their working class roots and music as not merely an art form but a job. They set out, and had some degree of success, in making their labour as disalienated as possible. The work of the Grateful Dead will be subject to further analysis, but next we must turn to a model in which we can now conceive what is produced within the context of the missed encounter. That is to, say, the social history of cultural production.

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<sup>85</sup> The Grateful Dead (1987), “Throwing Stones”.

## 2.4 The Social History of Cultural Production

In a famous passage in the final part of the introduction to his *Grundrisse*, Marx pointed out that the ‘charm’ of art from days-gone-by was precisely the disconnect between the level of artistic and cultural development, on one hand, and the development of ‘society’, conceived in its rational, bourgeois form.<sup>86</sup> Enhancing Marx’s insight, I will be making use of the method, pioneered by Neal Wood and Ellen Meiksins Wood, the *Social History of Political Thought* (SHPT).<sup>87</sup> The Woods attempted, as historical materialists, to find an approach to political theory that eschews, on one hand, mechanical reductionism of political theory to a specific historico-temporal context, whether in the case of orthodox Marxism or of the respected Cambridge School, notably Quentin Skinner. On the other hand, in retaining the ‘charm’ or ‘meaning’ of political theory that can speak through the ages, as it were, they wanted to avoid the lapsing into deep hermeneutics and decontextualization prevalent amongst both post-structuralists and the followers of Leo Strauss. This is not however to say that the likes of Foucault and Strauss, in particular, do not inform this work.

The SHPT approach presupposes a certain trans-historicity to the questions raised by the ‘great’ or canonical political theorists. In short, SHPT addresses who rules and who is ruled, what is the degree to which direct producers control their labour, and so on. It is how these questions were approached, specifically embedded in a historical-spatial context that allows for appreciation of a dialectic of conjuncture and history. Radical theorization of human emancipation, for example, was formulated on a vastly different register, that is to say, who was

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<sup>86</sup> Marx (1973), 110-111.

<sup>87</sup> Wood/Wood, N. (1978); Wood (2008).



being emancipated from what and why, across the ages.<sup>88</sup> Reactionary theorization of hierarchal rule can also be found, as Ellen Wood puts it, “from time immemorial”.<sup>89</sup>

The Woods’ approach and that of Political Marxism is predicated on the insight that, like an Althusserian atom, the very existence of capitalism is contingent and somewhat accidental. As opposed to the dominant position within Marxism, and perhaps held by Marx himself, though his position seems to shift,<sup>90</sup> which dictated that capitalism arose in the interstices of feudalism, Political Marxism makes the assertion that it arose out of the disintegration of the rules of reproduction pertaining to feudalism. There was a virtual stalemate in the ongoing class struggles between peasants and lords, which ended up leading to the unintended consequences of marketization of rents, demographic shifts following the Black Death, geopolitical change, the privatization of church lands and dozens of other contingent events. Peasants may, in early capitalism, have retained their ownership of the means of subsistence, but the market was no longer an option to sell their surplus, it was a compulsion – all producers were compelled by a newly unleashed pattern, what Anwar Shaikh calls “real competition”.<sup>91</sup> Michael Zmolek, one of the most original historians working within the Political Marxist tradition, makes a telling point.

The amazing thing about capitalism, an economic system which promotes the regulation of production according to the dictate of the market ahead of all other forms of regulation, is that it developed out of feudalism, an economic system in which production was intensively regulated according to extra-economic rules and norms.<sup>92</sup>

With the introduction of this new set of social property relations, new contradictions arising out of the settlement of the class struggles that determined feudal societies produced new

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<sup>88</sup> Bensaid (2008); Wood (2008); Panitch (2002).

<sup>89</sup> Wood (2002), 74.

<sup>90</sup> Anderson, K. (2009) and Balakrishnan, G. (2014) are informative on these shifts from a ‘stagist’ conception of development to what Anderson refers to as a “multilinear” conception. Balakrishnan’s reading of Brenner and Wood show the Political Marxist disavowed affinity with an Althusserian ontology.

<sup>91</sup> Shaikh (2015).

<sup>92</sup> Zmolek (2014), 28.

modes of thought and new types of hierarchy. Yet capitalism's "amazing" quality, to re-use Zmolek's apt term, is precisely that it was able, in its own way, with its separation of the economic and the political, produce theory, as well as art and literature, that recognized this hierarchy for what it was, as opposed to by way of mystification. The realization that life, in the last instance, is determined by material factors led to a variety of both celebratory and denunciatory responses.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, new forms of conceiving creative human activity outside the realm of the market entered the lexicon, forever altering their practice. Raymond Williams points out that the act of producing culture in a conscious sense, of 'art' as something separate and distinct from customary life came contemporaneously with the industrial revolution.<sup>94</sup> Throughout human history, in the Woods' model, mystification of hierarchical class society has been the norm. Thus, alongside 'great thinkers' like St. Augustine, who have justified class society and hierarchy, Wood focuses upon the rival thinkers, those that, in every form of class society, came to defend the ruled against the rulers.

Against St. Augustine's doctrine of original sin and gospel of suffering, his rival cleric Pelagius preached a gospel of free will, agency and a universalized notion of the Jewish idea of *Tikkun Olam*, or human responsibility to heal the world.<sup>95</sup> In turn, throughout the ages, reactionary Catholics and Protestants as well as nominally secular metaphysicians, respectively Pope Benedict, Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Heidegger refer to humanist or emancipatory thoughts and ideas as "Pelagian".<sup>96</sup> Tellingly, Fluss points out that Wood had an unfinished line of inquiry comparing Pelagius to St. Augustine. Similarly, against the liberal political

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<sup>93</sup> Hill, C. (1984). It can be argued that Thomas Hobbes, from the Right, also was an opponent of this new set of arrangements.

<sup>94</sup> Williams (1983).

<sup>95</sup> Wood (2008); Fluss (2015); Boer (2014).

<sup>96</sup> Fluss (2015).

economists' naturalization of capital and conservative dialectician's naturalization of the state, Marx formulated a set of ideas predicated upon the abolition of class society, a process that could, in turn, bring about the re-enchantment or dis-alienation of humanity, or human emancipation.<sup>97</sup> Indeed Marx was called Pelagian. As well, any thinker or practice that even appeared to shake the foundations of bourgeois rule is referred to as Marxist.

History, as Marx says, does nothing, but rather, it is humans that make history within a set of parametric determinants. This, *abra-cadabra*, is what is revealed to us by way of ascertaining properly the social history of political thought. History had to provide the bases, the common sets of beliefs and practices that would throw up an Augustine, a Pelagius, a Marx, a Heidegger. All responded to specific issues of the time, and were indeed explicitly partisan in their approach to affairs both of Earth and Heaven. The question under consideration is transhistorical in that it pertains to the very existence of class society and human capacity for self-rule and self-organization. Pelagius and Marx were not themselves rooted among the wretched of the earth, yet like all radical thinkers, consciously speak from this standpoint, as do their opponents from a ruling class standpoint. Making use of their conceptualizations, and in the case of Marx, their analytical methodology, can only be properly executed with the self-conscious knowledge of the historically particular praxeologically universal elements.

As with political theory, there have been two predominant critical approaches to the analysis of rock music. On the one hand, there is the tradition of 'rock criticism' and the genre of 'rock biography', both mostly populated by journalists. At best, as in the works of Peter Guralnick or Dave Marsh, this tells 'history from below' about the development of specific cultural forms.<sup>98</sup> As critics, Marsh, Robert Christgau, Lester Bangs and others presupposed a

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<sup>97</sup> Ollman (1976).

<sup>98</sup> Guralnick (1999); Marsh (1999).

critical assessment of the conjuncture within which the music was embedded when engaging with the form itself. Yet, given that this form developed in the style of “consumer guides” as it did engagement and analysis, this left itself open to a variety of presuppositions. At worst, this risks a romanticism and construction of elaborate mythologies, which neither account for their rubric of qualitative assessment nor acknowledge the implicit politics of their project. This reaches its nadir in the Cold War liberal historian Sean Wilentz becoming Dylan’s house mythmaker.<sup>99</sup>

On the other hand, there is an instrumental approach that often approaches the cultural production itself ex-posto-facto. The quality of rock music, driven as it is by words – lyrics – as part of the parcelled out bits of sound known as songs – is assessed merely by its lyrical content. Certainly making such assessments is important, but this risks reducing cultural production to its agitative quality, not as ‘spiritual labour’ that militates against capitalist social relations in general. What is more, there has been very little high-quality explicitly political rock music. This is not to say that the politics of Bruce Springsteen, Public Enemy or the Clash don’t enhance their objectively brilliant song-craft. Indeed, while to socialist listeners, their lyrics, and even their anthemic delivery, like trade union anthems, may take special self-consciously radical pleasure in fist-pumping against ‘the man’, there is a risk of depoliticization in ‘political’ music.

The critic Frederik DeBoer points out, in regards to the consumption of ‘anti-racist’ cinema:

I always read about how white people don’t want to “confront the past” when it comes to Jim Crow, slavery, and all of the other racist monsters that America has played host to. Bullshit. White people, at least educated urban progressive white people, love to confront the past of America’s race problems. They do precisely because “confronting” things, like “facing up to” things, or “acknowledging” things, is a way to give yourself credit for doing something when you’re doing nothing at all. It flatters the contemporary conceit that you are your cultural consumption, when the old-fashioned truth remains the same: that your behavior is what matters.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Wilentz (2010).

<sup>100</sup> DeBoer (2015).

How then can we assess the political content of cultural production in general, and music in particular? As noted from the outset, music continues to exist and thrive and, indeed, in the era of Spotify and downloads, has effectively been decommodified.<sup>101</sup> Its purpose is spiritual nourishment. In and of itself, it speaks no truths, has no politics. It is, as Badiou posits in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, best understood intraphilosophically.<sup>102</sup> Music is autonomous from politics and philosophy in the sense that it exists in its own right, but the truths it imparts or occludes determine and are parametrically determined by the social totality. The universal invariable in music is not, thus, spiritual nourishment, an aspect of capitalist social property relations and the commodification of clock-time. Music disalienates time, but time has not always been commodified.<sup>103</sup> The universal invariant is play, the development of human capacities for creative and social activity. If the communist future, as the classics proclaim, will involve an abolition of the gap between manual and intellectual work, this presumes the corollary of the abolition of the gap between work and play. This was what Anderson was referencing in his positing of rock and roll as communist art.<sup>104</sup>

The universal invariant in the SHPT model is varying ideas as to who rules whom and how. As Neal Wood has pointed out, one will learn far more about John Locke, to cite one

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<sup>101</sup> This point is contestable, for example, by Jodi Dean (2009) who makes the point that to see this as decommodification is ideological or fetishistic, setting up a straw person fantasy. My point here is much more direct. For someone with an internet or wireless connection and a moderate degree of 'tech savviness', any film or music recording ever made is accessible free of charge, hence outside of the circuit of commodities. It is true that by having internet or wireless access, the subject is operating within the sphere of commodities but Dean's point is akin to saying that if someone has sex with their partner in a rented apartment, to see that sex as anything but a masked commodity is ideological, as after all, rent is being paid. Those that make the point that audiences become commodities are conflating the dual value inherent in commodities, and by extension human subjects. To an advertiser, an audience may be a commodity, but that doesn't, in turn, implicitly turn the end-user into consuming a commodity when she listens to a free song anymore than someone who accidentally glimpses a billboard. Shoplifting and bank-robbery occur outside the legal-juridical framework of capitalism. So does illegal downloading.

<sup>102</sup> Badiou (2005).

<sup>103</sup> Abel (2014); Martineau (2015).

<sup>104</sup> Anderson (1969).

example, from reading half a dozen historical volumes and biographies of the period, than in reading existing analyses of John Locke. Locke, after all, formulated a beta-version of the labour theory of value as he observed what is now broadly found to be the origin of capitalism. Locke theorized productive and unproductive peoples at a time of genocide against Indigenous people. This is to say that without this vital historical context, Locke will be genuinely seen as an advocate for free speech and free association, forgetting that these rights, as formulated, were only applicable to men-of-property.<sup>105</sup> This is not a reduction of Locke to his context, as is the case with Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge School.<sup>106</sup> This is to see the broad, uneven and combined developmental forces at play in the English century of revolution that instantiated a theorist who reflected the increasingly anti-monarchist elements among the capitalist aristocracy, a publicist for a prominent slaver who was simultaneously an advocate of regicide. This enables us to see a new set of social property relations ‘as an innocent’ – that is to say, before it has been theorized and defined, before the disciplinary development of political economy and after that, economics. It is no accident, then, that to this day, liberal advocates of civil liberty can sincerely draw upon Locke’s work; yet it also points to the limits of their own politics – that is to say, advocacy for civil liberties within the context of a set of social relations that often requires their violation.<sup>107</sup>

In the case of musicians, the schema at play is similar in the case of this work. One will learn far more about the art of Brian Wilson from historical material, than from the cottage industry of pop-cultural studies analyses of *Pet Sounds*. To really analyse Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys, one needs a grasp on the history of California, the westward migration of

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<sup>105</sup> Wood, N. (1984); Locke (2004).

<sup>106</sup> Abele/Comninel/Meiksins (2016).

<sup>107</sup> Wood (1984).

‘flatlanders’ like the Wilson family, the new sociological strata and historical subject of the ‘teenager’, the power of musician unions in Los Angeles and how Wilson (and Phil Spector) benefited from this rotating group of wonderful musicians known as the Wrecking Crew, pioneers of the *wall of sound*. One has to also look at the field-of-force in California politics in the sixties, the rise of Reagan and the Black Panthers, of LSD and Vietnam, of the historical competition between Los Angeles and San Francisco’s cultural scenes, pitting Wilson, the Byrds and the Doors against the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Thus, armed with this historical material, one can examine what is universal, and still speaks to us, the “charm” of Brian Wilson’s art. *Pet Sounds*, to use a prominent example, is often thought of as *ornate* and a whole generation of indie-rock bands have attempted to capture this ornateness to varying degrees of success, notably the work of Magnetic Fields or the Smithereens. What is remarkable, however, is how chaotic *Pet Sounds* really is, underneath all of this. What is so moving about *Pet Sounds* is what is moving about Renaissance painting – it is to *hear the invention of a new form!* And thus, the form itself has to be defined, historicized and descriptive and affective elements brought into the mix. This may lead us to see how *Pet Sounds* actually can illuminate all of the great contradictions of the period. It is at once radical and conservative. It militates against social mores only to accept them on a higher level. The more experimental it becomes, the more it can be accommodated into a sort of ‘counter-narrative’ predicated upon the theme of subterranean Americana, as is found in the works of Greil Marcus<sup>108</sup> and will be spelled out in more detail in future chapters. Wilson later wrote a song, on the Beach Boys’ *Sunflower* LP, known as “Add Some Music to Your Day”, about the palliative quality of music. *Pet Sounds* is the ultimate in musical palliative; it is the opium of the eternal

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<sup>108</sup> E.G. Marcus (1997).

teenager, the heart of a heartless suburbia. There will be a further excursion on the Beach Boys' work. At this point, however, the parameters have been laid out, that is to say, what constitutes our actual object of analysis and with what tools we shall be analysing this object.

## 2.5 Towards a Rock Aesthetic

As referenced in the first chapter, what is, to this day, the most serious Marxist engagement with rock music came in a set of debates in *New Left Review*. The interlocutors of the "rock aesthetic" debate were NLR editor and theoretician Perry Anderson (writing under the name Richard Merton), and the theorist and translator David Fernbach (writing under the name Andrew Chester).<sup>109</sup> Anderson firmly rejected formal-technical analysis and proposed a combination of lyrical exegesis and class analysis, without any explicit reference to musical form. Fernbach responded in agreement with that idea, but proposed an axiomatic development of a 'rock aesthetic' with which to undertake the venture that Anderson proposed. Anderson's position has much for which to recommend it – one can only get so far with formal analysis, and while not impossible, one cannot deduce conjuncture from its spiritual production. Fernbach's set of axioms is worth a brief engagement, in order to be as specific as possible as to the historical material at hand.

Fernbach posed, for critics, the following questions:

- a) what structural co-ordinates of the music are determined by its commitment to dance and to lyric?
- b) what other structural co-ordinates of rock music are determined by its socio-cultural base?
- c) what defines rock music's borders with other contemporary forms such as jazz, blues and soul music, and the different schools of 'serious music'?
- d) what are the effects of rock music's domination by the vocal, particularly on the development of Instrumental styles?
- e) is this domination by the vocal an essential characteristic of rock?

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<sup>109</sup> The identities were confirmed in personal correspondence with an editorial board member of *New Left Review*.



f) what, underneath all prevalent mystification, are the artistic projects at work in current rock musical projects?

g) what specific criteria have been developed in practice to attribute aesthetic value to rock instrumentation, vocal technique, group playing, song writing, and to what extent do these define a coherent aesthetic field?<sup>110</sup>

Thus, the purpose at this point is to provide a basis for identifying the structural or formal co-ordinates of rock music, the primacy of rhythm and syncopation that free up space for lyric to deliver melody. As noted, most rock scholars, from critical analysts like Garofolo to mainstream scribes of liner notes such as Wilentz or Rob Bowman, seem to presume that this formal analysis is not necessary, relying more on descriptivism and lyrical engagement. The determination of historically and geographically specific bases upon this prevailing structure will be found, while the framing of the border question will be implicitly questioned, as will be the vocal/instrumentation binary. Yet the artistic projects at work within rock will be clearly identified, as they differentiate. Through this differentiation, we will see the various forms of value ascribed to instrumentation, group playing and so on, and the reader will see this to be certainly a coherent aesthetic field in the broadest possible sense, though not without contradictions. A project that could encompass studio perfectionism and onstage chaos could only be contradictory for artists, who, despite their own insecurities, *were* made for the *changing* times.

It is tempting to use a trope popularized by Slavoj Zizek, to respond to the questions posed within the Fernbach/Anderson debate. That is to say, in response to ‘formal or lyrical analysis’ the answer would likely be ‘yes please’. That is to say, one cannot engage the type of formal analysis proposed by Fernbach without the contextual analysis offered by Anderson, and vice-versa. Indeed, taken together, Fernbach and Anderson can be combined within the context

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<sup>110</sup> Fernbach (1970), 5. Punctuation kept from original.

of the social history of cultural production. To take Fernbach's most rock-specific axiom as to schematizing "the artistic projects at work in current rock musical projects",<sup>111</sup> this question would need analysis equally predicated upon form, content and conjuncture. Garofalo and many rock critics analyse content, while other more technical analysts, particularly Eric J. Hobsbawm's work on jazz, engage with content.<sup>112</sup> Finally, conjunctural analysis and historiography, Hobsbawm notwithstanding, often pays little attention to form or content, of music or of cultural production as a whole. To truly historicize, the necessary internal relations between form, content, conjuncture and history must all be taken into account, albeit on necessarily distinct levels of generality.

What will next be engaged, thus, is an attempt, by way of excursions, both realist and speculative, as to what I will be calling, the 'sake' of art. This is of course a play on 'art for art's sake', as if the creative self-activity of humans for the purpose of refinement, of enjoyment, of play, of protest, of expression, of *bildung*. Moving to a 'reading history backwards' vantage point that examines the concept of music, art and culture in a way that neither entirely abstracts out the conjunctural specificity of the object of inquiry, nor allows that specificity to determine the speculative excursion, will be the purpose of the next chapter.

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<sup>111</sup> Fernbach (1970), 5.

<sup>112</sup> Hobsbawm (1999).

## Chapter 3

### The Sake of Art in General and the Sake of Art in Capitalism

#### 3.1 What's Puzzling You is the Nature of My Game

Cultural production is always both a crystallization of the totality of social relations as a whole and the creation of an inter-subjective entity that by necessity will outlast the life of both its creator and those for whom it produces affect. The balance of class forces, the tension or monotony of everyday life, gender, sexuality, war and peace, all play out on the veritable canvas of art and craft. Its greatness, or *charm* is found in a combination of how it illuminates all of this, even on a level of abstraction that goes over the head of the affective recipients, and its 'timeless' quality, predicated as much upon contingent factors as on skill. Bob Dylan's "[Like a Rolling Stone](#)" was perhaps the first piece of high art to top the pop charts and hit it big on AM radio, a 45 rpm single clocking in at nearly seven minutes. What is unique about this song is not only its expressionistic and autobiographical lyrics from the gender-ambiguous/androgynous speed-freak mid-sixties Dylan persona. It is also not only its length. Rather, its secret is absolutely contingent; it is that journey-man session musician Al Kooper, a guitarist, who was tinkering around on the Hammond B3 organ while tape was rolling. Untrained on the keyboards, Kooper was always racing to catch up to the rest of the band. This sound of an organ 'catching up' to the music, never quite making it, like a rolling stone, is an apt metaphor for the never consummated encounter between the sixties Left and the countercultural/music milieu.

As an explanatory framework, there is much to be gained with an application of Leon Trotsky's concept of uneven and combined development (UCD),<sup>113</sup> especially in its explications

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<sup>113</sup> See Trotsky (2009); Davidson (2014).

that emphasize it as an heuristic, as opposed to a teleology. UCD can give a sense of what social property relations are historically and geographically specific to a given temporality, and in turn how aspects of the parts seem to jump out ahead or lag behind The Whole. In regards to an analysis of aesthetics, however, it allows no more than a space for inference in regards to a ladder of abstraction that ranges from the specific role of any given set of social property relations to a micro-analysis of the no longer hidden abode of production. Social reproduction is not so much invisible in this frame as assumed. And this is to assume what needs to be explained. How did tastes form and thus crown the artists' head? How did artists in turn twist and grab taste like Machiavelli's Prince is able to tame fortune?

On the other hand, the dominant mode of writing about popular music, the idiom of the 'rock critic' even when its purveyors are radical social theorists (Ellen Willis, Robert Christgau, Greil Marcus), is as a first-order priority, concerned with the object itself. As Christgau writes in his memoir, there were no right-wing rock critics, all belonged to a certain social set, those writing for alternative newsweeklies, over-educated, often graduate students seen as too countercultural for the organized Left and too activist for the counterculture.<sup>114</sup> They did, however, see their work as a conscious project of attempting to balance an explication of their commitments, socialist, feminist, anti-war, with the fact that the 500 word capsule review was essentially providing a consumer's guide. There will be more said about the work of the critics later in this chapter, but suffice it to say at this point, that these critics did make a conscious attempt at an encounter, yet the limits of their prevailing form rendered them at best mediating figures, unlike those who developed critical idioms around film, opera or visual arts.

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<sup>114</sup> Christgau (2015).

### 3.2 Music. Communism. Alchemy

The cultural theorist Frederic Jameson's aphorism "always historicize"<sup>115</sup> is apt insofar as the aim here is to situate music, and in particular, people's music, in the context of an enlightenment project, as inherently in opposition to reaction, oppression and exploitation. This isn't to say that music is a part of the caricatured enlightenment of anti-modernists of the Right and Left, but an enlightenment project that preserves the incandescence of earlier pre-enlightenment metaphysical/experiential praxis in the sense, as we shall see, as people's, or popular music allows a synthesis of singular execution and infinite reproduction. This is as much rooted in the caricatured enlightenment, that of 'instrumental reason' and 'rationalism', as it is a 'folk enlightenment' that preserved the insights of the enlightenment's progenitors, those mystics, seers and heretics, gnostics, kabbalists, Sufis and Illuminists, Pelagians, alchemists and astrologers.<sup>116</sup>

Marx and Marxist theory is nothing but a culmination of this progressive demystification, yet the *knowing subject exists outside of theory*. This was Marx's declaration, in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, when he referred to past materialism that is purely contemplative, and separates 'knowledge' from 'doing', subject from object. When Marx first undertook his critique of Hegel, it was not merely to put Hegel 'right side up', as the saying goes.<sup>117</sup> Rather, it was to continue Hegel's own project of demystification, which itself stood upon the shoulders of those heretics who had been foundational figures in communist and millenarian social movements. Originally, the truths of the internal relation of the subject and nature, of individual and particular had to be

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<sup>115</sup> Jameson (1981), 1.

<sup>116</sup> Smith, C. (2001).

<sup>117</sup> Marx (1991).

mystified in riddle and metaphor, and this fact could only be known to those known as *adepts*, be it in Kabbalah or the esoteric thought of Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>118</sup>

Of particular note is the dialectic of esoteric and exoteric in the annals of alchemy. Just as liturgical texts must not be read in a ‘literalist’ sense in order to grasp their historic specificity, in the fashion of SHPT. Rather, special attention must be paid specifically to the exoteric, that is to say, the exterior or surface message, and the esoteric, the revelatory or ‘secret’ meaning accessible only to other adepts. By way of example, the alchemical notion of finding or forging the Philosopher’s Stone, rooted in the ancient Greek concept of *chrysopoeia* (indeed a character has this name in *Rumpelstiltskin*), which literally refers to the transmutation of an object into Gold.<sup>119</sup> There are a variety of levels to this, which cannot be dismissed away as tasteful metaphor any more than Hegel’s Owl of Minerva. To be able to ‘make something out of nothing’ is in keeping with the emphasis on creative human activity that was the practical credo of the alchemists, many of which were skilled tradesmen or proto-scientists. Silk, in alchemical allegory, thus represents the ‘fabric’ of society, while being able to turn it into gold is to manifest the ‘goldness’, the collective solidarity of human beings. In some way, shape or form, this mode of knowing was shared by the vast majority of ‘bourgeois revolutionaries’.

Gradually, the knowledge, basically, of the primacy of self-activity, of free-will as against mechanistic ‘new science’ on one hand, and the ‘divine right of kings’ on the other, seeped its way into the intelligentsia, not merely among philosophers but among artists, poets and musicians, notably Mozart and Beethoven, Masonic adepts, and revolutionary sympathizers. Hegel was no musician, he was a mere philosopher, yet he was able to discursively grasp, in Cyril Smith’s words, “nature as part of God’s active being, and humanity at the centre of

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<sup>118</sup> Smith, C. (2001).

<sup>119</sup> Lachman (2011).

nature... knowledge so gained was the path to freedom and self-consciousness”.<sup>120</sup> This is in keeping with the Gnostic credo that the creation of the earth was incomplete, and with the Kabbalistic credo that the job of adepts, or those with knowledge, was to perfect the imperfect and sometimes terrible creation of human life. As Blake would later put it, this was to build a new Jerusalem, to counteract the dark Satanic Mills.

This is the ‘rational kernel in the mystical shell’ so referred to by Marx, who reproached the Left Hegelian milieu for its contemplative negation of religion. To Marx, this was to assume what was to be explained and caused categorical errors. Bruno Bauer, Jewish himself, wrote a pamphlet known as *The Jewish Question*,<sup>121</sup> that situated the historical role being played by Jews in European commercial life within the context of a tendentious and even obscurantist reading of Halakhah, akin to those ‘experts’ today who read the actions of Islamists by way of Quranic passages and complain about Sharia Law. Thus, Left Hegelians, to Bauer, ought to have opposed Jewish emancipation in the liberal Prussian monarchical state formation. This absolute mystification conflating the affective contagion of religion as well as its actually binding (‘religio’) force of customary law with the specificity of the structural role played by (secular and worldly) Jews, that is to say, in finance misses the point completely, not merely misunderstanding “the Jewish question” but the very nature of the developing bourgeois state, that of “impersonal power”, in Heide Gerstenberger’s phrase.<sup>122</sup>

The point, to Marx, that religion was an opiate is not a critique of the use of opiates, indeed, it is not, as is often claimed, that Marx makes the claim that the bourgeoisie uses religion

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<sup>120</sup> Smith, C. (2001).

<sup>121</sup> Bauer (1844/1962).

<sup>122</sup> Gerstenburger (2009).

to drug people. This opiate is also the ‘cry of the oppressed’. Sometimes a painkiller is just a painkiller; that is to say, a structural imperative.

Another hint at this demystification comes in the infamous chapter on the working day in the first volume of *Capital*. When a boss reproaches a worker making the claim that he is a decent fellow, the worker has a few words for the big boss-man. This may well be the case, says the worker to “Moneybags”, who may even be a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Yet the structural imperative of capitalism is accumulation – it is the “religion of everyday life”,<sup>123</sup> an injunction of “Moses and the Prophets”<sup>124</sup> – a telling phrase indeed. So with this context of class struggle, the capitalist was “the thing that you represent face to face with me has no heart in its breast. That which seems to throb there is my own heart-beating”.<sup>125</sup> This is due to the fact that, in its experiential quality – which itself becomes objective through the operationalization of the law of value, “capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him”.<sup>126</sup>

Much has been made of this telling passage, notably by David McNally, who posits a connection between Marx’s use of vampiric metaphors and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, suggesting that the latter was a metaphor for the power of humans to create something that had the appearance of being outside of themselves, a salient point especially in regards to McNally’s analysis of finance capital and its growth without surplus value generation. McNally extensively draws upon African folktales to trace the shifting of the monster narrative with the shifts in

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<sup>123</sup> Marx (1981), 969.

<sup>124</sup> Marx (1976), 343.

<sup>125</sup> Marx (1976), 343.

<sup>126</sup> Marx (1976), 343.



capitalist social property relations, and in a memorable phrase, capitalism’s “occult economies”.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, though perhaps with less of a sophisticated politico-economic analysis, Slavoj Zizek repeatedly refers to John Carpenter’s *They Live*, in which a proletarian everyman, played by Canadian professional wrestler Roddy Piper, finds a pair of sunglasses that reveals the ‘real’ meaning of billboards, advertisements, indeed capitalism itself. Advertisements become 1984-type posters that say “obey” or “conform”, while the bourgeoisie appear as garish skeletons, redolent of Day-of-the-Dead imagery rooted in occult Mexican Christianity.<sup>128</sup>

The point that Marx discovered was precisely the *reality of appearances*, missed by Bauer in his confusion of the Jewish question, and was systemically only hinted at by the entire line of occult thought from the Ancients to the Gnostics, from the Alchemists to Hegel. The Gnostic idea of the incompleteness of creation, the notion that ‘Gods walk the Earth’, the fact that *mystified reality* can be *lived reality*. Capitalism creates a fetish in which the religion of everyday life, in Durkheim’s terms, not the ‘rite’ but the ‘ritual’ is participated in whether one believes in it or not.<sup>129</sup> There is no outside to commodity fetishism. Yet it is predicated upon a collective mystification, which is why the communist movement, like the Alchemists before them, believed it had to be solved by a collective de-mystification. All the way back to the original European alchemist, Joachim of Flore, the Gnostic project of what its opponents have called the “Immanentization of the Eschaton” has been the only hope for a radical dis-alienation and emancipation of humanity. This Pelagian notion, as it were, of “heaven on earth” is an obvious heresy to Islam, Judaism and Christianity.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> McNally, David (2012), 17-88.

<sup>128</sup> Carpenter (1987); Fiennes/Zizek (2010).

<sup>129</sup> Durkheim (2008).

<sup>130</sup> Fluss (2015); Wilson, R.A. (2016).

The concept of the ‘immanentization’ of the eschaton was pioneered by the ‘post-ideological’ theorist Eric Voegelin who wrote, “The problem of an eidos in history, hence, arises only when a Christian transcendental fulfillment becomes immanentized. Such an immanentist hypostasis of the eschaton, however, is a theoretical fallacy”.<sup>131</sup> Yet what if it is not, pace Voegelin, a theoretical fallacy, if one is fully aware and cognizant that this political project occurs on a metaphysical plain, and with an aesthetic or affective component, that of communist immanentization? In very real terms, capitalism has supplied the human species with abundance and misery. It has created a circumstance in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in which Luxemburg’s old credo of socialism-or-barbarism has never seemed so true! This lens is what led reactionaries, and not just far-right cranks but ‘respectable conservatives,’ notably those in and around *National Review* magazine, like the preppy and pipe-smoking William F. Buckley Jr. to see the obvious affinity between the socialist project and the development of the counterculture. To wit, the counterculture itself saw its project as that of *immanentizing the eschaton*, as satirized by Robert Anton Wilson’s *Illuminatus Trilogy* in which Wilson astutely sees a thread that connects class struggle, libertarian and anarchist utopias. This itself was influenced by the proto-Situationist Chaos-Magick anarchism of the Principia Dischordia and the Church of Eris, vital participants in the sixties counterculture, part of a project of demystification as much as the antiwar movement.<sup>132</sup> The radical shift to a reality in which mystification is apparent yet disavowed is temporarily shifted with the communist affect of popular music, and thus, in capitalism, this is the sake of art.

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<sup>131</sup> Voegelin (1987), 120.

<sup>132</sup> Wilson, R.A. (1983; 2016).

### 3.3 Don't Forget the Charm

In a short but telling passage in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx extemporizes as to the non-coincidental relation between art and the level of what we are here calling development, as in socio-economic development, but goes deeper as to examining prevailing social ontologies that produce these forms, finally to state that in contrast to mere historical analysis:

The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model...A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naïvité, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm?<sup>133</sup>

I don't see Marx's use of 'eternal' as a throwaway at all, but rather a challenge – to himself perhaps, but to aesthetes in general (and Marx and Engels were certainly aesthetes) – to keep in mind the autonomy of that “eternal charm” of what Marx elsewhere calls “spiritual production”<sup>134</sup> following Storch. It is not enough to say that a mode of production impacts the form, the vessel containing the affective qualities that constitute great art, as the content of this type of art – its 'charm' can only be seen as transhistorical if it has indeed developed greatness, which we can't reduce, conceptually, to a sort of subjectivism. The problematique of the relationship between a world artistic culture and the capitalist mode of production is not unrelated to questions of interconnectedness as a whole, of the very possibility of human globalization. Of equal, if not greater importance to criticism, it can only provide so much understanding of art's purpose beyond crystallizing a mode of production and what either ruling or popular classes anoint as great and good.

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<sup>133</sup> Marx (1973), 110-111.

<sup>134</sup> Marx (2000), 285.

Artistic production, broadly conceived, predates capitalism<sup>135</sup> and has developed, in a combined sense, but not towards any specific goal except to be as free as possible from the fetters of monarch, noble, capitalist or commissar. There can be no socialism in capitalism. But there can be, due to the historically unique and under-theorized role of the artist, relatively disalienated labour, production and consumption of art in all historic modes of production. Art is a glimpse beyond the realm of necessity, Bloch's "cold stream"<sup>136</sup> of Marxism in which we scientifically analyse the passage from commodity to capitalism, from rational abstraction to unity of the diverse. It is a glimpse at the realm of freedom, of what Marx called "spiritual production". This is what Bloch called the "warm stream", the subterranean utopian component that is the metaphysic underlying any and all sincere socialist theory and practice, and certainly that of Marx, the humanism that dare not speak its name. Or as Trotsky put it: "All the emotions which we revolutionists, at the present time, feel apprehensive of naming – so much have they been worn thin by hypocrites and vulgarians – such as disinterested friendship, love for one's neighbor, sympathy, will be the mighty ringing chords of Socialist poetry...".<sup>137</sup>

Trotsky was certainly one of the first Marxists to incorporate psycho-analytic themes, and this heavily informs his eminently satisfactory conceptualization as to how art could flourish in a fully-developed communist society. The key point is that "the powerful force of competition which, in bourgeois society, has the character of market competition, will not disappear in a Socialist society....(it) will be sublimated".<sup>138</sup> The unity of diverse capitals in competition will be the unity of diverse cultural producers, and given that the access to all needed goods, housing,

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<sup>135</sup> Williams (1983) posits that while artistic production predates capitalism, it only took on its modern form as an "art", that is to say a skill within "culture", another new concept, subsequent to the Industrial Revolution. This is in keeping with Zmolek (2014) and Wood (2002).

<sup>136</sup> Bloch (2006).

<sup>137</sup> Trotsky (2005), 188-189.

<sup>138</sup> Trotsky (2005), 189.

food and leisure will be separate from production as a whole, and certainly cultural production, the superiority of one artist will be decided by the collective swarm intelligence of the masses, just as the masses' consumer habits are fed by and feed the reproduction of capitalist social property relations.

This is akin to Ornette Coleman's ideas in regards to the inherent democracy of music – art as the emanation of popular will as instantiated and crystallized by the artist.<sup>139</sup> Coleman was as illuminating — if not sometimes moreso — when theorizing his own project, as he was in the project itself. Indeed, the man was so on point that no less than Jacques Derrida comes off as humble — even insecure — in an interview that he conducted with Coleman in 1997. After an awkward mouthful attempting to make Derridean sense of improvisation's dialectic of repetition and rupture, Coleman tells Derrida, “Repetition is as natural as the fact that the earth rotates”.<sup>140</sup> Derrida clearly seemed interested in Coleman's dictum of “harmolodics” which decenters the specificity of tone. Decentering tone, however, was grounded in what Coleman referred to as “punching the C”.

Every musician has their own “movable C”, understood as a tone, a note, a timbre, a sound that was related to another tone, note, timbre – that is to say, a sort of determinate negation. It is through this “hidden C” – this implied structure that, to Coleman, roots the democracy of musical production and play. That repetition, that ideational presence of structure in a seemingly formless void is always-already present when sound is produced, or when social time is measured in a sense that sound becomes what we know as “music”.<sup>141</sup> This is perhaps

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<sup>139</sup> Cummings (2015). Coleman saw music as a sort of esperanto, a language that could communicate across barriers that was emblematic of a democratic and humanist spirit. All sound was music if conceived correctly, in my reading of Coleman, *Red Wedge*, 2015.

<sup>140</sup> Coleman/Derrida (1997).

<sup>141</sup> Coleman (1983), 54-55.

why one of the most satisfying moments for listeners of improvised music – jazz, rock, bluegrass or post-rock – is the segue or the re-entry of improvisation back into the chord pattern and metre of the composition being explored — the reappearance of the syncopation. The syncopation that confused Adorno exists in seemingly un-syncopated temporal parcels of social time.<sup>142</sup>

What Trotsky is doing here, following Marx, was turning Hegel ‘right side up’. It would be impossible to do Hegel justice right now and I claim no expertise. It can be said that to Hegel, beauty in art is the emanation of the Absolute Idea through an object,<sup>143</sup> in other words, art exists for art’s sake. Marxist cultural criticism cannot dispute this, but we thus are given an assignment, to ascertain what is ‘art’s *sake*’. Certainly we need to see the historical and political economic context in which art is produced, but we also need to have a materialist conception of beauty, that is to say, what gives us a glimpse of that “homeland”<sup>144</sup> to use Bloch’s phrase, of socialism, where ‘the free development of each is the free development of all’. Capitalism is a social metabolic order in which the infinite production of surplus value, that is to say the theft of historical time, stands in stark contrast to the participation in art.

Take music, for Hegel the most mysterious of all art forms. Music is a parcellized period of measured time full of sound that, depending on regional, cultural and other factors, takes on a certain form or ‘genre’. A song ‘reclaims’ time in the same way that labour is alienated through stolen time. In other words, aesthetic objects are certainly commodities, yet, they are also, in Badiou’s terms, “essentially finite” and the “creation of an intrinsically finite multiple”.<sup>145</sup> Their use value is non-disposable insofar as memory, like energy, cannot be created or destroyed, and the labour that goes into their creation, as well as the excess, can never be entirely subsumed

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<sup>142</sup> A version of the preceding two paragraphs originally appears in Cummings (2015).

<sup>143</sup> Hegel (2004).

<sup>144</sup> Bloch (2006).

<sup>145</sup> Badiou (2005),10-11.

under capital without a trace. In turn, one does not merely *consume* art, rather art is affective, at its best, an exchange of affective energy between the artist and her audience. It was due to this point, as we will recall Anderson, writing under a pseudonym, called sixties rock music the very first communist art form, in that, more than any form that preceded it, the artists, the musicians, the poster-makers and so on – were merely ‘part of the scene’.<sup>146</sup>

Perhaps, in hindsight, Anderson is hyperbolic, as forms of art across the mediums had been doing so throughout the modern period, notably visual arts. Anderson’s point drives home, however, the enthusiasm with which Left intellectuals approached what was seemingly a disalienated aspect of everyday life at a time in which such experiences were previously inaccessible. Anderson’s conceptualization must stand in distinction to an intentional modality of prefigurative politics. Rather, it was the manifestation, against the back drop of the uneven yet storied innovation of the sixties Left in all its manifold contradictions that precipitated a sort of ecstatic configuration, a glimpse at the utopia that dare not speak its name. This is the ‘sake’ of art, so to speak. Art, in the last instance is ‘for art’s sake’, and this *sake* is a prefiguration of emancipation in a concrete sense. Trotsky continues his point with a flourish, “man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonized, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise”.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Anderson (1968).

<sup>147</sup> Trotsky (2005), 207.

### 3.4 The Implications of Charm

For our purposes, the role of art is educative but not didactic, an emblem of culture in the sense that Raymond Williams defines it. That is to say, culture is “a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort”.<sup>148</sup> The concept of art, thus, in Williams’ framework, is like the commodity in Marx, it has a dual character, a use value and, as opposed to an exchange value, a value as an act of human labour, whether alienated or free. Williams’ irresistible implication is that this humanism, this *bildung* is democratically accessible. This could be access to pleasure, narration and reflection upon the human condition, representation through non-discursive fashion, and technique.<sup>149</sup> This has its origins even before the advent of political theory, as Ellen and Neal Wood have pointed out.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, it was against the political dramatists that Plato and his followers used the dialogical form to essentially condemn this very idea. Of course it should be stipulated that this form of art or culture was not essentially conceived in such a way, this ex-post-facto theorization occurred likely during the Renaissance, indeed around the time of Machiavelli’s revival of atomism and a philosophy of the encounter. Be that as it may, functionally speaking, art was a leveller, and it is thus no accident that attempts at controlling it, through rituals like Saturnalia (Roman Carnival) and the idea of ‘bread and circuses’ could not subsume it without a trace. Artists had a means with which to communicate with their audiences that went over the heads of monarchical rulers, or, as was the case with Shakespeare, was admired by the monarchy as anti-noble. The Robin Hood legend is rooted in situating monarchs on the side ‘of the people’ against nobility, and indeed hearkens back to the Greek dramatists.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Williams (1983), 13.

<sup>149</sup> Eagleton (2015).

<sup>150</sup> Wood, N. and Wood (1977).

<sup>151</sup> Linebaugh (1986).



The demystification of politics post-Renaissance led to a demystification of the Arnoldian purpose of culture, but it had been known, implicitly by cultural producers, albeit in a sometimes mystified fashion.

Marx's point about the trans-historicity of charm is abuted by historicization of its specific instances in a concrete sense. The point that he is attempting to make is that one can only understand how the charm is generalizable by recognizing the historically specific forces at play and that are distilled in any given work of cultural production. Thus, we see a separation of imagination and creative activity of social human beings on the one hand, and technological, political and juridical change on the other. The latter will always inform the former in the last instance but the former can neither be reduced to nor deduced from any given mode of production. Rather, the non-linear trajectory of differentiation in regards to cultural forms accompanies the determined trajectory of the form as it becomes mechanically reproducible. In Walter Benjamin's historical schema, ranging from the founding and stamping of antiquity to the printing press, roundabout to photography, to sound recording and filmmaking, the developments are obviously rooted in the development of the productive forces, but what interests Benjamin, and Marxist cultural theory in general, is what effect and what affect took hold.<sup>152</sup>

In particular, the capacity for distraction embedded in mechanized art held a dual-edge blade for Benjamin. 'Bread and Circuses' and Saturnalia had been provided in all previous modes of production in order to let the population 'let off steam'. On the other hand, the educative capacity of art, of mechanized art, even of television, captured the imagination of Benjamin and other Leftist aesthetes. Indeed, there is a television and audio-visual equipment within numerous Diego Riviera murals. Seemingly antithetical to Benjamin, yet related, was the

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<sup>152</sup> Benjamin (1968).

American critic Dwight MacDonal, who inveighed against the idea that something emancipatory could be found in a popular culture. In the words of Scott McLemee, MacDonal claimed that “industrialization has destroyed old patterns of life and replaced them with alienation, conformity, stultification. The culture produced and merchandised under this system is a poor substitute for the older forms of High Culture and Folk Culture”.<sup>153</sup>

While both were readers of Adorno, Benjamin was glimpsing, as it were, the world to come, while MacDonal was bemoaning the world as it stood. Both stand as champions of culture against bureaucracy. Yet their schemas are non-contradictory, and the point that should be emphasized throughout this project is that MacDonal never meant to be as totalizing as first appears. Likewise, Benjamin indeed saw risk as well as emancipatory potential in the age of mechanical reproduction, what he called the “Aestheticization of Politics”. MacDonal was ensconced in the United States, surrounded in the kitsch of the Popular Front, while Benjamin was the lost chronicler of progressive Weimar. MacDonal was examining art under capitalism, and by taking aim at what is mass produced, he has a specific target in mind, in regards to music and visual art. His “folk culture”, the organic outgrowth of communities, as broadly understood, and “high culture”, understood as the canon of visual arts, literature and so forth, could well be emancipatory and there was no reason in his anarchist politics to believe that it was inaccessible to the masses. His warning signs of dullness, like Benjamin’s warning signs of fascism, are geographically and historically specific.<sup>154</sup>

One of MacDonal’s great admirers, the *Village Voice* ‘Dean of Rock Critics’ Robert Christgau, claimed that he “worked from a ‘theory’ of pop and that was more than an elaborate hunch. In essence it asserted the aesthetic and political equality of not just ‘folk’, not just

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<sup>153</sup> McLemee (2011); see also MacDonal (2011).

<sup>154</sup> Benjamin (1968); MacDonal (2011).

'popular', but crass and abject 'mass' culture".<sup>155</sup> Yet Christgau's mass culture was that of a new mass, not the mass of mass-cult and mid-cult, but the mass of the new subjectivities created in the nineteen sixties. The countercultural mass that Christgau was writing of and from was implicitly or explicitly left-wing, antinomian and slowly but surely, sexually liberating, as will be fleshed out in a later chapter on the lineages of the music of the period under analysis. The point of Christgau's work, however, was the explicit project, shared with his partner and later well-known socialist-feminist theorist Ellen Willis, of what could be termed progressive canon formation.

Taking the stylistic flourishes from MacDonald and the Marxian/Frankfurtian theorizations of Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm and others, the implicit purpose to what constituted good music to Christgau, Willis and other early critics, such as Patti Smith and Lester Bangs, and heavily informed by *Cahiers Du Cinema*, was an equal mix of evocation and technique.<sup>156</sup> The sake of this form of art, parcellized time filled with syncopation, rhythm and melodic instrumentation and vocal ornamentation, for 3 to 5 minutes a parcel, was its authenticity and balance. Evocation could be quantified in an emotive sense, while the latter was a mix of poetic and technical music judgement. Of course, there were limits and blind spots, an after-effect of a New York sensibility, to the new critics' aesthetic. There was an implicit segregatory mindset which paved the way for the segregation of the music market in the seventies – when white rock bands played blues, unless they were the Rolling Stones with Jagger's swagger and Richards' open-g guitar playing, they were 'ripping people off', or in today's parlance, engaging in 'cultural appropriation'. Likewise, Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana and Sly Stone were said to be playing 'white music'.

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<sup>155</sup> Christgau (2015), 2.

<sup>156</sup> Christgau (2015); Christgau (2004); Willis (2011); Bangs (2010).

The legacy, however intentioned, of the (mostly) white rock critics' relegating certain cultural forms as white music and certain cultural forms as black music, served to reinforce a sense of genre segregation, and hence, cultural segregation at a time of astonishing integration within popular music audiences.<sup>157</sup> There was often a sense of selectiveness, perhaps disavowed, as to which white musicians were playing black music, and vice versa. Without denying the uniqueness and differentiation of cultural forms as expressions of the authenticity of the African American experience, as even a theorist of a separation of white and black music, Reebee Garofalo points out, there is no 'pure' black or white music, there is, on the other hand, people's music, and in particular, poor and working class people's music.<sup>158</sup>

The separation, driven by tastemakers and rationalized by the industry, of white and black music, had far less to do with audience than to do with marketing and niche-creation. If there is any inherent flaw, even in this present project, it is that it has already become canonical that certain music performed by black people in the sixties, the rock-inspired improvised music of Miles Davis in particular, will not typically be subject to analysis, as it should be, alongside the Grateful Dead. In turn, Tammy Wynette and Aretha Franklin, who shared songwriters and session musicians, are not often written about as comparable artists, nor Funkadelic and Black Sabbath, Stevie Wonder and Harry Nilsson and so forth.

All of this being said, the means by which music gripped the minds of the counter-mass culture theorized by Christgau and Willis, was progressive dis-alienation of time. As Jonathan Martineau has pointed out, a large part of Marx's theory of alienation and alienated labour is the alienation of time through the introduction of clock time, and its standardization.<sup>159</sup> As was

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<sup>157</sup> Garofalo (1992), 13-26, makes this point inadvertently.

<sup>158</sup> Garofalo (1992), 26.

<sup>159</sup> Martineau (2015).

noted above, the purpose of a song, a record, a concert, was to dis-alienate this parcel of time, in which three minutes could seem to have the intensity of a lifetime or the beauty of the work of the Great Masters. In following the early communist jazz critics, a way of listening was encouraged that was anything but ‘leisure’ but encompassed leisure time without a doubt – but only in the sense of the progressive use of ‘distraction’ as theorized primarily by Walter Benjamin.<sup>160</sup>

### **3.5 Mellow my Mind: The Glory of Distraction**

In pre-capitalist times, what we now conceive as art and culture had the primary purpose of the encouragement of contemplation, the contemplation of an aura, in Benjamin’s terms, the ineffable, the deity, and then, with post-enlightenment architecture and music, mathematics, reason, natural law. Contemplation of aura by necessity creates a degree of mediation between the affective producer and the affective recipient. Hegel foresaw this in his quip that one no longer “bent the knee”<sup>161</sup> at art, yet at the time of his aesthetic theorization, mechanical reproduction had not yet revolutionized human society. With the transition to capitalist modernity and reproducible art, mechanically and otherwise, the ‘sake’ of art became inherently social, in the form of distraction, akin to the sublimated contemplation laid out by Trotsky. With distraction, as Andrew Robinson points out, “masses contribute to the loss of aura by seeking constantly to bring things closer. They create reproducible realities and hence destroy uniqueness”.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Benjamin (1999).

<sup>161</sup> Hegel (1975), 103.

<sup>162</sup> Robinson (2013).

It is in this very destruction of mystified authenticity in the form of aura that, however, can be found a true authenticity, a true uniqueness, not as a singular objet d'art. But compared with the indeterminate and exponentially increasing world of affective experience, and thus the re-connection with the collective ritual producing this mystified aura in the first place seems a possibility. As Benjamin points out in his unpublished notes, "Their true humanity consists in their unlimited adaptability. The criterion for judging the fruitfulness of their effect is the communicability of this effect".<sup>163</sup> And this was a key to both the inherently revolutionary or reactionary qualities of distraction embodied in the world of disposable art – even art 'in the cloud' is inherently not 'concrete' in the sense of a painting made in 1632. Art is a tattoo, an ornament, but not merely a fetish, a document.<sup>164</sup>

While Benjamin stipulates that the 'consumer value' and 'educational value' of mechanically reproduced art do not always coincide, they have great potential in doing so and making use of collective habit-formation as embodied in distraction, his schema, in his notes was simply "Reproducibility – distraction – politicization....Educational value and consumer value converge, thus making possible a new kind of learning. Art comes into contact with the commodity; the commodity comes into contact with art".<sup>165</sup> Art is here posited as never entirely subsumable into capitalist social property relations, in contrast, as Andrew Beech points out, with dominant Marxist and neo-classical political economies of art that see art as completely commodified.<sup>166</sup> The fight, thus, in this lens, would not be to decommodify art, but to use it to politicize.

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<sup>163</sup> Benjamin (2002), 141.

<sup>164</sup> For further explication of these themes, see Bourdieu (1966; 1990).

<sup>165</sup> Benjamin (2002), 142.

<sup>166</sup> Beech (2014).

It is unclear whether Benjamin merely was referring to the type of politicization embodied in his comrade Bertolt Brecht's dramas, or whether he saw distraction in and of itself as inherently politicizing. Yet if one conceives the process of political education as to be the stuff of everyday life in late capitalism, this now takes the form of a 24/7 bombardment of propaganda from all quarters, in the private, social and even intimate realms. There is no act, no production at all, that does not politicize but usually that politicization takes the form of a depoliticization, a mystification, for example, of the inherently political quality of common-sense notions. At other points, and what Benjamin warns against, this politicization can take the form of creating a basis for authoritarian politics. The notion of a politicization of aesthetics itself is an explicit response to what Benjamin saw as the aestheticization of politics, in Ernst Junger's novels celebrating the beauty of war, among Italian futurists. Indeed this phenomenon itself is rooted amongst the Bohemian Left, as Martin Jay points out. The symbolist poet Laurent Tailhade opined, "what do the victims matter if the deaths are beautiful," in the circumstance of an anarchists setting off a deadly bombing in the French Chamber of Deputies.<sup>167</sup> No less than Karlheinz Stockhausen made the same point after the 11th of September, 2001.<sup>168</sup>

In his theorization, Benjamin concentrates on the passivity and lack of mediation found primarily in the cinematic arts, with its potential for consumptive distraction. Yet with the advent, as noted, of recorded music, the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction, and hence the sake of art itself, has transcended a dialectic of distraction and contemplation. If pre-mechanical art was predicated on contemplation, which negates itself as compulsion, the preservation and transcendence, or the syntheses of these affective qualities amounts to contemplative distraction. This removes, in turn, the analytical separation that Benjamin makes

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<sup>167</sup> Jay (2014), 73.

<sup>168</sup> Stockhausen (2002).

between distraction as politicization and distraction as a merely consumptive pattern. Contemplative distraction in the form of cultivation of musical appreciation in both a collective and individual sense allows for a return of the repressed longing for authenticity, but authenticity that can be replicated – improvised music, for example, never sounds the same twice but can be recorded and circulated, even sampled, remixed, and like a meme, repurposed. What is contemplated in this sense is not the ineffable, but the mysterious and indiscernible affective contagion that is constituted by the remarkably similar phenomenon of syncopated and parcellized time.

Walter Benjamin developed his perspective contemporaneously, and to an extent, by indirect participation in one of the two encounters between culture and radical politics discussed in the next chapter.<sup>169</sup> Garofalo and others cited above developed their own perspectives having been shaped by the other, later encounter. These two conjunctures are the era of the Popular Front, as understood broadly, and the ‘Punk’ era, encompassing not merely punk rock music, but so-called post-punk, and the renewed interaction between rock music and black cultures, including reggae and hip-hop. As we shall see, the web weaved by analysis can only be untangled by analysis of the historical material itself, so it is to this abode of actual cultural production and social reproduction to which we next turn.

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<sup>169</sup> This is not at all to situate Walter Benjamin within the Popular Front milieu, rather it is to say that the Weimar cultural Left –within which Benjamin played a key role – was itself influential to the Cultural Front – as well as its critics.



## Chapter 4

### Here We Are Now. Entertain Us

#### 4.1 Realism or Modernism? Yes Please!

The long sixties, configurationally speaking, was a veritable renaissance in regards to musical form. Encompassing hundreds of years of development of compositional style, sonic texture, rhythmic groove and performative style, it also incorporated, as opposed to appropriated, musical form from every continent. It was, in short, a whole new sound, a new type of instrumentation, new modalities of vocal performance, as will be spelled out in more detail in the chapter five. The innovation, thus, of the long sixties, should be taken for granted, at the very least as a foundational moment in an aesthetic form that still, more or less, constitutes a deep connecting thread within global, not merely American culture. This chapter will provide a working concrete excursion, not a rigid ‘model’ but a set of axioms that will allow us to define the move toward an encounter. Of course, this means the provision of comparative counter-examples. Our excursion on the long sixties, hence, will follow a series of excursions through debates and practices as pertain to these other eras.

As was stated in the first chapter, using the dialectical procedure of *extension*, we can find two periods, the Popular Front era of the nineteen thirties and the punk era from the nineteen seventies into eighties, that, if not as *foundational* in regards to new form, contained a higher degree of sustainable *political innovation*, setting aside, at least for the moment, the undoubtable and wide-ranging cultural, artistic and literary achievements of either conjuncture. Put simply, what is meant by political innovation is a new way of ‘doing politics’ sustainable beyond its immediate context. This has less to do with actual organizations that found their stride in any of

the conjunctures in question, than organizing practices. To substantiate this conceptually is to articulate that the procedure of reading history backwards will be used, that is to say, a consequentialist account. Yet, this is not to reduce either era to what it produced in the sense of not placing one's vantage point in the thick of either conjuncture. Rather, it is to make the claim that these were both eras in which, for reasons that we shall see, the relationship between the Left and cultural producers was in complete lockstep. Indeed, recalling Garofalo's point about the eighties, these were times that cultural producers did not simply 'substitute' for social movements, they played vital roles as participants and in many cases, muses or shedders-of-light for the radical and revolutionary initiatives of either era.

One of the constant debates, as it were, to spring up in regards to an analysis of the Popular Front, in addition to the Punk era, as well as the sixties, is the seemingly false dichotomy between realism and modernism, with the addition in the seventies and eighties, in some schools of thought, of so-called postmodernism. As Neil Davidson points out, realism and modernism also became, as it were, totemic ideologies in the Cultural Cold War, as we will revisit in the conclusion.<sup>170</sup> One could add to Davidson's point that for a time in the nineties, a caricatured postmodernism served a similar purpose in the brief period of the 'End of History'. Yet, as we have seen, and as Davidson points out, in Leon Trotsky's work, there is no distinguishing realism from modernism in his "perfectly coherent theory of art in general".<sup>171</sup> Trotsky was far more concerned with protection of art from ideologists from reactionary to Proletkult. The key to a concrete analysis, in particular of the long sixties but also of the popular front and punk eras, is

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<sup>170</sup> Davidson (2017), 2. As part of the *Red Wedge* project, Davidson points out how simulacra of both were used by both sides of the Cold War, with the implicit point that in their respective ideological formulations, realism and modernism have inscribed within them, respectively Stalinism and Atlanticism/Americanism.

<sup>171</sup> Davidson (2017), 2.

not a complete dispensation with these concepts as connotative discourses, but to keep in mind their status as no more than signifiers that often obscure more than they clarify

Trotsky's often misunderstood point, as noted earlier, is the lack of possibility (and implicitly, the impossibility) of a truly working class culture within capitalism or under socialism.<sup>172</sup> In the case of the former, it was due to the ideological and material rule of the bourgeoisie and in the case of the latter, more tellingly, it was due to the communist negation of class society, hence culture under communism would be a genuinely human, unalienated culture. One can easily, thus, as Davidson points out, place Trotsky firmly in the camp of the modernists given his affiliations with Andre Breton and Diego Riviera, as well as the influence of heterodox Trotskyism on the great Modernist art critic Clement Greenberg.

The kernel of truth represented in the caricatured modernism and realism debates is not 'art for the masses' and didacticism versus 'art for art's sake' and free-spiritedness, though that is certainly a part of it. Rather it is that it is approaching the object of inquiry from a different vantage point, finding modernist strains in form that can often be described as realist, as in the paintings of Diego Riviera, and one can find realist strains in form that can often be described as modernist – as we will see, an implicit aspect of the cultural project of the long sixties was to transverse that debate. It is true, however, that the punk and popular front eras are more properly realist while the sixties were more properly modernist, and in turn, the former both had more long-term political impact.

What producers were conscious of, in particular in the thirties, but also in the seventies, was that of the responsibility of artists to engage in what Popular Front historian Michael

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<sup>172</sup> While Trotsky does perhaps 'bend the stick' on this point (in a polemic with those who did so in the opposite direction), his analytical purpose seems to be to emphasize that specific sets of social property relations limit or give rise to the conditions of possibility for meaningful cultural activity, as also pointed out by Bourdieu and Williams in different registers.

Denning calls the “labouring of culture”,<sup>173</sup> a process that largely comes from below, an entry of the working classes and the plebeian and folk aspects of everyday life into the realm of cultural production.<sup>174</sup> This remarkable phrase has a bit of a dual meaning, referring, on a surface level to something akin to the Marxist concept of socially necessary abstract labour time, that is to say, the labour of culture is the *collective production of culture*, defined, to recapitulate, in Williams’ sense “a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort”.<sup>175</sup> As well, however, there is what Denning calls a “curious dialectic”<sup>176</sup> at play here, which likely informs this concept, and is indeed inscribed in Williams’ formulation.

Mutatis mutandis, not only is the labouring of culture a denotation of cultural production, but it is *production by culture*. Another way of formulating this is that mass culture and the society in which it was embedded, and subjectivities it fostered, was produced by the working class itself. As Denning points out, this dialectic saw not only aspects of culture ranging from swing music to baseball “change the patterns of working class leisure,” but that “these forms and media adopted the styles and accents of the second-generation ethnic workers who joined the

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<sup>173</sup> Denning (1997), 151.

<sup>174</sup> Denning is close to Heterodox Trotskyist currents and is not contradicting Trotsky in his assertion of working class culture, he is asserting it as a “popular” or “Mass” culture, rooted at least partially in the working classes, yet aiming at a popular anti-fascist, as opposed to explicitly class oriented politics. The working class, hence, was a part of the Cultural Front, from strike songs to proletarian novels, yet this was not purely “working class” culture. It was not, however, to Denning, imbued or interpellated with bourgeois ideology either – this is to say that it operated with its own logic, and could not be reduced to, nor read off of class. This is in contradistinction to what Davidson calls Lukács’ “Stalinist” position, which came “not because he necessarily supported policies of (for example) starving Ukrainian peasants, super-exploiting Russian workers or murdering Bolshevik cadres, but because he supported the policies of Socialism In One Country, and of the Popular Front and its later variations (“anti-Monopoly Alliances”, etc.). This is not meant dismissively. The majority of the best militants and intellectuals in the working class movement made exactly the same choice for exactly the same reasons.” Davidson (2017), 3. While I don’t necessarily share Davidson’s take on Lukács as a ‘Stalinist’, which I find to be an exercise in concept-stretching, I do think it is worthwhile to examine the relation between Lukács’ practical political choices, which often shifted, and his aesthetic theory, which in the main, stayed the same throughout his life.

<sup>175</sup> Williams (1983), 6.

<sup>176</sup> Denning (1997), 153.

CIO unions”.<sup>177</sup> This everyday life, the organic institutions, the formal and informal infrastructures of dissent developed an entire ensemble of overlapping configurations. To be a unionized worker in New York city in the thirties, a picket-line or a protest, a party meeting or a baseball game, none seemed to be outside of ‘everyday life’. To be a young office worker in the late seventies who rejected the increasingly conservative ‘mainstream’ culture, a punk show, an anti-fascist rally, a night dancing to disco or hip-hop, all were component parts of a fledgling counterhegemonic and working class culture.

Culture, in a far more immediate sense in the punk and Popular Front eras, both reflected and refracted working class sensibilities and working class subjectivities, something quite different, as will be seen, from the retreat from class in the sixties. In both the Popular Front and punk era, established organizations and parties were merely component parts, often adapting to prevailing cultural trends, acting to coalesce and organize and perhaps, to a degree, instrumentalize working class culture. In particular, of course, the Popular Front cannot be reduced to, but also cannot be separated from the role of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA). The political initiatives, particularly in the United Kingdom, to develop out of the punk era, were pushed along by various heterodox Trotskyist tendencies, notably the seventies iteration of the UK Socialist Workers Party. The type of relationship the organized Left, meaning parties, or, in the case of anarchists, federations, as well as the left-wing of organized labour and the many so-called front groups on the one hand, and the various nooks and crannies of Bohemianism and cultural activity on the other, was one of marching in lock-step. In particular, in the thirties, an encounter was always-already there, it was normative.

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<sup>177</sup> Denning (1997), 153.

Finally, and unique to these two encounters, was that they even subsumed their internal opposition, or rather, the way we can, in a long view vantage point, see both the radical critique of the Popular Front on one hand, and the punk era on the other, to be a necessary internal relation to the object of critique. Clement Greenberg, the pioneering Marxist/Trotskyist art critic, and his colleagues, the New York intellectuals, formed their collective working class (and Jewish, unlike the Waspish, and according to Denning, sometimes anti-Semitic intelligentsia within the cultural front, including Edmund Wilson)<sup>178</sup> identity against the backdrop of the Popular Front. Punk, on the other hand, developed almost akin to the aforementioned New York intellectuals, opposing the holdovers of hippie culture as inauthentic and out-of-touch. This in turn enlivened and gave a second life to those they were ostensibly subjecting to musical and stylistic critique, notably Lou Reed and Neil Young – both of whom are now claimed equally as part of the classic rock and punk rock canons.

#### **4.2 Realism, Modernism and the Music Question**

The great Marxist historian and biographer Isaac Deutscher once said of Lukács, “He elevated the Popular Front from the level of tactics to that of ideology: he projected its principles into philosophy, literary history and aesthetic criticism”.<sup>179</sup> Lukács strongly recommended, and arguably helped to popularize the work of John Steinbeck to the international progressive intelligentsia, implying that the great bourgeois heritage contained in realism was now being articulated by the popular classes, as was the case in Steinbeck. Realism, in particular, but not limited to its form as the novel, was the legacy of the rising bourgeoisie, Simultaneously, Lukács condemned modernism, such as James Joyce, as part and parcel of the bourgeoisie’s lack of

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<sup>178</sup> Denning (1997), 57.

<sup>179</sup> Deutscher (1966), 291.

fighting spirit, akin to the philosophy of Nietzsche, a compromise with the aristocracy that followed the defeat of the Paris Commune.<sup>180</sup> He reserved special scorn for ideas and practices around a popular avant-garde, stating, “the broad mass of the people can learn nothing from avant-garde literature. Precisely because the latter is devoid of reality and life, it foists on to its readers a narrow and subjectivist attitude to life (analogous to a sectarian point of view in political terms)”.<sup>181</sup>

Yet Lukács’ own analytical framework, in particular his use of the concept of totality can, if pushed to its limits, bring other insights. For us to understand the limitations of Lukács’ own point, and thus, to get a handle on the Popular Front, the long sixties and the punk era alike, one must push this concept farther. No singular work of art can express everything, yet any qualitative assessment implied in this work and in the work of the most astute critics, whether or not they are aware of this, is the degree to which how much or how little a given cultural artifact implies the totality, the crystallization of the social whole. Art expresses the totality, that is to say, social relations as a whole, a “real historical power”.<sup>182</sup> This crystallization can certainly be inscribed in art regardless of the intention of its creators, and indeed:

The totality of the work of art is rather intensive: the circumscribed and self-contained ordering of those factors which objectively are of decisive significance for the portion of life depicted, which determine its existence and motion, its specific quality and its place in the total life process. In this sense the briefest song is as much an intensive totality as the mightiest epic.<sup>183</sup>

It is from this vantage point that we are able to see, as we engage with the particular mode of cultural expression under analysis in this project, music, that the categories through which many have engaged all three eras under analysis, are more than a little bit limiting.

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<sup>180</sup> Lukács (2014).

<sup>181</sup> Lukács (2007), 57.

<sup>182</sup> Lukács (2007). 24.

<sup>183</sup> Lukács (1978), 38.

Woody Guthrie and David Byrne may seem as odd choices to denote the music of, on the one hand, the popular front era, and on the other, the punk era. After all, folk music like Guthrie's is often seen to transcend the Cultural Front, even if Guthrie was a prime figure in this milieu, a committed militant and artist who as well as being a singer/songwriter, painted signs for a living. That paradigmatic image of Guthrie, the beat up guitar with the anti-fascist insignia, the rumpled look, and exaggerated Okie accent always had a bit of modernist artifice to sprinkle onto its realist gloss.

Like Guthrie, Byrne and his bandmates in Talking Heads were trained visual artists and designers, something apparent in the exceptional visual quality of Talking Heads' concerts and music videos. While the parameters as to what defines punk music have shifted to denote Ramones-influenced guitar rock, bands like Talking Heads and Blondie were as much a part of the articulation of a punk aesthetic, playing at CBGBs, than the 'harder' bands that followed. As well, like Guthrie, beyond the modernist sound sculptures, and perhaps postmodernist musical pastiche, Byrne's songwriting was perhaps the most directly political, in a raw, untheorized sense, of any rock music of its time. "Life During Wartime" engages the question of being in either a civil war or revolutionary situation, its polysemy rendered it quite powerful when Byrne performed it after September 11 2001. "Don't Worry about the Government" was spritely, but New Deal-nostalgia packed celebration of the public sector of civil servants being seen as loved ones – indeed, infrastructure and ideological state apparatuses are a constant theme in Byrne's songwriting. Most notably, in the last twenty years, in particular in response to George W. Bush's wars, Byrne has taken an outspoken anti-war position.

To step back to the Popular Front era, an equally salient forerunner of the long sixties is the figure of the bandleader, most notably Duke Ellington. Ellington was close to the Left,



played Communist party events and criticized the likes of the Gershwins for engaging in what would now be termed inappropriate cultural appropriation. It is perhaps symptomatic, but nevertheless unfortunate that Denning focuses less on Ellington's innovation as a bandleader, that is to say, as a coordinator of improvised music, and thus an incredibly important figure for our purposes, and more on his desire to make an African American musical.<sup>184</sup> It is not that this latter initiative was unimportant, yet his contribution to the art of improvisation shows Ellington to be not reducible to a 'mass' motif.

The era of the Popular Front and Cultural Front, in the last instance, was a part of – though by no means controlled by – Communist International (Comintern) cultural policy, whether as narrow as the likes of Zhdanov or as worldly and cosmopolitan as Lukács. What this meant was, however militant and committed to revolution the majority of party cadre happened to be, that it was taken for granted that there could be socialism in one country, with the concomitant focus on national-popular cultures. As well, after the ultra-left Third Period which was an embarrassment to international communism,<sup>185</sup> the turn was towards 'popular alliances' with the progressive bourgeoisie. It can be argued that the Communist Party's meeting Roosevelt in the middle has led to the ongoing orientation of 'mainstream' American communism towards the Democratic party, even during periods of Cold War fever. To wit, unlike today, in the thirties, to the extent that they opposed fascism and were not opposed to the growth of the labour movement, there certainly was a progressive bourgeoisie in the thirties, and the Popular Front is as much a part of their legacy as anyone else's. All of this aside, the Popular

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<sup>184</sup> Denning (1997), 310.

<sup>185</sup> J.P. Marot astutely points out that Trotsky and the Left Opposition within the Communist movement actually considered the Third Period to be a 'left turn' for Stalin, as was his peasant policy. Both of these policies are justly seen by nearly the entirety of the Left as monumental blunders. Yet Trotskyism, at least in its orthodox varieties, often fails to account for its own role in what it later rightly condemned. Marot (2013).

Front was a consummated encounter between cultural production and Left politics in the sense that it transcended the limitations of liberalism and Stalinism alike. The institutions, summer camps, aesthetic styles, and so forth, have sustained themselves, not in spite of the limitations of the popular front, but in many ways, because of them.

It is no accident that the Punk era is often associated with anarchism, due to a large extent to the spectacle of the Sex Pistols, a creation of the London based artful dodger Malcolm McLaren. When we broaden the scope as to what constitutes the punk era, we can encompass not just the narrow style of simplistic 4 chord guitar rave-ups, whether in the style of The Who and The Kinks like most British punk, or in a more fifties-rock or Chuck Berry style, as in the Ramones. We can include, as noted, the other CBGB bands, not just the aforementioned Blondie and Talking Heads, but also the improvisational rock of Television. We can thus look back to precursors of the specific aesthetic form in the work that followed the Velvet Underground, bands in the UK like Roxy Music and experimental acts like Henry Cow, jazz musicians like James Blood Ulmer; early hip-hop music; the less mainstream and more queer disco scene; post-punk, 'indie' and alternative music. There is not even close to the space in this project to truly capture the encounter between the Left and the immensely innovative punk era.

The most important, and sustaining achievement of this milieu was the Rock Against Racism initiative in the UK – an initiative, as noted, that was an originary form of the consciousness-raising role of cultural producers theorized hyperbolically by Garofalo. In the face of when Eric Clapton, one of the prime figures representative of the turn towards the middle of the road in rock music, praised the English neo-fascist racist Enoch Powell from the stage at a concert in 1976, it was clear that something needed to be done within the music community. Rock against Racism founder Roger Huddle, a member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP),

points out that this was at the same time as a relative rut in musical creativity. “Young black musicians – encouraged by the revolutionary music and lyrics of Bob Marley – were developing a strand of ska and reggae that reflected their experience in Britain”.<sup>186</sup> Huddle points out that the growth of pub-rock, a scene that gave the world Elvis Costello, among others, was fertile political ground. Of note is the singer/songwriter Tom Robinson, who wrote openly, as opposed to obliquely not merely of gay sexuality but of queer liberation with “Glad to be Gay”.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, the archetypal English radical rock songwriter Billy Bragg traces his belief that music could change the world to his engaging as a participant and audience member in this initiative.<sup>188</sup> SWP member Red Saunders penned a letter that would become the basis for Rock against Racism, and a mix of cultural producers and socialist activists from across the far Left got onboard. The growth of the punk scene and culture, alongside the growth of Roots Reggae and Dub Music, which had a give-and-take and indeed close relationship itself with punk music, helped the process along.<sup>189</sup> Other anti-racist initiatives in the UK and beyond, notably the Anti-Nazi League in the UK and Anti-Racist Action in Canada, followed in the same tradition, with both having cultural producers as key protagonists. Indeed, even today, with the urgency of anti-racist action against the worldwide growth of right-wing populism, we can see the legacy of the consummated encounter of the punk era.

The Popular Front and punk eras both developed art and politics on the basis of an immediate and somewhat urgent need. The protection against racism (and homophobia and sexism) animated the latter, while the former was broadly about fostering social cohesion and

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<sup>186</sup> Huddle (2007).

<sup>187</sup> Huddle (2007).

<sup>188</sup> Bragg (2007).

<sup>189</sup> Much could be said about the close relationship with the most advanced punk rock musicians, notably the Clash, and root reggae/dub music – indeed the legendary Lee (Scratch) Perry produced music for the Clash, who in turn, regularly covered reggae and ska classics. One of the great ironies of this early encounter within music culture has been the neo-nazi adoption of ska music.

equality. Certainly, they were not without contradictions, and one can even argue that, in terms of cultural production alone, they did not meet the standard set by the long sixties. As well, one could argue that they had their own inherent vices inscribed in their scaffolding – the jingoism and national-populism of the Popular Front became the aesthetic of Ronald Reagan, and, unlike improvised music, punk music, in its simplicity and raggedness, has found itself well-suited to far-right and even racist politics. Yet the initiatives, the infrastructures of dissent that developed out of these eras sustained themselves more than most that came out of the long sixties, a time in which both the Left and the music counterculture rightly felt that time was out of whack.

#### **4.3 Time of the Season**

“I just wasn’t made for these times,” sings Brian Wilson on the Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds*.<sup>190</sup> What were these times? A half century on, there is a general and interdisciplinary consensus that the sixties was a transformative time, not merely in English-speaking countries, but on an international scale. The concatenation of a multiplicity of forces and historical actors and their interplay; international transformation and the process of decolonization; shifting attitudes, spurred by social movements, towards gender, race and sexuality, not merely in advanced countries, but everywhere, the ‘masses’ took their place on the historical stage.

For the purposes of this work, the conjuncture under inquiry is not the ‘actual’ sixties, rather it is a specific epoch, from January 1965 to November 1972.<sup>191</sup> While avoiding a ‘snapshot’ of this period that would assume what needs to be explained, I am using the concept of conjuncture, as defined by Althusser with reference to the “exact balance of forces, state of overdetermination of the contradictions at any given moment to which political tactics must be

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<sup>190</sup> The Beach Boys (1965), “I Just Wasn’t Made for These Times”.

<sup>191</sup> Manning (2015).

applied”.<sup>192</sup> While this approach, in an abstract and general sense may simplify, the virtue of using this Althusserian concept in defining a frame of reference is precisely its preliminary quality, an identification of the necessary internal relations of a given period. While we will return to the cultural sphere, a few words must be given as to the field-of-force operating that gave rise to the New Left on one hand, and the development of a music-oriented counterculture on the other, and why this particular period is of note.

1965, the point of origin, already saw the near-maturation of the various forces, from above and below, that would balance and give rise to the aforementioned “moment to which political tactics must be applied”.<sup>193</sup> From below, the New Left was starting to coalesce in both the United States and (in its second iteration), the United Kingdom. These new social movements initially grew out of the Civil Rights movement and the peace movement. From the beginning, the traditional ‘organized’ far Left had trouble getting a handle on these new movements. From above, following early sixties Cold War tensions, the US and USSR entered a period of ‘peaceful co-existence’, which arguably freed up the United States to pursue its vicious war on the people of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Finally, the postwar dynamism of increasingly globalized capitalism gave rise to the appearance of abundance among working classes in the advanced capitalist countries, an impression that led to analyses predicated upon so-called ‘monopoly capitalism’ and ‘corporate liberalism’ that gave rise to existential problems of “one dimensionality”.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Althusser (2015), 253.

<sup>193</sup> Althusser (2015), 253.

<sup>194</sup> Marcuse (2010); Baran and Sweezy (1970); Wood (1986). It is not at all unsurprising to find an affinity between Baran and Sweezy’s work and the work of Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse and Baran were longtime friends and comrades, having worked in US government institutions, and often shared ideas and read one another’s work. *Monthly Review* published an illuminating correspondence between the two, in which one sees the gestation of the ideas of both *Monopoly Capital* and *One Dimensional Man*. Baran/Marcuse (2014).

In late 1972, much had changed. The United States was losing the Vietnam war, and global capitalism was entering a period of global turbulence, with the US having recently depegged its dollar from the gold standard.<sup>195</sup> The right-wing ideological counter-offensive had started to coalesce, foreshadowing the upcoming decade of neoliberal restructuring in order to restore profitability. Conservative political scientists on both sides of the pond bemoaned an “excess of democracy” and an “adversarial news media”.<sup>196</sup> Samuel Huntington, with more than a bit of insight, criticized this “impulse of democracy ... to make government less powerful and more active, to increase its functions, and to decrease its authority”.<sup>197</sup> In turn, the social movements themselves, though in varying degrees in the US and UK, petered out, alternately retreating into obscurantism, ‘official’ politics or ultra-left adventurism, and ‘Third Worldism’.

In contrast to the growth of a wide array of infrastructures of dissent that were able to, against the odds, sustain their existence coming out of the Popular Front, or the social movements and activist networks that coalesced in the punk era, the sustained political shifts that grew out of the long sixties never really institutionalized to the same extent.<sup>198</sup> The most successful antiwar protest movements in the United States, the “mobilizations”,<sup>199</sup> that were put on by a coalition linking independent leftists, the Communist Party and the US Socialist Workers Party, liberals and progressive church groups dissipated and went their separate ways. There can

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<sup>195</sup> Gowan (1998).

<sup>196</sup> Huntington (1975).

<sup>197</sup> Huntington (1975).

<sup>198</sup> It is worth mentioning that, while not institutionalizing to the same extent, the currents that fed into the formation of the Rainbow Coalition and eventually Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaigns, were, in part, a manifestation of networks that developed during the long sixties. A key moment here is the founding of the Union of Radical Political Economists (URPE) in 1968, and the cornucopia of research approaches that developed during some of the Left’s ‘long march’ into academia, notably the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. See Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf (1983) for a paradigmatic statement of this approach. In turn, it is also worth mentioning that this milieu, while certainly oriented to class analysis, attributed a far more causal role to social movements than traditional Marxism. A critical but sympathetic appraisal is found in Bidet and Kouvelakis (2007). On the Rainbow Coalition and the inherent vice of attempts at American social democracy, see Brenner (1985); Hilton (2016); Heideman (2016).

<sup>199</sup> Elbaum (2004), 53-60; Gitlin (1993); Ness (2005).

be no doubt that there was a paradigm shift in popular beliefs around ‘social issues’ coming out of the sixties. The legacy of this shift belongs firmly with the Left, yet no mass organizations or socialist parties developed, and these issues, from queer liberation to environmentalism, were often institutionalized by liberal pressure-politics. This is not to discount the achievements of the social movements, perhaps most notably, some real victories in the ongoing battle for reproductive justice. One can add to this the growth of ‘intellectual jobs’, from academia to computer programming, community organizing and poor people’s campaigns and so forth. Yet as the saying goes, much of this ferment existed in ‘silos’.

#### **4.4 Intelligence or Agency**

The transformations of the sixties have been broadly understood by critical scholars in two senses, either voluntarist accounts of ungrounded agency or deterministic approaches as to ascertaining the prime mover or ‘intelligence’ inside a given social phenomenon. To a large degree, all historical transformations suffer from this conceptual bifurcation – such as that around the transition to capitalism either being driven by technological change or the Protestant ethic. In turn, the normative historical and political lessons gleaned by either of these approaches, predictably, remains to a large degree one-sided. The former approach is ahistorical. It erases the structural determinations of capitalism, the vertical struggle between appropriating and producing classes. Through this lens, movements and states weren’t transformational because of the historical moment, the determination, if anything, was entirely in the other direction. What is left are sheer battles of human will or ‘contention’.

The latter approach is retroactively attributing all causality to the vicissitudes of capital, with working classes as passive observers. This approach traditionally taken by some Marxists,

reduces the struggles of the sixties to the “development of the productive forces”.<sup>200</sup> Through this lens, if the transformational actors, from above and below, of the sixties, did not exist, history would have had to have invented them. In reality, the retreat from class was in form, but not content in terms of the actuality of the long sixties. The cresting of Hunter S. Thompson’s great wave was a defeat of the working classes in both society and workplace – whether or not those being defeated identified as working class or not. Thus, the transformations of the sixties need to be understood as a Missed Encounter, a brass ring not grasped, a period that reached closure with punk and the aesthetic of negation, of ‘no future’.

Certainly, as has been seen, the labouring of culture cannot be separated from broader social patterns, be they economic or political. It is insufficient to merely assert a relative autonomy of cultural practices from capitalist social property relations. Yet what is taking place in that autonomous sphere, that labouring of culture, is that curious dialectic of cultural reproduction. To be determined in the last instance by capitalism, with capitalism conceived as a social relation, a process, not merely a mode of exchange, is not to be necessarily overdetermined by it. The Jefferson Airplane’s album *Volunteers*, from which the lyrics of the title of this project were taken, was manufactured and distributed by a big capitalist corporation, RCA, and constituted in each individual vinyl record hours and hours of dead labour, some properly remunerated and some super-exploited. But its lasting legacy is being the singular representation of the attempted encounter between the far Left and rock music culture in the long sixties.

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<sup>200</sup> See Chibber (2013) and Wood (1995) on the idea of ‘productive forces Marxism’, or technological determinism. It should be noted, however, that Marxist and feminist theorizations of the shifts in capitalist social reproduction within the long sixties do indeed exist, and in many ways, grew in direct response to the common-sense retreat-from-class, notably Harry Braverman’s masterful *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, originally published in 1974. Braverman and others were responding to the plethora of new forms of management and social administrative practices that were formulated precisely to contain the development of class consciousness. Braverman (1998).



There is a lot to be said, on the other hand, for the voluntarist or historicist approach of analysis. While laden with historically specific contradictions, much more can be understood as to the views of historical actors by way of engagement with movement or mandarin memoirs, ‘history from below’, not to mention concrete examples of acts of contingent historical will that had effects that shifted or prevented shifts in the course of the species as a whole. The obvious example here, though predating the general conjuncture under inquiry, was the ‘cooler heads prevailing’ outcome of the so-called Cuban Missile Crisis. Yet this voluntarist approach, as an extension, delves into seeing politics as always a contest of wills. A more synthetic approach would be to analyse these circumstances as the concatenation of many world events on a general scale, which had created the conditions of possibility of nuclear weapons aimed at the United States, but the contingent outcome of human action was what brought it to an end.

In turn, classical Marxist approaches, focusing on the determinations and contradictions that comprised the era, can be incredibly useful but are not without their own limits. There is a voluminous literature on post-war capitalism that situates the shifts of the sixties, both from above and from below, within the context of the shifting dynamics of the internationalization of capital and, in turn, the very specific determinations in given social formations.<sup>201</sup> To take another obvious historical example, the growth of a peace movement in the United States is often told as a population rising up in revulsion to the crimes committed by empire. While certainly this revulsion animated the principles of many activists, an important reason that such a vast anti-war movement took hold, and indeed, had a certain degree of success – even achieving recognition by Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh – was the necessity of the draft.<sup>202</sup> As well, the movement grew due to the fact that, concretely speaking, it was known, at least by

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<sup>201</sup> Gindin and Panitch (2012); Brenner (2006).

<sup>202</sup> Brightman (1995); Elbaum (2004).

1967, that the war was unwinnable. This, finally, turned significant sections of the ruling class against the war, and it is no accident that it was Ayn Rand readers like Allan Greenspan and his cohort within New Right think tanks who most vigorously pushed for an abolition of the draft.<sup>203</sup>

Few analyses of the sixties, however, have synthesized these insights and even fewer have drawn out particular lessons that pertain directly to the Missed Encounter between popular culture and the far Left.<sup>204</sup> On a very simple level, one can speculate that the limitation of even the best accounts of the era was due to partiality, that is to say, they were written by, in-effect, participant observers. There have been examples – fleeting and uneven – of critical Marxist approaches that have captured the conjuncture in its multi-facetedness, and given hints for future inquiry.<sup>205</sup> Ranging from historical memoirs to intellectual history to rigorous historicism, these works share an analysis of the sixties as phenomenologically significant, but situated within a historical context and a set of specific parametric determinants. It is interesting to note that many analyses glean far different lessons working with the same overall understanding.

Fundamentally this comes down to the political question, which lies outside the realm of proof, except to state simply, at this point, that by its own terms, everyone failed in the sixties. It was, indeed, the calm before the storm of neoliberal restructuring, of ‘no future’.

#### **4.5 Money (That’s What I Want)**

While political economists are no doubt still debating the state of global capitalism in this conjuncture, there is a broad consensus that this was – at least at the level of experience for

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<sup>203</sup> Hitchens (2000).

<sup>204</sup> Some memoirs of activist intellectuals close to cultural figures, like Christopher Hitchens, Tariq Ali and Daniel Bensaïd come – perhaps inadvertently – close to capturing the Missed Encounter, if only due to the fact that the Marxist backgrounds of these intellectuals allow a certain reflexivity missing from the genre of memoir. Ali (2005); Bensaïd (2015); Hitchens (2011).

<sup>205</sup> Perhaps the best is Randall (2017). Others include Garofalo (1997); James (1995).

working class white people – the ‘Golden Age’ of capitalism, though it can now be clearly seen as anomalous, with today’s zig-zag crisis capitalism being more the norm than exception. With that being said, Marxist political economists from Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch to Robert Brenner, agree that the internal contradictions of capital were starting to come to a head, though differing as to whether on the one hand, it was the wage squeeze by a materially powerful working class, or the tendency for the rate of profit to fall on the other. What can be said, in a general sense, is that this was an era in which the white working class could justifiably, for the first time, see itself as ‘middle class’. A unionized black working class shared many of the material, if not political and social spoils of this ‘affluent society’. Single income households had television sets and hi-fi systems. Detroit was pumping out cars with garish and bright colours, reflecting social optimism. As will be seen, the growth of social movements that were not directly related to ‘economic’ questions were rooted largely in what was, in appearance, a permanent capitalist boom.

This was especially the case in the United States. Well regulated capitalism combined with high levels of state expenditure – ‘guns and butter’ or ‘military Keynesianism’. Since the Depression, planning had replaced a ‘cyclical’ model of accumulation with a ‘growth’ model. As Alejandro Reuss points out, “Government spending on consumption and investment (which excludes transfers) was somewhat higher (generally 21-23% of GDP) from the late 1950s to the early 1970s”,<sup>206</sup> adding that all major sectors were regulated and the ‘captains of industry’ as well as the anti-communist labour leadership was fine and dandy with these circumstances. The aerospace and information technology industries, in relatively infant circumstances, provided not just a base for steady accumulation, but had an iconic fascination within mass culture. The

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<sup>206</sup> Reuss (2009).

United Kingdom was not quite as well off as the United States. The contradictions, however, were all the more apparent in a nation that had only recently lost its colonial empire.

#### **4.6 Chimes of Freedom: Enter the New Left**

The distinctions in the state of capitalist social property relations in the United States on the one hand, and in the United Kingdom on the other were to have a profound effect on both the politics and aesthetics of the conjuncture as a whole. It can be speculated, even, that the sense of adventurism that overtook the US Left in the late 60s was because of the seemingly drastic shift from growth to crisis, while the British Left took the shift more in stride. The retreat from class in political theory as well as practice was far more pronounced in the United States than in the United Kingdom, as will be seen. The growth of a kind of Maoism with American characteristics was the resulting form in the US, while the dominant strands within the socialist movement in the United Kingdom were either within the Labour Party, or farther Left, within the milieu of heterodox Trotskyism, followers of Ernest Mandel and Tony Cliff.<sup>207</sup>

Indeed, abundance capitalism and global war gave rise to opposition movements in the UK and US not specifically based on a class character, even if, as noted above, the draft question was implicitly centred around class given the availability of deferrals to the elite. Indeed, the coalescence of movements around more ‘social’ and ‘political’ questions led theorists at the time to revive, albeit in widely differing senses, Lenin’s theory of ‘labour aristocracy’,<sup>208</sup> simply put, that the ‘upper echelons’ of the proletariat in the “First World” had been ‘bought off’ and thus, proletarian revolution would not occur in the advanced capitalist countries until it had been

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<sup>207</sup> E.M. Wood (1987; 1990); Draper (1966); Ness (2005); Ali (2006);

<sup>208</sup> See Post (2006) on the fallacy of modern uses of Lenin’s concept of “labour aristocracy”, used by Lenin in a descriptive fashion but by ‘third worldists’ in a normative sense.

completed amongst the underdeveloped majority. The popularity of *Monthly Review*, which took a serious interest in anti-imperialist and anticolonial struggles standpoint is a case in point,<sup>209</sup> as are the theorizations of the likes of Marcuse, that postulated revolutionary agency as coming from students, the lumpen-proletariat, Black nationalists, even politicized street gangs. The Trotskyist Fourth International also took an ‘ultra-left’ turn, leading to a split. This made sense, in a context in which the class struggle within nations was replaced, conceptually, by the class struggle between nations.

The US and UK New Left both were rooted in a rejection of what was termed the Old Left, of both official communism and social democracy. It was more the former in the UK, with the original New Left largely precipitated by those who had left the Communist Party after the invasion of Hungary in 1956.<sup>210</sup> The US New Left, in its most prominent institutional form (Students for a Democratic Society or SDS) grew out of a union-funded League for Industrial Democracy retreat, as part of a broader effort to build an ‘economic justice’ movement, of which the Civil Rights movement was thought to be a mere component. The US labour Left, at the time both militantly ‘workerist’ if not outright anti-capitalist, but staunchly anti-Soviet (and thus, implicitly pro-NATO or, as the pejorative went, ‘State Department Socialist’), cast out this rebellious lot for what it perceived as ultra-leftist adventurism, and its condemnation of the system as a whole.<sup>211</sup> It is notable, however, and complicates the common viewpoint of stodgy old labour Leftist versus young vivacious radicalism, that one of the prime issues with which the early New Left, in both the student and Black movements, were divided upon, was the issue of

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<sup>209</sup> *Monthly Review* itself was ‘third worldist’ but not in a vulgar or adventurist sense, and whatever flaws one can find in their theorization of contemporary capitalism, the journal, and in particular Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy played principled roles in international struggles from Latin America to Southern Africa.

<sup>210</sup> Samuel (2006).

<sup>211</sup> Isserman (1998).

labour and the working class. The likes of Max Shachtman and Bayard Rustin, lifelong socialists who are somewhat compromised by their lack of opposition to, if not outright support of the Vietnam War, seem far less sullied by history than the uneven and contradictory legacy of the US student movement.<sup>212</sup> Of course most figures cannot be situated on one pole or another, yet the point here is to problematize a narrative that finds inherent virtue in the New Left and bad faith among its critics.

As Wood points out, “Among the diverse movements we tend to lump together as the ‘revolution’ of the sixties, there emerged one major and long-lasting theme: an emphasis on the autonomy of ideological struggle and the leading role of intellectuals, in default of the working class”.<sup>213</sup> While the so-called ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ in China likely did start ‘from below’ as a rising of radicalized students upset at censorship by bureaucrats, and thus instrumentalized by Mao Zedong against his party rivals, many of whom came from the old landowning classes; Maoism in the United States was altogether another creature, marked by “extreme voluntarism...conviction that revolutions can be made by sheer political and ideological will unfettered by material constraints...a view of socialist transformations as ‘cultural revolutions’ – whether Maoist or not – in which intellectuals and students are the principal agents, at best acting in alliance with, or even on behalf of workers and/or peasants, and increasingly as autonomous revolutionary agents in their own right”.<sup>214</sup>

This type of “irrationalism” never took hold in Great Britain to the same extent. While Wood is right to critique the lack of class analysis in late sixties *New Left Review*, it should be

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<sup>212</sup> Isserman (2000); Drucker (1994).

<sup>213</sup> Wood (1990), 33.

<sup>214</sup> Wood (1990), 35. One should not immediately, however, dismiss North American Maoism, in particular its influence within the Black left and in community organizing. There is a significant distinction between the Black Panther party and New Communist Movement on one hand, whatever their flaws, and the type of Maoism that Wood is writing about, akin to Jean Luc Godard’s satirical *La Chinoise*.

noted that other segments of the Far Left – including segments, such as the Trotskyist International Marxist Group and the early iteration of the International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party, continued an emphasis on class struggle, and indeed, were the two socialist groups to attract prominent cultural figures, notably Keith Richards, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, as well as still prominent intellectuals such as Terry Eagleton or the late Christopher Hitchens.<sup>215</sup> While similarly overstating the role of intellectuals and cultural practice, the Trotskyist movement in the United Kingdom, which had institutional links with the more ‘cultural’ aspect of the New Left, did much to prevent the same type of degeneration, as did the presence of the Left within the Labour Party.

As time wore on, these movements were in their own way defeated, dispersed or co-opted. A steady ‘long march into the institutions’ on both sides of the pond may well be the most lasting positive effect of the New Left. While the projected ‘Red Bases’ on university campuses, as suggested by Robin Blackburn, now a respected historian, never came to be, the impact of Marxist, feminist, third worldist and critical scholarship played a key role in what the new right would call an adversary culture. Others, of course, turned to the ultra-Left. Histories of the sixties/seventies ultra-Left are fraught with either sectarian and moralist condemnation or romantic ‘contextualization’, notably in the work of Ron Jacobs on the Weather Underground, or the prevailing idea of the Black Panthers as some kind of community-organizing NGO.<sup>216</sup> These elements of the Left, however, made large mistakes, which opened up the door to organized efforts at disruption and infiltration by the deep state, which had an adverse impact on any real possibility of even gradual transformation.<sup>217</sup> Others still, in the guise of ‘New Politics’, entered

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<sup>215</sup> Ali (2005); Hitchens (2010).

<sup>216</sup> Jacobs (1997).

<sup>217</sup> Weiner (2007); Elbaum (2004).

the Democratic Party in the United States or the Labour Party in the UK. Whatever the limitations and compromises made by these forces, they had a real impact on the culture of official politics, a battle still playing out in the Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn camps of these two historical parties.<sup>218</sup>

#### **4.7 From May 68 to Neoliberalism**

Another trajectory, coming out of the sixties, and informed equally by the new social movements and the cultural Left was a very pronounced right-turn by a wide swathe of intellectuals, and the general growth of techno-libertarian thought that permeates Silicon Valley. Indeed, it is no accident that the likes of Steve Jobs took LSD when one realizes the intersection of tech and hippie culture, an intersection that still exists on both sides of the class divide.<sup>219</sup> One of the foremost, once-Maoist intellectuals of Paris 1968, Andre Glucksmann, famously supported the presidency of the reactionary Nicolas Sarkozy, and argued that May 1968 was not Left wing, but “anti-totalitarian”. Glucksmann, who was far closer to the likes of Foucault than Leftist Foucauldians may want to acknowledge, was a foundational thinker amongst the Nouveau Philosophes, the Maoists who discovered the Gulag and Solzhenitsyn and emphasized, as against the “grand narrative” of revolutionary theory, romanticized what they called ‘Plebeian’ power. This conceptualization, also inspired by ‘revisionist’ accounts of the French Revolution that emphasized liberty at the expense of equality and fraternity, even second guessing the Paris Commune. As cultural historian Michael Scott Christofferson points out, to this crowd “the struggles of the gulag inmate and the marginal in France are essentially the same; indeed, the gulag is a modern version of the earlier ‘great confinement’ studied by Foucault in

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<sup>218</sup> Hilton (2016); Seymour (2016).

<sup>219</sup> Price (2015).



*his Madness and Civilization*. In both East and West, resistance against normalization is the only viable politics”.<sup>220</sup>

This point is furthered by Boltanski and Chiapello’s *New Spirit of Capitalism*, an essentially Neo-Weberian work that argues that while the ‘Protestant Ethic’ sustained early capitalist social property relations, the new flexible capitalism of the last half century is sustained by the hedonism and libertarianism of sixties culture.<sup>221</sup> As one famous slogan put it at the time, ‘it is forbidden to forbid’. That capitalism itself could be transgressive or libertarian in a classical sense was echoed in some quarters of US social movements as well. A significant part of the Black Nationalist movement turned to Black owned businesses, one of whose early supporters is currently a Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas. It is less surprising, as Corey Robin points out, than one thinks, to see a trajectory from the Black Panthers to the conservative right.<sup>222</sup> It is one thing to make peace with capitalism, yet quite another to realize that one never had been at war with capitalism as such in the first place, but rather, corporate power, white supremacy, and even some more liberal variants of the theory of patriarchy.

As Sebastian Budgen points out, in regards to Boltanski and Chiapello,

There have always been, they argue, four possible sources of indignation at the reality of capitalism: (i) a demand for liberation; (ii) a rejection of inauthenticity; (iii) a refusal of egoism; (iv) a response to suffering. Of these, the first pair found classic expression in bohemian milieux of the late nineteenth century: they call it the ‘artistic critique’. The second pair were centrally articulated by the traditional labour movement, and represent the ‘social critique’.<sup>223</sup>

In the sixties these two forms of critique meshed briefly in the best of New Left culture and activism as well as in the flourishing of cultural production in this particular conjuncture. In

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<sup>220</sup> Christoferson (2015).

<sup>221</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello (2006).

<sup>222</sup> Robin (2010).

<sup>223</sup> Budgen (2000), 150-151.

turn, the root of the Missed Encounter was the failure of these two types of critique to establish a permanent coalescence. Demands for liberation and inauthenticity without class analysis and willingness to work towards change will end up as libertarianism. Demands for a refusal of egoism and responding to suffering will end up as a moralism of support without empowerment. To Marx, alienation pertained to all four of these elements. It is a pity that this brief period of dis-alienation never achieved its potential. This is, to a large extent, the fulcrum of the Missed Encounter. As opposed to an organically developing infrastructure of dissent as in the popular front or punk eras, either on a mass or countercultural scale, the separation of these modalities of critique, and hence practice, is the Missed Encounter 'essence' underlying the lockstep 'appearance'. The true shame of it all is that if these critiques and practices truly did coalesce, if the encounter had been consummated after all, it would actually have achieved all four without any compromise, unlike either middle-brow Popular Front or avant-garde punk eras.

#### **4.8 The Great Rock and Roll Conspiracy**

One of the great conspiracy theories coming from the anti-communist Right was that the Beatles were part of a communist and homosexual plot to brainwash the youth of America.<sup>224</sup> This opens up the question, what did traditional communists make of the Beatles? The communist movement, in both its mainstream and heterodox forms, had not shied away from admiration of musical experimentation. Not merely folk music, which was a niche market, played by communists, sold by capitalists and bought by liberals. Jazz music impresarios, indeed the jazz music business, was heavily populated by members of the CPUSA. The first great jazz producer Rudy Van Gelder, founder of both Prestige and Blue Note records and virtual inventor

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<sup>224</sup> Martin/Segrave (1993), 157.

of a specific recording style, was a lifelong ‘fellow traveler’. While many jazz musicians were apolitical, and some even Cold War liberals willing to go on State Department junkets – Dizzy Gillespie and Bill Evans come to mind – many more were explicitly on the Left, notably Max Roach, Charles Mingus and Jackie McLean. While it is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting that the further one travelled towards the avant-garde, the more likely it was that the musicians would have radical politics. Mingus and Roach, in particular, come closer to an evocation of the deprivations of racialized American capitalism in their instrumental suite LP *Freedom Now* than most didactic, lyric-driven folk music.

This opens up the question: why did the ‘mainstream’ Left have such a confused, if not hostile, response to the Beatles? The Beatles were ‘decadent’, their records were banned throughout the communist world, with the exception of the relatively social-liberal Yugoslavia. Indeed banning the Beatles was one of the impetuses for youth to get involved in the Prague Spring, and it doesn’t seem accidental that the only musicians to be banned by authoritarians of both the Left and the Right (Greece, Chile) were the Beatles.<sup>225</sup> While the Khrushchevite thaw opened up space for a jazz scene to develop in the Soviet Union, and later instrumental funk and disco music became popular, the Beatles were thought of in almost the exact same way that the John Birch Society considered them in the United States. Notably both the arch-reactionaries and the Brezhnevites insinuated that the Beatles were queer, not far off the mark, according to some accounts.<sup>226</sup>

From Little Richard onwards, there were seemingly more queer people playing rock music than any other cultural form, though “Tutti Frutti”<sup>227</sup> aside, the references to sexuality

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<sup>225</sup> Lebowitz (2012); Marcus (1997).

<sup>226</sup> Wickman (2013).

<sup>227</sup> Little Richard (1955), “Tutti Frutti”. The original lyrics referred to a “tight booty” that could be “greased”.

came through signifiers. Van Morrison's love song to a trans woman, "[Madame George](#)" was hidden in plain sight on his masterfully arcane *Astral Weeks* LP. Pete Townsend, even, wrote about gender dysphoria on "I'm a Boy". The affectation of long hair on men and unshaven bodies on women was taken, perhaps correctly, as a rejection of traditional gender roles, and both male and female artists, notably Mick Jagger and Janis Joplin, seemed to revel in arousing those of the same gender as them. Perhaps even more threatening on the level of 'immanentization of the eschaton' was the integrated quality of the rock music milieu.

Rock music's core audience, from the very beginning, was racially and gender integrated; even in some cases, it skewed female. With this said, it is certainly the case that the majority of artists under inquiry, and that entered the canon, were white males. This is partially due to the fact that black music, in the fifties and sixties, developed contemporaneously, but on a separate trajectory as rock music – which was not without a fair share of integrated bands. In turn, rock audiences, white, black, male and female, embraced black music, Motown and Stax/Volt. Indeed, Black music was the cultural soundtrack to the first wave of sixties social movements. In turn, rock music, in particular Bob Dylan, was highly influential within the black Left.

Sly and the Family Stone, steeped in the Bay Area's rock scene, but incorporating the vocal style of gospel and Motown, was a fully integrated band. Black, white, Latino, male and female, queer and straight. Starting out as a dance band, they broke late in the era under inquiry, with their classic performance at Woodstock and the album, *Stand*. Later they released one of the great political masterpieces of the era of the Black Left, *There's a Riot Goin' On*. Likewise, Carlos Santana's set of outfits were always integrated, if their music was at best, tepid. Finally, the Jimi Hendrix Experience matched the Black American studio veteran with two white English and Irish session musicians, and famously covered Bob Dylan as well as the garage-punk

pioneers, the Troggs' "Wild Thing". The Grateful Dead, to whom we will return repeatedly, was led by a Latino man and an Irishman steeped in black culture.

Female artists were subject to a much more rigorous 'star system' than were men in rock music. Some of the most important artists under inquiry, however, either had prominent female members or were led by women, as was the case with the Jefferson Airplane, led by Grace Slick. Janis Joplin, a Texan queer white woman was a surprising success, showing what ends up happening when a technically skilled vocalist combines a deep Texas accent with conscious attempts to sound like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. Few vocalists of any era, any genre, had the power of Janis Joplin performing live. Starting as the 'chick singer' in Big Brother and the Holding Company, Joplin had some degree of solo success, but like many artists of the era, shone the most brightly onstage. Rooted in the Toronto folk scene, Joni Mitchell surfed the borderlines between folk, jazz and rock, and created a body of work that is just slightly outside the scope of inquiry in question, yet her "[Free Man in Paris](#)" from the record *Court and Spark* remains the best lyrical/musical distillation of the end of the era, to which we will return. But before travelling in time to the end, we must now look back at the beginning, as to how the caterpillar of rock and roll turned into the butterfly of *Rock*.

## Chapter 5

### Passages from Rock and Roll to 'Rock'

#### 5.1 Any Old Way You Choose It

There are a number of narratives as to what constitutes the origin of rock and roll music. Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's "That's Alright Mama", later covered by Elvis Presley, a jump-blues with a hint of a shuffle-style rhythm is oft-cited. Alternately, Jackie Branson and Ike Turner's "Rocket 88", the first of very many uses of double entendres to refer to both driving and sexual activity, is a likely candidate, in particular for its use of a distorted Fender Stratocaster guitar sound. Still many other accounts cite Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock around the Clock", certainly stylistically adventurous, but more likely given such a status due to the whiteness of the musicians and a good chunk of their audience. This is not to say, however, that rock and roll music, as integrated a cultural form as has ever existed in the United States, was predicated upon so-called 'cultural appropriation'. As Mark Abel has shown, even in rudimentary form, there have never been hermetically sealed African, European and Asian musical traditions. Even in its gestational form, rock and roll was as rooted in 'white' or hillbilly/Scots-Irish cultural forms – what is now called 'country and western music', bluegrass and folk/traditional mountain music as it was in Black and, even more pronouncedly, Latino and Afro-Cuban forms.<sup>228</sup>

The following chapter will attempt a tentative genealogy of the musical forms under consideration, rock music from 1965 to 1972, in a socio-historical sense. While not without formal analysis or political connection, the purpose here is to introduce the broad cultural themes by way of what I am calling 'excursions', miniatures that capture the conjuncture without being

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<sup>228</sup> Abel (2014).

subject to a full-on study. In particular, the role of figures such as Brian Wilson and Lou Reed will be subject to analysis. Equally salient will be the introduction of specific cultural practices like smoking marijuana, and the changing, mutating form of rock music as it grew out of rock and roll. We will return in more details to the broader themes in the case studies, but the purpose of these excursions is to emphasize the multi-layered fabric and also as an implicit contribution to a rethinking of the sixties rock canon, not in form or content, but in interpretation.

In turn, the overall politics of the cultural forms may be mentioned in passing but deeper analysis of the interactions, encounters and Missed Encounters will also come in a future chapter. The purpose of this mode of exposition is to engage in a social history of rock music, going from the first records themselves to the origin of *rock music*, which will be distinguished, analytically, from *rock and roll*, to its pinnacle as an aesthetic form, and finally to the denouement of its renaissance, and the degeneration, that, as will be seen, existed contemporaneously with the degeneration of the social movements. The purpose here is historical and geographical specificity. The primary regions in which the form developed were the United States and Great Britain.<sup>229</sup>

The important distinction, thus, to make, when gauging the origin of a specific cultural form is not merely the origin of the form itself, but the origin of its audience, which can roughly be dated to 1955 and 1956, the years of “Tutti Frutti”, “Heartbreak Hotel”, and “Blue Suede Shoes”. This audience exponentially grew in the fifties, among young men and women, among white people and people of colour, largely due to the advent and mass-availability of television sets, ‘Hi-Fi’ systems, and the growth of music-oriented radio stations along with radio

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<sup>229</sup> The reader is encouraged to listen to the accompanying Spotify playlist or follow the hyperlinked song titles if reading this on a connected device or computer. Or better yet, the reader is encouraged to seek out this music on vinyl.

‘personalities’.<sup>230</sup> Dick Clark’s Philadelphia-based *American Bandstand* had the first televised moments of interracial dancing, while a variety of DJs, across the country, as well as in Canada and the United Kingdom developed specific on-air personae. New social archetypes, from Hollywood and Broadway, appeared, and the new musicians were quick to adopt – consciously or not – these archetypes, the brooding male loner, the sexually ambiguous showboat, the femme fatale, the nerd with machismo, the conniving uncle. Most importantly, for our purposes, rock and roll music, for the first time hatched the seeds for what could potentially be a national, racially and gender integrated popular counterculture not based on mere kitsch. The role of working classes in all of this must not go unrecognized as well, the phrase, “gonna raise hell at the union hall” (or some variation, all involving partying at union social events), exists in a number of early rock or rhythm and blue songs, by both black and white artists.

One of the archetypes of the 50s that rock and roll militated against was the ‘conformist’, the man in gray flannel, the lonely married woman, the bland quarterback. Rock and Roll was authenticity. It was Rock Hudson’s arbourist in Douglas Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* or Marilyn Monroe’s drifter in *Misfits*.<sup>231</sup> It also made pretense at high culture. “I got no kick against modern jazz,” sings Chuck Berry, “unless they try and play it too darn fast”, differentiating his populist appeal from that of the growing experimentation in the world of Hard Bop<sup>232</sup>. While Norman Mailer’s *White Negro* chronicled this overall emerging counterculture in its mythological form, a more authentic cultural constellation was growing out of working class and déclassé former bourgeoisie, and outside of the major metropolises. It was the culture in which

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<sup>230</sup> Willis (2011).

<sup>231</sup> It is worth noting that the archetypes mentioned in the above paragraphs are rooted in Cultural Front aesthetic forms that survived the McCarthyite blacklist, itself a full-frontal attack on the remnants of the Cultural Front. See, EG Buhle/Wagner (2003).

<sup>232</sup> Chuck Berry (1957), “Rock and Roll Music”.



Allen Ginsberg wrote poems about Trotsky and anal sex; where Vance Packard warned the masses of the “hidden persuaders”<sup>233</sup> of the public relations industry; where Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse popularized a humanist and psychoanalytically informed socialism. It was, as the great socialist critic and champion of rock music Dwight MacDonalD once called his own work, “middlebrow”. It was sophisticated enough for the intelligentsia, but one could dance to it.<sup>234</sup>

## 5.2 When I Grow Up (to be a Man)

We have already seen that Brian Wilson is a paradigmatic figure for the new subjectivity that was instantiated in the sixties, that of the ‘teenager’. The teenager, the youth, seemed to have all kinds of agency, in the imaginary world of the early Beach Boys. Yet this agency existed in very specific parameters, and was often sundered by parents, authority figures and unrequited love. Wilson described their *Pet Sounds* as a “Teenaged Symphony to God”.<sup>235</sup> God, in this context, is not the Calvinist judgemental God of the fifties, but a kind of deistic mystification connected to a confused and speculative but nonetheless discernible recognition of chaotic totality. If “God only knows” what the narrator of the symphony would do without his lover, it is a statement that the notion of the lover not existing was ontologically unfathomable. The teenager of *Pet Sounds* was the culmination of a decade of the development of the rock and roll audience. This character started out bragging about his surfing prowess and cars, symbols of material abundance in the context of growing working class living standards. Soon, however, he was getting “bugged dragging up and down the same old strip” and had to find somewhere

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<sup>233</sup> Packard (2007).

<sup>234</sup> Ginsberg (2010); Fromm (2011); Marcuse (2010); MacDonalD (2014).

<sup>235</sup> Wilson, quoted in Siegel (1967).

“where the kids were hip”.<sup>236</sup> He sought out help from women, as opposed to attempting to help them. On *Pet Sounds*, he realizes that time was out of whack and that while he thought he could make it alone, he couldn't, he needed collectivity. This need led him, on the one hand, to seeing a sprawling, egalitarian alternative vision of Americana; and on the other, with the help of psychedelic drugs, to deteriorate into a severe mental health disability.

The child was indeed the father of the man. Rock and Roll mutated with its audience. The screaming teenaged girls and boys, the ones who either wanted to be Elvis Presley and Little Richard or to have sex with them, grew into the constituency for the new 'Beat Generation'. The use of marijuana and hashish, as well as 'uppers' and 'downers', replaced the 'square' drinking of Mommy and Daddy. Rock and roll differentiated as it encountered youth cultures from coast to coast, in the UK, Ireland, Canada, even West Germany, where an early iteration of the Beatles played to screaming crowds and amphetamine fueled fistcuffs. Vocal groups – both co-ed, male and 'girl group' of both Black and Italian-American provenance grew out of working class 'corner' singing in Baltimore, Cleveland and Dublin. As the French and film critics developed the 'auteur' concept for directors, the notion was pollinating into music, with the most obvious example being Rudy Van Gelder in Jazz, notably moving over to Phil Spector, the aforementioned Wilson, Burt Bacharach and Berry Gordy.

The constitution of the counterculture or 'youth' as social archetype cannot be reduced to the popular sociology of the time, in particular, the work of Erving Goffman on the 'self' and authenticity.<sup>237</sup> The prevailing mood was not, contra Goffman, the need to 'create' a new self, but rather a sort of 'return of the repressed', a progressive dis-alienation and move away from the one-dimensional quality of abundance-capitalism. The theme of a return to some type of

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<sup>236</sup> The Beach Boys (1964), "I Get Around".

<sup>237</sup> Goffman (1963).

authentic self was ongoing, at the very least, until 1969. This mood prevailed not just in rock and roll – Miles Davis’s aptly titled “So What” evoked this sense of a dismal tide. The archetypal teenager is male, but not necessarily exclusively so, as much a working class white kid in the Midwest as a Black kid in Detroit or a Jewish kid in Brooklyn. Similarly, in the UK, where rock music culture had its own cultural lineage growing out of the *skiffle* or folk music scene, the archetype was primarily working class kids in port-cities – Liverpool was an early rock town due to enterprising sailors bringing blues and rock records back from the United States.<sup>238</sup>

A different youth culture was forming in the early sixties, in the United States in particular, and largely among Jewish and ‘white ethnic’ youth, that is the culture of folk music, lovingly captured by the Coen Brothers in *Inside Llewyn Davis*.<sup>239</sup> Adopting both traditional blues and country music, union and political songs, and often writing new lyrics to suit the changin’ times, folk was a cash cow for big corporate labels like Columbia as much as it raked in cash for the fellow-travellers at Folkways and Vanguard Records. The survival and popularization of folk music was largely a project of the Left, from the Communist-oriented Popular Front to the many and sundry followers of the various Trotskyist grouplets all the way to the anarchist ‘Wobblies’ of the International Workers of the World. It was members of the latter, who inspired and taught a young Robert Zimmerman, who had dubbed himself Bob Dylan.<sup>240</sup> A Jewish kid from Minnesota, Zimmerman had come to New York to make music, but ostensibly also to meet Woody Guthrie, the fellow travelling folk-singer who was convalescing. With his song “Blowing in the Wind” covered by the middle-of-the-road folk stars Peter Paul and Mary, and his singing it from the dais at the March on Washington, Dylan became a massive star to this

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<sup>238</sup> Spitz (2005).

<sup>239</sup> Coen (2013).

<sup>240</sup> Dylan (2004), 52.

milieu.<sup>241</sup> However ostensibly radical this CP-oriented milieu happened to be, Dylan found these bourgeois Stalinists to be a bit hypocritical. Presented an award by the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee a short few days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, he claimed to identify with Lee Harvey Oswald, and dedicated his award to the Cuban revolution.

### 5.3 Ready to Go Anywhere

Fan mythology, a great corpus of knowledge in its own right, stipulates a very specific transitional moment, when rock and roll music became ‘rock’. This was Bob Dylan’s electric set at the Newport folk festival in summer 1965. A veritable *Rashomon* story, there are many disputes as to precisely how the audience – and more importantly – the Popular Front aligned folk music intelligentsia – responded to Dylan playing with distorted blues-rock of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. Many accounts point to no less than Pete Seeger losing his temper and, quite literally, pulling the plug on Dylan’s set, while others claim that this narrative is an exaggeration, and that Seeger had merely asked the sound engineers to lower the volume so as not to bother elderly audience members’ ear drums. Accounts from the audience claim both adulation and annoyance.<sup>242</sup> Whatever the case may be, this performance was literally like nothing that had ever been heard. On one hand, the distorted ‘blues rock’ of the Butterfield band had already existed, as did Dylan’s expanding palette, away from directly ‘political’ songs to a more impressionist, even surrealist approach – when asked in 1965 why he no longer wrote protest songs, Dylan claimed with some justification that all of his songs were protest songs. But the combination of impressionist lyrics and half-spoken ‘phrased’ vocals with electric guitars and

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<sup>241</sup> Among the organizers of the March was the previously mentioned socialist activist Bayard Rustin. See page 103. It is often forgotten that the event was not merely for civil rights, but for jobs and justice. It was explicitly oriented towards a multiracial working class coalition.

<sup>242</sup> Marqusee (2005); Jackson (2004); Wilentz (2010).

Hammond organs was something entirely new, as were his three masterpiece records of the 65/66 period, a topic to which we will return.

To give a schematic overview of the formal distinctions between rock and roll and rock, rock developed within the interstices of rock and roll. Rock, in its simplest form, was when the bass instrument moved from the standup double bass to the bass guitar. The latter was rarely used in fifties rock music, save for the proto-funk boogie of Little Richard's top-notch combo. Rhythmically speaking, in its ordinary form, it was 'on the twos', every second beat accentuated by the rhythm section, as opposed to 'on the ones' in most black music.<sup>243</sup> Instrumentation, with the exception of (guitar, or less often, piano and organ) solos, was primarily rhythmic with melody provided by vocals. Rock music, by this logic, like punk, hip-hop and heavy metal afterwards, was as much about a specific attitude or over-arching aesthetic than any particular form. Yet something could "rock" formally speaking, causing the head to inadvertently nod, and not be rock, as was the case with the harder edges of late bop music, and something could be rock without 'rocking', as was the case with *Pet Sounds* or the work of Harry Nilsson.

If rock and roll was limited in scope to music with a very specific relationship to the early stuff, Elvis, Chuck Berry and the like, rock, was the distillation of rock and roll with continued developments in the Blues, Jazz, cinema, print and literature. It had become, almost by accident, a serious form. This was foreshadowed in the response by the intelligentsia to the Beatles. Remarkably original working class kids out of the skiffle scene, the Beatles had the great good fortune to meet an enterprising, closeted gay promoter, Brian Epstein, who designed an aesthetic and sound for the early band, from the mop-tops to the lapel-free suits.<sup>244</sup> The Beatles, from the start, wrote the majority of their own material, and made their cover-songs entirely their own –

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<sup>243</sup> Vincent (1995).

<sup>244</sup> Spitz (2005).

indeed there are few male vocal performances on record as powerful as John Lennon's on their cover of the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout".

In August 1964, a meeting took place that was aesthetically and politically fateful. An invited guest in the Beatles' set of hotel suites, Dylan took out his stash of high-quality marijuana and lit up a joint. He'd misheard the Beatles accented "I get by" in "I Want to Hold Your Hand" as "I get high".<sup>245</sup> John Lennon's account of the evening is worthy of quoting, "I don't remember much what we talked about. We were smoking dope, drinking wine and generally being rock 'n' rollers and having a laugh, you know, and surrealism. It was party time".<sup>246</sup> On the other hand, Paul McCartney was mystified and saw the creative potential in this substance that, if one looks at the long arc of his work, may well have cured McCartney's ADHD. "I'd been going through this thing of levels, during the evening. And at each level I'd meet all these people again. 'Ha ha ha! It's you!' And then I'd metamorphose on to another level".<sup>247</sup> Dylan introduced the Beatles to American bohemia, and the Beatles in turn, showed Dylan that one could be artistically sophisticated while using electric instruments, the rudiments of rock and roll. The influences were already starting to appear in each other's music, and this *session* seems an important precursor to *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Rubber Soul*.

Having started to smoke pot and look beyond the manufactured strictures of their commodification, the Beatles, in particular Lennon, started to get bored with the routine. While their songwriting, in particular their singles ("I Feel Fine"; "Ticket to Ride", "Eight Days a Week") showed a great leap, they had become stagnant as Dylan took the reins, and "folk rock" started to fill the airwaves. Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone", near six minutes long, was the

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<sup>245</sup> The Beatles (1963). "I Want to Hold Your Hand"; Martin/Beatles Anthology (2002).

<sup>246</sup> Lennon/Beatles Anthology.(2002).

<sup>247</sup> McCartney (2014).

longest number one song of all time and perhaps the most obliquely written rock song to top the charts until 1991 and Nirvana's "Smells like Teen Spirit". At its best, this transitional form led to real sonic inventiveness, even sometimes the use of traditional folk instrumentation alongside a rock rhythm section, other times predominantly covering other artists and quite literally superimposing Dylan with the Beatles, as was the case with the Byrds. In England, this took the form, for The Kinks in particular, of incorporating music-hall and vaudeville type songwriting.

#### **5.4 Everybody Must Get Stoned**

Cannabis Sativa, in both its flower and hashish forms, and to a lesser extent, opium and cocaine, had associations with the Bohemian milieu since the turn of the century. Indeed, marijuana's illegality was largely rooted in a moral panic about white youth consorting with people of colour, and early anti-drug propaganda films are nothing short of hilarious.<sup>248</sup> There is little doubt, however, that the widespread use of marijuana, as opposed to alcohol, among the growing youth culture had an impact on what type of cultural consumption would take place. Art should be cerebral and contemplative, expressionistic and giggle-inducing. As Jerry Garcia later said of the Grateful Dead, "we mix it for the hallucinations",<sup>249</sup> and the Dead are known, to the present day, of structuring their set-lists around a psychedelic experience, substance induced or otherwise. Added to this was the growing popularity of psychedelic drugs, such as LSD, psilocybin mushrooms and mescaline. Still legal in the mid-sixties, a whole acid scene developed on both the east and west coasts. LSD, which had been used by various elements of the elite – in particular those close to the literary intelligentsia that staffed the early Central Intelligence Agency, trickled down in a circuitous fashion though multiple mysterious forces were at play.

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<sup>248</sup> Herer (1973).

<sup>249</sup> Jackson (1999), 146.

After all, the CIA had taken to using LSD (and other psychedelics, as well as marijuana) in ‘mind control’ experiments, both on unwitting, and witting subjects. Two of the witting subjects were novelist Ken Kesey and Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter.<sup>250</sup>

As chronicled, albeit one-sidedly, by Tom Wolfe, Ken Kesey was radicalized by LSD, but not in a traditional sense. Starting a quasi-cult/quasi-performance art group known as the Merry Pranksters, he and his comrades purchased a school-bus, christened “Furthur”, and had no less than “Cowboy Neal at the wheel”.<sup>251</sup> That is to say, that the driver was the chain smoking amphetamine freak Neal Cassady, already the model for Kesey’s *McMurphy* and Kerouac’s *Sal Paradise*.<sup>252</sup> Theirs was a cultural radicalism. They certainly were well connected with the Bay Area’s far Left, in particular, the anarchist-leaning Diggers, named for the early English proto-communists of the 16th century and their mime troupe. At the same time, Kesey was justifiably suspicious as to the Left instrumentalizing and using what was an organically developed social milieu, and, what is more, he felt their tactics wouldn’t go anywhere. Hearing Jerry Rubin speak at an anti-war rally, Kesey famously turned to Jerry Garcia and remarked that Rubin sounded like Hitler or Stalin.<sup>253</sup> In the Bay Area and throughout Northern California, the Pranksters put on what were called Acid Tests, and the house band was the Grateful Dead.

Perhaps no band is so indicative of the contradictions of Americana<sup>254</sup> than were the Grateful Dead. They were a living instantiation of the genealogy of rock music. A working class street tough who played rock and roll drums, Bill Kreutzman joined with a folkie and bluegrass

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<sup>250</sup> Lee (1993); Brightman (1998); Wolfe (2008).

<sup>251</sup> The Grateful Dead (1968) “That’s It for The Other One”.

<sup>252</sup> Browne (2015).

<sup>253</sup> Wolfe (2008), 97.

<sup>254</sup> Much more will be said in regards to the concept of Americana in chapter 7 (on the Grateful Dead), chapter 9 (on Bob Dylan), and finally, in an extended excursion in the concluding chapter. For our purposes, it is rooted in the peculiar dialectic of realism and modernism, artifice and actuality, that embodied the Cultural Front in the United States. Woody Guthrie is a foundational figure, yet so is Norman Rockwell. As a configuration, Americana can range from music like the Grateful Dead to Grand Ole Opry, films from Sam Peckinpah to John Ford, and so forth.



banjo player, Jerry Garcia. Joining them were one of Garcia's guitar students, the rich kid Bob Weir who also had the privilege of studying slide guitar with the legendary Reverend Gary Davis. Rounding out the band was a Schoenbergian jazz/experimental trumpet player who had never heard a note of rock music before seeing the Rolling Stones play live.<sup>255</sup> The trumpeter Phil Lesh picked up the bass guitar, and an Irish kid from a black neighbourhood who was embedded in black culture, Ron (Pigpen) McKernan, played organ and sang a great deal of the group's early material. While the songwriting for other Bay Area bands, notably the more vocally radical Jefferson Airplane and Creedence Clearwater Revival, was at first more sophisticated, no rock band had ever improvised like the Grateful Dead. Their improvisations, often on simple blues themes and often in Miles Davis-style modal tuning, were often set to day-glo light shows.

After recording a flawed first album and confusing the hell out of Warner Brothers executives, the Dead developed a reputation as a live band and a part of the scene in the Bay Area, playing benefits for radical groups as well as the 'human be-in', an early attempted encounter between the Left and counterculture. Soon joined by yet another drummer, former military march drum champion Mickey Hart, they expanded their improvisational palette to experiment with time signatures. Early names for some of their early compositions often were in reference to a time signature: "The Eleven" which retained its name, was 11 beats for every 4 bars, while "The Main Ten" (later renamed "Playing in the Band") was 10/4.

In Britain, Cream and Pink Floyd, similar to the Dead, both originally played improvisations on basic blues themes. Pink Floyd, who'd originally called themselves the "Pink Floyd Sound", after two blues musicians, Pink Anderson and Floyd Council, who were admired

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<sup>255</sup> Wolfe (2008).

by their original lead vocalist and songwriter, Syd Barrett, took up a residency at the aptly-named UFO club at London and blew minds with their improvisation, light shows and Barrett's unhinged stage persona. Cream developed contemporaneous to Pink Floyd, a formation of three of the best-known London musicians, in other words, 'the cream of the crop'. They were known to play three hour sets with only five songs or so, and one of their early fans was the newly arrived Londoner Jimi Hendrix, who modelled his own 'power trio' on Cream, while concentrating less on lengthy improvisation and more on a highly original, John Coltrane-influenced guitar sound that is unmatched to this day. Throughout the late sixties, the blues-based improvised rock style – perhaps the lasting legacy of sixties music – differentiated throughout the United States, Great Britain, Ireland, Canada and Australia. In the American south, an integrated group of longhairs led by two brothers started playing as the Allman Brothers Band, pioneering the use of odd time signatures. In Toronto, a group of hippy kids formed Rush, while in Australia, AC/DC was formed, and over in Ireland, Thin Lizzy.

As rock music differentiated in the mid-sixties, it underwent a number of stylistic shifts. Dylan's 'plugged in' touring in 1965/1966 not only gave rise to a rough-and-tumble blues rock, but also to greater textural, lyrical and instrumental innovation, in particular with the aforementioned *Pet Sounds* by the Beach Boys, a response to the Beatles' *Rubber Soul* and The Kinks' *Face to Face*. The album-as-form was developing as a form of popular art. The notion of an album speaking for itself, not merely a carrier of a few hit singles as well as some 'filler' was pioneered by Frank Sinatra and Johnny Cash and adapted into rock music by the Beatles, largely thanks to their innovative producer George Martin. This all too was highly connected to the widespread popularization of the use of marijuana – a 44 minute album allowed the stoned listener to actively engage, in a subtly altered state of consciousness, with a narrative, either

apparent or implied. A more hard-drug influenced and gritty instantiation of this form was starting to bubble beneath the surface on the American east coast and Midwest, in Detroit, Cleveland, Boston and especially New York. Perhaps the best and most influential band to come out of that milieu was the Velvet Underground.<sup>256</sup>

### **5.5 White Light/White Heat**

If the Grateful Dead were the distillation of the light side of the sixties, but one that shone a ‘dark star’, the Velvet Underground were their polar opposite, and while configurationally and temporally out of the long sixties, only gained recognition outside of a tight New York milieu after they had disbanded, and in particular, in the Punk era. The Dead and their ilk begat classic rock, while the Velvet Underground was proto-punk. While the Dead gave rise to a lot of pretty terrible and indulgent music, the Velvets gave rise to power-pop, glam-rock and early gay rock music, punk, post-punk, and finally, ‘indie’ rock. While both shared an interest in dissonant improvisation and light-shows, their audiences and what they were trying to achieve were worlds apart, though missing links existed in regards to Lou Reed, the principal songwriter of the Velvet Underground’s training as a poet with Delmore Schwartz, a second generation beat poet. Reed was an upper middle class Jewish kid, queer, and a Dylan fan whose parents subjected him to Electro-Consulve Therapy for his moodiness and to “suppress homosexual desires”.<sup>257</sup> Returning to his undergraduate degree, he became ‘better adjusted’ but not without being banned from the Reserve Officers' Training Corps for pulling a gun on a sergeant. Aside from loving early rock music, particularly the vocal groups, Reed followed early free jazz, in particular the ‘harmolodics’ of Ornette Coleman, mentioned in chapter 2. This was less about improvisation

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<sup>256</sup> Willis (2011); Wilentz (2010).

<sup>257</sup> Cale and Rees (2016).

per se than it was about song-structure. Reed, like Coleman, used an implied, as opposed to explicit melody, in some of his songwriting (notably “[European Son](#)”, “Men of Good Fortune” and “Rock and Roll”); the implied melody being Coleman’s ‘floating C’, what Coleman called the implied rhythmic melody or bassline, a hidden chord against which other instruments interact either converging or diverging with any given chord without that chord ever being actually played by any of the instrumentalists. This commitment to experimentation, to a popular avant-garde is the hidden configurational connection between all the musicians discussed within this project.

All the while, like Paul Simon, Randy Newman and Carole King, Lou Reed was one of many New York Jews to work as professional pop songwriters.<sup>258</sup> Reed joined forces with John Cale, a Welsh bass player and violist who had studied with the Maoist experimental atonal composer Cornelius Cardew, and they virtually invented a hybrid of drone-music with a moderately rock and roll/surf-rock framework. The two were joined by Lou Reed’s classmate, Sterling Morrison, also a guitarist, and the androgynous Maureen (Moe) Tucker, a highly original drummer who used mallets instead of drumsticks, played standing up and rarely used the cymbals or high hats. Their sound was quite literally brand new. Screeching electrified viola droned over a bass-less chugging two guitar sound accompanied by a rhythm that may as well, and often was, played on garbage bins or one resonant bass drum. While sharing a penchant for long instrumental passages with the Dead, the Dead’s jams were ascending/descending and structural, while the Velvets turned ‘vamping’ into drones, and experimented with Noise, as best found on live versions of “[Sister Ray](#)”.

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<sup>258</sup> Bockris (2003); on Coleman, see Cummings (2015). On Jewish/African-American collaboration in culture, see Denning (1997) and in particular, Buhle (2004).

Andy Warhol was to the Velvet Underground what Ken Kesey was to the Grateful Dead. An enigmatic figure, a radical son of a coal miner but celebrated by the bourgeoisie, Warhol's overall influence falls outside the overall scope of this work. Warhol was fascinated by new modes of commercial design and kitsch that had come out of the post-Popular Front aesthetic of the fifties. His famous paintings of everything from Monroe to Mao, from cops with dogs charging activists to Coca Cola, reflected an aesthetic of commensurability, not so much disposability, but ascertaining of that trace of authenticity by rendering it equally visible in all phenomena. "What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coca-Cola", as Warhol said, so this uniformity of form had to be matched by a diversity of content.<sup>259</sup> For this he branched out beyond painting to bring in sound and light. This came in the form of the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, a travelling sound and light show, for which the Velvet Underground (nicknamed by fans and band members alike, 'the Velvets') became the house band. The use of ultra-bright stroboscopic lights is the reason for the Velvets' iconic early image of The Whole band wearing sunglasses. They would have been blinded without them. Warhol also matched them up with the German-born singer Nico for part of their first album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, for which he claimed production credit merely by lending his name to it while leaving the actual production to the band, and designing its iconic phallic banana album cover. Nico sang on only three songs, but had a very similar deadpan delivery as Reed, finding the 'hidden C' and playing up her accent.

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<sup>259</sup> Warhol (1975), 229.

The Velvets kept improving throughout their short career, making one more experimental album, and two more albums that veered towards a highly immaculate pop sound. This is not to mention the scads of original material only played in live sets, and released after they disbanded. As fan lore has it, very few people heard them, but those that did started a band. Indeed, their early hardcore fans later went on to be key figures in the punk and post-punk scenes in New York and Boston: Scott Quine, Jonathan Richman, Jerry Harrison and Jim Carroll to name but a few.<sup>260</sup> What the Velvets had done, in a manner related, though differentiated from what had been achieved on the West Coast and in the UK, was to create a distinctly ‘east-coast’ art-rock sound, an aesthetic that survived the broader cultural degeneration, but simultaneously served as a critical litmus. To the early rock intelligentsia, very few bands could match the prowess of the Velvet Underground.<sup>261</sup>

One thing that the Velvets shared with their contemporaries from coast to coast and across the pond was an abrupt stylistic shift from garish experimentation to outright elegance. Their final album *Loaded* is perhaps the swan song of The Whole subject under inquiry. The musical zeitgeist, as 1968 turned to 1969 and so forth, was that experimentation had hit its limit, and the only way to turn this limit into a barrier and leap over it, to use Lenin’s phrase, was a subtle traditionalism. After the psychedelic 1967 and ill-fated sojourn with Transcendental Meditation/obscurantism, the Beatles recorded the disjointed but traditional self-titled album, known forever as the *White Album*. The Grateful Dead learned to sing harmonies and played country and western shows under stage-names, culminating in their twin 1970 albums *Workingman’s Dead* and *American Beauty*. Bob Dylan engaged in this after his motorcycle accident and return to a cabin in upstate New York with his touring band, recording a whole ton

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<sup>260</sup> Bockris (2008).

<sup>261</sup> Bangs (1981).

of ethereal, stoned and nonsensical original material, alongside covers of Johnny Cash and even Sam Cooke in widely bootlegged sessions, later released as *The Basement Tapes*. His backup band, simply named 'the Band', were to shift things in their own right, growing out of the interstices to create a new aesthetic of their own.

## 5.6 Pulled into Nazareth

After the sessions with Dylan, the Band kept recording in their collective Woodstock home, affectionately known as 'Big Pink', releasing their debut album (named for the house) to huge critical accolades. Dylan's painting on the album cover, six stick figures (presumably including himself) showed him to be as much a part of the Band's spiritual family as was Epstein for the Beatles, Kesey for the Dead and Warhol for the Velvets. George Harrison wrote in his memoir that when he heard *Music from Big Pink*, it was as if he was hearing music for the first time.<sup>262</sup> Using a double keyboard sound (organ and piano) and with a drummer as trickily melodic as Moe Tucker was militaristic, the Band had a deceptively pastoral sound, masking a decisive surrealism. Four of Five Band members were from southern Ontario, while one was from the American south. The southerner, Levon Helm, and the First Nations member, Robbie Robertson, were the principal creative forces in the Band, outside Dylan. [\*Music from Big Pink\*](#) had songs written by Dylan, as well as Robertson, and took on an elegiac sound. It was low-fidelity, recorded live on rudimentary equipment. The singing sometimes strained, it had an aura of emotional desperation unheard in (white) rock music, and given the vocal prowess of four of five members, the singers traded lines, and sang together, not so much in harmony, but in unison. The lyrics, influenced by surrealism, continued the psychedelic aesthetic of the time, but instead

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<sup>262</sup> Harrison (1981).

of psychedelic music along with boy-loses-girl blues or bad acid poetry, it was minimalist, minor key post-Dylan rock music with songs about a world of mystery – plus a good Johnny Cash murder ballad thrown in for good measure.

With the critical success of the Band, musicians who had started out in the aforementioned folk-rock milieu started to attain their own degree of success, critically and commercially. Buffalo Springfield had an uneven catalogue with some great songs, notably “For What it’s Worth” and “Mr. Soul”, the former of which became a protest anthem in spite of its equivocation. Two of their notable members, however, would have much more to say afterwards, these members being Stephen Stills and Neil Young. Stills (and sometimes, but not often) Young played with former Byrd David Crosby, one of the few self-conscious socialists working in music at the time, and former English teen-pop star Graham Nash. While their early work is successful, building upon the Band and Springfield, they did help set in motion a trajectory towards degeneration and navel-gazing singer/song-writing. Neil Young, on the other hand, has had a career of innovative – if annoyingly uneven work, and indeed recorded some great material with the Band’s rhythm section (on *On the Beach*). Young’s sonic impact, in particular his forming of Crazy Horse which aesthetically bridged the gap between the Dead and the Velvets, is a hallmark of this transitional period. Like Reed and the Velvets, Young was able to transcend his sixties persona, while holding onto it when convenient.

In the Bay Area, there was Creedence Clearwater Revival (CCR), who were an antithesis to most of the rest of the Bay Area scene. Though not without long instrumentals, CCR were the first great American singles band in quite some time, churning out 2.5 minute song after 2.5 minute song, with bluesy guitar and left-populist lyrics referring to Vietnam, touring life and, in their tour-de-force, how one could match proletarian ethics with rock and roll, “Fortunate Son”.



Their Bay Area neighbours, Jefferson Airplane, while always in the psychedelic camp, audience-wise, were always crafty songwriters, and increasingly political. Their 1969 album *Volunteers* is the pinnacle of the fleeting encounter between far Left politics and rock music. “All your private property is target for your enemy,” they sing, “and your enemy, is we...we are forces of chaos and anarchy”.<sup>263</sup> These lyrics, on their own, were dime-a-dozen, but they were matched with a great three-singer blend, adopting a ‘line-trading’ technique introduced by the Beatles and perfected by the Band.

With all of this great music and cultural exchange happening, good things don’t last forever, just as with the social movements. The first great rock critic, Lester Bangs, declared the end of rock and roll at the time Lou Reed quit the Velvet Underground in fall 1970. Similar sentiments were heard in the Bay Area with the closing of the Fillmore. As small operations run by enterprising Jewish promoters were replaced by big capital and the life of the ‘rock star’, the old scenes were being replaced. This was resisted, in varying degrees, by the Grateful Dead and others who built cult followings, but it had a seriously deleterious effect on the form as a whole. As all of these various styles ossified, routes out were taken that often led to aesthetic degeneration. Crosby, Stills and Nash, Neil Young and Joni Mitchell were one thing, but they begat the likes of James Taylor, Bread, America, Seals and Crofts and other horrible singer/songwriters, satirized well by Bill Hader and Fred Armisen’s “Documentary Now” fake band, the Blue Jean Committee, whose big hit was “Gentle and Soft”. In turn, the Grateful Dead and Pink Floyd have influenced at least two generations of truly bad music. Originally, progressive rock was literally ‘progressive’, in that bands had both progressive politics and progressive music. Early Genesis, for example, had thirty-minute suites about evil landlords out

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<sup>263</sup> The Jefferson Airplane (1969), “We Can Be Together”.

to get their tenants, with glammy costumes and odd time signatures. Soon, however, prog-rock was all about extended drum solos, so well satirized by Spinal Tap. As the latter novelty band's catch phrase, went, "There's a fine line between clever and stupid".<sup>264</sup>

### **5.7 Stoking the Star Maker Machinery Behind the Popular Song**

As established entertainment conglomerates took over rock and roll and created its own star system, the means with which one could be unique depended far more on self-marketing, mystique and virtuosity. Or it could just as well mean being buddies with people at the major labels, hippies turned hip capitalists. Rock criticism, as form, started out in the "underground press", including the newspapers of the far-Left, with smatterings of material in the journals of the intelligentsia, notably the *New Yorker*. Jann Wenner's *Rolling Stone* magazine played a role in shifting this grassroots 'criticism from below' in his star-like coverage of the Beatles et. al, but his music editor, Ben Fong Torres allowed for the development of genuinely talented critics, notably Bangs, Marsh and Greil Marcus. In a sense, one could look at this degeneration by way of real subsumption to capital in a fatalistic sense. After all, Woodstock was a shit-show, in regards to a business venture, and Altamont was even worse. Rational capitalists didn't allow for gate-crashing and open-air drug markets, let alone allowing Hell's Angels adorned with garish swastikas and fearsome handlebar mustaches to work security and punch Marty Balin in the face.

Instead, rational capitalists hired 'Artists and Repertoire' men (A&R men in industry parlance) to create "mystique" around "career artists" that could be loss leaders, that is to say, lose money while gaining reputation as purveyors of fine craft and making up the difference through underpaying musicians and selling millions of novelty and one-hit wonder type

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<sup>264</sup> Reiner et al. (1983).

records.<sup>265</sup> It is worth acknowledging that even at the height of the period under inquiry, the majority of songs on top 40 radio were by no means rock music, they were as often novelty or “easy listening”. Artists like Van Morrison, Bruce Springsteen and David Bowie benefited from this new system, but experimentation by collectives, by bands, was thrown by the wayside in terms of what was pushed by the industry. As differentiation from above took place, in terms of finding an artists’ demographic and constituency – of which ‘critics’ were but one component – audiences became segmented and segregated, by race and by class and education level. Some acts that had their beginning as the wave started to crash resisted this differentiation, and provided a soundtrack for the defeat of their own form.

Little Feat were, and are, one of the ultimate cult bands. Formed by members of Frank Zappa’s Mothers of Invention, their lead guitarist, vocalist and songwriter Lowell George’s song “[Willin](#)” had drug references, which were verboten to the straight-edge Zappa crew, according to keyboard player Bill Payne. Payne also speculates that Zappa thought the song itself was too good for George to remain a sideman.<sup>266</sup> They were among the first to engage in what filmmakers and visual artists had engaged for centuries. This is to say that as opposed to inventing a new form from scratch, they did so by hybridization. They were L.A. kids who grew up in Hollywood, who were easy adapters of a hybrid of Bakersfield country music, Bay Area hard rock, Cajun music and the Beatles. No one had ever written a song like “Willin” from their debut album, an odd spoken-word country song/dirge sung from the perspective of a truck-driver/smuggler who runs on “weed, whites and wine”. Their “A Apolitical Blues”, in following their mentor Zappa, poked fun at the apolitical turn amongst American youth culture. Against a hard blues with a sort of ‘hidden C’ style reminiscent of the Velvet Underground, Lowell

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<sup>265</sup> Christgau (2015).

<sup>266</sup> Payne (2014).

George, the vocalist/songwriter/slide guitarist barked a 12 bar blues about telephone calls from “Chairman Mao, Ronald Reagan, Tricky Dick and John Wayne”.<sup>267</sup>

Neil Young came into his own in this transition time, as he had been one of the artists sought after by industry capitalists. Having explicitly called for revolution (“gotta get down to it!”)<sup>268</sup> on “[Ohio](#)”, Young developed a profound sense of pessimism that culminated in his “Ditch Trilogy” of albums (*Time Fides Away*, *On the Beach*, *Tonight’s the Night*) which immediately followed the end of the era. Combining his harder-edged guitar playing with his country-ish touring band, not to mention Levon Helm and Rick Danko of the Band, revolution was no longer, to Young, something to be desired. It was now a Charles Manson/Patti Hearst nightmare, as on “[Revolution Blues](#)”. Yet the hard-edged nightmare is so irresistible that it is tempting to hear it dialectically, as Young sings, “I heard that Laurel Canyon is full of Famous Stars, but I hate them worse than lepers and I’ll kill them in their cars!”<sup>269</sup>

Perhaps the great exemplar, however, not merely of the “End of the Sixties”, but of the transition to neoliberalism, was Steely Dan. Like Little Feat, they were masters at hybridizing, but brought in very sophisticated understanding of jazz, and New York-Jewish left-wing sardonicism. Their songs are full of characters that may have left the sixties, but the sixties never left them. There is the narrator of “[Hey Nineteen](#)” who is surprised that the teenaged girl he is picking up, against his better judgement, has never heard of Aretha Franklin. There is “Kid Charlemagne”, based on a composite of the radical activists who had ended up as successful drug dealers, having started in the drug trade while living ‘underground’. Or take “My Old School” in which the narrator, a bourgeois kid who had spent years as a hippie and a radical, returns to his

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<sup>267</sup> Little Feat (1972), “A Apolitical Blues”.

<sup>268</sup> Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young (1970), “Ohio”.

<sup>269</sup> Neil Young (1974), “Revolution Blues”.

college reunion and sees what life he used to live, with a mix of disgust and wistfulness. All of this was set against a backdrop of increasingly slick and professionalized production values – it is no accident that audiophiles love Steely Dan. This slickness was an exaggerated metaphor, explicitly so, of the depersonalization and individualism implicit within the new subjectivity that began to emerge in the early seventies.

“Dark Star crashes,” sing the Grateful Dead, “pouring light into ashes”.<sup>270</sup> Sixties rock music shone like a star, but a dark one, only discernible if you looked at it right. It developed and flourished ahead of capital, and capital raced and raced to catch up. From Dylan’s Newport performance to Lou Reed’s last show with the Velvet Underground, to take two above-mentioned markers, a quantitatively greater amount of a qualitative entirely new cultural form was recorded, released and heard. That this music continues to be an exemplar was precisely due to its precociousness as compared with mass culture. When mass culture caught up with it, it could no longer develop, it could only hybridize. Even the punk rock revolt of the late seventies, and the arguably more consistent rock music era of the 90s (1991 to 1999 to be exact), did not invent new languages. The artists of the sixties did. And that, as Marx said of the pre-Socratic epics, was their charm.

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<sup>270</sup> The Grateful Dead (1968), “Dark Star”.

## Chapter 6

### It's All Too Much

#### 6.1 We Blew It

One of the last great artistic moments of the counterculture came in the form of Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda's *Easy Rider*. The soundtrack backdrop provides some of the best sixties 'Americana' rock music – the Band's "The Weight", Brotherhood of Man's "Don't Bogart Me", Steppenwolf's "[Born to Be Wild](#)". The two hippies with classic 'cowboy' names – Wyatt and Billy – are on a cross-country motorcycle trip, to get to New Orleans to sell the cocaine that they'd procured from a garishly dressed high-society type, played with no small amount of symbolism by famed music producer Phil Spector. Along the way, these cultural radicals stop along the highway of rural America and are joined by a drunken prodigal son, a radical small town lawyer memorably portrayed by Jack Nicholson. Notably, the two hippies, budding entrepreneurs with no structural antagonism with capitalist social property relations, survive a vicious beating by redneck/white supremacist types, while Nicholson's radical lawyer does not. The two have no choice but to continue their journey. After a cognitively violent LSD experience in New Orleans, after selling the cocaine, Billy (Hopper) seems satisfied with the journey, but Wyatt (Fonda) declares "we blew it". The countercultural types who were unable to let go of the individualist striving for "bread" had survived an attack, but stared into the abyss, which had stared back with dark and foreboding eyes. The radical lawyer they'd encountered on the way was not so lucky. Finally, after realizing they'd blown it, the two of them are shot and killed on their motorcycles by rednecks, bearers of the dismal tide.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Fonda and Hopper (1969).

It is here that we see a vital facet of the Missed Encounter between the sixties Left and the rock music counterculture. Leftists either came along for the ride with the hippies, only to get burned.<sup>272</sup> Or hippies were instrumentalized by the Left, only to turn away and write whole rock operas opposing the Left, trade unions and collective social and political endeavours. It is my position, that the great tragedy of the sixties was this ‘blowing it’. It was a Missed Encounter between two milieus that by all accounts should have combined forces. Music and the new music-oriented counterculture not only missed the boat politically, but never was able to achieve its full potential. On the other hand, in failing to not merely orient, but to swim alongside the counterculture, the far Left was unable to develop a mass base out of what famed celebrity-Leftist Abbie Hoffman referred to as “Woodstock Nation”.

Like the previous chapter on the music side-of-the-equation, The following chapter will attempt a tentative mapping of the far Left and the social movements, from 1965 to 1972, including the pre-history and postscript (starting in 1949 and ending in 1977) in a socio-historical sense. We define ‘far Left’ here to include both traditional Marxist and socialist organizations, either from the ‘Old Left’ communist, socialist and social democratic, or more heterodox Trotskyist, anarchist or Maoist traditions, those both within and outside the New Left. As well, the student-movement, from the Free Speech movement to the SDS, looms large, as does the black Left, notably the Black Panther Party, but going back to the Left wing of the civil rights movement. Finally, of course, bringing many currents together was opposition to the imperialist war in Vietnam. The following is less on the theoretical debates within the Left as such, except those that pertain directly to strategy. Rather, the account here is consequentialist, in line with the historical social theorist Neil Davidson’s account of bourgeois revolution.<sup>273</sup> Davidson’s

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<sup>272</sup> Gitlin (1993); Elbaum (2004).

<sup>273</sup> Davidson (2012).

account was written partially to come to terms with Marxian questioning of the concept of bourgeois revolution. From Perry Anderson on England to George Comninel on France,<sup>274</sup> claims had been made that the bourgeoisie were not the central historical agents of various historical events referred to in Marxist and Whig history as Bourgeois Revolution, therefore these revolutions cannot be called “bourgeois”. Meeting Comninel and others in the middle, Davidson does not deny, for example, that capitalists were not the prime movers in these revolutions; his consequentialist approach is such that these events are now situated as creating the conditions of possibility for the rise of bourgeois power. Whatever reservations one has with Davidson’s re-conceptualization, the notion of gauging historical material by virtue of outcome has a unique virtue in the study of the social movements of the sixties.<sup>275</sup>

The point is, the far Left blew it, and the ‘new social movements’ that sprung up autonomously became unmoored.<sup>276</sup> From one perspective then, the conditions of possibility of transformational politics, let alone revolution, were a mixed bag by virtue of a variety of contingent factors and movements of people acting in their own individual and collective interests. The anti-war movement in its mainstream iteration, organized by the liberal intelligentsia, Trotskyists and pacifists, had great success in helping the Vietnamese revolution in its protracted defeat of American imperialism. The early women’s movement, while starting out among educated bourgeois white women, did make an impact, though one that would certainly

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<sup>274</sup> Anderson (1963); Comninel (1987).

<sup>275</sup> This is not to raise consequentialism to an epistemological postulate, but rather to examine retroactively the tendencies in a given conjuncture – within that conjuncture’s prevailing social relations and common sense – and thus to examine what historical forces were unleashed by such tendencies. On this level of generality, hence, this does not contradict dialectical causality, it merely isolates specific instances in an expository sense.

<sup>276</sup> A critique could be raised that the Left never had the social weight or depth to not ‘blow it’. To the extent that it didn’t have the social weight to build a truly revolutionary movement and party, this is obviously the case. Be that as it may, the uneven but very real success of the civil rights and antiwar movements in eventually instantiating social change show that, without delving into the rabbit-hole of counterfactuals, the ingredients, if not the recipe, was present in the belly of the beast.



not be felt within the broader Left itself, reportedly.<sup>277</sup> The gay liberation movement, which was only supported by small fractions of the Left, sprung up as much by necessity as anything else.<sup>278</sup> The ecological movements placed pressure upon governments, and of all politicians, US President Richard Nixon championed the creation of an Environmental Protection Agency. Finally, the Civil Rights movement, which moved into so-called 'Black Power', had obvious ramifications in the United States and beyond.

A consequentialist ledger sheet for these movements, on the other hand, would show that far from being unqualified successes, they have developed in a combined and uneven sense. American peace movements have always been an uneasy mix of pacifists, the religious and liberals who find war distasteful, conservative isolationists who don't desire 'foreign entanglements' and finally, socialist anti-imperialists. 'Vietnam syndrome' was excised first by Reagan's Second Cold War and finally by Bush Sr.'s 1991 Gulf War. At this stage in American politics, even avowedly socialist presidential candidates must genuflect to the military industrial complex. The 'women's movement' has had successes, to be sure – the movements towards egalitarian post-secondary institutions; women entering the trade union movement; the eventual battle to legalize abortion. Of particular note were rebellions inside Left organizations over a gendered division of labour. Gay liberation, or more commonly in the 21st century, queer liberation, has indeed brought bourgeois rights, from marriage to anti-discrimination statutes, to gay men and to a degree, lesbians, but there are many battles. People of colour, left-wing and transgender individuals are continuously written out of this history. Environmentalism has suffered serious defeat even as it gains more public support. Finally, the Civil Rights movement

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<sup>277</sup> Ehrenreich (1976).

<sup>278</sup> Drucker (2015).

was, like Perry Anderson's conception of the English revolution, incomplete – were it to be complete, there would not be the necessity of today's renewed anti-racist movement.<sup>279</sup>

This leaves us, then, with the 'organized Left'. Among self-consciously socialist activists and intellectuals, a route beyond the Scylla of Stalinism and the Charbydis of social democracy was the central aspect of the socialist project in the advanced capitalist countries. Hal Draper's *Two Souls of Socialism*, and its theorization of "socialism from below",<sup>280</sup> while associated with a particular tendency, those who had been followers of the heterodox Trotskyist Max Shachtman before his sharp right turn, expressed the general will of the more serious-minded elements of the organized Left. Contemporaneously, however, there were international cults of personality, notably around Che Guevara and Mao Tse-Tung. Of course, the two were counterposed to Stalinism or 'vanguardism', which, at least in the case of Mao, was not unrealistic insofar as he championed what has now been called the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution', which notably started amongst students protesting against censorship. As in China, a student movement developed in the United States, and this was to be the central factor in regards to how one can assess the consequences of the sixties Left. Hot-housed by Cold War Social Democrats as well as Shachtmanites, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) took on a life of its own. Yet even so, the SDS while anti-systemic, often articulated their concerns in a moralist discourse. As Draper pointed out "The new radicals are non-ideological in the sense that they refuse to, or are disinclined to, generalize their ideas and positions. They are inclined to substitute a moral approach – indeed a dogmatic moral approach – for political and social analysis as much as possible".<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Ness (2005); Gitlin (1993); Draper (1967); Ali (2006).

<sup>280</sup> Draper (1967).

<sup>281</sup> Draper (1965), 184.

## 6.2 Carrying Pictures of Chairman Mao

It was precisely this moral approach that was the Achilles heel or inherent vice of the sixties Left. With a retreat from class, politics took a moral turn, which was followed by a cognitive turn.<sup>282</sup> Political economy took a backseat to psychoanalysis and radical psychiatry amongst movement teach-ins. The “Dialectics of Liberation” conference that took place in fall 1967 featured no less than four radical psychiatrists, a number of moral philosophers, yet precisely one individual Marxist economist, Paul Sweezy, and one ‘on the ground’ activist, Stokely Carmichael.<sup>283</sup> In response to repeated psycho-dynamic flourishes, Sweezy and Carmichael did make the case for Marxist analysis and active, agential politics. Carmichael, in particular, is quite polemical and on-point in his critique of a concentration on psychological factors, while Sweezy is quick to place these factors in the context of what was still seen to be a post-war boom. Between 1946 and 1973, the U.S. experienced the longest sustained boom in its history; and the standard of living for most American workers improved throughout the fifties and early sixties, in manufacturing and the newly unionizing public sector.<sup>284</sup>

Yet neither Sweezy nor Carmichael speak of class struggle. Sweezy’s talk was in regards to the future of capitalism, in which he predicts a form of convergence between central planning

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<sup>282</sup> Occurring perhaps contemporaneously with the retreat from class, and to grow more exponentially in the seventies was a rise – particularly in the United States – in what are commonly known as ‘micro-sects’, identifying as Marxist-Leninist, mediated usually by either Maoism or Trotskyism, with the former seeing itself as the “New Communist Movement”. However ‘vanguardist’ and authoritarian, if not cult-like these formations may have been, they played a not insignificant role in keeping alive a class-struggle left, sent militants to work in heavy industry as well as the newly unionized public sector to ‘salt’ workplaces with activists as part of a ‘turn to industry’. The growth in particular, of what is often called ‘workerism’, oriented explicitly to workers and implicitly reversing the retreat from class with a retreat from other aspects of developing a fighting Left, notably hegemonic and cultural struggles. With some exception, these formations ostentatiously rejected the sixties counterculture. See Brenner/Brenner/Winslow (2010); Elbaum (2004); Jacobs (1997).

<sup>283</sup> As noted on page 97, and related to the previous footnote, it is not that political economy as a discipline did not flourish in the long sixties with the founding of URPE. It is that it did not have the same agitative appeal. One can, however, concede that, in a consequentialist sense, the political economists of the era had a longer term impact on Left thinking than many of the briefly fashionable psychoanalytic theorists.

<sup>284</sup> Cooper (2015).

and market mechanisms. The trick, implicitly, to Sweezy, is for the movements to influence and even get out ahead of what seems to be, to a Neo-Smithian Marxist<sup>285</sup>, an inexorable playing out of historical destiny, of the development of the productive forces.<sup>286</sup> Like Sweezy, Carmichael sees the prime historical agent to be the Third World. Indeed, he explicitly adopts a vulgarization of the ‘labour aristocracy’ thesis, in that the class struggle between bourgeois and proletariat had been displaced by one between the Third World and the capitalist countries, with the “Socialist bloc” standing somewhere along the sidelines. African-Americans, says Carmichael, are part of the Third World. In turn, the American working-class were objectively reactionary – here Carmichael seems to reference not just white but Black organized labour – in that they lived off of the expropriation of surplus from the Third World, be it the American south or central Africa.<sup>287</sup>

This hodgepodge of elements constituted a beginning for what increasingly became an American and, to a lesser degree, British fascination with Maoism. To be clear, we are neither referring to Mao’s considerable insight as a theorist and a revolutionary nor his contradictory and repressive rule of the Chinese state. To a certain degree, we are dealing with the already mentioned Andy Warhol’s Mao, an Anglophone simulacrum as much informed by Bakunin, yet we are also dealing with an emerging and still-influential political current within the North American black Left, those who would now identify as Post-Maoist. The former became the social base of both ultra-leftist ‘adventurist’ political approaches and right-turns that were, in a deep sense, inscribed in this particular brand of “plebeian” Maoism. On the intellectual level, a

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<sup>285</sup> See Brenner (1977). for an assessment of Sweezy and his co-thinkers’ “Neo-Smithian” mode of analysis.

<sup>286</sup> It would be uncharitable to make the claim that this represents the totality of Sweezy’s worldview, but it is notable that this is how he framed how he spoke to a “Dialectics of Liberation” conference from what can be read as a teleological point of view.

<sup>287</sup> Cooper (2015).

milieu dominated by the likes of Sweezy and *Monthly Review* analysis of “monopoly capital”, this set in motion an implicit politics with an ‘underconsumptionist’ analysis of American capitalist society. As we shall see this was not unrelated to the development of a politics of reformism. If déclassé intellectuals were to play a role, it would be that of the Machiavellian counsels to the Black vanguard’s Medici. While losing the fetishistic orientation to Black Nationalism, this milieu would morph into those theorists of “populism” and “radical democracy” that divorces the socialist project from anti-capitalism. As Wood puts it, “In many if not most scenarios, the working class has taken its final exit, replaced by a plurality of agencies and struggles in the 'new social movements', and finally a shift from these movements to the 'politics of identity'. Agencies still attached to a broad emancipatory project have now given way to new forms of particularism or outright despair”.<sup>288</sup>

The latter became the social base of organized Black politics in municipalities, the prime movers of Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition.<sup>289</sup> The latter could be said to reflect, in a refracted sense, the development of class struggle within the emerging Black political coalition (in properly Maoist terms, a contradiction among the people) still led by sincere socialists like Bayard Rustin. Rustin, and even Martin Luther King’s compromises with the labour leadership, cold warriors through-and through and not without justification, explicitly stood against revolutionary approaches, whether socialist or nationalist.

To Wood, this political Zeitgeist “marked by a strong tendency to promote students and intellectuals to the vanguard of history, as the leading agents of human emancipation – perhaps through the medium of 'cultural revolution’”,<sup>290</sup> was beyond merely the aforementioned Third

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<sup>288</sup> Wood (1994), 23.

<sup>289</sup> Brenner (1985). Also see Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf (1983).

<sup>290</sup> Wood (1994), 30.

Worldist fashion. It was bound up in the sociology of the academy, as much of the professoriate as of the student radicals – a milieu that Wood and myself operate within. It was the temptation, as noted, of the philosopher-monarch, the Aristotle training Alexander or Machiavelli tutoring the Medicis. The revolutionary agents, in this brand of politics were without a doubt intellectuals, “at best acting in alliance with, or even on behalf of workers and/or peasants, and increasingly as autonomous revolutionary agents in their own right”.<sup>291</sup> The working class, through this lens, had been hegemonized by consumer capitalism and one dimensionality.

Wood’s account of the Maoist milieu begs for continuation, within the tradition of the social history of political thought. What was the specificity of the epoch that produced a flourishing of a theorization that anointed the student and the intellectual? In Neal Wood’s terms, what was the ‘ideal’ to which those on the Left, theorists and practitioners, attempted to schematize? In addition to this, what was it about the state of American society that militated towards this sense of substitutionism. Meiksins Wood points out that simultaneous to the theoretical retreat from class there was a wave of class-struggles – to which contribution was made by an early iteration of the International Socialists – happening in the United Kingdom, not to mention the general strikes in France and Hot Autumn in Italy. The great rank and file rebellion in the United States was to take place (and be defeated) in the seventies, but it is true that in the United States, save for some pockets of militancy, there was a tendency towards cautious reformism, not unlike today’s business unionism.<sup>292</sup>

One thing that the American Left has yet to adequately come to terms with was the class basis of labour’s embrace of anti-communism. Wood has noted that the Left has often critiqued the working class “as it really exists” as economistic or, in Lenin’s terms having “trade union

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<sup>291</sup> Wood (1986), 33.

<sup>292</sup> Brenner, A./Brenner, R./Winslow, C. (2010); Moody (1997).

consciousness”.<sup>293</sup> This was extended, as has been seen in theories of labour aristocracy, which are as empirically unverifiable as they are politically suspect. In simple material terms, the American working class had never been better off, indeed at that time they were the highest paid proletariat in human history, and indeed the welfare state built by Roosevelt’s New Deal would survive presidents, congresses and senates from both political parties. Especially given the purging of communists, Trotskyists, anarchists and other anti-capitalists from positions of influence within labour – those who’d earned their influence as organizers, not as theoreticians – workers did not meet anti-capitalists on the shop floor. Instead, their impression of ‘communism’ was a system, where, in real terms, the working class had far less power. In addition to this, East European workers did not have the social or political rights that had been won over a century of struggle by the American working class – bastions of workers in American manufacturing came from East European backgrounds and had seen their countries go up behind the Iron Curtain.

To contextualize this anti-communism and conservatism is not to endorse it, but to problematize the standard accounts, offered at the time by Marcuse, Carmichael, Sweezy and others, that match up to the labour aristocracy account. In turn, it is also to problematize accounts that argue that workers may well have been conservative, but were mistaken. The truth is, the American welfare-warfare state brought the goods. As Phil Ochs sang about labour leaders bemoaning the closing of missile plants,<sup>294</sup> the left was not thinking through these questions and building alliances with manufacturing workers to advocate for conversion and expropriation, as is starting to happen between environmentalists and workers in fossil fuel industries. Short of Left alternatives, anti-communism with expanded social rights was not merely an idealistic credo but it ‘made sense’. This was an era in which proto-neocons like Daniel Bell were proclaiming

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<sup>293</sup> Wood (1994); Wood (1995); Lenin (1901); Lih (2010).

<sup>294</sup> Ochs (1964).

the end of ideology.<sup>295</sup> It is not that he was onto something; rather, he was witnessing a society with relative labour peace due to historically specific factors. In turn, working class anti-communism was historically specific. It also was a dividing line between the emerging student movement and anti-communist socialists in the labour movement.

### **6.3 Kaleidoscope Eyes**

Irving Howe was one of the old socialist left who had been, from the start, skeptical of the New Left and its lifestyle politics. Though not without his own blind spots, Howe's analysis of the era rings far more true than the pulpy "movement memoirs" that read like true crime Bonnie and Clyde epics. Howe rebuffed collaboration with the New Left (predicting in 1970 that the rise of the ultra-Left would lead to the election of Ronald Reagan) and was particularly caustic in regards to SDS. An apocryphal tale has him being harangued by a young student for his insufficient support of the movement, and for not being a revolutionary. "I've been a revolutionary my entire life", said Howe, "and in a decade, you'll be a dentist".<sup>296</sup> Howe's line may be humorous, but it contains a large amount of truth – though certainly there are socialist dentists out there. Having lived through American Trotskyism since the thirties, Howe had a suspicion of mass politics, indeed, he was of the generation that, against Proletkult enthusiasm for 'proletarian art', took on an approach to aesthetics redolent of Trotsky. Most notably, he rejected what would become the hermeneutic style of reading literature (Howe was always an opponent of the term 'text').

Howe was also of the generation that to be anti-Stalinist was not yet to be seen, as he was by some, as a 'State Department Socialist' or apologist for American power. Indeed, Howe and

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<sup>295</sup> Bell (1959).

<sup>296</sup> Karp (2013).



his generation of anti-Stalinist socialists came of age in the late thirties, and were the rare principled opponents of the Popular Front. Their milieu made a pact with the CIA (whose precursor had employed Paul Baran and Herbert Marcuse) to disrupt Soviet fronts, their logic for embarking upon a Cultural Cold War was that it was a battle for the Left, and if Trotskyists and anarchists received covert support, so be it.<sup>297</sup> This, however, was a sticking point in the relationship between Howe and his milieu (including Shachtman, Draper and Michael Harrington), and the emerging student Left. Anti-communism, to this new Left, was antiquated. Thoroughly opposing communism or even explicitly revolutionary politics, the SDS's founding Port Huron statement, essentially a social democratic document written at a gathering of young socialists through the AFL-CIO and Anti-Communist backed League for Industrial Democracy, criticized Anti-Communism as a guiding ideology:

An unreasoning anti-communism has become a major social problem for those who want to construct a more democratic America. McCarthyism and other forms of exaggerated and conservative anti-communism seriously weaken democratic institutions and spawn movements contrary to the interests of basic freedoms and peace. ...Even many liberals and socialists share static and repetitious participation in the anti-communist crusade and often discourage tentative, inquiring discussion about "the Russian question" within their ranks – often by employing "stalinist", "stalinoid", "trotskyite" and other epithets in an oversimplifying way to discredit opposition.<sup>298</sup>

The statement, was however, anti-communist itself, yet in keeping with the common-sense anti-communism mentioned in the previous section:

As democrats we are in basic opposition to the communist system. The Soviet Union, as a system, rests on the total suppression of organized opposition...The Communist Party has equated falsely the "triumph of true socialism" with centralized bureaucracy. The Soviet state lacks independent labor organizations and other liberties...The communist movement has failed, in every sense, to achieve its stated intentions of leading a worldwide movement for human emancipation.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Saunders (2013).

<sup>298</sup> Haydn et. al (1961).

<sup>299</sup> Haydn et. al (1961).

It is worth noting that the SDS's opposition to communism existed alongside, and was to a degree quite similar, to its opposition to McCarthyism. With this said, the reference to reflexive anti-communism or 'Stalinophobia' among the anti-Stalinist socialists hit a bit close to home for the older generation, who had cut its teeth fighting 'Stalinoids' in the labour movement, those old enough to remember the Stalinist support of anti-strike legislation in World War II, or their backing of the internment of Japanese-Americans. Howe in particular, correctly saw the seed of adventurism, not so much in the original statement's 'anti-anticommunism' but in its moralist tone. As well, not unlike Louis Althusser's famous critiques of "humanism" and the young Marx, Howe saw the emphasis on human emancipation and the self-consciously upper middle-class tone of the student movement to have excised class struggle from the socialist project.<sup>300</sup> This milieu, however, did play a prominent role in what was to be the first great challenge of the student movement, after civil rights and stopping Goldwater had taken up most of their first few years of existence. The Free Speech Movement (FSM) at Berkeley, however, taken up by the SDS, was primarily a project of Draper's International Socialist Club, later to morph into the International Socialists. Seemingly archaic, the FSM may well have had the most profound impact on the expression of radical politics in the sixties, in the United States and beyond. It was the Vietnam War, as much as anything else, that put the SDS in the limelight. It is not, as we will see, that they were the prime mover in organizing against the war. Indeed, it was, as noted, pacifists and small groups of Trotskyists who had put together the first demonstrations against the war. At this demonstration, however, SDS president Paul Potter gave a speech that doesn't quite live up to its paradigmatic legend. Casting the war as immoral and evil and genuflecting

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<sup>300</sup> Gitlin (1993); Elbaum (2004).

towards anti-communism, Potter comes off as nothing so much as a confused young activist who has read a lot of Noam Chomsky and C. Wright Mills.

We must name that system. We must name it, describe it, analyze it, understand it and change it. For it is only when that system is changed and brought under control that there can be any hope for stopping the forces that create a war in Vietnam today or a murder in the South tomorrow or all the incalculable, innumerable more subtle atrocities that are worked on people all over – all the time...How do you stop a war then? If the war has its roots deep in the institutions of American society, how do you stop it? Do you march to Washington? Is that enough? Who will hear us? How can you make the decision makers hear us, insulated as they are, if they cannot hear the screams of a little girl burnt by napalm?<sup>301</sup>

The self-serious aspect of Potter's speech belies an admitted lack of concrete analysis.

Potter quite literally, begs the question, in that the system itself is not named. As well, there is not a mention of socialism or capitalism, and more than a little bit of genuflection towards anti-communism. Whether this was strategic, meant to 'win over' those who had imbibed anti-communist 'common sense' is an open question. As the Vietnam war raged along with the 'war at home' of demonstrations, "Singing songs, and carryin' signs, mostly saying hooray for our side",<sup>302</sup> SDS actually developed an analysis that was as heroic as it was hubristic. Influenced in no small part by a paradoxically workerist Maoist sect, Progressive Labour, that had been 'burrowing' inside of SDS, 1967 saw a sharp Left turn for the SDS in both theory and practice.

On the one hand, this meant concretely developing draft resistance on a day-to-day level, even developing what amounted to a sort of underground railroad type operation for soldiers who had gone AWOL as well as draftees, to either live 'underground' among the hippie counterculture or go to Canada, Scandinavia or Allende's Chile. On the other, it led to an overestimation of the student movement's Left within the overall balance of forces. "We are going to make clear In the next few years both to the government and the radical movement that

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<sup>301</sup> Potter (1966).

<sup>302</sup> Buffalo Springfield (1967), "For What its Worth".

the New Left – and I mean SDS, SNCC, some ghetto groups and a few other organizations – is definitely where it is at in American left-wing politics,”<sup>303</sup> said an outgoing national secretary at the 1967 convention, described, with charming typos and grammatical errors, in the internal bulletin, as such, replete with attempted encounters with the soundtrack to its constituency.

WITH SERGEANT PEPPER'S Lonely Hearts Club Band providing the spiritual cadence, Students for a Democratic Society is quick-marching to the political left. At its sixth annual convention here June 25-30, the nation's largest radical student organization embarked on a collision course with the United States government..... An SDS convention is like reading Chairman Mao through kaleidoscope eyes. The words hop, skip and jump but patterns ultimately emerge strong and clear, if somewhat altered and stylistically unique. The pattern: Left-liberal politics—New Politics—is out, hardly worth discussion in fact. Resistance is in. SDS, with 250 chapters and about 30,000 national and local members, is not yet a revolutionary organization, but that is the direction in which it now seems headed.<sup>304</sup>

The bulletin was making reference to a ‘New Politics’ initiative that had been genuinely gaining ground amongst SDS members, and indeed among much of the broader socialist Left. Some of this milieu found themselves suddenly supporting Democratic candidates in 1968, the “peace candidacies” of Eugene McCarthy or Robert F. Kennedy. After the Democratic convention in Chicago 1968, in which police mercilessly attacked peace activists while inside, the party backroom machine-style engineered a candidacy for anti-communist labour stalwart Hubert Humphrey, reinforcing, in the eyes of the New Politics milieu the apparently reactionary quality of ‘Big Labour’. The initiative aimed at democratising the party, and increasing the power of democratically elected delegates, that is to say, democratizing the party itself. Indeed, on its own entryist terms, New Politics succeeded in setting in motion a chain of events that would lead to the party adopting a platform calling for full-employment. Yet, as political scientist Adam Hilton points out, they were subject to outright sabotage from within and beyond

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<sup>303</sup> G. Calvert, quoted by Smith (1967).

<sup>304</sup> Smith (1967), 19. I have retained the spelling and grammatical mistakes of the original.

the party.<sup>305</sup> Notably much of this sabotage was undertaken by the labour bureaucracy, yet at the same time the initiative had brought more rank and file labour activists into the party, if for only a brief period, than had been involved since the thirties.<sup>306</sup>

Thus, it can be seen that however hubristic the SDS's far-Left happened to be in 1967, it at least had the foresight to avoid dead-end engagement with the machine. The dialectical dreidel turned after the events of 1968, and the hubris morphed into outright ultra-leftism in its simplest 'infantile disorder' sort of sense. There had always been a sense of substitutionism amongst the academic Left, and there still is in 2017. The turn taken went well beyond substitutionism to a sort of acid-Gueverrianism, in the form of what became known as the Weather Underground. Their foundational statement, "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows", quoting Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues", in a 1969 summer bulletin of SDS, contained a very un-nuanced analysis of the conjuncture, redolent of a less sophisticated version of the aforementioned arguments by Sweezy and Carmichael. Yet in what amounts to an irresoluble contradiction, they also offer quite a sophisticated analysis of the breadth of the working class in the United States at the time, a sort of "class-fraction" analysis of the 'links on the chain.'<sup>307</sup>

Young people in the US are part of the working class. Although not yet employed, young people whose parents sell their labor power for wages, and more important who themselves expect to do the same in the future—or go into the army or be unemployed—are undeniably members of the working class. Most kids are well aware of what class they are in, even though they may not be very scientific about it. So our analysis assumes from the beginning that youth struggles are, by and large, working-class struggles.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Hilton (2016), 101-110.

<sup>306</sup> Hilton (2016), 101-110.

<sup>307</sup> See Jacobs (1997); Wood (1986).

<sup>308</sup> Asby, Ayers et. Al (1969).

Led by what they call a ‘Black Vanguard’ tailed by the ‘youth’, the broader working class had an historic task set out for it. This was to lead a Marxist-Leninist party in the Maoist mold, but in a context seemingly ripped straight out of pre-World War I Russia, a clandestine party with effective secrecy and active cadres and centralized leadership. They offer this as the only option after making a strong case as to the repressive quality of the American state and society domestically. They also inveigh against reformism, calling for schools to be closed, not reformed – indeed, there is a subtle neoliberalism to their anti-state politics. Overall, it is not that their analysis of the conjuncture was incorrect – indeed, save some rhetoric, it is far more astute than those academics decried by Carmichael. It is that there is, from the Port Huron Statement all the way to the Weather Underground, a dichotomy between electoral reformism on the one hand, and insurrection on the 1917 model on the other. One is reminded of Leo Panitch’s distinction between socialists who are revolutionaries and revolutionaries who are socialists.<sup>309</sup> Yet there were alternatives, as was found on the other side of the Atlantic, in which the New Left’s failure was not so extreme, and its encounter with popular culture more astute.

#### **6.4 Killed the Czar and His Ministers**

“The work that lies before us at present is to make Socialists, to cover the country with a network of associations composed of men who feel their antagonism to the dominant classes, and have no temptation to waste their time in the thousand follies of party politics”. – Edmund Morris<sup>310</sup>

The UK, unlike the US, had a claim to have had a genuine socialist movement, an active trade union culture and a labour party. No such imaginary simulacra of ‘middle class’ existed

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<sup>309</sup> Panitch (2001).

<sup>310</sup> Morris (1906). quoted in E.P. Thompson (1976), 83.

amongst the English in particular, one was either upstairs or downstairs, and this lack of ‘bourgeois consciousness’ was what led Perry Anderson to hypothesize the incomplete quality of the English Revolution. Like the US, a New Left had started to develop in the UK in the late fifties, primarily – but not completely – in the intellectual realm. As Wood puts it, “The British New Left was in some important respects distinctive, especially because here the radicalism of the sixties...was directly connected to, and continuous from, an earlier and rather different ‘New Left’”.<sup>311</sup> This was a concatenation of independent Marxists, those who had moved subtly towards a heterodox Trotskyism, and those who had been members of the Communist Party of Great Britain but left over the oppression of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, firmed solid intellectual grounds for theoretical ferment.<sup>312</sup> The entire notion and concept of a *New Left* was borne out of the merging of two journals, the *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*, to become one, the *New Left Review*. Its founding statement, by Stuart Hall, had some lofty goals in an attempt to encounter the youth culture on shared terms:

The purpose of discussing the cinema or teen-age culture in NLR is not to show that, in some modish way, we are keeping up with the times. These are directly relevant to the imaginative resistances of people who have to live within capitalism—the growing points of social discontent, the projections of deeply-felt needs. Our experience of life today is so extraordinarily fragmented. The task of socialism is to meet people where they are, where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, nauseated... the traditional task of socialist analysis will still remain. The anatomy of power, the relationship of business to politics, the role of ideology, the analysis of transitional programmes and demands, are all central to that discussion of the state, without which there can be no clarity, either of theory or practice....<sup>313</sup>

Hall and the *New Left Review* called for the formation of Left clubs:

We shall—in Left Clubs or Tribune Societies, informal groups and university clubs—be parallel to, rather than competing with, existing organisations of the Labour Movement: free where they are tied, maintaining a direct link with similar movements and tendencies in other countries. The Left Clubs, and other similar centres with whom we want to

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<sup>311</sup> Wood (1994). 24.

<sup>312</sup> Chun (1993).

<sup>313</sup> Hall (1960), 1.

maintain informal links, will not look towards some centre for directives and guidance, whence the tables of the Socialist Law will be dispensed, but press in upon the centre with their own initiatives. These ought to be, moreover, centres of socialist activity, where a demonstration of socialism can be made, and where the fragmentary sense of community and solidarity, which used to be part of the socialist movement, can be pieced together again.<sup>314</sup>

These lofty goals butted up against a younger generation, with which the founding generation at *NLR* struggled with for control of the journal. The Left Clubs never took off, though fledgling groups like the nascent International Socialists held reading groups around *NLR* as well as *Monthly Review*, *Science and Society* and other Marxist journals. While the founders, the so-called “First New Left” were tied to the labour movement and, in particular, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the newer generation was far more eclectic. The shift towards continental theory and the retreat from class began with the non-Communist Castro supporter C. Wright Mills’ “Letter to the New Left” in which he explicitly encourages an abandonment of what he called the “labour metaphysic” of classical Marxism.<sup>315</sup> Though Mills was hardly alone among Marxists abandoning value theory, others, in particular those around *Monthly Review*, retained a class struggle stance.

This ‘second New Left’, led by Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn and Tom Nairn, among others, abhorred what it called the ‘populism’ of the original New Left, and explicitly oriented itself away from the movements of the time. As Greg Elliot points out, “The first New Left had regretted, and sought to bridge, the mutually injurious gulf between culture and politics, ‘theory’, and ‘practice’, intellectual and manual workers, their successors made, as it were, a virtue of necessity”.<sup>316</sup> A turn was taken towards continental theory, while politically they were all over the map, celebrating Fanon and Guevara while advocating critical support of the Labour Party!

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<sup>314</sup> Hall (1960), 2.

<sup>315</sup> Mills (1961), 18-23.

<sup>316</sup> Elliot (1994), 47, quoted by Wood (1994), 27.



While they did publish a great deal of influential critical political economy and engaged with the growing heterodox Trotskyist groups, notably the International Socialists and International Marxist Group, they, in the words of one of their early theoreticians, Peter Sedgwick, consciously severed the “umbilical cord” that tied them to “extra-intellectual” activity, that is to say, the really-existing movements.<sup>317</sup> While never delving into ultra-left action as in the United States, they adopted a Third Worldism refracted through Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution.<sup>318</sup>

Wood critiques, in this milieu, “an emphasis on the autonomy of ideological struggle and the leading role of intellectuals, in default of the working class”.<sup>319</sup> This is a truism, but Wood’s comparative point between the first and second New Left opens up a broader question as to whether the ‘original’ New Left was not guilty of the same praxis. The founding milieu, notably Ralph Miliband, started the *Socialist Register*, which, while maintaining more solid ties with Labour movement intellectuals, took on an ‘instructive’ tone towards the working class. The leading role of intellectuals, as it were, in this case, was in regards to registering as a socialist and thus having the ability to comment from the sidelines. Avoiding vulgar Third Worldism, the original *Socialist Register*, while certainly having a ‘line’ of sorts, definitely attempted to spark discussion across existing and emergent tendencies, ‘new’ and ‘old’. It is certainly the case that E.P. Thompson, in particular, bested Perry Anderson in the debate between the two journals on the character of the development of English capitalism. Anderson’s critique of Thompson as “voluntaristic” was apt, however, and the answer to the voluntarism that constituted the making of the English Working Class was for intellectuals to lead that class. There was nothing

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<sup>317</sup> Sedgwick (1964), 148-149, quoted by Wood (1994), 30.

<sup>318</sup> Elliot (2007) quoted by Wood.

<sup>319</sup> Wood (1994), 30.

condescending about the practices of these circles, and indeed they did foundational work in adult education. Yet it did reflect a sense in which class struggle perspectives had to come to the working class through some form of mediation.

Further left, however, more self-consciously ‘revolutionary socialist’ organizations were percolating. The Fourth International had been founded by Leon Trotsky and his supporters in the Left Opposition in 1938, and indeed, the aforementioned Howe and Shachtman had been close to Trotsky, visiting him in Mexico before his assassination at the hands of the GRU. At a time of the official Communist movements contortions in the face of Soviet foreign policy, Trotskyists took a much more principled approach to radical political activism, in particular their opposition to anti-strike legislation during the second world war.<sup>320</sup> It is now common-sense cliché that Trotskyism is prone to splits, but these splits are often portrayed in a joking fashion, when they were predicated upon matters of principle – it was argued that how one conceived the Soviet Union, for example, would in turn, affect political strategy in a given conjuncture.

Trotskyism in the UK during the era of the New Left attracted some of the most cogent minds. The International Marxist Group (IMG), a branch of the Ernest Mandel led Fourth International, was prominent in the UK as well as Canada. One of its notable early recruits, Tariq Ali, who was close to *New Left Review*, in turn recruited Robin Blackburn and Perry Anderson. Throughout the seventies, quite a few members of the editorial board of the *New Left Review* were affiliated to the Fourth International.<sup>321</sup> Forming a backbone of the antiwar movement, the IMG’s Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, and Russell Tribunal, in which a panel that included Bertrand Russell investigated US war crimes, was perhaps the most effective pedagogical tool that the Vietnamese Revolution had outside of Vietnam itself. This type of activism brought left-

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<sup>320</sup> Cannon (2002).

<sup>321</sup> Ali (2005).

leaning cultural producers, notably Keith Richards, Mick Jagger and John Lennon, into the orbit of the IMG and Lennon was for a while a party activist, even doing newspaper sales. This foreshadowed the Left-backed “Rock against Racism” initiatives of the 80s, a rare successful encounter between the far Left and rock music, which brought aboard the Clash, Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band, the Police and others.

By the early seventies, even by Ali’s own accounts, the IMG had been eclipsed by the International Socialists.<sup>322</sup> While the IMG had flirted with a sort of adventurist politics, not dissimilar to US Maoism, they never quite degenerated as did the American (or German) far Left. Part of what influenced their sense of adventurism was a romantic admiration of Che Guevara. To the dismay of the Soviet Union, Fourth International theoretician Ernest Mandel – along with Paul Sweezy – had been advisors to Che Guevara, and for a time, Trotskyism, almost as a whole, embraced the cult of Che.<sup>323</sup> It was the IS, however, that had inserted itself into a prominent position during a late sixties strike wave, at a time when the student Left, even in class-conscious Great Britain, had taken part in the international retreat from class. The IS attracted prominent – or soon to be prominent – intellectuals, notably Terry Eagleton, who himself was recruited by Christopher Hitchens. Internationally renowned theorist CLR James was an informal advisor.

The IS had formed initially out of a loose amalgamation of the Palestinian Jewish intellectual Tony Cliff (Ygal Gluckstien)’s Socialist Review Group, which had been expelled from the Fourth International for taking a ‘Third Camp’ (‘neither Washington nor Moscow’) position, with those in the United States, around Max Shachtman, who’d also been expelled. While the Shachtmanites and the Cliffites disagreed on the nature of the Soviet Union – the

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<sup>322</sup> See Hitchens (2010).

<sup>323</sup> Lowy (1975).

former correctly calling it bureaucratic collectivist, the latter somewhat tendentially declaring it 'state capitalist'. Both held to a position that the Soviet Union and its satellites – even Cuba and Yugoslavia – were not 'degenerated workers states' but states with a unique and as-yet categorized set of social property relations. While by no means ultra-Left in their practice, they did develop relationships with milieus now thought to be ultra-Left, in particular, Italian Operaismo and what is now referred to variously as autonomism or left-communism.<sup>324</sup>

It is notable that the Marxist theorist who has likely done the most to examine encounters between culture and revolutionary politics, Terry Eagleton, came out of the International Socialists. Through Eagleton, as well as the Fourth International's Michael Lowy, there was a revival in interest in Walter Benjamin from a Marxist perspective, as compared to the depoliticized and/or theological approaches respectively championed by Hannah Arendt and the Kaballist Gershom Scholem. With an emphasis on the integrality of personal and collective transformation, on a purely theoretical level, Benjamin's work has the best 'fit' with how the rock music counterculture saw itself. In revisiting the work of Benjamin, Ernst Bloch and other forgotten Marxist aesthetes, albeit refracted through a fashionable Althusserian style, Eagleton helps illuminate the vicissitudes of the Missed Encounter between the far Left and rock music in the period under analysis.<sup>325</sup> It is at this point, given that we have seen an explication of the Missed Encounter, that we will finally turn to three case studies, engaging in more detail in the social history of cultural production.

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<sup>324</sup> See Negri (2003).

<sup>325</sup> Eagleton (2012).

## Part II: Case Studies

### Chapter 7

#### Jehovah's Favorite Choir

##### 7.1 Saint of Circumstance

The Grateful Dead, as legend has it, were so-named due to their original name, the Warlocks, being used by another garage-rock band. High on an exotic psychedelic drug, DMT, guitarist Jerry Garcia intentionally ruffled through the pages of bass-player Phil Lesh's copy of a dictionary of mythology.<sup>326</sup> His finger landed on the entry for a genre of folk-tale known as Grateful Dead. With some variation, the story has a traveller finding the corpse of a man, often one unable to afford a proper burial. Paying for the dead man's burial, the traveller finds himself joined by a companion, either in animal or human form, who acts as 'the grateful dead', by saving the traveller's life. Whether true or not, this folkloric wisdom, as much predicated upon (in an indirect but sumptuous sense) the new class-society that would inform such a story as it was by mystical Americana, is a dominant theme in the Grateful Dead, and in particular lyricist/poet Robert Hunter's lyrics. Even moreso, it stands as a metaphor for the Grateful Dead and their disciple's purpose in American capitalist society and the culture industry, to embody and attempt to transcend the contradictions by overlapping and traversing the interstices. While an expressive totality, the Grateful Dead's art and culture is redolent with mystery, almost as if it was a secret society.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Richardson (2014), 56.

<sup>327</sup> Browne (2015); Lesh (2005); Kreutzman (2015).

As noted in a chapter five, no band embodies the contradictions of the long sixties, aesthetically, politically and sonically, as well as the Grateful Dead. They were both a band truly steeped in American folk traditions, ballads, country/western, the blues and bluegrass, and a band steeped in experimentalism and the avant-garde, Schoenberg, McCoy Tyner, Varese. They were a band that revelled in the culture of the Bay Area, they were *Life Magazine* photo stars as ‘hippies’; yet they were never quite as practically apolitical, let alone ‘lovey-dovey’ as the ‘hippie’ culture was portrayed, at least at first. They were socially and politically close to the Bay Area far Left, whether Maoist or anarchist or Black Panther, while being foundationally, albeit unwittingly, influenced by CIA LSD experiments, and in general, held an almost Popular-Frontist view of Americana – and indeed three had been in the US military, one while writing lyrics for the band.<sup>328</sup> Throughout their career they made friends in all sorts of mysterious circles, from the Left-wing underground to Saudi princes, from Latin American revolutionaries to the US State Department.<sup>329</sup>

There is so much to the Grateful Dead’s music that there is actually a scholarly field and academic conferences on their work, but much of it consists in hagiography and lapses into a sort of liberal theology, mistaking the surface phenomena for its core meaning, and anthropomorphizing sound in a sense that assumes what needs to be explained. The movement is not without its musicological insights but the following chapter will be less of an engagement with the existing literature and more a direct analysis of the Grateful Dead’s art in the context of the long sixties and their aftermath. Beginning with an engagement with the manifold versions of the songs “Dark Star” and “Eyes of the World” and the aesthetics and politics of

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<sup>328</sup> Brightman (1998), Browne (2014), Richardson (2015) and Kreutzman (2015) are four of my primary reference points for Grateful Dead historiography and ‘factoids’.

<sup>329</sup> Brightman (1998), Browne (2014).

improvisation, there will be an engagement with the equally salient song-craft of the Dead. Following this, both songs will be contextualized as a response to and an implicit engagement with the social movements of which the Grateful Dead always had one foot in and one foot out. The engagement will break one of the overall rules of this project, as music that was written and performed as recently as 2016 and as long ago as 1965 will be involved.

One of the consciously avant-garde purposes to the Grateful Dead's art is a dialectic of contemporaneity and differentiation. To aficionados intimately familiar with their voluminous output, time flattens in an affective sense. A multidimensional form of 'reading history backwards' thus informs the vantage point operationalized in this chapter. This multidimensionality takes the form of equal measure formal and lyrical analysis, as the two, in Grateful Dead form, are inextricably intertwined. Yet form is examined in the same sense as lyrics, given its inseparability from content. This procedure also situates itself from a future vantage point, while Jerry Garcia is dead and the years of the formal Grateful Dead are more than twenty years over, the aesthetic project – one with real political undertones – embarked upon by the Grateful Dead is not yet over. This open and expressive quality brings a fluidity to the thematically and configurationally organized excursions to follow. In doing so, we examine the Grateful Dead as embodying the Missed Encounter as both exemplar and exception, oscillating within the historical dialectic of lockstep and swerve, consummation and failure. This is exemplified in that their claims to not being political are as common as their common-sense support of the social movements of the San Francisco Bay area. So common-sense was this radical analysis that, without conscious knowledge, they explicitly brought the theme of class back into American music's lyrical content, particularly on *Workingman's Dead*. Thompson's great wave was something that, in a very real sense, lived on in the Grateful Dead's music and its

still-existent imagined community. Unlike the disintegration that took place on the Left, the Dead ‘kept on trucking’. They didn’t miss an encounter with the Left, the Left missed an encounter with them.

## 7.2 The Transitive Nightfall of Diamonds

Gilles Deleuze’s *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* brings to mind a piece such as the Grateful Dead’s “[Dark Star](#)”, in which a simple rhythm and melody gradually decomposes, but is sometimes still discernible from one of five instruments, for upwards of twenty minutes.<sup>330</sup> We begin with formless music, “space” as it has been termed in the Grateful Dead lexicon, “whose complete semblance is accepted and imitated by painting”.<sup>331</sup> Six instruments (two guitars, a bass guitar, an organ and two sets of trap drums) are tangential relations; the more contradictory they sound, the more complimentary the audience finds them. A pattern begins to emerge after a few minutes, perhaps a trace of a 4/4 rhythm coming from one set of trap drums penetrating a fainter 6/8 rhythm from another, the bass physically discernible as a third rhythm. Still no melody, and as soon as one seems to emerge, we have the return of the chaos, space.

As Deleuze writes of Francis Bacon, “there are no feelings” in space, “there are nothing but affects, that is ‘sensations’ and ‘instincts’... sensation is what determines instinct at a particular moment, just as instinct is the passage from one sensation to another”.<sup>332</sup> It is instinct, between the earth and sky, band and audience and, as the phrase goes “the music that plays the band” that will cause pattern recognitions in the space that may metamorphosize from sensation to instinct (in space) to feeling – comfort, familiarity and indeed relishing of the sublime, that

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<sup>330</sup> Deleuze (2003); The Grateful Dead (1968), “Dark Star”.

<sup>331</sup> Hegel (2004), 124.

<sup>332</sup> Deleuze (2003), 35.



comes with the entrance, finally, of melody. While feeling is at the forefront, essential sensation is never fully subsumed by visible feeling, they exist contemporaneously. Poetry sung melodically enters the imagistic field:

Dark star crashes, pouring its light into ashes.  
Reason tatters, the forces tear loose from the axis.  
Searchlight casting for faults in the clouds of delusion.  
Shall we go, you and I while we can  
Through the transitive nightfall of diamonds?<sup>333</sup>

The cross-sensual imagistic fragments, in words and sounds combines the Hegelian conception of music “negating and idealizing into the individual isolation of a single point, the indifferent externality of space” with poetry as “a sound develops into the Word... whose import is to indicate ideas and notions... the universal art of the mind”.<sup>334</sup> We can hear space somewhere between thought and expression, but it develops into discursive melodic vocalizing which articulates the sacred image in which “reason tatters” and a “nightfall of diamonds” is the backdrop for an investigation of “faults in the clouds of delusion”.<sup>335</sup>

These images are heard words and sounds, but imagistically they are also seen through an operation of synaesthesia. Deleuze has pointed out that “to hystericize music, we would have to reintroduce colors, passing through a rudimentary or refined system of correspondence between sounds and colors”.<sup>336</sup> Deleuze is describing synaesthesia, that is to say, for sound to be rendered visible. While much of the voluminous neuroscientific research on synaesthesia posits somewhat of an ‘ideal type’ of synaesthete, it does seem that specific image relations can have a synaesthetic essence discernible to observing agents who allow their receptors to be opened. In

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<sup>333</sup> Grateful Dead (1968), “Dark Star”.

<sup>334</sup> Hegel (2004), 234 to 236.

<sup>335</sup> Grateful Dead (1968), “Dark Star”.

<sup>336</sup> Deleuze (2003), 47.

the case of the Grateful Dead and those within the configuration of psychedelic music, the receptors or ‘doors of perception’ have been opened by way of use of psychedelic drugs, such as LSD or psilocybin. Indeed, the Grateful Dead, rooted in the legendary acid tests, deliberately structured their concerts with the assumption that much of the audience had been dosed with LSD. The first of two ninety-minute sets was largely comprised of more evocative verse/chorus/verse songs, to ease the transition. The improvisation and space would come in the second set. Post-Grateful Dead bands, such as [Phish](#) or [Sonic Youth](#), continue in this tradition.

The power of these sensations and instincts returns us to the realm of the political by way of the demonstration of potentiality for democratic collective ecstasy. However seemingly removed from a rigidly defined politics, “collective ecstasy entered the colonialist European mind was stained with feelings of hostility, contempt and fear”.<sup>337</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich points out in reference to the discovery of ecstatic ritual of “savages or lower-class Europeans...the capacity for abandonment, for self-loss in the rhythms and emotions of the group was a defining feature of ‘savagery’”.<sup>338</sup> In referring to what can be correlated to Deleuze’s sensational/experiential model and indeed connecting it to the *Dionysian* Grateful Dead culture as well as political spectacle, Ehrenreich provides us with clues to what can be conceived as the ecstatic configuration, and its inherent revolutionary potentiality. From this standpoint, one can look back at the accusations of communism against rock music well into the sixties; the showing of Elvis Presley from waist up on the Ed Sullivan show ensuring that his gyrating crotch was invisible to the American den; the Stalinist banishment of Allan Ginsberg from the fermenting pre-Prague Spring Czechoslovakia; the banning of May Day rituals and invention of Labour

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<sup>337</sup> Ehrenreich (2006), 9.

<sup>338</sup> Ehrenreich (2006), 9.

Day.<sup>339</sup> The notion of ecstatic need not be confused with fully thought out ‘happiness’ or ‘contentment’. Indeed, the ecstatic experience can be jarring, even painful and confusing.

The ecstatic configuration of sensation is thereby a political configuration, “parcelling out the visible and invisible”,<sup>340</sup> and in doing so, mobilizing the masses. That this mobility can take different forms and different ostensible motivations rests on the same foundation that mobility is required, as such, to manifest violence to the capitalist metabolic order. Thus, the fascist spectacle of bodies moving as one is a rip-off of the communist spectacle, and indeed the revolutionary spectacle, going back to Robespierre’s cult of reason. The modern masses will not be moved, as Benjamin points out, by an individual painting or even the classical didacticism of Bertolt Brecht or John Sayles.

Under the sensational administration of the aesthetic regime of the arts, all-encompassing sensation can be a motor force of enjoyment as a political factor. In turn, producers of images, in committing an act of violence in which, to use Jean Luc Nancy’s terms “there is nothing to reveal, not even an abyss, and that the groundless is not the chasm of a conflagration but imminence infinitely suspended over itself,”<sup>341</sup> pre-emptively co-opt any reification by bypassing feeling and arriving first at sensation and instinct, in which feeling is imminent and potentially revolutionary. The extrinsic politics of this regime were best expressed in Perry Anderson’s connecting live rock music to communism. As with the Grateful Dead, self-loss could also be accompanied by self-definition in collectivity, to “wake now to find out that you are the eyes of the world”.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Ehrenreich (2006); Ginsberg (1956).

<sup>340</sup> Rancière (2004), 19.

<sup>341</sup> Nancy (2005), 26.

<sup>342</sup> Grateful Dead (1973), “Eyes of the World”.

### 7.3 Wake of the Flood

Along with “Dark Star”, “[Eyes of the World](#)” is the Grateful Dead’s improvisational masterpiece, yet it is in many ways its opposite, reflective of a different period and a different purpose, but travelling towards the same destination. While “Dark Star” would often emerge out of space, “Eyes” had a defined beginning, a few jazz-inflected sustained chords, with Bob Weir and Garcia weaving their guitars around each other in an instantly recognizable riff, followed by a very traditional, within-the-structure, but mellifluous guitar solo from Garcia. The odd juxtaposition of sustained notes and playing high up the fretboard, but in a minor key, adds a ‘touch of grey’, as it were, to this very elegant combination. After about ten minutes of this, the first verse comes in, and it is subtly reflective of the circumstances of the band in 1972.

Right outside this lazy summer home  
you don't have time to call your soul a critic, no  
Right outside the lazy gate of winter's summer home  
wondering where the nuthatch winters  
Wings a mile long just carried the bird away  
Wake up to find out  
that you are the eyes of the World  
but the heart has its beaches  
its homeland and thoughts of its own  
Wake now, discover that you  
are the song that the morning brings  
but the heart has its seasons  
its evenings and songs of its own.<sup>343</sup>

Robert Hunter is here having a clear-eyed, sober, but not demoralized glimpse at the totality whose sounds are distilled by the Grateful Dead. 1967’s “Dark Star” was meant to invite someone in, *onto the bus*, that was as much about social as it was cognitive or affective revolution. 1972’s “Eyes” addresses the listener first with tones of absolute mellifluity and then lyrics sung without any mannerism, and with more than a bit of a reverent tone. The culture of

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<sup>343</sup> Grateful Dead (1973), “Eyes of the World”.

the political and bohemian Left had no need to be self-critical. But it had to glimpse the essence of the present circumstances, and only in-so-doing, would become aware of its own latent capacities. Summer always has a winter and even if someone is individually the eyes of the world, experiencing historical time in the present tense, but allowing optimism, the morning always brings the song. The heart, the capacities hidden, discovered on Dark Star's journey into the unknown, has its own "homeland" and there is no doubt that Heine-steeped Hunter is drawing on the same *bildungsroman* as Ernst Bloch in deploying this pregnant phrase.<sup>344</sup> The heart, also doesn't temporally coincide with the self, the "eyes", it has its "evenings and songs of its own".

Following the first burst of lyrics, the band is driven by its rhythm section into an extended series of high-fretboard guitar solos, neither theatrical nor subtle, but sustained, like a church organ or a bugle. Each instrument, lead guitar, rhythm guitar, piano/organ, bass guitar and drums, occupies its own space in a sense that one can discern the negative space, the emptiness between instruments, if one listens right. Garcia could be playing high-fretboard triplet modal scales, while pianist Keith Godchaux could be playing a slightly off-kilter rhythm piano part, leaving Weir to vamp simpatico with drummer Bill Kreutzman. The effort, unlike the thicker "Dark Star" improvisation, was not led by Garcia, however, but by bass guitarist Lesh, the low tones creating a synesthetic topography over which the music travels through time as opposed to space. If space transcends time affectively, time can also transcend space. Syncopated effervescence differentiates their trance-inducement from polyrhythmic cacophony. The cacophony was there to show that the silver lining of the sixties had a touch of grey, while

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<sup>344</sup> See Bloch (2006); Boer (2014).

the effervescence shows that the defeat had in its presence a victory. And to the lyrics, after ten minutes or so, the lyrics return and speak for themselves.

There comes a redeemer  
and he slowly too fades away  
There follows a wagon behind him  
that's loaded with clay  
and the seeds that were silent  
all burst into bloom and decay  
The night comes so quiet  
and it's close on the heels of the day.<sup>345</sup>

This stanza transparently articulates the rebirth motif, the potential imminent within the “seeds that were silent” that could grow or die. This, coming after the fading away of a redeemer – the New Left, the canonical music of the time, through a Gnostic or Masonic lens. In the Gnostic creation myth, Sophia, the Aeon of wisdom creates what she thinks will be God but turns out to be a demiurge, Baal. Indeed, Sophia manifested the demiurge, and by extension, our known universe,<sup>346</sup> without the participation of the Grand Architect or the other aeons. Because he was conceived in ignorance the demiurge was damaged. He developed on his own not knowing about the Architect of Sophia. He thought this universe was everything and that he ruled it all. As the Gnostic scholar and Deadhead Doug Allaire points out, “...some people have that hidden spark of divinity and are destined to rise above this misshapen world, others don't have the spark but know about it and can almost get to heaven, while the rest are just of the earth – clay – and never will amount to anything”.<sup>347</sup> Thus the redeemer was redeeming nothing but dead matter without the spark, the capacity, to instantiate an encounter.

The Gnostic mythos has been an articulation of spiritual and temporal radicalism, arguably since the days of Pelagius's rivalry with St. Augustine, the Cathars, the Left-wing of the

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<sup>345</sup> Grateful Dead (1973), “Eyes of the World”.

<sup>346</sup> R.A. Wilson (1977).

<sup>347</sup> Allaire quoted in Dodd (2013).

English Revolution and the Freemasonic cadre of the ‘bourgeois revolutions’. As Marx pointed out, the Masons played at least as important a role as the communists in the Paris Commune,<sup>348</sup> and, to wit, those in radical Occultist circles played a role in early Marxist socialism.<sup>349</sup> Some of Lenin’s closest advisors, not to mention Parvus, the initial theorist of uneven and combined development, were Freemasons and those that explicitly believed that communist revolution was an instantiation of the redemption of the earth by divinity. This type of ‘spiritualism’, as it was called, was tolerated and even encouraged by others among Marxists, it was quite literally atheistic while theological about human practice. This spirit was readily apparent in the mythos of the sixties New Left, and it is no accident that its most sincere adherents came out of the era perhaps torn and frayed, but still in it for the long haul.<sup>350</sup>

In a later song, related thematically to “Eyes of the World”, Hunter writes, “If you get confused, just listen to the music play”,<sup>351</sup> and these words would often lead into a magnificent guitar solo. The consistency of music as having the capacity to both rise above and not merely soothe but challenge the sense of pervading defeat is echoed even in the late work of the Velvet Underground, where “all the protest kids”<sup>352</sup> had their lives saved by rock and roll, despite all the complications. Yet this was Benjaminian distraction on a higher level, to travel with one’s audience as outliers and outlaws of the American century, and to carve their own territory, one that has taken circuitous routes through a wide manner of American institutions, from the far Left to high-technology, from the political establishment to the military industrial complex. Yet

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<sup>348</sup> Landor (1871).

<sup>349</sup> Marot (2013); R.A. Wilson (1977).

<sup>350</sup> Marot (2013).

<sup>351</sup> Grateful Dead (1975), “Franklin’s Tower”.

<sup>352</sup> Velvet Underground (1970), “Sweet Jane”.

to truly follow the Gnostic wisdom of the Grateful Dead requires fidelity to the mythos of the Grateful Dead legend itself.

This Gnostic-atheistic consciousness is implicitly socialist, yet finds itself detached from socialist politics and a milieu devoid of joy. Of usually bourgeois or petit-bourgeois class background, this consciousness rejects ‘the system’ itself, perhaps due to the subtle effect that the feeling of criminalization is imparted on a teenaged consumer of cannabis. In continued existence, it subsists on participation in the informal and largely non-capitalist economy, from the strange new age world of tourmaline collectors to boutique marijuana, from organic farming co-operatives to decentralized computer programmer networks.<sup>353</sup> Often won over to libertarian politics for cultural reasons, this milieu, in 2016, were enormous supporters of socialist presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.<sup>354</sup> There is latent power in a collective entity that is not so much lead but ministered to by musicians, an entity often ignored or scoffed at by socialist politics, reduced to ‘cultural appropriators’ if they are white and dreadlocked, for example.

As will be seen, the general route taken by the Grateful Dead and Deadheads was one of the exit routes from the defeat of the New Left and Counterculture that managed to sustain itself. Routed in underground culture which was itself as much an epiphenomena of the radical Left’s network to protect war resisters and activists, as it was a growing informal network of pot growers, acid chemists, drug dealers, and such-like providing ‘movement jobs’, it kept the train on its tracks. Much of this had to do with, as we will now return, to the mythos of the Grateful Dead itself, the reciprocal inversion, the one helping the two helping the many, the grateful dead.

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<sup>353</sup> Obviously, these circles operated ‘within’ the capitalist economy, but, like, for example, the co-operative movement, they attempted to not replicate capitalist social relations in their own economic practices, to varying degrees of success. It can be argued that the ‘outlaw’ economy is far more ‘politically constituted’, albeit in an informal sense, than legally recognized capitalism. The political constitution of said relations is not a state, but a set of collective practices.

<sup>354</sup> Personal communication with Phish fans, a community I have been involved with since 1992. Phish were early adopters, if not coiners of the phrase “Feel the Bern” during a soundcheck in August 2015.



## 7.4 I'll Get Up and Fly Away

One of the most astounding pieces of songwriting produced by the Grateful Dead is “[Wharf Rat](#)”, debuted live in 1971, never recorded on a studio album but first appearing on LP on *Skulls and Roses* AKA *Skullfuck*, a 1971 double live album.<sup>355</sup> The narrator encounters a “blind and dirty” homeless person in the San Francisco Bay wharf. Having no change to spare, he agrees to listen to the man’s story. The man speaks of his lover, Pearly Baker, who he loves even more than wine. He’s spent most of his life incarcerated, “for some motherfucker’s crime”, and the rest he’s been drunk. The fantasy of he and his love “flying away”, however, encourages him that he’ll be “back on his feet someday”, even if he knows he’s not living right. While much of the song’s narrative is situated on a bed of a slow minor-key shuffle and sad-sounding guitar, the vow to change shifts entirely, to an even slower, organ-drenched gospel, which dissolves and transcends itself back into the song’s main structure and the wharf rat nervously stating that he knows his lover has been faithful. Perhaps somewhat dumbstruck, the narrator can do nothing but agree with the wharf rat’s contention that his lover, Pearly Baker, has been true to him and all is right with the world.

“Wharf Rat” is reflective of the overall outlook not merely of the Grateful Dead, and not merely of the broader musical/hippy counterculture, but indeed of the Bay Area far left itself. In the fall and winter of 1968/1969, the fortunes of the Left seemed to be dissipating to those within the cultural vanguard. Cointelpro was readily apparent, that is to say, the complex web of direct actions undertaken by the FBI and CIA to provoke division and gather intelligence in regards to the far Left. Of note was the use of drugs to drive political wedges between and within

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<sup>355</sup> Grateful Dead (1971), “Wharf Rat”. The album itself was released eponymously after being disallowed from using the more ribald title of *Skullfuck*, but forever known to fans, and later reissued under the name of *Skulls and Roses*.

organizations. The police had started an assassination and repression campaign against the Black Panther Party, not long after the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the collapse of the effort by a significant part of the labour-Left to move the mainstream Democratic party in a progressive direction by the agency of Eugene (“Stay clean for Gene”) McCarthy. Antiwar sentiment among the general public was increasing, but this was reflective less of the successes (though not insignificant) of the Left-wing antiwar movement, but than several institutions, big business and the media, turning against the war that most could see had already been lost.

This translated musically into a gradual but pronounced appreciation of a country/blues form, what was later called ‘roots’ or ‘Americana’. Sonic chaos was still there, but it was punctuated by sonic mourning and sonic anger, both more rooted in traditional song and rhythmic structure. The Dead’s Bay Area comrades, Jefferson Airplane, as noted elsewhere, wrote the most traditionally political songs within this new post-psychedelic aesthetic, and for many young people, their easy-to-understand boogie rock songs were the first call for revolution they’d ever heard. Bob Dylan, perhaps the originator of this move with his famously bootlegged *Basement Tapes* with the Band, also was a harbinger. Both were elliptical but clear about a sense of foreboding, of loss but of a will to fight with the stakes being higher than previously understood.<sup>356</sup>

The Grateful Dead’s adoption of this outlaw Americana trope was through its immersion in country, bluegrass and blues music, and, in turn, Robert Hunter’s poetry shifting away from wordplay and expressionism to ballads, ‘story-songs’ and narratives of ‘life-on-the-road’. It is easy to see how Hunter’s pieces of folk-wisdom seemed almost like paeans to the early 20th century Bay Area, of Wobblies and roustabouts, yet that “old weird America” still existed in the

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<sup>356</sup> Dylan (1968; 1974; 2012); (1997); Wilentz (2010).

interstices and in the costume of the hippy radical. This spirit was there in a range of songs/poems ranging from 1968's "Cosmic Charlie" through to 1972's shift with "Eyes of the World" and provided a bridge between the chaos of "Dark Star" and the mellifluous quality of "Eyes". It was already a "long strange trip", but there "ain't no time to hate".<sup>357</sup> Even with napalm that could "steal your face right off your head", another world was possible, in which there was "nothing left to do but smile, smile, smile".<sup>358</sup>

### 7.5 Five Dollars a Day

The pinnacle of this period of songwriting for the Grateful Dead was on their twin masterpieces, *American Beauty* which followed *Workingman's Dead* in 1970, along with the large amount of songs written during that time but not recorded in the studio. They represent, as a whole, an examination of the USA outside of their existence as Bay Area bohemians. So authentic seeming was their "[Cumberland Blues](#)" about unions and mineworking in West Virginia that a coal-miner encountered the band some years later and was shocked that none had any experience or direct knowledge of the mines.<sup>359</sup> On a certain level, these songs were conscious attempts to meld the Grateful Dead's countrified turn with lyrical and topical tropes reminiscent of workers' songs from the thirties. But the broader fact that this indeed occurred in its own right, right in the midst of the New Left retreat from class is something entirely different – but also a reminder of the Grateful Dead's own proletarian origins.

"[Uncle John's Band](#)" opens side one of *Workingman's Dead*, and continues to serve as a sort of hymn to the Grateful Dead experience as a whole, asking listeners to look beyond the

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<sup>357</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), "Truckin'"; "Uncle John's Band".

<sup>358</sup> Grateful Dead (1972), "He's Gone".

<sup>359</sup> Richardson (2014), 152.

beginnings that seem easy, as well as the easy times that mask danger. Accompanied by delicately picked major key guitars overlapping percussive 12 string acoustic and very light percussion, the texture evokes the polar opposite of the dissonance of “Dark Star” but also the breeziness of “Eyes of the World”. Over this, voices beckon the listener to come along, but needs to make a proclamation: “Goddamn, well I declare, have you seen the like? Their wall are built of cannonballs, their motto is ‘Don’t tread on me’”.<sup>360</sup> Following a chorus, the lyrics are merely beckoning the listener to hear his songs, to avoid hatred, to be aware of what one is up against. After all, “Don’t Tread on Me” was the motto of the American far Right, of those in power, of those bombing Cambodia and Vietnam.

This leads into a lighter set of songs, whether about the pathos of failed seduction or challenging the devil to a game of cards and losing. Then there is “[New Speedway Boogie](#)”, the least elliptical and most direct statement the Dead made about movement and hippy politics.<sup>361</sup> The “end of the sixties” is often written as taking place at the Rolling Stones’ quixotic free festival at Altamont speedway. Contacts between the Rolling Stones and Grateful Dead’s management created circumstance in which Hell’s Angels, who the Dead, lovers of transgressive cultures, had a working relationship with, worked security, for free beer. Throughout the show the Angels got drunker and drunker, and, as noted earlier, assaulted Marty Balin of the Jefferson Airplane. Later, during the Rolling Stones’ set, a man pulled a gun and there was reason to believe he was going to shoot at the stage – indeed, in the Mayles brothers’ documentary film *Gimme Shelter*, the gun is clearly visible. The Hell’s Angels beat the man to death.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “Uncle John’s Band”.

<sup>361</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “New Speedway Boogie”.

<sup>362</sup> Browne (2016); Mayles (1970). See also Thompson, H.S. (1967).

“Please don’t dominate the rap, Jack, if you got nothing new to say”,<sup>363</sup> starts New Speedway Boogie. The Grateful Dead and their organization had been blamed, by the Rolling Stones organization, by the rock press and sundry observers for the Altamont affair, which occurred on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1969. Two weeks after the concert, on the 20<sup>th</sup>, the song debuted, with a haphazard name often thought to be a play on the Jesse Fuller blues song “New Minglewood Blues” – the speedway in the title being Altamont. This was a sad set of circumstances for the Bay Area scene, and to scapegoat the Grateful Dead – or even the Hell’s Angels – was to miss the point. Altamont was a really-existing crystallization of the looming destruction of the counterculture and defeat of the Left. LSD laced with amphetamines or PCP was circulating in the crowd. The US was bombing Cambodia and the people were getting bombed on harder and harder drugs.<sup>364</sup> This was foreboding, regardless of the circumstances...

Now I don't know but I been told  
it's hard to run with the weight of gold  
Other hand I heard it said  
it's just as hard with the weight of lead.<sup>365</sup>

The weight of gold here is the rich rock stars, the Rolling Stones. Brief Trotskyist sympathies notwithstanding, they were absolving themselves of any responsibility, and later even cashed in with soundtrack albums. It is not uncommon for the Altamont murder to be taken as a transgressive and infamous part of the Stones’ legacy, while the Dead were irresponsible “lead” bearing hippies. In response to all of this, their attitude was defiant and sober:

Things went down we don't understand  
but I think in time we will....  
Spent a little time on the mountain  
Spent a little time on the hill  
I saw things getting out of hand  
I guess they always will

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<sup>363</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “New Speedway Boogie”.

<sup>364</sup> Lesh (2005); Kreutzman (2015); Browne (2016).

<sup>365</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “New Speedway Boogie”.

I don't know but I been told  
if the horse don't pull you got to carry the load  
I don't know whose back's that strong  
Maybe find out before too long  
One way or another this darkness got to give.<sup>366</sup>

With this polemic against the bourgeois dilettantes blaming cultural workers for a complex social phenomenon that “we don’t understand”, a phenomenon that – at least until the darkness gives, will continue to get out of hand, the first side of *Workingman’s Dead* comes to a close. Side two begins with “Cumberland Blues”, which, as mentioned, deals with working in coal mines. The narrator wants to spend more time as *gattungswessen*, as a human being with his lover, Melinda. But he has to be at the mine, where he makes good money (Five Dollars a day!) and after all, he’s lucky to have what seems to be seniority, as others keep crying to take his shift in this precarious sector. He’s walked a picket line and knows its import. This indeed fits into the next poem/song, “Black Peter”, sung from the perspective of perhaps the same worker, lying ill on bed, and perhaps dying, with a fever of 105, which is followed in turn by “Easy Wind”. The latter song involves a man who is “balling a shiny black steel jackhammer, chipping up rocks for the great highway”, and is nonchalantly, even without thought, working and drinking himself to death. Performed as a loud blues-rock shuffle by the Dead, the lyrics are distilled as sad and defeated in a cover version by Bill Callahan of Smog.

The side and record ends with one of the Grateful Dead’s anthems, “Casey Jones”, often mistook as a jokey novelty cocaine song (given that it starts, literally, with a recording of apparently David Crosby nasally ingesting cocaine). In many ways, however, “[Casey Jones](#)” is a culmination of the album’s theme of the travails of working America. Anthropomorphizing a train as an extension of its engineer, the folkloric character Casey Jones (one of the few

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<sup>366</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “New Speedway Boogie”.

archetypal figures in the Dead iconography to have its origins in older folk idioms, akin to Stagger Lee), it is defiantly celebratory of a train staying on the tracks, no matter what, referring slightly back to the lyrics of “New Speedway Boogie”. Defeat was impending and hippies were starting to do the ultimate paranoid, individualist drug, cocaine – still thought of as natural and recreational, like marijuana. It was this kind of hyper-manic affect, the drug that came to define the neoliberal era that was a defense mechanism yet also a tool in the battle to get by and survive, with ambiguous result.

Trouble with you is  
The trouble with me  
Got two good eyes  
but we still don't see  
Come round the bend  
You know it's the end  
The fireman screams and  
The engine just gleams.<sup>367</sup>

Recorded soon after, and coming from a set of songs that were written and debuted live contemporaneously with *Workingman's Dead*, *American Beauty* was the implicit other ingredient in the impending defeats. If *Workingman's Dead* was about the resilience of the working class, *American Beauty* was on what was left of the American ideal itself, as refracted through what had once been a psychedelic patriotism, yet now rotting in the rivers and forests of Indochina. Notably, the Stanley Mouse designed album cover, with its Medieval-cum-psychedelic iconography and writing, can be read either as “American Beauty” or “American Reality”.

The album begins with “[Box of Rain](#)”, a song about death, written directly about the death of bassist Phil Lesh’s father, and how Lesh, an atheist, came to process this experience; its universality came to represent a continuation of the theme of getting by, yet on a more individual

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<sup>367</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “Casey Jones”.

level. The passing of life, the dimming of the light of fortune was “just a box of rain, I don't know who put it there, Believe it if you need it, or leave it if you dare”.<sup>368</sup> The songcraft itself was mournful, but more spritely, with more readily apparent percussion and electric instrumentation than on *Workingman's Dead*. “Friend of the Devil” and “Sugar Magnolia” the next two songs, deservedly became Grateful Dead standards. The former took on the same dark storytelling voice from *Workingman's Dead* to portray a roustabout far more afraid of the sheriff on his trail than the devil – indeed this man was grateful dead. The latter, a Bob Weir-driven guitar workout was a visit to a more instrumentally affective sound, the lyrics – delivered with Nashville style flair and Jordanaires<sup>369</sup> type backup vocals – serving as opposed to being served by the driving dance music. The lyrics, about being in love emphasize how this situation could alleviate the demons of everyday life, even, if again tongue planted firmly-in-cheek – “Takes the wheel when I'm seeing double, pays my ticket when I speed”.<sup>370</sup>

This tone continues with the shuffling harmonica driven “[Operator](#)”, written and sung by the relatively absent-from-the-studio original Dead bandleader Ron (Pigpen) McKernan. Pigpen is singing to an operator trying to convince them to find his lover – it is essentially a throwback to a fifties love-song. Yet it takes on an existential tone when the narrator realizes his “baby” may not be reachable after all, and he wonders about her well-being – perhaps she's a bank robber or a sex worker – but finally comes to realize that if she's alright, he's alright, and his wonderment was not about finding her but about knowing how she was doing.<sup>371</sup> “Candyman”, shimmering with pedal-steel guitar and a thicker version of the sonic textures of *Workingman's Dead*, rounds out the first side of the record, another “story” type song, seemingly about an evil

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<sup>368</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “Box of Rain”; Lesh (2005).

<sup>369</sup> The Jordanaires were Elvis Presley's backup vocalists.

<sup>370</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “Sugar Magnolia”.

<sup>371</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “Operator”.



pimp and a man who comes to kill him, perhaps to redeem his lost love. The harmonies, helped along by singing lessons, were not dissimilar to the predominant trends in ‘folk-rock’, yet they were still refracted through a Grateful Dead sensibility – tonally on point, even if charmingly off-key.

Side two opens with the hymnal “[Ripple](#)”, replete with gnostic imagery, the individual coming into fruition through the collective, as inscribed by the redemptive – yet essentially merely partial – power of music, a veritable fountain “That was not made by the hands of men”.<sup>372</sup> The tone is that of mournful defiance, yet with elegance and an unironic and unpretentious use of a children’s choir, singing in unison as opposed to harmony. The mournful defiance continues with “Brokedown Palace”, perhaps a metaphor for the dying of the once unified Bay Area social and aesthetic movements. There is both musical and lyrical quoting of Rodgers and Hammerstien’s “Ole Man River”, made famous by the great communist singer Paul Robeson, “lovers come and go, the river roll, roll, roll”. “Til the Morning Comes”, with dreadfully dated misogynist lyrics, is nevertheless buoyant as a guitar workout and an uptempo lead into the album’s final hymn, “Attics of My Life”. Simultaneously a hippy love song, psychedelic gnostic goddess worship and a hymn to collectivity, it contains some astounding passages.

In the book of love's own dream, where all the print is blood.  
Where all the pages are my days, and all the lights grow old.  
When I had no wings to fly, you flew to me, you flew to me.<sup>373</sup>

The album closes with Weir’s “[Truckin](#)’”, perhaps the Grateful Dead’s best known song. This completes the *Workingman’s Dead/American Beauty* saga with a return to stories of working, yet in this case, they are out of character. While buttressed with classic Grateful Dead

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<sup>372</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “Ripple”.

<sup>373</sup> Grateful Dead (1970), “Attics of My Life”.

folk wisdom, notably “What a long strange trip it’s been”,<sup>374</sup> the song tells the story of being working musicians, where what town one is in starts to blur together as they’re all caught up in ideology, “the typical daydream”. There are oblique references to the cocaine and speed-fueled life that develops when one lives with such odd hours, and finally the story of the Grateful Dead being arrested for possession of pot and LSD in New Orleans in February 1970, while ending with the gripe of being off the road.

Sittin' and starin' out of the hotel window.  
Got a tip they're gonna kick the door in again  
I'd like to get some sleep before I travel,  
But if you got a warrant, I guess you're gonna come in.  
Busted, down on Bourbon street, set up, like a bowlin' pin.  
Knocked down, it get's to wearin' thin. They just won't let you be, oh no.  
You're sick of hangin' around and you'd like to travel;  
Get tired of travelin' and you want to settle down.  
I guess they can't revoke your soul for tryin',  
Get out of the door and light out and look all around.<sup>375</sup>

“Truckin’” was quite likely the origin of the seventies bumpersticker catch phrase ‘keep on truckin’ – it reflected the Grateful Dead sensibility of getting by, of transcending and surpassing the limitations by carving out a different space that overlapped with but differed from the “typical daydream”. Instead, theirs was and is a “sunshine daydream”.

Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter wrote a number of other songs that continued and deepened the *Workingman’s Dead/American Beauty* theme, but that weren’t recorded on the albums. Among the greats are “Loser” and “Deal”, with cards as a metaphor for defying chance, “Bird Song”, a reflection on the death of Janis Joplin and the end of an era, and a song that took off in wondrous improvisational directions when performed live. There were also songs that began to explicate the Grateful Dead understanding of *Americana*, in which “Uncle Sam was

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<sup>374</sup>Grateful Dead (1970), “Truckin’”.

<sup>375</sup>Grateful Dead (1970)., “Truckin’”.

hiding out in a rock and roll band”.<sup>376</sup> To a New Orleans style shuffle, “[Ramble On Rose](#)” presented a great cast of characters, a folktale worthy of Joe Hill himself.

Just like Jack the Ripper  
Just like Mojo Hand  
Just like Billy Sunday  
In a shotgun ragtime band  
Just like New York City,  
Just like Jericho  
Pace the halls and climb the walls  
Get out when they blow  
Just like Crazy Otto  
Just like Wolfman Jack  
Sittin' plush with a royal flush  
Aces back to back  
Just like Mary Shelley  
Just like Frankenstein  
Clank your chains and count your change  
Try to walk the line.<sup>377</sup>

One common reading among Deadheads and Grateful Dead scholars is that the song is on one hand a metaphor about metaphors themselves, on the other hand, it is about American music.<sup>378</sup> It seems more realistic, and also given the songwriting that accompanied it, listed above, that the song is about the vicissitudes of the aleatory reality of rolling muddy rivers, at the end of the sixties and the dawn of reaction, “clank your chains and count your change” indeed. Reality could present a fine line between monster, gambler, raconteur, used car dealer, disc jockey and cultural producer. Ragtime is a consistent reference in the lyrics, “a song that ain’t never gonna end” until someone meets the fabled “leader of the band”. In the presentation of this vast cast of characters, as in other songs of the time, “Jack Straw”, “Brown Eyed Women” and “Tennessee Jed” among them, there is an intentionality of creating a fictional mythology but

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<sup>376</sup> Grateful Dead (1974), “U.S. Blues”.

<sup>377</sup> Grateful Dead (1972), “Ramble On Rose”.

<sup>378</sup> Lesh (2005); Kreutzman (2016).

not one of mysticism and worship, but rather of the dialectical relationship between labour and chance.

This was it, in terms of the ‘great wave’ referred to by Hunter S. Thompson. The future was here, the revolution hadn’t happened, people were on their own. Corpses were mounting and the American state and ruling class was on the offensive at home and abroad. The movements had “lost one round but the price wasn’t anything...Knife in a back and more of the same”.<sup>379</sup> The response here was that there was “nothing left to do but smile, smile, smile”. The smile was not one of resignation, as in other cultural production of the twilight of the sixties. The smile was some intuition that one was on the right side – at the very least culturally – and that the trick was preservation of a different current in American society and culture. To a large degree, this reflects a stoic unwillingness to allow the labour/chance dialectic to dominate and alienate human existence, akin to the rejection of clock time as shown in the tossing of wristwatches in *Easy Rider*.

## **7.6 The Kids They Dance and Shake their Bones**

While later in their career they were publicly involved in causes ranging from Latin American solidarity to the environment, the Grateful Dead consciously sought to not be ‘political’. This has to be understood, however, in the context of living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area, home both to an historical Left and Bohemian milieu, co-existing, collaborating and all things told, being manifestations of the same uniquely west coast radical sensibility.<sup>380</sup> To be on the far Left was the common-sense, so to let that define one’s artistic production seemed to be beside the point. In this, the Dead were in many ways repeating moves

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<sup>379</sup> Grateful Dead (1972), “He’s Gone”.

<sup>380</sup> Richardson (2014).

made by Cubists and others who drank from the milk of radicalism to represent it in an oblique and perhaps unintended sense.

As it stood, the Grateful Dead regularly played benefits for the Black Panther party and the Bay Area Left generally speaking. As a Grateful Dead internet archivist going by the moniker of “Corby342” puts it, the Panthers “were seen as trans-political: supporting the Panthers at the time was like opposing the Vietnam War or being pro-Ecology, a moral position that superseded any immediate political issues”.<sup>381</sup> The Dead even had radical credibility on a worldwide scale – indeed when the ill-fated “Festival Express” tour across Canada took place, activists in Toronto protested the fact that they were charging admission. Jerry Garcia himself came out and addressed the protesters, explaining that they weren’t making any money, rather, they had to pay for the travelling and the equipment.<sup>382</sup> In his short speech, he repeatedly referred to the Dead (and Janis Joplin, the Band and other luminaries), implicitly, as workers, as people “doing our jobs”. This may not have been enough for the purest Toronto lifestyle-radical, but was enough to disburse a demonstration that was planning on “gate-crashing” the concerts. Marxist historian Carol Brightman points out that when the Dead played university campuses that were going through strikes and occupations, the political activity would stop, but not the strike – instead, the strike would surround the Dead, who, after the Kent State massacre, placed raised red fists on their bass-drums and amplifiers. They opened up the show with Martha and the Vandellas’ “Dancing In the Streets”, a longtime movement anthem as noted.

The Grateful Dead, in other words, were not merely wading in a velvet sea of political dabbling – they were cultural workers, progenitors of a popular avant-garde – thus intrinsically political, and this politics instantiated itself on the one hand with the penchant for free

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<sup>381</sup> Corby342 (2013).

<sup>382</sup> Smeaton (2003); Brightman (1998).

improvisation, and on the other, with a concentration – along among the hippy set – on the working classes as subject matter. Anti-racism and anti-homophobia were a large part of their retinue, yet weren't articulated as political questions, but rather, to use Corby342's phrase "trans-political". In concert, they even played up a young Bob Weir's boyish looks, to the delight of the sexually liberated Bay Area audience. Later, their album *Shakedown Street* centred around a song bemoaning the gentrification of the Castro neighbourhood. Even in the case of Islamophobia, the Dead were ahead of the curve. In the height of popular seventies American Islamophobia, during the Arab boycott and 'oil crisis', they made a whole album of Arabic-influenced music, centred on the dirge-ish side-long suite "[Blues for Allah](#)", which contains an oblique lyrical critique of Zionism and Arab nationalism alike.<sup>383</sup>

It was with the Panthers, and the Maoist 'New Communist Movement' in general, however, with whom they had their most concrete affiliation. Perhaps it was due to this that the Dead and their community – at least inadvertently, but in their own experience, strongly believe – and continue to believe – that they were targeted by Cointelpro covert actions. Brightman raised this with the legendary Mountain Girl, founder of the Merry Pranksters and Garcia's life partner.

"In 1969 and 1970, it became apparent that something was going on with the drug supply," Mountain Girl recalls. "Acid was getting harder to get. And there was all this other stuff around, especially cocaine, which was being touted by doctors like Dr. Hippocrates, Gene Schoenfeld, in the Berkeley Free Press. It's great stuff, they'd say. It's pure, and it helps you get through your work day, and there's no hangover". And Mountain Girl wants to know, "Where does this cocaine come from? Could we ask this question?"<sup>384</sup>

With Paul Krassner, she believed that cocaine, like heroin, which moved in on the Dead some years later, was not necessarily coming by donkey back over the mountains of Mexico

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<sup>383</sup> Grateful Dead (1975), "Blues for Allah".

<sup>384</sup> Gans/Brightman (1998).

from campesinos far away. It was coming on 747s from Southeast Asia and South America, with the CIA. "They were flying it into this country, she says, and dropping it off to their informants in the inner cities. And it made its way to our scene right away, because so much of it went to San Francisco and Berkeley. And it destroyed our scene," she exclaims. "And it destroyed the scene in Berkeley, too. It did its job, boy, and it was like a bullet right at the heart of The Whole thing. And it scared the shit out of me. I was sure we were being targeted".<sup>385</sup>

The Dead's milieu was a perfect target for these operations due to it forming a public face of the underground, which by 1970-72, while ostensibly a safe-haven for political dissidents and others, had also formed economies of scale in drugs. Even Abbie Hoffman sold cocaine while living underground.<sup>386</sup> Through this shadow world, adventurers, con-artists and eccentric people of unexplained wealth entered the milieu, including gun runners and those who claimed connection with a myriad of intelligence services. Indeed, it was also through these connections that they were able to tap into the State Department and actually play at the Great Pyramid of Giza.<sup>387</sup> Likewise, the Grateful Dead had a large following in the eighties among Young Republicans, including the infamous white supremacist Ann Coulter, who bragged about how she encouraged Garcia and Weir to refuse to distance themselves from their conservative fans (mostly from the fraternity/country club Republican set, not the radical right).<sup>388</sup> Mysteriously, Bob Weir's songwriting partner John Perry Barlow, a self-proclaimed anarchist and a pioneer of the internet, counts Dick Cheney as a close friend, partially due to his 'day job' as a highly successful cattle rancher in Cheney's home state of Wyoming.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Brightman (1999).

<sup>386</sup> Hoffman (1989).

<sup>387</sup> Lesh (2005).

<sup>388</sup> Coulter/Hill (2003).

<sup>389</sup> Barlow (2002).

Brightman makes an important point in that after *American Beauty* and *Workingman's Dead*, the critical intelligentsia – with the exception perhaps of Robert Christgau – stopped paying attention to, let alone rationally appraising, the Grateful Dead due to it seeming, from the outside, to be more a sociological phenomenon than a band. They were not incorrect in regards to any broader visible cultural impact, but given the perhaps New York-centred cultural rejection of the hippy set, it tended to affect their judgment in any case. It should be noted, however, that the Dead always had the respect of punk and postpunk musicians so beloved by the critics. Postpunk bands deliberately emulated the Dead's community building. The punk scene gave Deadheads a pass, and Jerry Garcia often went to CBGB's.<sup>390</sup> In turn, those analysing Deadheads sociologically had a pronounced tendency towards seeing the music itself as epiphenomenal. At best, there are useful studies, but only about a specific and noticeable niche among Deadheads, that is to say, "true hippies" and the like, those living in communes, outlaws and such. To ignore the role that the collective cultural production played in all facets of this, and how it expressed this totality is akin to a study of religion that doesn't attempt an analysis of how the religious see the deity as well as how the deity is theoretically and liturgically constituted.

To see this, thus, as an expressive totality concretely manifested in the unique affective cultural production of musicians, but communist in Perry Anderson's sense, and certainly prefigurative, is to see it, as Brightman points out, as where "everyone else went" when the Baby Boomers sold out. The process out of the counterculture, out of the New Left, was often a process which the neoconservative sociologist David Brooks has called the instantiation of the *BoBo* (bohemian bourgeois) class. This liberal bourgeoisie internalized the social values of the

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<sup>390</sup> Wenner/Garcia (1982).



sixties (around race, gender, forms of family, peace, drugs, etc.) in a tertiary sense but had long departed from them – perhaps they visited when they attended Grateful Dead concerts. The Bobo was a tastemaker, the subject that entered the Democratic Party in the seventies, and moved right with the party and their own upward mobility as beneficiaries of the welfare state and inexpensive or free post-secondary education. They became somewhat post-political as long as they retained a sort of mean with which to relate to one another – this as exemplified in the 1984 film *The Big Chill*. They always imagined, whether aligned with Reagan or the New Age movement, whether they drove a ‘Beemer’ or a Saab or a Volvo that they were still on the bus.<sup>391</sup>

But the Dead milieu were those who stayed on the bus. These were those who, in at least the case of some 3000 people, traveled to nearly every Grateful Dead concert between 1973 and 1995. And from this core was the periphery, cultural rebels who landed in spaces not traditionally seen as cultural or political. They founded media and Left political institutes while rejecting ‘communism’. They were anything but bourgeois liberals. Like in any broad social aggregate, it can be safely assumed that most did not become ‘political’ but the majority that did stayed where they were, on the far Left. One cannot go to a socialist conference in the United States, in particular in California or New York, and not see a flood of older white men in Grateful Dead T-shirts, often casually smoking joints. They held onto their Deadhead affiliations like they held onto their Maoism or Trotskyism, often entering Academia and populating departments such as Economics at Amherst, Politics at Reed College and so on.<sup>392</sup> They became schoolteachers and worked in the public sector or the growing non-profit industrial complex. Indeed, in some places, many, like Minnesota senator Al Franken, did become active Democrats, within the liberal wing of the party. Al Gore was close to this particular faction. What united all

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<sup>391</sup> Brooks (2001).

<sup>392</sup> Jacobs (1997); Brightman (1999).

of this was a rejection of the bourgeois liberalism that all blamed for the Vietnam War and the concomitant rise of Nixon and then Reagan. Their failure was also seen by the growing conservative segment of ‘jam band’ fans.

Indeed, Deadheads who were Republicans or more specifically ‘movement conservatives’, Pro-Gun, anti-abortion, were in a sense, coming from a self-evidently ‘radical’ standpoint. It is not sufficient to merely say that rich kids who were smart enough to know their own class interests and liked smoking pot and were OK with gay people constituted the later Deadhead milieu, though certainly a good chunk of that crowd got on the bus. Rather it is that this was a manifestation, even for these rich kids, of another USA, not one in which they were raised, and one that, in their day jobs, they ostensibly opposed. No less than Ann Coulter spoke in an interview of being a Ronald Reagan justice department appointee, and with other right wing justice department lawyers, skipping work all the time to go to Dead shows – something not difficult from Washington, D.C. The success of the right-wing narrative as anti-establishment was not, as some say, akin to today’s Trump phenomenon; rather, it was a projection of an ideal-form of free-market and classic conservative-communitarian orientation – self-help as opposed to ‘welfare dependence’ – that is to say Deadheads as *conservative*, that appealed to this milieu.<sup>393</sup>

The very fact that the Grateful Dead experience could provoke the utopian imagination combined with their ostensible rejection of politics led to a circumstance in which they did not feel it to be their position to stipulate where that imagination went. That there were contradictions to this imaginary projection of another world being possible is immaterial as to whether the band themselves were aware of these contradictions. But they did not see

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<sup>393</sup> Coulter/Hill (2006).

themselves, and correctly so, as the vanguard of a social movement or sociological phenomenon – indeed there likely was a vanguard among Deadhead circles, these being west coast pot growers. The Dead were as much legitimate followers of the ‘Grateful Dead Family’ as anyone else. Their role consciously was to provoke the imagination, which allows sustenance of the culture itself. One of their later epics, “[Terrapin Station](#)”, sums up this phenomenon.

The storyteller makes no choice. Soon you will not hear his voice.  
His job is to shed light, and not to master  
Since the end is never told, we pay the teller off in gold,  
In hopes he will come back, but he cannot be bought or sold.<sup>394</sup>

To shed light was to propose the existence of light, more gnostic symbolism, but not how it can be mastered, whether for good or evil. Merely to point out, as elsewhere “once in a while you get shown the light, in the strangest of places if you look at it right”<sup>395</sup> was sufficient, alongside music that could hit every affective button, creating a veritable affective pandemic. No band ever came as close to Anderson’s idea of rock and roll being a prefiguration of communism. To understate their importance in the development of a popular avant-garde, and as an emblem of the sixties, both aesthetically and politically, is a mistake. People will always listen for a secret and search for a sound. Ride you out in a cold rainstorm and nail you to a cross.

The sound that the Grateful Dead and its successors provide, the glimpse at the totality through surrendering to the flow of improvisation, built upon the work of pioneers before them. Aesthetically speaking, they took influences from all corners; indeed they were postmodern before the term entered popular parlance. Of course the pioneer in question was Bob Dylan, and indeed, from the very beginning of their career until their final show, at which Jerry Garcia poignantly sang “[Visions of Johanna](#)” months before his demise, rarely would a Dead show go

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<sup>394</sup> Grateful Dead (1977), “Terrapin Station”.

<sup>395</sup> Grateful Dead (1974), “Scarlett Begonias”.

by without a Bob Dylan cover. Throughout their career, they also covered The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and, towards the end, The Who. It is to these British artists and their 'invasion' that we now turn.

## Chapter 8

### English Rock: Palace Revolutions and Compromised Solutions

#### 8.1 The Peculiarities of English Rock

American rock music, to a large extent, developed out of a retro-actively intelligible synthesis between a multiplicity of forms. Blues and country music, for example mutated into one another, with one superseding the other, but with a preservation and transcendence of both forms.<sup>396</sup> This, in turn, could lead to further dialectical interplay and differentiation, but the differentiation became so geographically specific that developments in the Bay Area, New York, Detroit and Cleveland, to name four 'rock and roll cities', were almost entirely different.<sup>397</sup>

The UK, and England in particular, in contrast, developed rock music in a style not dissimilar to the development of capitalism in the United States. This is to say, it did not develop out of existing social contradictions, as in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England or the Netherlands. Rather, it appeared, nearly out of nowhere and largely informed by the English working class's fascination with American working class music, predominantly the blues and early rock and roll. All at once, practically, bands that had cut their teeth playing American rock or blues covers, perhaps having a point of origin in the uniquely English form of skiffle or folk music, appeared on the scene. American artists like Carl Perkins, under-appreciated or controversial in the US, toured England and Germany in the early sixties, more often than not receiving a hero's welcome.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> For example, Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis both took the structural arrangements of country music with the melodic and arrangement style of jump blues. Going against the standard accounts of 'white music' and 'black music', it was Berry that preserved country music while incorporating jump blues, while with Lewis it was the opposite.

<sup>397</sup> Hicks (2000) is illuminating on the spatial differentiation of American rock music.

<sup>398</sup> Pareless (1998).

In North America, the appearance of English rock music on the global stage became known as the ‘British Invasion’. Of the bands that had their point of origin in this invasion, the four most important, and thus, under inquiry in this chapter, were The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who and The Kinks. All four started playing covers, with The Beatles and The Who more oriented towards early Motown, pop and soul, while the Stones and Kinks decidedly on the bluesy side of things. In regards to the parallel development of rock music and Left politics, there was a decisively difference, in turn, between The Rolling Stones and Beatles on one hand, and The Who and The Kinks on the other. The former gradually, partially by virtue of the common-sense cultural affiliations they had, situated themselves as attached, one degree or another, to left wing, and even far Left politics, in particular as the decade came to a close. The latter were decidedly conservative. The former spoke out against the Vietnam War before many other public figures, while Pete Townsend of The Who recorded [radio advertisements for the US Air Force](#) with “I Can See for Miles” playing in the background.

This chapter will be a series of comparative excursions within the rise and fall of the golden age of English classic rock music, primarily concerning the four aforementioned bands. More so than American rock music, English rock music’s connection with politics was not disavowed. For the Grateful Dead and Bay Area groups, as was noted, support for radical politics was second nature but not seen as ‘political’ anymore than their prefigurative hippy lifestyle, for example, their use of cannabis and psychedelics. For the Dead and company being ‘busted’ was part of the cost of doing business and brought about a sense of outlaw notoriety. When members of The Rolling Stones were arrested for possession of hashish, the Stones became a minor cause celebre among the liberal media as well as the Left. It was rightfully argued that arresting young people – including Rolling Stones members who were no more than 26 years old at the time of

an infamous 1967 arrest – was having their culture oppressed by the stodgy old police.<sup>399</sup> The *London Times* famously quoted William Blake, “Who Breaks a Butterfly on a Wheel,” in their defense not merely of the Stones but of cannabis culture.

It is useful to proceed into our excursions within the context of what Ollman calls studying history backwards. Ollman quotes Marx making the point that “the actual movement denotes developed capitalist production, which starts from and presupposes its own basis”.<sup>400</sup> This is to make the point, in distinguishing the mode of inquiry from the mode of exposition, and in turn the important distinction between organic movement and historical movement.<sup>401</sup> Thus our analysis of British rock music picks up from a point made in the previous chapter in regards to tensions between The Rolling Stones and the Grateful Dead over the ill-fated Altamont festival. The pre-conditions of the disintegration of the lock-step movement of rock music and radical politics, of the ‘peculiarly English’ Missed Encounter appear as the increasingly prevalent cultural distinctions between American and British cultural producers. Our vantage point is thus 1968 and 1969, with the disintegration of The Beatles, the metamorphosis of The Rolling Stones after the death of Brian Jones, and the transformation of The Kinks and The Who into early exemplars of what we now know as ‘arena rock’. In illuminating the internal differentiations in English rock and between English and American rock, it is possible to illuminate the preconditions of the moment of excitement and entropy, as well as the shifting fortunes and dynamics of radical politics and rock music on both sides of the Atlantic.

It is impossible to overstate the differentiation of form and content, between British and American rock music in general as well as between the paradigmatic examples laid out in these

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<sup>399</sup> Wyman (1990), 113-121.

<sup>400</sup> Marx (2000), 513, quoted in Ollman (2003), 115.

<sup>401</sup> Ollman (2003); Paolucci (2007).

case studies. This differentiation can be viewed in a sense akin to a flock of birds splitting in two, and going in entirely different directions. Likewise, this differentiation occurred in lockstep with political differentiation, partially due to immediate political concerns, but no doubt overdetermined by the general political cultural differences, as noted in chapter six. The encounter was missed, in a sense, for different reasons. The after-effect of the American Missed Encounter was fragmentation, both of musical cultures and social movements, with only a militant minority, cultural or political, still attempting to actually innovate. The after-effect of the British Missed Encounter was a recognition of its existence, and what can retroactively be discerned as a resignation to this lack of consummation. This very resignation laid the groundwork, as has been seen, to the uptick in cultural/political militancy in the punk era.<sup>402</sup>

While engaging in three discrete, yet internally related excursions, the vantage point will subtly shift between different levels of generality. The Beatles and The Rolling Stones are viewed specifically from the end of the respective era in question, and explicated in the same sense as they are analysed, that is to say, in 'backwards' fashion. Their process of artistic development is subject to a more formal analysis, though not without some analysis of lyric, but always in how it related to form. This brings a heightened understanding of conjuncture and rethinks dominant approaches to their music and appeal. The Kinks and The Who are subject to a more lyrical analysis, though again, not without some specification in regards to form. With an examination rooted in modern understanding of both conservatism and gender, this analysis reveals the conjuncture in a fashion that goes against the grain, by focusing on what seems to be a contradiction. This contradiction's historic specificity, taken alongside the contradictions of

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<sup>402</sup> In the case, as well, of lyrical analysis, British songwriters showed increasing sophistication and astuteness while American songwriters did not so much dispense with astuteness than idiomatically shift from topical to existential concerns. The oscillations of musical or formal style similarly differentiated, while sharing more commonality at least on the surface, with the incorporation of first bluesy, then 'psychedelic' and then traditionalist sonic elements.



The Beatles and Rolling Stones' mixed consciousness on class and gender, illuminates a component part of the Missed Encounter.

## 8.2 Just a Shot Away

Marx, among others, point out that in the years leading up to, as well as during the French Revolution, the intelligentsias across the rest of Europe, notably in German-speaking countries, expressed their solidarity with the revolution. Yet this solidarity was mediated in often artistic terms. Kant wrote of the “enthusiasm” that gripped European intellectuals, while Illuminists like Beethoven and Mozart both wrote allegorical symphonies that were celebratory of revolutionary achievements. The same could be said for the English in 1968. Social movements, students, workers and others on the far-left brought France to a near-revolutionary situation. Radicals rose up in the Prague Spring, itself more than a bit influenced by Allan Ginsberg, Lou Reed, Frank Zappa and other emblems of American bohemianism.<sup>403</sup> Revolutionaries were winning a war against the Americans in Southeast Asia. Outside of the United States, in the UK, young people saw the militancy of American young people and wondered why things weren't the same among the Brits. In “Sleepy London town,” there was no place for a “street fighting man”.<sup>404</sup> Instead, the working classes, the “salt of the earth” are offered nothing more than electoralism, a “choice of cancer or polio”. Rolling Stones bass guitarist Bill Wyman writes in his memoir, *Stone Alone*, of Jagger and Richards making a conscious attempt at “relevance”, not so much as marketing but because they truly were actively engaged supporters of radical politics in England.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Press, (2016).

<sup>404</sup> The Rolling Stones (1968), “Street Fighting Man”.

<sup>405</sup> Wyman (1990), 422-476.

British rock music in the long sixties is marked by a dialectic of this Kantian “enthusiasm” and resignation, pessimism of the intellect, agnosticism at best of the will. Their first major enthusiasm was an idealized America. But it wasn’t the America of napalm and Nixon, it was the America of rock and roll and movie stars, of what MacDonald called “mid-cult”<sup>406</sup>, not unlike how early Soviet aesthetes were ‘Americanists’ in their admiration of Charlie Chaplin.<sup>407</sup> From the very beginning, British musicians were absolute ‘super-fans’ of some of the most obscure American rhythm and blues, soul and blues music. Unlike later artists, notably Led Zeppelin, the likes of The Rolling Stones and The Beatles not only credited obscure Black American musicians like Arthur Alexander or Bobby Womack, but helped revive and spark interest in them. The Stones, in particular, did a fair amount to revive the careers of American blues artists like Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf. As well, even some American musicians ended up first ‘making a name’ in England after becoming ensconced in the British rock milieu. To American critics, even at the height of his success, Jimi Hendrix was playing “white music”, yet in England, he was able to carve out a sound and aesthetic that owed as much to his working class Seattle roots as it did to ‘swinging London’. Indeed, Hendrix’s sound and aesthetic was pushed along by Chas Chandler, formerly of The Animals, and his early champions and buzz-creators featured Brian Jones and Paul McCartney.

This detachment from the ‘belly of the beast’, and perhaps a collective mindset with less illusions, either over the power of art or the strength of radical politics, illuminates the lock-step relationship between English rock music and the far Left. Unlike the more wild-eyed Americans, Brits, cultural producers and radical activists alike, knew that this moment of ferment was all quite fleeting. Yet what English music lacked in ostensible connection with self-styled

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<sup>406</sup> MacDonald (2011).

<sup>407</sup> Hatherley (2016).

revolutionaries, it made up for in successfully crystallizing the conjuncture in which it was all too consciously embedded. As will be seen in this chapter, primarily through analyses of The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, The Kinks and The Who, as well as excursions examining Hendrix and Pink Floyd, the tentative but real connections between cultural producers and radical activists laid the groundwork, not only for the ‘charm’ that we can still find in it, but for further encounters, further movements, notably that around punk rock and the ‘Rock against Racism’ initiative.

To go back to the *New Left Review* debate between Anderson and Fernbach on a ‘rock aesthetic’, Anderson wrote two spectacular essays in the *New Left Review* on The Rolling Stones. These essays, even now, stand as perhaps the most rigorously theorized, insightful works written on the Stones. The first of the two, in early 1968, is all the more impressive in that it was written before the Stones’ ‘greatness’ and concentrates mostly on the transitional material from records like *Aftermath* and *Between the Buttons*, on themes like sexual exploitation (“[Backstreet Girl](#)”, “Yesterday’s Papers”), mental illness (“[Mother’s Little Helper](#)”, “Paint it Black”) and the will (and inability) to orgasm (“Satisfaction”, “[Goin’ Home](#)”). Indeed “Goin’ Home” is a ‘lost classic’ of sorts, with its vamping and chanting section appropriated quite successfully by Patti Smith on “Horses”; it is a song of desperation over a blues riff. If the Stones were cocky – and they were, right down to the tight-fitting pants – they were always ‘in-on-the-joke’; Brian Jones, Keith Richards and Mick Jagger’s outsized personalities, in particular, revelling in their archetypicality. Richards, the hard-living chain-smoking grandson of a founder of the Labour Party and admirer of Keir Hardie; Jagger the unashamedly bourgeois dandy; and Jones the mystic druggie who died before his time: all were archetypes, yet in many ways they became the roles they played. The same could be said for The Beatles. Anderson points out:

Perhaps a polarization Stones-Beatles such as Adorno constructed between Schoenberg and Stravinsky (evoked by Beckett) might actually be a fruitful exercise.... The Beatles have never strayed much beyond the strict limits of romantic convention: central moments of their oeuvre are nostalgia and whimsy, both eminently consecrated traditions of middle-class England. Lukács's pejorative category of the *Angenehme*—the 'pleasant' which dulls and pacifies—fits much of their work with deadly accuracy. By contrast, the Stones have refused the given orthodoxy of pop music; their work is a dark and veridical negation of it. It is an astonishing fact that there is virtually not one Jagger-Richards composition which is conventionally about a 'happy' or 'unhappy' personal relationship. Love, jealousy and lament—the substance of 85 per cent of traditional pop music—are missing. Sexual exploitation, mental disintegration and physical immersion are their substitutes.<sup>408</sup>

Like most music fans, Anderson is engaging a fair bit of cherry-picking on behalf of his favorite band. There is poignancy in what seems to be nostalgia and whimsy for The Beatles, a sense of loss and mourning perhaps redolent of troubled working-class upbringings. In many ways, one can respond to Anderson's point with a jibe that The Beatles were working class people playing bourgeois music while the Stones were the opposite, but that would be too clever by half. In turn, Lukács' *Angenehme* is the other side of the coin of Benjamin's distraction, and certainly the Stones excelled at such "pacification", in particular on songs like "Ruby Tuesday" or "No Expectations". The Beatles, likewise, can only be accused of having embraced a given orthodoxy of pop music if it is accepted that they invented the said orthodoxy. In reality, their embrace of the theatrical and all too "English" character, for example in "Penny Lane", subsequent to their quite daring early retirement from live performances, seems to be less redolent of a Stravinsky to the Stones' Schoenberg, but of the E.P. Thompson to the Stones' Anderson.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Anderson (1968), 30.

<sup>409</sup> Anderson (1964) proposed that the 'peculiarity' of English capitalism and society, the provincialism and continued power of the aristocracy was at least partially rooted in England having never undergone a bourgeois revolution. Thompson correctly made the rejoinder to Anderson that he was disavowing English culture and the role of working classes, as well as engaging in what Political Marxists have called a 'productive forces' analysis, situating capitalism as existing alongside increasing democracy and social liberalism. Anderson responded later to Thompson with accusations of empiricism and historicism, of missing organic development and conjunctural analysis. Likewise, The Beatles were always observers of the past. Yet for the Stones, the past in concrete form

It is telling, as we shall see, that the ‘near-encounter’ between The Rolling Stones’ art and far Left politics followed The Beatles. This occurred in the same sense that the art of The Beatles – as a group, given that their last three LPs were essentially collections of songs by solo artists upon which other Beatles may or may not have actually played – degenerated, while the Stones, incorporating diverse instrumentation and unique – and now trademarked – guitar tuning styles, an open G-tuning, influenced by T-Bone Walker and also known to be used by Neil Young and other masters of the power chord.<sup>410</sup> By this point, in 1969, Lennon was more at home with the American and Canadian peace movements than he was with the far Left in the UK, something that would shift after The Beatles’ breakup. The Stones, on the other hand, had their finger on the pulse of the zeitgeist, as the degeneration and strange changes in English art and culture were inscribed in their own music from the moment that they hit the big-time.

### 8.3 [I, Me, Mine](#)

The last recording session The Beatles undertook, in March 1970, was without Lennon who had quit the band, and the remaining three were awaiting the release of their final album, *Let it Be*, to announce their dissolution. The song that was recorded by the three remaining Beatles was George Harrison’s “I, Me, Mine”. It is likely that they had chosen to record this song, given that footage of Harrison playing it appeared in the as-yet to be released documentary *Let it Be*. One can’t help but suspect that the song’s lament over greed and their bitterness toward Lennon may have been a factor in their decision-making. The film shows The Beatles on

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does not exist except as abstract speculation leading up to their art – “just as every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners, saints”, from “Sympathy for the Devil” (1968).

<sup>410</sup> Richards, (2015). Richards is an extraordinarily cosmopolitan musician and human being, something unique, perhaps, to rhythm guitarists, those who provide – even more so than the drums – the scaffolding of a given type of cultural production. Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead plays a similar role.

the verge of disintegration, ostensibly as it shows the recording of what was to be known as *Get Back*, later to be retitled *Let it Be*. Harrison plays the song as Lennon dances a waltz with his radical artist partner, Yoko Ono, often blamed to this day for ‘breaking up The Beatles’.

The song itself has verses set to a waltz rhythm, “all through the day, I, me, mine”,<sup>411</sup> repeated in various forms, switching to a fast, seemingly Led Zeppelin-informed blues-rock chorus in which Harrison and McCartney rhythmically shout the title of the song. The song was partially about the fiduciary fracas that set in with the twilight of The Beatles’ careers in particular, and greed in general. Seven years earlier, The Beatles had recorded Barrett Strong’s “[Money \(That’s What I Want\)](#)”, now this issue of wanting money had caused irreparable rifts. Yet these rifts seemed to irreparable due to genuine differentiation of aesthetic sensibility among the four members of the band, differentiations that had been kept at bay until 1967 by manager Brian Epstein and producer George Martin, both of whom were as responsible as the band themselves for the “Beatles sound”.

The entire last album – though not the last one to be recorded, contained variations of this theme of the internal contradictions or inherent vices of The Beatles as artists overtaking the greatness they once had. The songs are great individually yet, unlike on any other Beatles album, do not form a coherent whole. Like *The White Album*,<sup>412</sup> *Let it Be* showcases three very distinct songwriters, with only two songs, “One after 909” and “[I’ve got a Feeling](#)”, being genuine, old-fashioned Lennon/McCartney songs. The former dated back to their nightclub days and the latter is a remarkable snapshot, combining individual McCartney and Lennon songs written in late 1968 and referencing the enthusiasm of the times, yet taking on a completely

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<sup>411</sup> The Beatles (1970), “I, Me, Mine”.

<sup>412</sup> I will be referring to The Beatles’ self titled eponymous “White” album by its official unofficial title, hence, *The White Album* as opposed to calling it *The Beatles*, as above with my referring to the Grateful Dead’s self-titled album by its original and widely used title *Skulls and Roses*.

different meaning upon release in April 1970. The rest of the record, though not without charm, is an afterthought, the songs being less than the sum of their parts.

The real last Beatles album, the last one recorded and arguably a masterpiece, was *Abbey Road*. Recorded and released rapidly in summer 1969, *Abbey Road* presented the artists at their best – certainly they were writing discrete songs but they played together masterfully. Lennon’s “Come Together” had originally been written for a potential Senate election campaign for the LSD huckster Timothy Leary, but had much more to say than a simplistic “tune in, turn on, drop out”. Indeed, underneath its plea for togetherness in the face of an unspoken but ever present Big Brother, this was a song, similar to his “Revolution” from the year before, resigned to a reality that could not be changed institutionally, rather through “consciousness expansion”. This theme was set alongside genuinely delightful wordplay. Harrison’s “Here Comes the Sun” and “[Something](#)” are lovely songs, maudlin enough for Frank Sinatra but without a hint of saccharine. McCartney’s [side two suite](#)<sup>413</sup> is a crowning achievement in his song writing career, though Lennon’s faux-Spanish songs are a bit embarrassing.

With all of this in mind, however, the album now seems monochromatic. As Anderson has it in his own dismissal of The Beatles as artists, they never “strayed much beyond the strict limits of romantic convention”,<sup>414</sup> depending more on whimsy and gimmickry. *Abbey Road* is a perfect rock record in a purely formal sense, but there is more emotion and evocation of the times on *Let it Be*. The former seems to stand outside of history and, one more time, make-believe a Beatles utopia, an “Octopus’s Garden” perhaps. This utopia of complete otherness,

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<sup>413</sup> The suite begins with “You Never Give Me Your Money” through Lennon’s “Sun King”, segueing directly into “Mean Mister Mustard”, which flows into Lennon’s drag-queen throwaway “Polythene Pam”, shifting gears for “She Came in through the Bathroom Window” before the elegiac finale of “Golden Slumbers” into “Carry that Weight” and “The End”.

<sup>414</sup> Anderson(1968), 31.

culminating in the aforementioned rare Ringo Starr written song is a continuation of a trope of ‘otherness’ and ‘negation’ throughout The Beatles career, from “Nowhere Man” to “Yellow Submarine” to the entire imaginary “Sgt. Pepper’s” universe to the Pranksters-imitation TV movie *Magical Mystery Tour*.

This other-worldly utopian spirit underlies The Beatles entire output, and is the not-so-hidden secret of their resilience. We have seen how The Beatles shifted radically, upon their exposure to Dylan, and thus to marijuana and American-style hippy culture. This led to a somewhat detached buy-in to the LSD cult – something that Lennon actually portrayed in far starker terms on his “[Tomorrow Never Knows](#)” and “She Said, She Said” than do the Grateful Dead, Pink Floyd or other acid-rock artists. Yet, the naïveté with which they approached utopia led them indeed to a sense of conservative bucolic reverie with psychedelic characteristics that is evident in the vastly overrated yet exceptionally influential album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.<sup>415</sup> Soon after, they were roped in by the huckster guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, though upon visiting the Yogi’s ashram in India, they discovered that he was a con artist, a cult leader, and quite likely a rapist.<sup>416</sup>

The experience in India was radicalizing, in particular for Lennon and Harrison, with the latter retaining ties to ‘Eastern spirituality’ and South Asia his entire life, including a stint with the Hare Krishnas. In the songwriting that came out this radicalization, the naïve utopia was temporarily, and on a tentative level replaced by an attempt at peeling a (glass) onion beyond

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<sup>415</sup> Like Bob Dylan’s *Basement Tapes* or Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon*, much theoretical and historical ink has been spilled on *Sgt. Pepper’s*. It is not that it is not a brilliant piece of art, but for the purposes of our inquiry of the differentiation within music and interrelations with radical politics, there is not much more to be said. Worth noting briefly, however, is “She’s Leaving Home” which is often said to be about abortion.

<sup>416</sup> “Dear Prudence” is a song originally written by Lennon and Harrison to comfort Prudence Farrow, the sister of Mia Farrow, who would not leave her tent at the Maharishi’s Transcendental Meditation retreat in Rishikesh, India. Various sources situate her having some kind of breakdown and/or having been sexually assaulted by the Maharishi himself. See Chiu (2015).



mystification. Lennon wrote “Sexy Sadie”, originally written as “Maharishi”, accusing the stand-in figure for the person who “made a fool of everyone”, and the impropriety is hinted at. On this and the entire *White Album*, Lennon is at his absolute best, most perceptive and politically astute, if sometimes naïve and confused. On “Happiness is a Warm Gun”, by way of shifting song-structure, he free-associates various forms of commodification, religion, guns and his own heroin use. Likewise, on “Bungalow Bill”, he tells a thinly veiled doggerel of the United States in Vietnam. Bungalow Bill roams around hunting wild game, yet is taken by surprise “deep in the jungle” by unpredictable warriors, sounding quite a bit like the National Liberation Forces in Vietnam. Elsewhere he is more oblique, but with a newfound sense of humble wisdom, something he would later write about on his solo song, “I Found Out”, a song about realizing the stark horror that is life on much of the planet. And even when he has fun, as on “Bungalow Bill” and “Birthday”, he insists upon having his radical artist partner, Ono, sing along, even having a few lines of her own on “Bungalow Bill”.

Of course, this all culminates in *The White Album*’s “Revolution”. Lennon later explained “Revolution” to Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn as merely his rejection of Maoism. In this [infamous interview](#), republished in *Counterpunch*,<sup>417</sup> the two *New Left Review* editors and Lennon’s Trotskyist comrades genuflect to what seems to be one heck of a tall tale – but one, that as will be seen, has a significant amount of ‘meaning’, of truth. In point of fact, “Revolution”, like “All You Need Is Love”, is an explicit rejection of Left politics, arguing – perhaps not incorrectly – that people’s subjectivities were not yet ready.

You say you got a real solution  
Well, you know  
We’d all love to see the plan  
You ask me for a contribution  
Well, you know

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<sup>417</sup> Ali/Blackburn/Lennon (1971).

We're doing what we can  
But if you want money for people with minds that hate  
All I can tell is brother you have to wait  
Don't you know it's gonna be  
All right, all right, all right  
You say you'll change the constitution  
Well, you know  
We all want to change your head  
You tell me it's the institution  
Well, you know  
You better free you mind instead  
But if you go carrying pictures of chairman Mao  
You ain't going to make it with anyone anyhow  
Don't you know it's gonna be  
All right, all right, all right<sup>418</sup>

This is quite transparent. Lennon seems to be referring directly to Leftists asking him for money, but he wants to avoid giving a penny to “minds that hate” (let alone those very few English Maoists). The use of the term “constitution” seems less redolent of constitutional politics than of the overall “constitution” of social/political relations, of the social formation itself, “the institution”. Lennonism (as opposed to Leninism) implies a need for a shift in consciousness, that minds in the sixties were not free enough, thus his narrator at the very least, is ostentatiously not only rejecting an encounter with the Left, but arguing that he knows better.

Yet a few years later, Lennon had undergone some serious intellectual development, had become a Marxist and advocate of psychoanalysis, and was a genuine radical Leftists, as noted, even going out on paper sales. Asked about “Revolution” by Blackburn and Ali, Lennon’s response is perceptive, not merely on this song, but of the *White Album* as a whole.

TA: In a way you were even thinking about politics when you seemed to be knocking revolution?

JL: Ah, sure, ‘Revolution’. There were two versions of that song but the underground left only picked up on the one that said ‘count me out’. The original version which ends up on the LP said ‘count me in’ too; I put in both because I wasn’t sure. There was a third

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<sup>418</sup> The Beatles (1968), “Revolution”.

version that was just abstract, musique concrete, kind of loops and that, people screaming. I thought I was painting in sound a picture of revolution—but I made a mistake, you know. The mistake was that it was anti-revolution. On the version released as a single I said ‘when you talk about destruction you can count me out’. I didn’t want to get killed. I didn’t really know that much about the Maoists, but I just knew that they seemed to be so few and yet they painted themselves green and stood in front of the police waiting to get picked off. I just thought it was unsubtle, you know. I thought the original Communist revolutionaries coordinated themselves a bit better and didn’t go around shouting about it. That was how I felt—I was really asking a question. As someone from the working class I was always interested in Russia and China and everything that related to the working class, even though I was playing the capitalist game.<sup>419</sup>

We must still consider Lennon to be telling a tall-tale in his explanation of the famous difference between the two versions of the song. It is just as likely that on the particularly sloppy, slow and satisfying “Revolution 1” included on the *White Album*, the ‘in’ is an afterthought, an improvisational utterance of the twenty-seven year old confused man facing the changes. Perhaps the decision to include this version on the album was overdetermined by, but irreducible to, the “in”. But its charm is precisely that it is clearly unplanned, like Ringo’s yelping about his blistered fingers included on the final take of “Helter Skelter”. Likewise, his musique-concrete experimentation, his attempt to incorporate the avant-garde is related to the concept of revolution far more so than the song. Yet it structurally shares much more of his wordplay aesthetic in his choice of what we now call “samples” than in any form of outright agit-prop.

What is telling in Lennon’s answer, however much it may have been informed by his more well-developed analysis, now at the mature and retired age of thirty-one was that he intuitively, like Jerry Garcia, saw limitations to what he describes as essentially ultra-Left, the ‘very few’ Maoists who basically got other protesters in trouble. Numerous reports from the era, on both sides of the Atlantic, portray Maoists and other ‘Third Worldists’ as playing this kind of ‘adventurist’ role that Lennon intrinsically recoiled from. He is describing a process not

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<sup>419</sup> Ali/Blackburn/Lennon (1971).

dissimilar, as we shall see, to the pessimism articulated in The Rolling Stones' "Street Fighting Man" in which a poor boy could merely play in a rock band, yet in a way far more palatable to the BBC, happy to hear what can easily be taken as mere liberal pacifism and anti-communism.

As a songwriter on *The White Album* Harrison develops by leaps and bounds. Merely twenty-five years old, he has his own song of the microcosm of interpersonal and political relations in "While My Guitar Gently Weeps". More infamous, perhaps, is "Piggies" in which Harrison lampoons the ruling class with terms perhaps influenced both by *1984* and *Lord of the Flies*. Later "Piggies", as well as McCartney's proto-heavy metal "Helter Skelter" would play a not insignificant role in Charles Manson's symbolic order.

McCartney's role on *The White Album* is both charming and decidedly lightweight, comic relief or ballads that only work as transitional pieces. As a songwriter, McCartney excelled at the epic detachment that characterized the rest of The Beatles' output. It is not that his songs are not highlights of *The White Album* but, rather, they are decentered, while Lennon, and even Harrison (who has far fewer songs) set the tone. There is an ornate quality to McCartney's songs, clearly showing how he, like the rest of the band, were becoming immense fans of the eccentric songwriting of Harry Nilsson. When this type of ornateness carries through on the songs themselves, however The Beatles' music does fall within the context of Anderson's critique. While without denying any charm to songs such as "Martha, My Dear", "Rocky Racoon" or even "Blackbird", taken out of the context of accompanying the Harrison and Lennon songs, they are essentially throwaways, transition tracks. McCartney achieves his real success moving in either experimental ("Wild Honey Pie") or heavy-rock ("Helter Skelter")

directions.<sup>420</sup> Yet with the showman taking a backseat, *The White Album* is shambling, chaotic, possessed of moments of confused pessimism and naïve optimism, but with a spirit of play, of something far more experimental than the formalism of their more elaborate productions. It is the Missed Encounter on record, the differentiation of the archetypal troubadours, their disintegration providing one of the great artistic moments of their career. Yet even they did not have the perceptive quality of The Who and The Kinks.

#### **8.4 Parting on the Left, now Parting on the Right**

Paradoxically, perhaps, the musicians with the most cogent analysis of the late sixties were those who could be described as conservative, not so much “bourgeois” but classically Tory conservative. Getting up on stage at the Woodstock festival to protest political repression, the radical gadfly Abbie Hoffman was beat over the head with an electric guitar by Pete Townsend, hater of hippies and lifelong reactionary.<sup>421</sup> The aesthetically adventurous rock opera *Tommy*, by Townsend and The Who, was deliberately anti-utopian, essentially portraying the masses as “deaf, dumb and blind” and he wrote what *National Review* calls the best conservative rock song of all time, “[Won’t Get Fooled Again](#)”.<sup>422</sup> Alongside Townsend and The Who, Ray Davies and The Kinks specialized in explicitly petit-bourgeois paeans to English life alongside pointed barbs against sixties culture. The Kinks’ *Muswell Hillbillies* was the pinnacle of this, using the signifier “hillbilly” to identify with the American right-wing and lyrical content included virulently anti-union and anti-welfare state sentiment.

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<sup>420</sup> It is worth noting that McCartney’s entire solo career has been an oscillation between these three songwriting techniques – the epic/showy, the rocker and the experimentalist. Perhaps the last few Beatles albums were preparation of this career, that, though spotty, is probably the most full-fledged of all former Beatles.

<sup>421</sup> Greenfield (1997).

<sup>422</sup> Miller (2005); The Who “Won’t Get Fooled Again”.

Ray Davies and Pete Townsend challenged the valorization of youth culture as an agential force – yet from a traditionalist Tory standpoint. Instead of street-fighting men and women, the youth portrayed by Townsend and Davies are “well-adjusted men about town, doing the best things so conservatively”.<sup>423</sup> They are easily swayed but for all intents and purposes have nothing to create but a “teenage wasteland” that would end up as nothing so much as a world “ruled by bureaucracy...people dressed in grey”.<sup>424</sup> This individualism, however, far from being an actual protest against the New Left common-sense of the time, was inscribed in the New Left *weltanschauung*.

Both The Who and The Kinks released their “real” debut 45s in August 1964, after a few false-starts. “I Can’t Explain” and “You Really Got Me” were worlds apart from anything else that had been heard in British rock, and indeed provided a template for half a century of garage-rock and punk-rock. While both still padded out their live sets and early LPs with blues covers, there was a wholly different aesthetic. This was an aesthetic of pure negativity, without a hint of celebration; what was going on around them – “things they do look awful c-c-c-cold”.<sup>425</sup>

Fundamentally, from the beginning, The Kinks and The Who played conservative rock music. Conservatism could be rebellious at a time in which monotonous NATO-leaning social democracy was the law of the land, and the hard-won welfare state and labour movement had nothing to offer the youth. As will be seen, their conservatism could even be far more tolerant, and even accommodating of sexuality, with songs about, among other things, jerk-off photos and torrid affairs with trans-women. They were also, at first, like the punk bands they inspired, primarily oriented to 45 rpm singles and EPs, with albums being an afterthought. Finally, they

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<sup>423</sup> The Kinks (1965), “Well Adjusted Man”.

<sup>424</sup> The Kinks (2005), “20<sup>th</sup> Century Man”.

<sup>425</sup> The Who (1965), “My Generation”.

made their name primarily in the United Kingdom, not achieving American success until the seventies, if at all. In the States (and Canada to a lesser extent) they are ‘twee’ progenitors, neat Wes Anderson soundtrack bands, their innovative conservatism paving the way for today’s ‘indie’ complacency. They provide moral authority to assholes and also made the best music of their generation.

One of the reasons that The Kinks never really made it in the United States was a ban put in place by the then-powerful American Federation of Musicians. The stories behind this ban are obscure, some claiming it was their onstage antics, if not violence – one onstage fight had one of them charged with assault. On the other hand, it should be noted that they were not selling too many tickets, having had an aversion to being either packaged like The Beatles, or being outlaw icons like The Rolling Stones and The Who. On the one hand this was taken by Davies as an example of American exceptionalism, even imperialism, a sort of Cold Warrior reaction. As he wrote in his memoir, “Just because The Beatles did it, every mop-topped, spotty-faced limey juvenile thinks he can come over here and make a career for himself. You’re just a bunch of Commie wimps. When the Russians take over Britain, don’t expect us to come over and save you this time. The Kinks, huh? Well, once I file my report on you guys, you’ll never work in the U.S.A. again. You’re gonna find out just how powerful America is, you limey bastard!”<sup>426</sup>

On the other, in Davies’ symbolic order, labour unions are the ultimate enemy, the enforcers of the grey-suited conformity of dull England. In “[Get Back in Line](#)”, you have the classic Davies song of longing, the woe-is-me with rueful hollow-body guitar tones, “biding time”. Life cannot be happy:

Cause when I see that union man walking down the street  
He's the man who decides if I live or I die, if I starve, or I eat  
Then he walks up to me and the sun begins to shine

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<sup>426</sup> Davies, quoted in Mastropolo (2014).

Then he walks right past and I know that I've got to get back in the line.<sup>427</sup>

The Kinks' "Well Respected Man" was so literal, in its adoption of music-hall tropes with descending chords and Everly Brothers harmonies, that it can almost be heard as ironic. Yet The Kinks were not sneering. The song is a celebration of the new subject produced by the (relatively) egalitarian postwar capitalism in the UK, a well-dressed young man who makes it a point of "doing the best things so conservatively", with ascending major key chords playing beneath the affirmation of conservatism, while descending chords accompany the scaffolding of this recurring character in Kinks music, what we can call the "20th Century Man".

And his mother goes to meetings,  
While his father pulls the maid,  
And she stirs the tea with councillors,  
While discussing foreign trade,  
And she passes looks, as well as bills  
At every suave young man.<sup>428</sup>

This style continued with the charming and seemingly queer-friendly "Dedicated Follower of Fashion", but really gelled on "Sunny Afternoon" taken off of The Kinks' first great full length LP, *Face to Face*, a song that bemoans high taxes and portrays the welfare state as a "fat mama" – a parental unit that "squeezes" the 20th century man. Immersing himself in the music of Frank Sinatra and Bob Dylan, the sincere social commentary – like Dylan, sounding far more aged than he was, one hears a paean not to a future, better world, but a look backwards. This kind of conservatism indeed has ambiguous meaning among the English – indeed the socialist movement had always had a streak of romanticism. But this song directly connected redistributive taxation with a lack of good weather – to wit, pioneers of what was then called "promotional video", the band lip-syncs the song in a snowy field, out of focus. This style

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<sup>427</sup> The Kinks (1970), "Get Back in Line".

<sup>428</sup> The Kinks (1965), "Well Respected Man".



perhaps achieves a sort of Blakean perfection on the well-worn "[Waterloo Sunset](#)" – called by the great socialist rock critic Robert Christgau, "the most beautiful song in the English language",<sup>429</sup> the lyrics subtly playing off of the communist favorite "Old Man River" and the same ascent/descent structure that marked Davies' songwriting, going back to "Tired of Waiting for You".<sup>430</sup>

What makes this beautiful is what makes this conservative, Tory in a classical sense. While the dirty river in "Old Man River", whether sung by Robeson or onetime fellow traveller Sinatra rolls along with the struggles of the narrator, Terry and Julie, making out on the bridge by the Waterloo Sunset are akin to people who have the ability to stand outside of history, outside of the rolling river, while Ray Davies watches them nostalgically. Set in their conservative ways, partially due to disputes with the AFL/CIO affiliate union AFM which had them banned from performing publicly in the United States, they continued to make peculiarly English rock music, sumptuous imperial nostalgia like "Victoria", where the satire was so arch as to render it no longer satirical:

Canada to India  
Australia to Cornwall  
Singapore to Hong Kong  
From the West to the East  
From to the rich to the poor  
Victoria loved them all.<sup>431</sup>

And of course in the chorus to Victoria, "Victoria" became "Toria". It is no accident that English intellectual conservatives would especially admire the Christopher Lasch-esque cultural pessimism of *Arthur or the Decline of the British Empire*. This wasn't the moral ambiguity of

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<sup>429</sup> Christgau (1972).

<sup>430</sup> The Kinks (1968), "Waterloo Sunset".

<sup>431</sup> The Kinks (1968), "Victoria".

Robbie Robertson's "The Night they Drove Old Dixie Down"; this was Ray Davies' nostalgia for the days of empire.

If The Kinks' primary targets of ire were the institutions of social democracy, The Who had a bit of an Adorno complex – Townsend is fundamentally full of fear and disdain of radicals, both in the UK and US – and this is something that still occurs. Of course, he has paid his anti-racist dues, unlike Davies, but Townsend is perhaps even more of a right-winger – as noted, he assaulted a prominent activist at a rock concert. The Who's *Tommy* can be read as a parable on the counterculture and New Left. A woman has a child after her husband has gone off to war and believing her partner to be dead, she meets another man and falls in love – yet her husband returns and beats this man to death. Young Tommy is brainwashed, in a sense – “you didn't hear it, you didn't see it” – and loses standard communicative ability, he is “Deaf, Dumb and Blind”. Instead, he is able to “play by intuition” and live life not through standard reason, but through a broad understanding of touch and imagination. In short, his trauma renders him unable to perceive what is going on around him. In the first of many instrumental evocations of this process of damaged life, “Sparks”, Townsend seemingly deliberately – and successfully adapts the complex instrumental patterns of American Left/counterculture aligned musicians, outdoing them even in a sense, before ending up, like the American acid rockers, covering a blues song “The Hawker” (also known as “Eyesight to the Blind”) by John Lee Hooker.

Yet sexual experimentation was not a route to liberation for Tommy, nor is LSD. It is pinball, the defeat of chance, the ability to have ‘crazy flipper fingers’ that saves him, and this brings a whole movement of people that follow his every move. Yet still, he is deaf, dumb and blind even if a doctor declares his ailment to be essentially psychosomatic. Suddenly, upon realizing this after hearing, he has a whole swathe of followers, who have been there all along,

due to his prowess at the spectacle of pinball. Coming to realize this, he becomes a charismatic leader with pretenses of New Age spirituality.

You'll feel me coming,  
A new vibration  
From afar you'll see me  
I'm a sensation.  
They worship me and all I touch  
Hazy eyed they catch my glance,  
Pleasant shudders shake their senses  
My warm momentum throws their stance.<sup>432</sup>

Eventually, Tommy's comrades abandon his movement or 'religion'; not because they disagree with his aims and methods but because he is trying to instill discipline, to go beyond smoking pot and to develop one's capacities of intuition by wearing earplugs, eye-shades and playing pinball. The blind, in short, were being led by the blind, and once he was no longer blind, they lost their own blindness. Tommy, of course, after losing his followers, still imagines he has them. This is – in short, a parable about the Left, a Left that Townsend rejects – it is notable that notwithstanding his rock star lifestyle, Townsend was rooted in a very real cultural conservatism not dissimilar to some aspects of the Left that banned long hair, illicit substances and 'hippy' lifestyles. But if there was any doubt to the politics of Tommy, this would be dissuaded with key songs from their next album, *Who's Next*.

While many of the songs on *Who's Next* are impressionistic, component parts of an unfinished rock opera, they continue to convey the theme of apocalyptic youth movements, something all the more prevalent after Charles Manson, not to mention widespread popular fear of political violence. This was a "Teenage Wasteland" that needed to be escaped at all costs. Revolutionaries "decide and the shotgun sings the song", leading to a genuflection to the new

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<sup>432</sup> The Who (1969), "I'm a Sensation".

boss, same as the old boss. The song declares an Arrendtian ‘totalitarian’ unity between Left and Right authoritarianism, a return to the *Icarus* parable of *Tommy*.

There's nothing in the streets  
Looks any different to me  
And the slogans are replaced, by-the-bye  
And the parting on the left  
Are now parting on the right  
And the beards have all grown longer overnight  
I'll tip my hat to the new constitution  
Take a bow for the new revolution  
Smile and grin at the change all around  
Pick up my guitar and play  
Just like yesterday  
Then I'll get on my knees and pray  
We don't get fooled again  
Don't get fooled again  
No, no!  
Meet the new boss  
Same as the old boss<sup>433</sup>

The fascinating thing about The Who and The Kinks is beyond their distinctly English conservatism, they also had a far more sophisticated view of gender than the horribly misogynist Rolling Stones or the pre-*White Album* Beatles. As Anderson pointed out, the Stones seem to immanently critique their own misanthropy and misogyny, though this would wear on, in particular after Brian Jones’ death. The Beatles’ misogyny was more subtle and spotty. There are songs that matter-of-factly mention intimate violence as a normal part of a relationship. The Who and The Kinks, on the other hand, have songs narrated by insecure men who are essentially *nebbishes*. These are the lads who come on all too strong, masking insecurity – they are anything but macho. This is captured well in The Who’s 1972 rock opera, *Quadrophenia*, arguably a superior work compared with *Tommy*. Set amongst the milieu of ‘mods and rockers’ that The

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<sup>433</sup> The Who (1971), “Won’t Get Fooled Again”.

Who came out of, the leading character, who suffers from severe disassociation or “quadrophenia”, wonders, on “[Sea and Sand](#)”.

The girl I love  
Is a perfect dresser  
Wears every fashion  
Gets it to the tee  
Heavens above  
I've got to match her  
She knows just how  
She wants her man to be  
Leave it to me  
My jacket's gonna be cut slim and checked  
Maybe a touch of seersucker with an open neck  
I ride a G.S. scooter with my hair cut neat  
I wear my wartime coat in the wind and sleet  
I see her dance  
Across the ballroom  
UV lights making stars shine  
Of her smile  
I am the face  
She has to know me  
I'm dressed up better than anyone  
Within a mile  
Oh, yeah  
So how come the other tickets look much better?  
Without a penny to spend they dress to the letter  
How come the girls come on oh so cool  
Yet when you meet 'em, every one's a fool?<sup>434</sup>

Like the Beach Boys, a large influence on The Who, the male narrators are never predatory, at least in The Who's early material. Indeed, there is more than a bit of sexual eccentricity. “Pictures of Lily” was a charting radio hit in the UK, its lyrics clearly about being unable to sleep as an adolescent until one's discovery of masturbation. Then there is “I'm a Boy” that reads, on the surface, as a bit of wordplay about a young man whose mother is forcing him to wear “frocks” like his sisters; it could also be about the phenomenon that now allows itself to be understood as trans-masculinity. From this angle, the misgendered male narrator of the song

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<sup>434</sup> The Who (1972), “Sea and Sand”.

is assigned female at birth yet he is not merely dysphoric, his masculinity is not about his corporeality, but how it is covered and made up.

My name is Bill, and I'm a head case  
They practice making up on my face  
Yeah, I feel lucky if I get trousers to wear  
Spend evenings taking hairpins from my hair  
I'm a boy, I'm a boy  
But my ma won't admit it  
I'm a boy, I'm a boy  
But if I say I am, I get it  
Put your frock on, Jean Marie  
Plait your hair, Felicity  
Paint your nails, little Sally Joy  
Put this wig on, little boy  
I wanna play cricket on the green  
Ride my bike across the street  
Cut myself and see my blood  
I wanna come home all covered in mud<sup>435</sup>

And thus, something that on the surface seems a lark, a set of reversals like their earlier “Substitute” is actually a compassionate look at what is seen as odd. Given what is now known about Townsend’s queerness, and the more overtly queer and gender-ambiguous content in later material, it seems reasonable to suggest that a reading of “I’m a Boy” is not reducible to feet-stomping whining at an overbearing mother. The song builds up to a defiant climax with Keith Moon’s drums taking the lead. It is in many ways a very obscure Who song, yet it was a radio hit and appears on many greatest hits compilations.

The Kinks’ song of gender-fucking is far more well-known, indeed it became their signature live song, chanted by thousands of fans in arenas in the seventies and eighties. “Lola”, like “[I’m a Boy](#)”, seems at first to appear to be a bit of a lark. Yet even taken on simple terms, a song about going out with the boys and going home with what seems, by our current understanding to be not a drag queen, but a trans-woman. This was, after all a time in which the

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<sup>435</sup> The Who (1966), “I’m a Boy”.

lines between the two were not quite as clear as full time trans-woman were still thought of as men and often lived within a context of enforced performance of masculinity. The lyrics encapsulate this ambiguity. Lola is never referred to as a “he”, Lola is always a “she”.

Well that's the way that I want it to stay  
And I always want it to be that way for my Lola  
La-la-la-la Lola  
Girls will be boys and boys will be girls  
It's a mixed up muddled up shook up world except for Lola  
La-la-la-la Lola  
Well I left home just a week before  
And I'd never ever kissed a woman before  
But Lola smiled and took me by the hand  
And said little boy I'm gonna make you a man  
Well I'm not the world's most masculine man  
But I know what I am and I'm glad I'm a man  
And so is Lola<sup>436</sup>

Much is made of this last stanza, in which the narrator, assured of his own manhood (if not ‘masculinity’) declares he is glad he’s a man, “and so is Lola”. This is seemingly deliberate ambiguity. Is Lola a man? Or is Lola glad that he’s a man? The key here is Ray Davies’ lyrics betray a wisdom beyond their years. Gender-fluidity is a fact of life, and the whole world is mixed up and muddled up about it, except Lola, and this makes the narrator very happy, and able to enjoy intimacy. On that note, it is a moot point whether Lola is a man, but it seems far more likely that Lola is not a man, but is glad that the narrator is a man.

As can be seen, The Who and The Kinks, in their exception to the rule of the lock-step development of canonical and classic rock music with the development of the New Left, actually, if inadvertently, had a far more real encounter with the reality of social relations in late sixties English capitalist, patriarchal and hetero-normative society. If one compares their actual practical politics with The Rolling Stones and The Beatles, one will find them, as is to be

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<sup>436</sup> The Kinks (1970), “Lola”.

expected, to be outright reactionaries. The Kinks played the Sun City resort in Apartheid South Africa, while Pete Townsend refused to allow the progressive filmmaker Michael Moore to use his “Won’t Get Fooled Again” in *Fahrenheit 911*. It was precisely as reactionaries, as outliers, that they were able to glimpse the limitations embodied in the conjuncture. They would never aesthetically or culturally degenerate, like The Rolling Stones.

### 8.5 A Choice of Cancer or Polio

In 1971 and 1972, The Rolling Stones recorded and released a pair of albums, *Sticky Fingers* and the double LP [\*Exile on Main Street\*](#), that encapsulate precisely the dissolution of the lock-step relationship between the far Left and cultural producers. Having been ill-advised by early managers, The Rolling Stones, as of 1970, owed hundreds of thousands of pounds in back taxes to the British Treasury, and decamped for France. They had developed, over the previous few years a very specific sound, coming out of the recording of the single “Jumping Jack Flash” and the album *Beggar’s Banquet*. Switching to open G tuning, as in the legendary guitar work of the likes of Ike Turner and Lightning Hopkins, the power-chord guitar sound became the Stones’ trademark, dependent as much upon percussive downward strumming as on melodic picking. Likewise, Jagger was still as macho and ribald as ever, but had affected a sort of androgynous appearance and stage manner, something that would be played up later on when he would kiss guitarist Ron Wood on stage. An unreleased track from 1969, [“Cocksuckers Blues”](#) adds to this layer of the Stones’ aesthetic, but it was left on the cutting room floor.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> “Cocksucker’s Blues” is a remarkable song in that Jagger inhabits precisely the sexualized young person that is usually the object of desire. Comprising a (faux?) autobiographical narrative of a young man from the countryside moving to London. The young man is on the hunt for rough sex, but proverbially can’t get no satisfaction in getting his ass fucked or his cock sucked, to use the terminology in the lyrics, finally to be either assaulted or at the very least roughly penetrated by a cop or “pig”. This ambiguity may well be a statement on how openly gay young men were treated by police. The Stones recorded two versions, one a deliberately Delta-style blues, with slide guitar and ‘moanin’, another as a fast and sleek rocker, akin to “Live With Me”. Later a very disturbing film, of the Stones’



*Exile on Main Street*, recorded in Keith Richards' palatial estate in the south of France, strips the Stones' sound down to its bare essentials, while evoking the blues band that they'd originally been intent on forming. Bringing in a diverse array of musicians, including the legendary upright bass player Scotty Moore from Elvis Presley's band, this was junkie-rock at its finest. It did not go unnoticed, as was seen in a previous chapter, that hard drugs started entering countercultural milieu in 1968 and 1969, and what started off as 'chipping' with heroin became, in the case of Richards, a habit that was largely a trademark, adding to his haggard aesthetic. Indeed, one of the album's highlights, "Torn and Frayed", was specifically about heroin addiction, in a way far more direct and sardonic than the retrospectively melodramatic songs by non-junkies, notably the Velvet Underground's "Heroin".

It is not as if these tax exiles (hence the album title) had given up on politics as such. "Sweet Black Angel" was their tribute to Angela Davis, a hero to Richards in particular, while "Sweet Virginia" was a dig at southern racism, imploring southerners to "kick the shit right off their shoes". "Shine a Light" is a heartfelt tribute to the late Brian Jones, and also serves, in hindsight as an elegy to the entire era – nothing would be the same after 1972, for the Stones or anyone else. The songs, in a sense, then, are both historically specific yet their charm is that, unlike any other Stones album, and save for the oblique reference to Davis, they seem to float above history and politics, like the old junkie expression goes, "floating on a cloud of titties".

The aesthetic presuppositions that provided the scaffolding for *Exile on Main Street* were largely put in place on the previous album, [\*Sticky Fingers\*](#). This was their first full album recorded with Brian Jones' replacement, Mick Taylor, a skilled young blues player who had cut his teeth playing with English blues legend John Mayall. Perhaps as well known for its Andy

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1972 tour, including scenes of band members seemingly raping groupies as well as Richards shooting heroin was made, but never officially released.

Warhol album cover, depicting the crotch of a well-endowed man in denim, with a zipper that, on original pressings, would open to reveal a balloon penis that would jut-out like a pop up book – Warhol was one-upping his previous work designing for the Velvet Underground. This album contains some of the most offensive, irredeemable music in the Stones’ catalogue. “Brown Sugar” is a crass, racist song about having sex with Black women, as well as, perhaps, a double entendre referencing a slang term for heroin. Yet with its charging Richards’ guitar riff and Bobby Keys’ saxophone solo, it achieves the near impossible and is redeemed – not in spite of, but because of its outright disgusting quality. A harbinger for the absolute degeneration of blues rock into cocksure sexist crowd pleasers, “Brown Sugar” has an aftertaste akin to being cut with salt. Likewise, “Bitch” is built upon another astounding Richards’ arrangement with a dynamite horn section that almost, but doesn’t quite, make up for the misogyny.

The rest of the album continues to develop the Stones’ parallel universe, outside and beyond politics. Ornate songs like “Wild Horses”, co-written by an uncredited Gram Parsons, or “Moonlight Mile”, express a sense of longing and disintegration, the equivalent of the fallen wave, the failures of sixties politics and the individualization of human concerns. They had achieved a certain comfort on much of the record, recorded as it was before their tax exile. That comfort, of course, like on *Exile*, was filtered through a regularization of hard drug usage – and in that the Stones were trendsetters. “Dead Flowers” is a fantastic and highly traditional country song, in which the working class narrator thinks his love interest is too good for him, “with her silver poster chair”, so he’ll just hang out in his basement and shoot-up. Likewise, “Sister Morphine”, written by Jagger with his former partner Marianne Faithful, and featuring almost disturbing slide-guitar from Ry Cooder, is a little horror show morsel of either being too doped up, recovering from surgery, or both.

Much of *Sticky Fingers*, as noted, was written and recorded immediately after the Altamont incident, mentioned in the previous chapter, for which The Rolling Stones blamed the Grateful Dead. The Grateful Dead, as has been seen, used this opportunity to reckon with “the darkness”, but the Stones, at least publicly, moved on and distanced themselves ostentatiously from the American rock scene and counterculture, at least its west-coast iteration. They had never been much for psychedelia in any case, having failed in their answer-album to The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s*. That album, *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, does contain some excellent songs worthy of revisiting, but it was not the right ‘fit’. It is most notable for being the last album that Brian Jones, a multi-instrumentalist polymath who had been eclipsed by Jagger and Richards, played a vital role in shaping.

Prior to Altamont and 1969’s renowned tour of the United States, The Rolling Stones recorded their transitional record, [\*Let it Bleed\*](#). Partially recorded while Jones was ostensibly still a band member, but featuring some contributions from Taylor. The album was recorded alongside one of their great non-album singles, “Honky Tonk Woman” which became the template for the riff-oriented songs that would follow on the next two records. Another, more playful and fiddle-adorned country version of the song, entitled “Country Honk” appears on the album. The Stones are still in their unorthodox mode, in regards to relationships, on both “Honky Tonk Woman” and album tracks like “Live With Me” and the pathos of “Let it Bleed”; machismo is bubbling underneath the surface. But it is cut by ribald humour, as on the guitar rave-up “Midnight Rambler”. Yet it is with mixing relationship metaphors with a statement on the Vietnam War that the Stones make a political statement, on “Gimme Shelter”.

Oh, a storm is threat'ning  
My very life today  
If I don't get some shelter  
Oh yeah, I'm gonna fade away

War, children, it's just a shot away  
It's just a shot away  
War, children, it's just a shot away  
It's just a shot away  
Ooh, see the fire is sweepin'  
Our very street today  
Burns like a red coal carpet  
Mad bull lost its way  
War, children, it's just a shot away  
It's just a shot away  
War, children, it's just a shot away  
It's just a shot away  
Rape, murder!  
It's just a shot away  
It's just a shot away<sup>438</sup>

Jagger and Richards had already developed a sense of sobriety around the possibilities of political change in the near future, unlike their colleagues in the United States. Songs like “Gimme Shelter”, which opens the record, were deliberately meant to evoke the horror and bleakness of times in which others were still dancing in the street and calling for the rise of the Age of Aquarius. The album itself is bookended by such statements, ending, as it does with “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” which itself is, to a large degree, a continuation of the themes, that will be revisited, of “Street Fighting Man”. Three simple observations are carried through the songs, and repeated, all surrounding the theme of futility. There is the love interest at the fancy reception, who at first seems to be looking for a drug connection, but is later revealed to be a metaphor for the times. “Practiced in the art of deception”, as she was, she had blood on her hands. There is also Mr. Jimmy, who shares a cherry-red soda with the narrator at the drug store soda fountain where the narrator seems to be filling the love interest’s prescription. In between the two, there is the day-to-day burnout of far Left politics in sleepy London Town.

I went down to the demonstration  
To get my fair share of abuse  
Singing, "We're gonna vent our frustration

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<sup>438</sup> The Rolling Stones (1969), “Gimme Shelter”.

If we don't we're gonna blow a fifty-amp fuse.”<sup>439</sup>

This could be taken, on one level, as a criticism of ultra-Left adventurism, of the type that Lennon complained about to Ali and Blackburn. Yet it seems to be a descriptive, as opposed to normative line, in keeping with the criticism of “Compromised Solutions” in “Street Fighting Man”. Perhaps, Jagger seems to be suggesting, it was time for the British Left to kick it up a notch, like the French. The Stones had established a relationship the previous year with Jean-Luc Godard who filmed their recording of “Sympathy for the Devil” for an experimental film released as *One plus One*, and could not have been unaware of the fighting spirit of French radicals, in comparison with their fellow Londoners. Interspersing readings of revolutionary theory and poetry, images of street battles and the Vietnam war, *One plus One* ages quite well and is about the closest The Rolling Stones came to a full-fledged encounter, mediated by Godard, with revolutionary, not merely radical politics.

“Sympathy for the Devil” is what opens up their ‘comeback’ album, as noted above, [\*Beggar’s Banquet\*](#), perhaps the finest musical distillation of 1968, in all of its contradictions and coming from the standpoint of the relative lack of a real social movement in England. It is explicitly proletarian with a hint of aristocratic satire, encapsulated by the photo of the Stones ‘banquet’, found on the inside of the original gatefold LP cover. Starting with the now-familiar but still jarring percussion, followed by primal yelps, we are brought into the Stones’ lair with “Sympathy for the Devil” – itself such a historically specific – yet in its own way universal – song. The narrator, Lucifer, a “man of wealth and taste” stands in for the demiurge of necessity, who “stuck around St. Petersburg” to be a participant in the Bolshevik revolution, vividly recalling “Anastasia screaming in pain”. Yet this revolutionary role allowed him to ride a tank

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<sup>439</sup> The Rolling Stones (1969), “You Can’t Always Get What You Want”.

and hold a general's rank when the blitzkrieg raged and the fighters stank. Before that he had "watched with glee" while kings and queens fought for a century in the name of this or that deity. Evoking the very recent assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, the listener is placed on the hook for "killing the Kennedies". Finally a declaration that "every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners, saints". All of this is accompanied very sparsely by Nicky Hopkins' piano, around five or six percussionists and one of Keith Richards' best recorded guitar solos.<sup>440</sup>

Having entered the banquet, we come to "No Expectations", ostensibly about a failed romance, but also on one level of generality, the eclipse of Brian Jones as a Rolling Stone (his slide guitar on this song has a sadness that is hard to quantify) – and also about the repeated theme on the record – the lack of fighting capacity among the English at the time. It is a foreboding song of defeat, but not completely hopeless, just melancholy. Side one continues with the jaunty "Dear Doctor", a country send-up and "Parachute Woman", a Chicago-blues style song. The culmination of the first side comes with "Jigsaw Puzzle" with another mournful slide guitar performance from Jones. The song is the most direct statement of how the Stones – millionaire performing artists, but exploited cultural producers targeted by police and intelligence services – saw themselves. We are introduced to a series of Dylanesque characters who have been outcasts all their lives. Embedded in this is a description of a band that by description seem remarkably like the Stones, before the song ends with a sardonic verse about a popular uprising of "Grandmas" who have had their pensions frittered away, get attacked by a regiment of soldiers under the watchful eye of the queen, who the dying grandmothers don't hesitate to thank.

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<sup>440</sup> Lyrics all from Rolling Stones (1968), "Sympathy for the Devil".

Side two starts with one of the most recognizable guitar riffs ever recorded, that of “Street Fighting Man”. Technically, this song is quite novel – as distorted and abrasive as the guitar sounds, it is actually a layering of a number of recordings of the riff itself played by Richards on an acoustic guitar – there is no electric guitar at all on the track, save one of the last pieces of music recorded by Brian Jones, a lick at the end that may or may not actually be a mellotron. “The time is right for palace revolution”, sings Jagger, “but where I am, the game that’s played is compromised solutions...so what can a poor boy do but to sing in a rock and roll band”.<sup>441</sup> Perhaps defeatist, but with an optimism of the will, hence as noted, its lyrics printed in *The Red Mole*. It’s impossible to overstate how scared this song made the authorities – it was banned from radio stations all over the world. Ironically, as noted, the song expresses pessimism (like with the Grandmas of “Jigsaw Puzzle”) as to the capacities of the English in sleepy London town, compared with Prague, Paris or Chicago. Once again, Perry Anderson is worth quoting at length.

The most obvious track here is, of course, Street Fighting Man. Released virtually simultaneously with The Beatles’ lamentable petty bourgeois cry of fear Revolution, its ideological credentials were certified by Mayor Daley in person. For our purposes, the most important element of the record, which situates it well beyond even, say, the Doors—is the non-equation of music and politics in it, and the parallel non-assimilation of the USA and Britain. All facility is here rejected (rock = revolution: Doors/Airplane). The theme of the number is precisely the lack of revolutionary traditions in England (In sleepy London town, the game to play is compromise solution) and the necessarily surrogate role rock may play in the absence of them (What can a poor boy do/except play in a rock and-roll band?). The composition is thus an exact musical statement of the destiny of music in a society which blocks any political prolongation of the people’s art.<sup>442</sup>

The rest of the second side, as opposed to the melancholy jauntiness of side one, replicates the narrative in a delving into the muck of proletarian life in “sleepy London town”,

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<sup>441</sup> The Rolling Stones (1968), “Street Fighting Man”.

<sup>442</sup> Anderson (1970), 93-94. Note: grammar, spelling and lack of capitalization are from the original.

the milieu in which rock stars want to drink “to the Salt of the Earth” while fearing the “faceless crowd”. A cover of Robert Johnson’s “Prodigal Son” is followed by the problematic, disturbing and captivating “Stray Cat Blues”, a song that if made today could very well land the band in legal trouble, given the frank depiction of teenaged sexuality and the business-like, even aristocratic guitar crunch. While it may seem disturbing, and even questionable, there is no question that the narrator is not forcing himself on the teenaged “stray cats”. Rather, it is a twenty-five year old man who has a thing for teenaged girls, and as he says, “It ain’t no capital crime”. This finds its antithesis in “Factory Girl”, a fantasy of meeting an archetypal working class woman. Jagger wanted to sleep with “Common People”<sup>443</sup> like the narrator of Pulp’s Brit-Pop hit, this itself being a trope in English popular music. We come to a finale with the aforementioned “Salt of the Earth”, with a final twang of the slide guitar from Brian Jones and Keith Richards’ first solo lead vocal on the first verse, doing his best Chet Baker imitation, drinking to the good and the evil. The limitations offered in British society are laid bare.

Spare a thought for the stay-at-home voter  
His empty eyes gaze at strange beauty shows  
And a parade of the gray suited grafters  
A choice of cancer or polio<sup>444</sup>

To this day, there has not been a more succinct description of the false choices on offer in bourgeois democracy. The song picks up to a frenetic pace in the spirit of American gospel music, an elegy for working class hopes and dreams. The reference to working class people being those who are “lowly at birth”, while the unashamedly bourgeois Jagger sees a “faceless crowd” in which the faces look strange, is a moment of humility rarely found in any political rock music. Jagger and Richards are admitting that as much solidarity they may have with the

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<sup>443</sup> Pulp (1995), “Common People”.

<sup>444</sup> The Rolling Stones (1968), “Salt of the Earth”.



working classes, they could offer nothing more than toasts at a beggar's banquet. They could sleep with sex workers and factory girls, they could participate in anti-war and social movements, but life was still a "Jigsaw Puzzle", and, as they sing on a song first recorded in these sessions, "you can't always get what you want".

The period that we have just visited is often known as the Stones' "classic period", from *Beggar's Banquet* through to *Exile on Main Street*. Indeed, sonically and aesthetically, each of these works builds upon the next, but as we have seen, each one subtracts from the next, in terms of being at one, not merely with the Left, but with history as a whole. As heroin abuse, groupies and rock stardom set in, banquets were no longer held for hardworking people, they were held merely for the sake of a good time, a roll of the tumbling dice. This to highlight the degeneration and differentiation of a rock band from committed militants to decadent aristocrats, from street-fighting men to "torn and frayed" codeine-poppin' studs.

It is apt that on *Exile on Main Street*, there is a track – the big hit single from the album – known as "Tumbling Dice". An aleatory track if there ever was one, the narrator here is perhaps a stand-in for rock music as form, having missed an encounter with politics. He was becoming aware of its own contingency as represented by tumbling dice. The rock audience, segmented as it now was by growing record companies, concert promotion operations and the other accoutrements of big business, were nothing more than "low down gamblers", if the Stones didn't please them, they were ultimately disposable, and promoters could trot out Aerosmith or the New York Dolls, depending upon the audience or what they were trying to evoke.

In 2005, well into George W. Bush's 'war on terrorism' the Stones recorded, as of 2017, their last studio album of originally composed songs, *The Big Bang*, including one delightful and cutting song known as "[Sweet NeoCon](#)", about the crew of war-mongers surrounding Bush. This

was still at a time in which artists were being quite quiet about politics, lest they be told to “shut up and sing”. The Rolling Stones, given the gravity of the circumstances, at least appeared to have something to say about politics, greed, capitalism and war. This is not at all the case for Bob Dylan, who we shall turn to next.

## Chapter 9

### Wheels On Fire: Bob Dylan in Historical Context

#### 9.1 Live in a Political World

The general public consciousness of the sixties is expressed by connecting its music with broader changes in social relations, often as telescoped by a film soundtrack, like that of *Forrest Gump* or *The Big Chill*. One hears, through the selection of Hollywood wizards, the changes within what Bowie called the “warm impermanence”<sup>445</sup> of sixties abundance capitalism degenerating in the chaos of the Vietnam War and generational splits. The technological wizardry and integrationism of Phil Spector and his girl groups give way to the Beach Boys, then the Beatles, and then things start getting political and one hears “Stop, hey, what’s that sound, everybody look what’s goin’ round”, from Buffalo Springfield’s “For What It’s Worth”.<sup>446</sup> It could be that or “Eve of Destruction” by Barry McGuire or perhaps, most elegantly, Sam Cooke’s stunning “A Change is Gonna Come”. If a film producer really wants to throw a curveball, she would counterpose these songs to the likes of Merle Haggard’s “Okie from Muskogee” or General Sadler’s “Ballad of the Green Berets”.

It is notable, however, that all of the above mentioned songs use the broad idiom of American folk, roots and gospel music, emphasis on layered rhythm guitars or pianos and organs, both acoustic and undistorted electric, emotively delivered vocals and appeals to the passions. Yet at the same time, their political content is not always as straightforward as the didactic tone taken. The first two songs mentioned are strangely detached, worried about the world, but not at all suggesting any agency that would attempt to change things. Instead, they

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<sup>445</sup> David Bowie (1971), “Changes”.

<sup>446</sup> Buffalo Springfield (1966), “For What It’s Worth”.

narrate the fear underlying the abundance, the fresh memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis, “paranoia strikes deep”.<sup>447</sup> Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come” became known as a Civil Rights anthem, its optimistic message belied by its mournful minor-key and even pessimistic tone, brought out even more by [Otis Redding’s cover version](#). Yet like “Eve of Destruction” and “For What It’s Worth” it is detached, not a protest song so much as an experiential narrative.

Tellingly, this can apply as well to Haggard and Sadler’s songs. Haggard later admitted that he played up a patriotic persona but was also active in opposing the Vietnam war and was covered by the Grateful Dead. “Okie from Muskogee” is as much a joke on its audience as it is a celebration of those ‘straight’ Americans in white small towns, where they don’t grow their hair, smoke marijuana, love the police and military and are proud of their heritage.<sup>448</sup> Sadler’s “Green Berets” is in turn, surprisingly sanguine and even anti-war in regards to what can amount to a lament at the unrecognized dirty work performed by the Berets, the assassinations and covert operations, the ass-covering for the top brass.<sup>449</sup> These were all laments disguised as didacticism, an attempt at the real deal protest songs that set in motion the era’s music, less by virtue of their politics than by virtue of a combination of their genuine quality, the ‘right place, right time’ phenomenon and the folk music movement’s embeddedness in the social movements, notably the Civil Rights movement.

The political music that reached a mass audience during the long sixties can be analysed as of three types – the generally political or protest songs, often about the Vietnam War and, at a certain point, proclaiming the need for revolution. Relatedly, there is music that makes reference to the conjuncture and/or acts as a distillation of a certain moment, exposing a certain

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<sup>447</sup> Buffalo Springfield (1966), “For What it’s Worth”.

<sup>448</sup> Merle Haggard (1968), “Okie from Muskogee”.

<sup>449</sup> Sgt. Barry Sadler (1966), “Ballad of the Green Berets”.

contradiction. Finally, and perhaps most lastingly, there is the music that – by virtue of being performed by those embedded in a common-sensical fashion to the New Left and counterculture – acts upon the prevailing assumption that revolution was around the corner and they were there to provide the soundtrack.

Seen through this angle, Bob Dylan is the universal centre of any conceptualization of the Missed Encounter. At the beginning of Dylan's career, it would be no exaggeration to make the claim that the Left, in both its old and new forms saw Dylan as an inspirational figure, and it would be equally apropos to make the claim today. Yet a distinction needs to be made between the Left's hopes for Dylan before his outgrowing a didactic modality of expression, and the Left's continued wonderment at his mysterious and evocative words, equally historically specific and polysemic. Yet to focus for a moment on the beginning of Dylan's career, he himself, as implied in his exceptionally esoteric memoir, as well his constituency, wanted to pigeonhole him in a category that seemed to have surpassed its relevance. This is to say, a Popular Front troubadour, a proletarian chronicler. Dylan's single-handed negation of that archetype, out of which came the chameleonic individualist icon that is the artist we now know as Bob Dylan. In doing so, he opened up a wide field of space for rock music experimentation, yet also enhanced, perhaps inadvertently, a focus on the individual. This focus on individual iconography has proved a two-headed sword in music production, analysis and even appreciation.

Perhaps such a focus on Dylan can be challenged to make the case that to imbue Dylan with such historical power and relevance, perhaps more so than any other artist discussed in this project, is to fall prey to an individualist analysis of the conjuncture. Yet Dylan is to this constellation a figure on the level of Lenin for the Russian Revolution or DaVinci in the Renaissance. He is not a mythologically singular figure, he actually is a historically singular

figure. It seems he may well be aware of his significance, as he is an elusive figure as a private individual, preferring, seemingly to embody the role with which the cunning of reason has foisted upon him. After winning a Nobel Prize for literature in 2016, his Nobel lecture barely mentioned his own art. Instead, after briefly and consciously situating himself as being informed in the first instance by music, and the tradition of Popular Front-derived canon of American folk songs, the working class traditions, and outlaw lore. Yet this was not sufficient, as Dylan notes, he was also informed very deeply as a reader of literature, which provided him with “a way of looking at life, an understanding of human nature, and a standard to measure things by”.<sup>450</sup> He thus spends the rest of his long lecture with excursions on *Moby Dick*, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Odyssey*.<sup>451</sup> His excursions point out, even if inadvertently, the dialectic of historic specificity and timelessness in all three works of cultural production, and his own implication being that this dialectic can be found in his own art.

Dylan, after all, started out consciously adapting an aesthetic entirely rooted in the Popular Front, the folk-singing comrade. Indeed Dylan was an activist and deeply committed to the civil rights movement early in his career. Even Dylan’s deviations seem to be a playing out of the contradictions embedded within this aesthetic. The myth of Dylan, metamorphosing from agitating folkie to impressionistic troubadour, followed by androgynous rock star, reclusive stoner, Christian fundamentalist and so forth, is rooted in some degree of truth. Yet throughout all of these mythologized personae, he never strayed from the folk idiom that he mentioned in his Nobel lecture, nor from being stylistically informed by classical realism and classicism. That he continued to achieve ‘charm’ even while offending his audience’s deepest sensibilities, whether

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<sup>450</sup> Dylan (2017).

<sup>451</sup> It turns out the excursions may well have been plagiarized, the latest of many of the perennial joker’s hijinx; see Rubin (2017).

through fundamentalism, or more recently, a disturbing reverence for the Confederacy in the US Civil War, can be seen as far less mysterious giving a concrete reading of what he represented.

Like with the Grateful Dead, a formal analysis of Dylan's work is inseparable from a lyrical analysis, and neither are separate from a conjunctural analysis. Again, this is due to the inarguable connotation that Dylan's work finds in reference to both the politics and music of the sixties, but also due to the dialectic of the forms that Dylan came to embody, both of which themselves – folk music, literature – can only be captured through both formal and lyrical analysis. The purpose here, in culminating with an analysis of Dylan as the proverbial centrepiece of this project as a whole, is not to overstate Dylan. The point is to take him off of his mythological pedestal and bring him back as the “Jokerman”, the answer to the riddle of the Missed Encounter.

## **9.2 Younger than that Now**

There has likely never been so powerful a statement of ambivalence with the Old Left of Communist Parties and trade unions, of folk music and ‘the Jewish Community’, of bourgeois Victorian manners with articulations of anti-capitalism, than Bob Dylan's 1964 song “[My Back Pages](#)”. We will return to this song, but let us set the stage. Dylan had been popularized in his early works as a prominent singer/activist in the Civil Rights movement, who performed at the March on Washington. His manager, the lugubrious Albert Grossman, carefully crafted his image as a young man who came to New York to meet Woody Guthrie; this was only partially the case – indeed he wanted to visit Guthrie but also wanted to ply his trade as a musician. Within months of arriving in New York he was a sought-after session harmonica whiz, playing

on records by fellow traveller Harry Belafonte among others.<sup>452</sup> Over the years, Dylan recorded one album primarily of faithful, exquisitely performed covers, and two masterpieces, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* and *The Times they are a' Changin'*. The former is the superior album, mixing humour with cutting politics – in particular, “Masters of War” and honest narrations of youth, hinting at his future work. The latter was far more didactic, with some exceptional individual songs but not holding together quite as well. Being a protest singer was not all that Dylan was cracked out to be.

Dylan's route away from the Old Left came most famously, as portrayed excellently in Todd Haynes' experimental bio-pic *I'm Not There*, when accepting a special award from the Emergency Civil Liberties Commission, as has been mentioned. This organization, founded by those affected by McCarthyite repression and purged from the more well-known ACLU, was well-respected among the aging Jewish fellow traveller community in New York.<sup>453</sup> In many ways, Dylan felt like he was a puppet to this milieu, akin to Phil Ochs' archetypal liberal, that is to say, someone who gave money and perhaps went on marches when it was convenient, but not someone who actually could fathom social transformation. These are the “mothers and fathers throughout the land”<sup>454</sup> who criticize that which they have no understanding in “The Times, they are a Changin'”. While denouncing in no uncertain terms the milieu he was addressing as “old” and counterposing them to those who had gone on a solidarity trip to revolutionary Cuba, Dylan even went so far as to critique the mainstream civil rights leadership. His Black friends in the music world didn't have to wear suits and didn't have to be respectable. Finally, after again

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<sup>452</sup> Marqusee (2005).

<sup>453</sup> Marqusee (2005); Haynes (2007).

<sup>454</sup> Bob Dylan (1963), “The Times they are a-Changin'”.



referencing the Cuban revolution, Dylan dropped a bomb, while ending with his shout-out to the radical wing of the Civil Rights movement.

I'll stand up and to get uncompromisable about it, which I have to be to be honest, I just got to be, as I got to admit that the man who shot President Kennedy, Lee Oswald, I don't know exactly where —what he thought he was doing, but I got to admit honestly that I too – I saw some of myself in him. I don't think it would have gone – I don't think it could go that far. But I got to stand up and say I saw things that he felt, in me – not to go that far and shoot. (Boos and hisses) You can boo but booing's got nothing to do with it. It's a – I just a – I've got to tell you, man, it's Bill of Rights is free speech and I just want to admit that I accept this Tom Paine Award in behalf of James Forman of the Students Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and on behalf of the people who went to Cuba. (Boos and Applause).<sup>455</sup>

Dylan was surely, like Malcolm X's talk of chickens roosting, being a sly provocateur. Nevertheless, he is driving home the point in a strong way that Oswald was actually willing, in a twisted way, to do something concrete in the face of US involvement in Cuba, the assassination of Lumumba, the beginnings of the Vietnam War, was his point. He connects this point to those actually doing concrete political work, as opposed to the “old people” in the crowd, that went from thinking they were being poked fun at, to realizing they were the target of his ire. They were, as he later obliquely called them in “It's Alright Ma”, “social clubs in drag disguise”.<sup>456</sup> Dylan's political presuppositions, presuppositions that underlay his art, came crashing down, as merely having a normative critique of American democracy, and being an activist (as Dylan was, going on many Freedom Rides) in the Civil Rights movement wasn't enough. It is in this context that he wrote “My Back Pages”, singing of “using ideas of my maps”, and having “romantic facts of musketeers”,<sup>457</sup> all while enraptured by “crimson flames”, an oblique reference the Communist tradition. It should be noted that Dylan didn't much care for the

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<sup>455</sup> Dylan (1963).

<sup>456</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “It's Alright Ma (I'm only Bleeding).”.

<sup>457</sup> Bob Dylan (1964), “My Back Pages”.

CPUSA; contemporaries of his, such as Dave van Ronk were Trotskyists and he effuses in his memoir about the “Wobblies” or International Workers of the World (IWW).<sup>458</sup> It is after a number of elliptical references that follow, that made many take this song (and “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue”) as a sign of apostasy, of ‘selling out’.

A self-ordained professor’s tongue  
Too serious to fool  
Spouted out that liberty  
Is just equality in school  
“Equality,” I spoke the word  
As if a wedding vow  
Ah, but I was so much older then  
I’m younger than that now.<sup>459</sup>

This stanza crystallizes the specificity of Dylan’s move away from Popular Front/folk music politics, but towards actually a wider, more radical cultural critique. Simultaneously, however, it is seen by Dylan scholars as a statement of apostasy, as if “equality” was no longer something he believed in. It gives comfort to those, both on the Left and amongst those Liberal Americanists to write Dylan out of radicalism. It would seem, however, that he is critiquing the “self-ordained professors” of the liberal intelligentsia for having the audacity to think that formal equality – “equality in school” – would bring substantive equality – emancipation – to black people, workers and those others who deserve to hear the ‘chimes of freedom’. This is to say that, given his focus, along with the movement in which he was embedded, on achieving substantive political reform going only ‘half the way with LBJ’, he could no longer utter in a formal juridical discourse, a “wedding vow”; it had to be struck for, fought for. It is no surprise that contemporaneous with this, he wrote a much more poetic vision of change, “[Chimes of Freedom](#)”, in which impressionistic lyrics surround pleas in regards to...

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<sup>458</sup> Dylan (2004).

<sup>459</sup> Bob Dylan (1964), “My Back Pages”.

Flashing for the warriors whose strength is not to fight  
Flashing for the refugees on the unarmed road of flight  
An' for each an' ev'ry underdog soldier in the night...  
Tolling for the rebel, tolling for the rake  
Tolling for the luckless, the abandoned an' forsaked  
Tolling for the outcast, burnin' constantly at stake.<sup>460</sup>

The contrasting vision of “equality in school” as opposed to fighting for total human emancipation is redolent of Karl Marx’s “On the Jewish Question”. Marx criticizes Bauer, who like himself was a secular Jew and a Left Hegelian, for claiming that Jews are incapable of being free due to the specificity and generality of their religion. Thus, argues Bauer, Jewish emancipation, as was occurring in more liberal areas of Prussia at the time, was not worthy of radical support. Marx, on the other hand, historicizes the stereotypical ‘Jew’ of Bauer’s imaginary, but more importantly, even if granting these historically specific practical characteristics, there was no contradiction between that and “equality in school”, that is to say, formal equality.<sup>461</sup> The chasm between formal and substantive emancipation is thus captured in the juxtaposition of being “younger” than the wise professor who reduces liberty to formal equality, with those who fight for all of the oppressed until they hear the crashing of the chimes of freedom. And even so, the degree to which one is emancipated is contextually determined.

Ah, my friends from the prison, they ask unto me  
“How good, how good does it feel to be free?”  
And I answer them most mysteriously  
“Are birds free from the chains of the skyway?”<sup>462</sup>

The theme of what emancipation would look like and what aspects of the old were portents of the new would be the specific theme of the work within Bob Dylan’s next, and arguably, most artistically successful era, from 1965 into 1966. In the fall of 1964, Dylan had

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<sup>460</sup> Bob Dylan (1964), “Chimes of Freedom”.

<sup>461</sup> Marx (1991).

<sup>462</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “Ballad in Plain D”.

started playing a number of new, elliptical and impressionistic songs as part of his live sets, though they had yet to be issued on vinyl record. In early 1965, in the midst of recording this new music, going beyond the hint of his previous album title *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, Dylan was asked by a journalist why he no longer wrote protest songs. “All my songs are protest songs” was his reply. As opposed to writing for the Old Left, for those who protested vicariously through concert attendance, placard holding at rallies and other tame stuff that offended Dylan’s more adventurous sensibility; he was writing of and from within the New Left. He wasn’t writing didactic descriptive songs with easy emotional cues through switching to minor chords or triplicate strumming. Surrealist poetry, Jewish mysticism that (likely unintentionally) evokes Walter Benjamin, and most of all, being embedded in a culture in which “something was happening” and knowing what it was: this was the radical source material for Dylan’s classic period. Wobbly iconography was giving way to the cosmopolitan and even postmodern aesthetic informed by Sartre, Marcuse and the Beatles.

### **9.3 Ceremonies of the Horseman**

Todd Haynes’ Dylan biopic, *I’m Not There*, while flawed in its postmodernist conceit of overlapping pastiche-style Dylan narratives, and ignoring the necessary internal relations between disparate aspects of the totality of his artistic output, is nevertheless canny in its casting of the 1965/1966 Dylan. This segment, in which Dylan is played by a strikingly androgynous Cate Blanchett has Blanchett completely looking the part, as Dylan mutates from someone who had to move beyond simplistic didacticism to a representative aesthetic of the world around them, its limits and its potentialities. In casting Blanchett, Haynes, in a sense was not merely

*genderfucking* Dylan, Blanchett looks and acts the part.<sup>463</sup> It bears recollection that in 1965 Dylan was a 24-year-old Jewish kid increasingly in search of a different identity, persona, something authentic. He found that in looking the part of a veritable “dedicated follower of fashion”,<sup>464</sup> and with his baby-face and Jew-fro hair, his look and appeal was far from macho, though, and Haynes is clear with his use of phallic imagery, decisively (sixties) male, a dedicated follower of fashion.

Between 1965 and 1967, Dylan recorded probably his three best albums as well as the legendary *Basement Tapes* (that only in 2015 were commercially released in their entirety). He released a single (“Like a Rolling Stone”) longer than anything that had been played on commercial radio (upwards of six minutes) and it went to number one. Indeed, as his art took on more of a depth, a ‘folk rock’ milieu started to form, playing gently electrified versions of Dylan songs replete with patrician harmonies, a far less abrasive form than the out of tune organ and thudding bass guitar on “[Positively Fourth Street](#)”. In the aforementioned song, which came as Dylan was already well-ensconced in this new gender-fucking persona, Dylan responds with ripostes towards the Old Left.

I wish that for just one time  
You could stand inside my shoes  
And just for that one moment  
I could be you  
Yes, I wish that for just one time  
You could stand inside my shoes  
You’d know what a drag it is  
To see you.<sup>465</sup>

Dylan did snark like no other, going back to his early break-up song, “Don’t Think Twice (It’s Alright)”, in which his complicated feelings towards the end of a romantic tryst are boiled

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<sup>463</sup> Haynes (2006).

<sup>464</sup> The Kinks (1965), “Dedicated Follower of Fashion”.

<sup>465</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “Positively 4<sup>th</sup> Street”.

down to the fact that his erstwhile partner had wasted his precious time – but “it’s alright”.<sup>466</sup> Snark, however was one ingredient in this persona, which leapt off with the half-acoustic, half-electric *Bringing it All Back Home* LP, which serves as a transitional work. On the one hand, much of it is extension on his meditations on love and relationships, but as opposed to objectification of a ‘girl’, they are songs that speak of submission, of supplication, “without ideals or violence...true like ice, like fire”.<sup>467</sup> On the other hand, the love that doesn’t “look back”<sup>468</sup> of “She Belongs to Me” is almost a stand-in for a mystical ultimate reality, a remarkably utopian-communist vision of magic swirling ships, as found in “Mr. Tambourine Man”, one that rejected American inauthenticity, as on “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream”, or finally, explicitly connected the themes of romantic love, transformative revolution, theology and utopia, as on “Gates of Eden”.

Relationships of ownership  
They whisper in the wings  
To those condemned to act accordingly  
And wait for succeeding kings  
And I try to harmonize with songs  
The lonesome sparrow sings  
There are no kings inside the Gates of Eden<sup>469</sup>

#### **9.4 Lookout, Kid.**

It is with “Maggie’s Farm” (later a protest anthem against Margaret Thatcher) and especially “[Subterranean Homesick Blues](#)” that Dylan opens a veritable continent of form and content, using the “rap” style vocals from *talkin’ blues* folk songs over a rumbling 4/4 beat and almost surf-sounding guitar. It is in this song, and its accompanying music video, in which in

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<sup>466</sup> Bob Dylan (1963), “Don’t Think Twice (It’s Alright).”.

<sup>467</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “Love Minus Zero/No Limit”.

<sup>468</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “She Belongs To Me”.

<sup>469</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “Gates of Eden”.

lieu of lip-syncing the lyrics, Dylan famously held placards with each line, tossing one aside as the song moved along, all the while Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky smoke cigarettes just at the left-hand side of the frame, that really showed Dylan's full-fledged transformation from writing for the Left to writing of and from within the Left. "Subterranean Homesick Blues" is packed with wordplay but also slang and vernacular only discernible to young people, Leftists and Bohemians, allusions to police surveillance and "fire hoses". Oft-quoted is its lyric telling listeners not to follow leaders, but its accompanying admonishment to "watch the parking meters" is equally telling – it is capital that rules, and specifically, the theft of time, the extraction of absolute surplus value. It is the parking meters, the blind measurements of parcelled out time that need watching. Famously, the Weather Underground took their name from a stanza that exhorts not needing a weather man to know which way the wind blows, their reading of the first verse being that of an exhortation towards 'underground' organizing. Telling as well is Dylan's succinct sum-up of bourgeois normativity that he was, as it were, protesting against.

Ah get born, keep warm  
Short pants, romance, learn to dance  
Get dressed, get blessed  
Try to be a success  
Please her, please him, buy gifts  
Don't steal, don't lift  
Twenty years of schoolin'  
And they put you on the day shift.<sup>470</sup>

It is precisely here, as much as in its 'evil twin' "[It's Alright Ma \(I'm Only Bleeding\)](#)", that Dylan is truly first engaging in protest music, as a protester himself, stating in the later that if thoughts were actually known explicitly, he'd be off to the guillotine. The personal is political and is determined in the last instance by accompanying axiomatic law-abidedness with resignation towards the world of alienated labour. In this latter song, Dylan mischievously

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<sup>470</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), "Subterranean Homesick Blues".

references the famous ex-communist Arthur Koestler in his continuous mischievous break with the old Left (“darkness at the break of noon”),<sup>471</sup> which he continues to portray as bourgeois liberals celebrating “strict party platform ties: social clubs in drag disguise”. As much as anything else, however, Dylan, in both electric form on “Subterranean” and in acoustic form on “It’s Alright Ma (I’m only Bleeding)”, was starting to experiment with the controversial musical praxis of syncopation and repetition. On one hand, there is minimalist syncopation, almost like a modern “looped” drum-beat and familiar repetition of sloppy piano, upright bass and Mike Bloomfield’s guitar. On the other hand, there is a fast, almost beat-like acoustic guitar rhythm with barely more than two chords. In both cases the vocal delivery is delivered in the style of hip-hop music, half-sung, half-phrased.

Notably, Frankfurt school theorist Theodor Adorno inveighed against syncopation, against what Abel refers to as “groove”.<sup>472</sup> To Adorno, whose critique of jazz was predicated upon a critique of improvisation itself, and the concomitant repetition of syncopation, the ‘groove’ within which improvisation took place was nothing more than a polyrhythmic parlour trick. Yet this very structural trap that to Adorno disallowed extensive innovation in form allows for intensive innovation in content, and is reflective of Central European classicism in which shifts in tempo and melody drove rhythm, not the other way around. To a large extent, the entire foundation of rock and roll music, as such, was based on a cross-pollination of syncopated styles of music – the syncopated language of the drum became, and still is, the lingua franca of nearly all music. Adorno would scowl at the sound of Profokiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* overlaying a sampled hip-hop beat, as is heard in the work of Montreal DJ Kid Koala.

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<sup>471</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)”.

<sup>472</sup> Abel (2014); Adorno (1968).



What Dylan did with syncopation, starting with *Bringing it All Back Home* and with “Subterranean Homesick Blues” and “It’s Alright Ma (I’m only Bleeding)” in particular, was fill in the content with discursive expression not capturable in prose, and only deliverable like a jazz improviser. This continued, as was mentioned in a previous chapter, with the gloriously sloppy “[Like a Rolling Stone](#)”, whose sound hinged upon, quite literally, a musician trying to ‘catch up’ with the rest of the band. Accompanying this was lyrics about being ‘out of place’, a young bourgeois who is now seeing the world for herself. The song seems autobiographical yet is written about a “she”, lending credence to those who assert that Dylan’s gender ambiguity of the period was a significant part of his performative shift. As well, as previously noted, that summer Dylan played his infamous set at the Newport folk festival, in which he played raw, dissonant rock music accompanied by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, sounding more than a bit like pre-“Satisfaction” Rolling Stones. Dylan’s guitar playing itself became a percussive instrument, while Bloomfield and Butterfield played lead guitar and harmonica circles around its superstructure.

The theme of “Like a Rolling Stone” was deepened and widened on the LP *Highway 61 Revisited*, still, to this day, one of the most lasting critiques of bourgeois America in the sixties. The charm, as Marx put it, is its crystallization of its historicity. *Highway 61 Revisited* evokes not so much the critical-theoretical stance of Herbert Marcuse or Erich Fromm, but the radical misanthropy of Christopher Lasch and Dwight MacDonal. Dylan’s development in this period, in fact, shows a remarkable parallel with the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser, a former Catholic socialist turned Communist Party member, who made his name by abandoning what he saw as the humanism and revisionism of mainstream French communism. Just at a time when critical-theoretical and humanist stances were becoming hegemonic among everyone from the New Left

to budding Euro-communism, Althusser declared that Marx broke with the humanism of Feuerbach just as he broke with the officialdom of post-Stalinist communism, and just as Dylan broke with the Old Left. And like Althusser, Dylan's project was now a dissection of ideological interpellation. This existed in a sense in which the reality of proletarian life is so detached from how it is conceived by the bourgeoisie that everyone is trying to escape from – or to – “Desolation Row”, but when they get there, they are on their own, with no direction home.

Conceiving politics more dialectically, Dylan wrote critiques of everyday life that were at once scathing and sympathetic towards the bourgeoisie of the “Affluent society” of sixties America, set to chaotic, if structured blues-rock arrangements. The music itself was something a mass audience had never heard before, and was dependent upon deliberately sloppy experiments. There were times, even, that Dylan made directly political statements about aesthetics, such as [“Desolation Row”](#):

Praise be to Nero's Neptune  
The Titanic sails at dawn  
And everybody's shouting  
"Which Side Are You On?"  
And Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot  
Fighting in the captain's tower  
While calypso singers laugh at them  
And fishermen hold flowers.<sup>473</sup>

What seems apparent is that the narrator variously sees themselves as a calypso singer or a fisherman, laughing nervously at fascist-identified poets, capitalist extravagance and archaic union hymns; it being presupposed what side he is on. “Desolation Row” is the dystopia that contains seeds of utopia, not merely in its laid-bare desperation, but in its saturnalian quality – Einstein is disguised as Robin Hood, yet the denizens of the Row itself are mere objective, archetypal figures. They are either “jealous Monks” or literary figures such as Ophelia or the

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<sup>473</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “Desolation Row”.

Hunchback of Notre Dame, even biblical figures like Cain and Abel and the Good Samaritan. Cinderella affects the image of Bette Davis, fantasy becoming reality, while real figures like Einstein, Pound and Elliot take on disguises.<sup>474</sup> In a device that Dylan would put to use more than once, the song finally becomes about a one-on-one relationship, one that seemingly is about friendship or comradeship as opposed to romance. It is almost anti-climactic, as in the later “Idiot Wind”, when Dylan follows all of this with a mundane kiss-off – yet it makes sense when he speaks of “Rearranging their faces” and giving them all different names – they, being the “lame” people mentioned by the friend being addressed. “Desolation Row” itself, is the repressed utopia, like the “underneath” on the Netflix TV series *Stranger Things*, something from which no one can escape to or from:

Now at midnight all the agents  
And the superhuman crew  
Come out and round up everyone  
That knows more than they do  
Then they bring them to the factory  
Where the heart-attack machine  
Is strapped across their shoulders  
And then the kerosene  
Is brought down from the castles  
By insurance men who go  
Check to see that nobody is escaping  
To Desolation Row.<sup>475</sup>

## 9.5 Temporary Like Achilles

In 1966, Dylan recorded the swan song of this period of his career, and, along with *Highway 61 Revisited*, the cornerstone of what would become the New Left aesthetic. The double LP, *Blonde on Blonde* is actually far more austere than it seemed at the time, with one

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<sup>474</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “Desolation Row”.

<sup>475</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), “Desolation Row”.

side taken up by an almost sappy love song to his wife, and a kind of detachment from the critique that had so marked his 1965 work. This however is merely the surface, the “thin, mercury sound” that Dylan spoke of when referring to the otherworldly texture of the album, replete with garish organs and tubas, but essentially played by crack Nashville session musicians, and/or the band that would later be simply known as the Band. For example, “Just like a Woman” seems at first like a song of yearning, dredging deeper, one realizes it is about Edie Sedgwick of Warhol’s Factory scene, “with her fog, amphetamines and pearls”.<sup>476</sup> Even deeper, it is a statement of sexual ambiguity, yet deeper than that, it is an essentially improvised song, as recordings recently released have shown – from when the recording session itself started to when the final cut was laid down on tape, the only thing that remained was the chorus and the odd line, including the one about amphetamines.

The album itself starts out with what is simultaneously a marijuana anthem and a mourning of everyday alienation “[Rainy Day Woman #12 and 35](#)”, the term “stoned” is a double-entendre here. The galloping marching band rhythm crossed with a Chicago blues riff is, like “Just Like a Woman”, virtually a stream-of-consciousness *freestyle* (with lyrics further changed to this day, in live performances) about various situations in which people get “stoned” – not by smoking cannabis, but by having stones thrown at them. “I would not feel so all alone” sings Dylan, “everybody must get stoned”.<sup>477</sup> This isn’t a statement, however, of resignation; it is recognition of the reality of a culture splitting in two, where one side throws stones at the other. After more of a straight – and decisively stoned blues in “Pledging my Time”, we arrive at “[Visions of Johanna](#)”, in a sense, Dylan’s most impenetrable, Borgesian song, the lyrical minimalism cloaked by psychedelia. After painting an aural picture of contemplation, Dylan

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<sup>476</sup> Bob Dylan (1966), “Just Like A Woman”.

<sup>477</sup> Bob Dylan (1966), “Rainy Day Woman #12 and 35”.

reveals where he is as an artist and political/social actor, akin to Chagall's figure of the "Fiddler", better known as represented in the schmaltzy Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.

The fiddler, he now steps to the road  
He writes ev'rything's been returned which was owed  
On the back of the fish truck that loads  
While my conscience explodes  
The harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain  
And these visions of Johanna are now all that remain.<sup>478</sup>

The continuing device of alternating between second and first person narration returning what seem to stand in as sacred emblems – perhaps the blessing of the old Left, metamorphosed here as commodified theology, the emblem of the fish. This is being traded in for the experiential self-activity of sixties culture and praxis, the explosion of conscience in which the skeleton key, that is to say, the guide to the map, and the rain, demarcating the specificity of how the map is perceived. There is a sense then here, that Dylan has said his piece, he's gotten his protest off his chest to have solidified in his classic persona, the Jew-fro, the stoned eyes, the leather and suede and the androgynous features; the sardonicism and the somewhat pathetic misogyny. Thus, at this point on *Blonde on Blonde*, we finally arrive at *rock* as full, developed form, not just Dylan's rock music, but rock music as it stands, a *rock aesthetic*. The majority of *Blonde on Blonde* is a revelation that almost seems simple when heard now, but this type of sound had never been heard before, even if much of it had to with articulating a composite, surrealist radical lyric poetry with Chicago blues-meets-country with a touch of The Beatles and the first great use of the Hammond organ in rock music.

In between these classics "One of us Must Know", "Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat" and "Fourth Time Around", among others, perhaps the most important, and arguably the most important statement of Dylan, the artist and radical is "[Stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis](#)

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<sup>478</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), "Visions of Johanna".

[Blues Again](#)". Even the title, and how it is delivered as a sung lyric is an obvious evocation of being in the American south, where music, black music, hillbilly music came from, but as an outsider, a Jew. Dylan was one of many Jewish-Americans who were deeply involved in the Civil Rights movement. A few others, Goodman and Schwermer, were killed not far from Mobile. On the other hand, the mystique of the south is what defines Dylan's art, the dialectic of hillbilly and sharecropper, dandy and proletarian. Evoking the declaration of the existence of "Desolation Row", the song is a series of tales of different manifestations, either of Dylan himself, or rather, crystallizations of the conjuncture through revival and reinstantiation of archetypal figures. There is the ragman, Shakespeare, Mona, Grandpa, the Senator, the Preacher, the Rainman, Ruthie and the Neon Madman.<sup>479</sup> Every little vignette is simultaneously reducible to obscure personal interaction and cryptic references, Shakespeare being in the alley speaking to a French woman who is trying to find him but the letter can't arrive due to a missing post office may be another reference to Edie Sedgwick. Yet what to make of Shakespeare having pointed shoes and bells but to knock Shakespeare – and himself – off of a pedestal to be no more than a fool, an idiot, a gimp, a song and dance man sneaking Sally through the alley? Is Grandpa a stand-in for Lyndon Johnson, setting a fire and then shooting it full of holes? What of the rainman, with his cures that the narrator mixes, against the rainman's advice, only to lose his sense of time, there is reason to believe that this is none other than Owsley Stanley, LSD chemist.<sup>480</sup>

In a sense, Dylan has here left the realm of protest and commentary, and crystallizes through allusion the newly constituted subject of the young person in the sixties. And with this new persona on board, along with prodigious amounts of cannabis, LSD and amphetamines,

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<sup>479</sup> Bob Dylan (1966), "Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again".

<sup>480</sup> Bob Dylan (1966), "Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again".

Dylan embarked upon his infamous final tour of the United Kingdom backed up by The Hawks, soon to be known as the Band, as mentioned in chapter 5. Already there had been rumblings among his folk music fans about his electric music, which had been openly declared decadent by figures close to the Communist Party. Indeed it was the Communist Party who organized booing campaigns at Dylan concerts. At one infamous concert at the Royal Albert Hall, a voice cries out from the crowd calling Dylan “Judas”.<sup>481</sup> “I don’t believe you” responds Dylan, who with each night of anger and booing became more abrasive, satisfying the minority of his audience comfortable with this shift, and triggering the stuffy Old Leftists. Dylan responded further to this “Judas” line by yelling “You are a liar”. Dylan was not Judas, nor was he Jesus. He was just a song-and-dance man.<sup>482</sup>

## 9.6 Too Much Confusion

After Dylan’s intense British tour, he may or may not have been in a severe motorcycle accident, or more likely this was a story concocted by his manager, Albert Grossman, to cover for his sudden period of reclusiveness. In this time, he regrouped, detoxed from what was reportedly a serious amphetamine addiction and moved up to upstate New York, to a house known as “Big Pink”, and recorded what became known as the *Basement Tapes* with his comrades, the Band. *The Basement Tapes*’ original songs are primarily textural experiments, continuing along the line trod on the three previous records, but making no pretense at profundity. Though not released until the mid-seventies, these recordings were widely bootlegged and more than a few songs were first popularized by other artists rather than Dylan,

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<sup>481</sup> Fleming (2016).

<sup>482</sup> Fleming (2016).

notably the Byrds. In a sense, Dylan was coming full circle, back to a more authentic ‘folk’ music than had been packaged by his Popular Front mentors.

Much has been written about this set of songs, particularly by the liberal critic Greil Marcus, who calls it an emblem of an “Invisible Republic”, what he calls the “Old, Weird America”, to use the two titles of his books on said tapes.<sup>483</sup> Perhaps this is how Marcus takes this piece of work, and there is no doubt that great affective satisfaction could be found in sitting back and enjoying the rawness and the surplus obscurity and ragged harmonies of the recordings, released and otherwise, from this period. The charm, however, of them, and reason they are not an object of this particular inquiry is that, like a theorist’s unpublished work, it is not meant to be a part of what is consciously provided as a body of work. It has the charm then, of b-side compilations, rare EPs, fan club albums and so forth that form a very real tie between artist and fan. It’s certainly quite a gas to hear Dylan and Rick Danko strain their voices on songs like “Nothing Was Delivered”, about waiting all day for one’s weed dealer, who doesn’t show up. Qualitatively speaking, as well, it is as vital as anything in Dylan’s catalogue; but it is the private Dylan with his buddies, booze and pot. It is not the Dylan that crystallized the masses, and anything written about this era inevitably falls into a sort of obscurantist fanboy cultism.

Dylan released the paired down, politically charged but highly pessimistic album *John Wesley Harding* in fall 1968, just at a time in which a revolutionary optimism had gripped the minds of the masses. At this point, by conscious artistic choice, Dylan had utterly detached himself from popular culture and the Left. While *John Wesley Harding* is clearly a cryptic record overdetermined by Vietnam, to a certain degree it is also a no-longer immanent critique of the New Left by rediscovering and renovating a more direct, topical, and increasingly linear poetics.

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<sup>483</sup> Marcus (1997).



The ambiguity of the central figure of the record, John Wesley Harding, who was never known to kill an honest man, was based on a real-life cowboy. This comes at a time in which the figure of the cowboy was simultaneously an emblem of reaction in American cinema, but also a hegemonizing communist figure in the Spaghetti Westerns. Tellingly, on the title track, we are told of a crime, a “situation”, from which Mr. Harding escapes, yet we don’t hear of the crime, we just hear that he’s really good and true, a gentleman and someone who stands up for the poor and downtrodden. This is like the album’s relationship to Vietnam; Dylan, at one point or another, claimed to oppose the war, and at one point, as a provocation, claimed he supported it.<sup>484</sup>

This texture permeates this record. We are confronted with the figures of Tom Paine and St. Augustine, as figures that disapprove of the paths taken by the song’s narrator. We are confronted with genuine parables with explicit morals, simple admonitions to “do right”; Reform Jewish *Tikkun-Olam* style politics underlaid with cowboy aesthetics. “[All Along the Watchtower](#)”, perfected, as even Dylan acknowledged, by Jimi Hendrix, is the Vietnam War song, justifiably included as battle-ground background music in a number of Vietnam War movies, notably Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*. It could either be a drafted American soldier or Vietnamese revolutionary who can protest at businessmen drinking his wine, ploughmen digging his earth. This was said by a figure known as “the joker”, whose comrade, the thief admonishes him to steel away, to prepare for battle, “let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late”.<sup>485</sup> Indeed this short, cryptic dialogue, between a joker and a thief reveal them to be “two riders” approaching a palace filled with princes. This could not be more representative, even, of 16th century English revolutionaries, the core sources of all communist and radical politics, an

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<sup>484</sup> Bob Dylan (1968), “John Wesley Harding”.

<sup>485</sup> Bob Dylan (1968), “All Along the Watchtower”.

aesthetic for Dylan that ended with this record, which itself ends with two country and western songs.

The times, they were changing, as it were, and had passed Dylan by, as if the two were at odds. The Dylan of the classic period was thus frozen as an iconographic element for the New Left, while Dylan put out an uneven batch of records, ostentatiously travelled to Israel, including the Occupied West Bank, and Jerusalem. If Dylan had become the clueless “Mr. Jones” of “Ballad of a Thin Man”, as noted in a previous chapter, Dylan, the archetype, was perhaps the central animating archetypal white male figure for the New Left, and not just among white people, like the Weather Underground. Dylan had always had an African American fan base going back to his dedicated activism within the Civil Rights movement, and like the generational split in and around his transition from acoustic troubadour to electric rocker, a similar generational split occurred within Civil Rights movement circles. Dylan had been a supporter, openly of the seating of Fannie Lou Hamer and the Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 convention, putting him on the left wing of the movement, well after the aforementioned speech to the ECLC that is taken by many Dylan historians as a sign of apostasy from the Left. Indeed, to conclude this chapter, it may be wise to re-examine Dylan’s statement that all of his songs were protest songs, in light of the total political picture offered.

Huey Newton and the Panthers, as has been previously noted, held discussions around the album *Highway 61 Revisited*, indeed one of the most iconic photos of the handsome Huey Newton is of him shirtless, happily holding its album cover, seemingly on his way to sit down after putting it on the turntable. Of particular significance was “[Ballad of a Thin Man](#)”.<sup>486</sup> Newton’s reading of this song is almost akin to Marx’s reading of the Jewish question. Partial or

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<sup>486</sup> Lypskey (2010).

social emancipation is incomplete on its own, and, in Newton's conjunctural analysis, partial emancipation may lead to a new, and more obscure modality of oppression. The lyrics are almost Marxian in how they address a confused stand-in, Mr. Jones. While Dylan has some degree of compassion, as noted, for the protagonist of "Like a Rolling Stone", he has nothing but scorn for the bourgeois confusion of white crew-cut straight laced society in its utter confoundedness and politics of compromise.<sup>487</sup>

You hand in your ticket  
And you go watch the geek  
Who immediately walks up to you  
When he hears you speak  
And says, "How does it feel  
To be such a freak?"  
And you say, "Impossible"  
As he hands you a bone.<sup>488</sup>

Newton was correct to see this as a distillation not merely of how the sixties New Left subject was constituted but a parable of false emancipation. Like many of Dylan's lyrics, the story is partially cribbed, in this particular verse, from an obscure Hollywood film, the pulpy film noir classic *Nightmare Alley*.<sup>489</sup> In the film, a drifter comes into a town looking for work. He is a veteran. He is shocked at the local carnival and the treatment of the geek – that is to say, the freak, who has regressed to being a real, live human animal, as it were. Yet by matters of chance and contingency, the leading man ends up the gimp himself, and is handed a bone. Instead of being one of the rolling stones, he is a freak, but not in a positive sense, as he denies his freakdom, all the while pacified by a bone. Mr. Jones is inquisitive but he lacks the frame of reference to even have the capacity of even posing the right question – as Bobby Seale put it in

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<sup>487</sup> Seale (ND); Lypskey (2010); Corbett (2017).

<sup>488</sup> Bob Dylan (1965), "Ballad of a Thin Man".

<sup>489</sup> John Huston's 1948 film *Nightmare Alley* concerns a drifter who thinks he can con a group of carnies, gawking at their geek, only to end up himself the geek.

reference to Newton, it would be he who becomes the geek, and will be treated far better than the (black) geek of sixties American capitalist circus.<sup>490</sup>

Beyond the Panthers, radicals pored over the lyrics of Dylan's classic period, hoping to find clues and cues for praxis, as if Dylan, a heretical and Bohemian Jew, was like Marx one hundred years earlier. More than anyone else, Dylan really did crystallize the form of subjectivity – at least in a performative sense – that would animate the New Left and still has a heavy hold on North American radical Left culture. Far more so than references to television shows like *The Simpsons* or *Star Trek*, Dylan is a lodestone, someone to quote alongside critical theory, literature or holy texts. As Haynes has shown, in his deconstructionist masterpiece biopic *I'm Not There*, there were many Dylans. It is notable that when Dylan renounced – explicitly – the Old Left, he was treated as an apostate, but when he didn't become deeply ensconced in the New Left, he was forgiven, even contextualized, as if he was Adorno or Althusser.

In the seventies, at the end of the New Left period, Dylan returned briefly to greatness with records that looked back upon the time. Yet earlier, for Dylan, political songs were actually about human relationships, these were often songs about human relationships overdetermined by questions of the political. *Blood on the Tracks* is both a harrowing story of his divorce and a statement of 'moving on', both from his old and new Left identity – and from his hermitish apostasy. "[Tangled up in Blue](#)" contains a number of statements of this, and is one of the keys to an analysis of the transition from the art of the New Left to the art of the neoliberal period, most of which involves a drastic dampening of expectations. This was Dylan's explication of Hunter

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<sup>490</sup> Seale (ND).

S. Thompson's crashing wave, but as Dylan would later note "I used to care, but things have changed".<sup>491</sup>

I lived with them on Montague Street  
In a basement down the stairs  
There was music in the cafés at night  
And revolution in the air  
Then he started into dealing with slaves  
And something inside of him died  
She had to sell everything she owned  
And froze up inside  
And when finally the bottom fell out  
I became withdrawn  
The only thing I knew how to do  
Was to keep on keepin' on like a bird that flew  
Tangled up in blue  
So now I'm goin' back again  
I got to get to her somehow  
All the people we used to know  
They're an illusion to me now  
Some are mathematicians  
Some are carpenters' wives  
Don't know how it all got started  
I don't know what they're doin' with their lives  
But me, I'm still on the road  
Headin' for another joint  
We always did feel the same  
We just saw it from a different point of view  
Tangled up in blue.<sup>492</sup>

It is with these lines that Dylan looks back at the long sixties, and his own embodiment of the Missed Encounter. The dialectic of similarity and difference, of revolution mutating into tragedy, of illusion and social role, all are present in these words of culmination. Like the king on the frontpiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Dylan contained multitudes. Any analysis, as above, of his voluminous artistic output will inevitably be provisional and partial, a part among a seemingly endless whole. Yet to analyse Dylan, as has been done above, not merely through

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<sup>491</sup> Bob Dylan (2004), "Things Have Changed".

<sup>492</sup> Bob Dylan (1974), "Tangled Up in Blue".

finding a code within Dylan and then applying it to the world around him, but rather engaging in the opposite, to analyse Dylan as determined by, and determining the conjunctures within which he was and is embedded, will at the very least allow a fleeting glimpse at something. This the concrete “sound of a rhapsody”<sup>493</sup> that is the very real Missed Encounter

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<sup>493</sup> Bob Dylan (1968), “When I Paint My Masterpiece”.

## Chapter 10

### A Conclusion: Rethinking Rock and Roll

#### 10.1 Split Open and Melt

In Noel Coward's *Brief Encounter*, a bourgeois housewife with a dull and uncultured husband happens upon a married man, a cultured, idealistic doctor who helps remove some dirt from her eye, similar to the donning of magic spectacles in Carpenter's *They Live*. The two become close and the relationship clearly approaches and even enters into the realm of an affair, yet it is clear to the audience that they never have sex, let alone engage in anything but the most awkward physical affection. Many are the times that one seems to ghost out on the other, before finally the woman proverbially puts the dirt back in her eye and rushes back into her husband's loving arms. As noted in a previous chapter, Althusser evokes *Brief Encounter* in his philosophy of the encounter. Through this lens, the dirt in the housewife's eye was contingent, an Althusserian atom swerved and had a *brief encounter* that turned into a Missed Encounter.

This about sums up the historical experience of the radical Left's encounter with popular culture. Within the context of the totality of the new set of social relations instantiated by the sixties, of the post-McCarthyism cultural thaw, of the early feminist movement and shifts in the modality of masculinity, of mobilizing against war and racism, the component parts, the *necessary internal relations* came into contact, one with the other and the other with another, yet there never occurred a full-fledged or *consummated* encounter. An artist like Bob Dylan started out idiomatically and culturally aligned with the far Left and believes he is taking his own Far Left values with him along the long strange trip stoking the star-maker's machinery, only to end up at a distance from both the counterculture and the Left. In turn, experimental musicians like

the Grateful Dead or the Velvet Underground crossed paths with the far Left and certainly had a relationship with them. The Dead indeed maintained their countercultural anti-authoritarianism, yet there was never a real subsumption of ‘Deadheads’ by radical Left politics.

The aim of this concluding chapter is to provide a sort of recap, as we have attempted to concretize the rational abstractions of ‘missed encounter’ and ‘lockstep development’ in a specifically defined period, “the long sixties” in specific places, mostly big cities in the United States and United Kingdom, production-wise, but big cities internationally, consumption-wise. A new theorization as to conceptualization of rock music has been attempted, influenced by unfinished and scattered discussions taking place during ‘the long sixties’. As part of this recap, there will be a re-visitation of the Anderson/Fernbach debate on the ‘rock aesthetic’. Following this, there will be an engagement with the (very few) alternative models engaging the same period, in hopes of building a case that, politically as well as theoretically speaking, the analysis offered in this work has allowed us to reconsider the form and content of sixties rock music and the Left. The bulk of this final chapter, sure to open up a new avenue of inquiry, engages the theme of ‘cultural imperialism’, as part of what has been noted to be the political aim of this project, the reclamation of the music of the long sixties by the radical Left.

To develop an approach, Marxist theory as well as the best of ‘rock criticism’ have been engaged. We have taken approaches from a variety of schools of thought, but primarily within a Hegelian-Marxist or dialectical tradition, though not without rejecting insights approaching the object of knowledge from a different direction. While not denying the embeddedness of the cultural form within capitalist social property relations, the primary purpose of this work has not been a political economy of the music industry, a project surely needed. Rather, it has placed its concern on the ‘use value’ of music within the new subjectivities appearing at the time. The



content of the music crystallizes and illuminates the political and social relations, which in turn had a determining influence, be it direct by way of a novel form of polysemy, as was discussed in earlier chapters. That is to say, a glimpse at the totality of the conjuncture in question forces us to imagine a conscripted soldier on their way to Vietnam identifying strongly with the Box Tops' "The Letter", or someone ducking the draft to the tune of the Byrds' "I Wasn't Born to Follow". In turn, one can't imagine songs like "We Can Be Together" or "Street Fighting Man" without seeing them as embedded in a specific socio-political context.

Likewise, in theorizing the sixties Left, more attention has been placed on its perhaps greatest and most important innovation, the attempt to move beyond authoritarian state-communism on one hand, and moribund social democracy on the other. While there is perhaps more continuity with more eclectic interstices of the 'old left' than this work has implied, the emphasis on the New Left has been primarily surrounding the fact that this was the corresponding, indeed in lockstep, politics, with the primary object of inquiry, the music of the period. Yet in examining the New Left on its own terms, even at its best, its respective fortunes on both sides of the Atlantic differed, as did the specificity of the cultural form and its own development.

Thus having developed this theory through engagement with theory and history, we arrived at the second half of the work, in which canonical acts of the era, that is to say, the Grateful Dead, 'British Invasion' bands and Bob Dylan, are subject to the model of analysis on offer here. We allowed ourselves full-fledged glimpses of these acts, through the lens, in particular, of 'reading history backwards', specifically from a vantage point a half century later. Yet in adapting said vantage point to examine the extension that we have called 'the long sixties', we primarily concern ourselves with a rethinking of canonical understandings of these

artists, their legacies and their politics. The multidimensional relations that constitute what we have been calling a Missed Encounter actually reveal themselves in this lesser known abode of social and cultural historiography.

As part of this conclusion, we will take one final excursion, stepping backwards to the era of the cultural Cold War, and make explicit what has been argued by implication throughout this project, the limitations of both the theory and the practice of instrumentalizing production, and the flaws this approach bring to ostensibly critical theorization of cultural production. Beyond being a mere comparative epoch, as in the age of the Popular Front or the punk era, the Cultural Cold War, in which the communist and liberal democratic countries attempted to instrumentalize their respective intelligentsias in a war of position, yet in actual fact, this was a war which led to neither victory nor defeat for either side in the cultural realm. In actual fact, it served to occlude actual cultural and aesthetic debates and innovations occurring within and across both ostensible ‘camps’.<sup>494</sup>

From this ‘campism’ on the part of the spymasters leads to a type of reductionist ‘campism’ on the part of many analysts who either reduce all cultural activity to superstructural factors (either directly or in the last instance) or proclaim cultural production as completely undetermined by superstructural factors. This is to finally drive home the point that, as in politics, innovation and transformation in cultural production in general, and rock music in particular, comes from below. The instrumentalization of cultural production can only be the work of the producers themselves. Since we retroactively discern the lockstep development of rock music and the Left in the long sixties, and analyse outward from the notion of the Missed

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<sup>494</sup> On ‘camps’ and ‘campism’ and its deleterious effect on analysis, see La Botz (2016) on Samir Amin.

Encounter, we have seen that the logic at work within both spheres was improvised, birthed out of contingent moments, uncontrollable and it is this that brings it endless fascination.

As was set out in the introduction, the Missed Encounter between the Left and the counterculture came in spite of the presence of many tendencies that would turn flirtation into consummation. In the United States, on the one hand, there was a dialogue of the deaf, with the Left misunderstanding the organically developing counterculture, and the counterculture often misunderstanding or disavowing the degree to which their cultural rebellion was indeed political rebellion. It was not as if a consummated encounter would have turned these disparate parts into a revolutionary whole, it is likely to have still not arisen, politically or culturally, to the peaks that it either implicitly or explicitly attempted to scale. Beyond this lack of understanding, the parameters within which these developments occurred provided concrete limitations that were impossible to surmount in a sustainable fashion, as I have attempted to show

In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, an encounter was missed, yet there was and remains a respectful relationship between producers of culture and the socialist left. No doubt this is due, as has been mentioned, to the generally more class consciousness – albeit in a threadbare and mixed sense – of British common-sense. Socialism and cultural production had been intertwined at least since the days of Oscar Wilde. At the same time there was a certain distance, also going back to the days of Wilde, between the workers’ movement and socialism, embodied as much in the salon of Fabianism as in Keith Richards’ grandfather’s friend Keir Hardie.<sup>495</sup> The encounter, it would seem, was missed not in the sense of the Americans, who, in retrospect, tried too hard. Rather, it was that the connections were taken for granted, and by the

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<sup>495</sup> Richards (2010).

time participants were aware of them, that is to say, 1968, it seemed too little, too late in “Sleepy London Town”.

The point, however, in deploying “Missed Encounter”, is to move beyond a very stultifying binary, one to which we have alluded. This is to say, as David James points out, between seeing rock music in a very particular sense, as either merely completely autonomous from a set of social property relations, or completely determined by said set of social property relations.<sup>496</sup> James posits a third option, that of what could be termed a sort of ‘relative autonomy’ that is determined by capitalist society in the last instance. This strikes one as wanting to have one’s cake and eat it too, but also as an obvious truism. Of course rock music appeared in capitalist society and of course, though with exceptions including co-operatively owned record labels and collective enterprises as in the case of the Grateful Dead, operates within capitalism. To make the claim that art is either entirely determined by or not determined at all by capitalism, or to ‘cop out’ and assert an Althusserian ‘relative autonomy’, is insufficient.

Likewise, while, as has been seen, providing a great deal of insight into the polysemic quality of rock lyrics, Garofalo, like James, situates rock music as a form of American “cultural imperialism”, pointing out the contracts that major record labels had with the Pentagon.<sup>497</sup> Laurence Grossberg identifies, similarly four typologies as to how Leftists, including those operating within the long sixties, situated rock music. The first is akin to vulgar Marxism, seeing it as merely superstructural and a means with which to divert youth energy; another, not unrelated, disputes its status as art at all, akin to Adorno on Jazz. On the other hand, to Grossberg, there are discourses in which it is seen as determined by economies of youth and leisure, and, again related, discourses in which it is seen as a folk practice that nearly transcends

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<sup>496</sup> James (1996), 72-73.

<sup>497</sup> Chapple and Garofalo (1976), 221.

its mediation within the capitalist mode of production.<sup>498</sup> Suffice it to say, the typologies identified by Grossberg all non-dialectical in their approach, suffering variously from a mechanical and monist materialism on the one hand, or an idealist question-begging approach on the other. Half a century after the Anderson/Fernbach debate, we still have no serious critical vocabulary with which to engage not just rock, but popular music in general. It is time, in other words, to rethink rock and roll.

## 10.2 To Kingdom Come

Revisiting the dialogue between Perry Anderson and David Fernbach, it seems that we have finally arrived at a provisional answer to the riddle of the Missed Encounter. As noted in the first two chapters, Anderson's lyrical and contextual analysis failed to sufficiently grasp the impact of form and technique. Fernbach's technical analysis of the component parts of a 'rock aesthetic', while exceptionally useful in categorization, fails to spell out the connection between this new form and the conjuncture within which it emerged.<sup>499</sup> What is important, however, is that during the long sixties, rock music was taken seriously. Retroactively, it does seem that Fernbach and Anderson were attempting to grasp what was not yet entirely discernible, that is to say, the Missed Encounter, the cresting of Hunter S. Thompson's 'great wave'.

Let us recall Anderson's seemingly 'far out' point with regards to the communistic quality of live concerts, in which the barriers between the audience and performer breaks down. Let us also recall Fernbach's highly technical set of axioms with which to analyse, and, implicitly, qualitatively assess rock music. It is here that we see what is implicit, but buried in both accounts, in other words, justification of enjoyment, qualitative assessment that befits the

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<sup>498</sup> Grossberg (1984), 95-96.

<sup>499</sup> Anderson (1968; 1970); Fernbach (1970).

specificity of rock music as both form and content. This assumes what needs to be explained in regards to why Anderson finds so much analysis-worthy material in the work of The Rolling Stones, or why Fernbach finds the Band to be “astonishingly pure rock”,<sup>500</sup> a culmination of the development of the form as of 1970. Yet this excess enjoyment is hard to miss. Anderson’s prose suddenly takes on an enthusiastic effervescence when extolling the virtues of *Beggars Banquet*. Fernbach’s technical exactitude takes on a similar aura when *kvelling* about how the Band were working class journey-men who had paid their dues, and that four of five members were competent vocalists.

This was a glimpse at the Missed Encounter as it was happening, as Fernbach put it: “Rock music may provide Marxists with a sensitive political barometer, and they may quite legitimately seek to harness musical practice to political requirements. But this must be clearly distinguished from an appraisal of rock as music”.<sup>501</sup> But what if, pace Fernbach, this appraisal cannot be divorced from Marxism when one considers Marxism not merely as specific set of political practices, but as a means with which to engage in appraisal? The Missed Encounter is right under Fernbach’s nose, proverbially speaking. Here is perhaps the most important English language Marx translator implicitly denying that Marxism informs his dialectically reasoned, ostentatiously Marxian appraisal.

Occurring contemporaneously with Anderson and Fernbach’s dialogue was the development of rock music criticism, as noted, limited by its ‘consumer guide’ capsule review format. Many of the early critics were indeed those who, in some way, shape or form, broadly shared Anderson and Fernbach’s political stance. Writing from a position more embedded within the counterculture than the organized Left, these critics often made the opposite error in

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<sup>500</sup> Fernbach (1970), 81.

<sup>501</sup> Fernbach (1970), 77.

comparison with Anderson and Fernbach. They emphasized affective enjoyment and originality but downplayed serious formal, historical or lyrical analysis. These early critics, notably Lester Bangs, Ellen Willis and Robert Christgau, clearly allowed their politics and sophisticated analytical palette to come through in their assessments.

An approach that combines Anderson and Fernbach's respected methods on one hand, and the idiom and epicurean sensibility of the early critics on the other, is the beginning point of establishing a canon, as has been attempted here. Yet even this is insufficient. What has been attempted in these pages, making use of Althusser's aleatory materialist 'philosophy of the encounter', mediated through a model emphasizing dialectical causality, is to stipulate that that in order to truly grasp, analyse, and finally qualitatively assess rock music – and by extension, any cultural form – critical theorists and 'rock critics' must examine the political and theoretical contestations occurring contemporaneously with the development of the form itself.

By using a method largely derived from Neal and Ellen Meiksins Wood's *Social History of Political Thought*, I offered some preliminary 'spiritual' steps towards the development of a rethinking and concretization of a rock music canon. In doing so, I situated rock music and the development of the counterculture as having a sort of metaphysical connection with Marxist theory and practice, a connection repressed by Anderson, Fernbach and the early critics. Marxists have often shied away from metaphysics, mistaking the mere act of speculation as engaging in idealism, but any analysis of the 'use value' of cultural form will inevitably involve one metaphysic or another, however disavowed. Both revolutionary politics and rock music, ideally speaking, involve demystification or re-enchantment, and I trace this back to rebellion against the development of official Christianity, the Pelagian heresy. This is to deliberately

resituate rock music within the common project of the Left, specifying both as part of the lockstep project of the unraveling thread of human emancipation.

Drawing on Walter Benjamin's ideas in particular, I expanded the notion of distraction to encompass how music is produced and consumed in an age of mechanical and now digital reproduction. In providing an overall analysis of the conjuncture in its broadest form, as well as in historicizing both the New Left and rock music, I attempted to show the parametric limitations that militated against a full-fledged encounter. Drawing on Ellen Wood's critical engagement with the New Left, I examined the cultural distinctions within both the British and North American iterations of this social force, and the shared 'retreat from class'. The move away from a class-based politics was occurring and accelerating precisely at a moment that the counterculture, in its own way, was rediscovering the working class as an historical subject. The Left failed to recognize the class implications of the countercultural rejection of clock time and rejection of engaging in the social reproduction of 'straight society'. Certainly, the development of an 'underground' allowed an intermingling of the forces, and further cultural intercourse, but this was at the margins.

Thus having theorized the era in a sense that engages with the 'sake' of art, its use value, we examine two comparative points in which cultural production and art have coincided, that is to say, the Popular Front and the Punk era. Finding an array of contradictions in both, there is nevertheless a conclusion that the encounters within both, for both historically contingent and specific reasons, approached retroactively intelligible consummation in a sense that, taken on its own terms, bore greater returns. At this point, we travel through an array of excursions, historicizing rock music as working class cultural production, and concretizing the lock-step rise and fall of rock music and the far Left in the long sixties. It is at this point that we shift gears,



and enter into the realm of our case studies, beginning with those on the aforementioned margins.

It was these margins that provide the basis for my analysis of the Grateful Dead, as well as other Bay Area musicians, those who actually did have connections with the Left. For regionally and historically specific reasons, there was the closest thing to a consummated encounter between the Left and cultural producers that occurred in this period, as I have shown. It is no wonder, then, that this culture, for better or for worse, and in all of its contradictions, has sustained itself, and continues to play a role in both American politics and American culture. On the other hand, the Missed Encounter is the most glaring when one looks at Bob Dylan's work, the subject of the final case study. Alienated by the Old Left, he was an exemplar to the New Left, while he was likely unaware himself of the political implications of his music after his turn away from traditional 'protest songs'. In many ways, Dylan himself, after all, is "Mr. Jones" in "Ballad of a Thin Man", his very ability to analyse in poetic form the contradictions of bourgeois society depends upon his never escaping from "Desolation Row". Thus, it is no wonder that, notwithstanding the odd moment of political engagement, often in reactionary, even born-again Christian or pro-settler Zionist forms, Dylan's art and politics have ended up on the nihilist end of the spectrum. This impacts, of course, the decontextualized and romanticized Dylan mythology that I critiqued.

Thus finally, in recapitulating the central point of the impossibility of the instrumentalization of cultural production, we will travel on a final excursion, as part of our conclusion, through the era of the Cultural Cold War. A significant number of the theorists, cultural producers, aesthetic forms and debates with which this project engages find their point of origin within the strange, hall-of-mirrors context of the Cultural Cold War. Here, alongside, a

revelation as to the purpose of the deployment of the abstractions of 'Missed Encounter' and 'lockstep' constitute a proverbial 'closing argument' in a people's cultural court. The real objects of analysis in this project have not been the mere abstractions, but rather the sensibilities that inform and are informed by them. In a concrete sense, then, the really existing practices of musicians and audiences, of political activists have been the historical material as articulated through this set of abstractions. A new means with which to engage a vital era of cultural and political history and practice has been provided, and it is hoped that this will provide new avenues of continued inquiry.

### **10.3 Glass Onion**

As was made clear in the first chapter, there is an overarching *political* purpose to this work. Rock music has, up to this point, not been sufficiently theorized by Marxism. To be sure, some on the Left, inside and outside of Marxism, Reebee Garofalo among others, have analyzed specific aspects of it, and literary scholars, notably Christopher Ricks, have done exceptional work in regards to lyric analysis, albeit from more of a Derridean standpoint. Other Marxist cultural theorists have addressed it as part of an overall theoretical project. Yet unlike how critical and Marxist theory has become a dominant approach of inquiry in the annals of jazz and blues scholarship, film studies, architecture and visual arts, among many other forms of cultural production, the 'common sense' understanding of rock music in an 'academic' idiom remains 'fannish' and 'descriptivist' enthusiasm that resembles and often acts as advertising copy. Like in historiography in general, we seem to be faced with a choice between a form of teleology and outright contingency or 'one damn thing after another'. In reality, in examining this era, we are

‘looking through a glass onion’, something that seems transparent visually, but in actuality, is one layer after another.

No doubt part of the reason for this conceptual confusion is that Marxists, like James, often preface their analysis with qualifiers about cultural imperialism, and so on, a seeming refusal to leave exchange value aside for a moment to analyse use value, as do cultural theorists on a wide array of other cultural practices. As such, however influenced by certain critical engagements, such as James on the Vietnam war and rock music, the ‘common sense’ analysis of rock music renders it essentially toothless yet also sorely undertheorized. Yet it is possible, as these pages have hopefully shown, to rethink rock music, to reclaim it for the Left. While music does not perhaps share the “economic exceptionalism”<sup>502</sup> of visual and figurative arts, it does a disservice to actual analysis of its purpose, or its ‘sake’ to reduce it to being a mere commodity. This would be akin to an analysis of architecture that doesn’t focus on design.

It is notable that the ‘common sense’ approach implicitly critiqued throughout this work actually has very little quarrel with many Marxist approaches. While Marxist approaches have attached the signifier ‘cultural imperialism’ to rock music, liberal historians like Wilentz and Bowman have celebrated its role as a part of so-called Americana, the “Old Weird America”<sup>503</sup> and so on. Both approaches, whether celebratory or defamatory place undue emphasis on rock music being an authentic expression of the United States of America.

These two typologies are mystifications in and of themselves. As will be expanded upon, a simplistic idea of “cultural imperialism” that ignores what Edward Said has called the “travelling”<sup>504</sup> and contrapuntal aspects of culture, that is to say, even the classic critique of

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<sup>502</sup> Beech (2014).

<sup>503</sup> Marcus (1997).

<sup>504</sup> Said (1982/2000), 195; Said (1994), 66. A contrapuntal reading of a cultural artifact is to assume the interplay of what Said terms both dominant and sub-altern readings of the history embedded within a conjuncture that in turn

“cultural imperialism”, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart’s *How to read Donald Duck*,<sup>505</sup> makes use of genuinely valuable tropes rooted in the “cultural imperialism” being critiqued. Likewise, what has been mystified by the likes of Greil Marcus and Sean Wilentz in their accounts of Americana is how much this form was a product of Cultural Front rethinking of regional working class and peasant musical forms, that is to say, a search for a people’s music as part of a progressive, if not socialist aesthetic-political project. This is a sanitized romantic Americana, a trope problematized in the Richard Gere segment of Todd Haynes’ *I’m Not There*.

This latter approach, correct in its historicization of polyglot roots within working class cultures predominantly in the United States, fails to problematize the role of the United States. Indeed much more is said about the contradictions of Americana in a two minute sequence of Quentin Tarantino’s *Django Unchained* in which the viewer hears banjos, autoharps and other traditional instruments, and sees ‘poor white trash’ playing said instruments, what we have come to call a high and lonesome sound. A quick pan of the camera reveals an African American slave chained to the ceilings by his wrist, about to be castrated with a red hot knife wielded by Walton C. Goggins.

Yet for our purposes, within the realm of critical as opposed to merely descriptive analysis, the problems run far deeper within existing Marxist and critical approaches. We must rethink “cultural imperialism”, as if culture in its authentic and lived sense can be comparable with Marxist theories of imperialism. Even allowing for, as Hannes Lacher has pointed out, the flaws, particularly the mechanistic and teleological aspects to foundational Marxist theories of imperialism, those of Lenin, Bukharin and so on, the idea of ‘cultural’ imperialism cannot be

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produces a given cultural artifact. This leads to Said’s concept of “travelling” theory, dictating that theory – and for our purposes – cultural production ‘travels’ from its point of origin both spatially and temporally, along the way misused, along the way to being “incorporated’ as common-sense.

<sup>505</sup> Dorfman/Mattelart (1984)

seen on the same register.<sup>506</sup> Can dominant forms of culture from imperial powers be read in the sense that Dorfman reads Donald Duck, that is to say, as having these imperialist power dynamics inscribed in the text itself? Of course, but this is not the same thing as the intellectually lazy deployment of “cultural imperialism”, a concept one often hears to imply, for example, that homosexuality is a western invention, that HIV is a conspiracy, that corrupt politicians with unorthodox views of international relations are agents of a foreign power. The continued genuflection to this in Garofalo and James on music, Hoberman on film, among others, seems to reflect an ambivalence over subjective enjoyment. It is a truism that powers great and small attempt to deploy culture, or so called ‘soft power’. The Cultural Cold War, briefly discussed in an earlier chapter, was, in the first instance, an ideological battle on a world scale over the legacy of the enlightenment and the best of European high culture, from classical to avant-garde. It is to this excursion that we now turn.

#### **10.4 That Bow Tie is Also a Camera**

The Cultural Cold War is actually portrayed quite well in Carol Reed and Graham Greene’s *The Third Man*, as the efforts at “cultural re-education” and so forth, was at first consciously championed by the British foreign office and intelligence agencies. Greene’s story of contingency – a British under-employed writer gets a gig in Austria to help put on plays and give talks that seem to go way over the heads of the audiences. He gets caught up in the ur-caper film, yet the point is that he is not someone aware of his being used, whether by British diplomats, or by a man who may well be his old friend, played by Popular Front heavyweight

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<sup>506</sup> Lacher (2007).

Orson Welles, a representative of powerful invisible forces – that is to say, Moneybags, a personification of capital. This old friend tells him, at a key moment:

Don't be so gloomy. After all it's not that awful. Like the fella says, in Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love – they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock. So long Holly.<sup>507</sup>

The non-contemporaneity of cultural development and political-economic stability, and the forces of capital and the state attempting to instrumentalize cultural development – even in the form of writers of pulp fiction, only to continuously fail, and recognize, themselves, the relative autonomy of culture – is an analysis lost in standard accounts of the cultural cold war. These narratives instrumentalize the players involved as mere cogs, and reduce politics to geopolitics, when one can just as easily argue – as I do, albeit tentatively, that the ‘political’ impact of the artists and intellectuals on both sides of this divide – Lukács and Neruda /MacDonald and Dos Passos; Sartre and Picasso/Shachtman and Pollack; Robeson and Shostakovich/Gillespie and Armstrong – while to an extent determined by the cold war, geopolitically – is misunderstood when all of these figures are instrumentalized. And in even heterodox and Anti-Stalinist left accounts, the players – Lukács in particular, among others, on the ‘Russian’ side, are correctly granted their autonomy. But the Americans are often reduced to being ‘stooges’ or power-hungry WASP opportunists, not anarchists and precocious Post-Trotskyists who were in over their head.

The most respected critical historiography of the Cultural Cold War, Frances Stonor Saunders’ *Who Paid the Piper*, lacks a class analysis of cultural production – indeed any real aesthetic theory at all.<sup>508</sup> This leads to confusion over how Left-wing intellectuals who opposed

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<sup>507</sup> Greene and Reed (1948).

<sup>508</sup> Saunders (2013).

McCarthyism, who were militant trade unionists and so forth, could collaborate with the Central Intelligence Agency and US State Department that at the same time as it was holding congresses, funding journals like *Partisan Review*, even helping members of the Trotskyist Fourth international, was also stealing the Italian elections, strike-breaking and working with Corsican gangsters in the South of France, meddling with fascists in Greece and West Germany, overthrowing Mossadegh and Arbenz. This, of course, leads to the obvious thinking of those, like James Petras in a review in *Monthly Review*, to deduce that “the enduring political victory of the CIA was to convince intellectuals that serious and sustained political engagement on the left is incompatible with serious art and scholarship”.<sup>509</sup>

This is instrumentalist and reactionary, and precisely what is wrong with the trope of ‘cultural imperialism’. Petras is taking a conservative Stalinist approach, in which only figurative or ‘topical’ art can capture a given conjuncture, and also, implicitly claiming that artists have a ‘responsibility’ that would be akin to stating that militant tool and die makers must be proficient on the harpsichord. The tendency towards asserting an autonomy of the arts, and the debate as to whether or not art can be, let alone should be, subsumed into political projects, is to miss the forest for the trees. It is easy and simplistic to read about, say, Jackson Pollack or Schoenberg being pushed covertly by the American state and deduce that Pollack and Schoenberg were stooges. Easy and blatant troglodytism, ignorance of the very real and very political achievements imbued within the work of abstract Expressionism and atonal Music. But to the likes of Petras, whether you are a Syrian opposing the ‘anti-Imperialist’ dictator Assad or an American curator of an Abstract Expressionist art exhibit, you may as well be a torturer in Abu Ghraib or someone slipping LSD in Paul Robeson’s coffee. There is little doubt that Cold

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<sup>509</sup> Petras (1999).

War liberals – I’ll add, would likely have a similar account of the intellectual lives of those who worked with Com-Info funded institutions during the Cultural Cold War. From this angle, the likes of Neruda and Picasso and Shostakovich were ‘useful idiots’ and ‘dupes’, and perhaps the likes of screenwriters Abraham Polonsky or Dalton Trumbo were agents of agit-prop, like that scoundrel Robeson. And indeed, to a certain degree, there would be a stronger case on that end of things than Petras’s campist reading of Saunders.

Saunders recounts a poignant episode at a Communist-backed world peace conference in New York in 1948, with a wide manner of the American liberal and Left Popular Front intelligentsia, including an heir to the J.P. Morgan fortune – this was more of a liberal bourgeois than working class conference – but there were certainly a great deal of world renowned writers and artists there – from Dashiell Hammet and Arthur Miller to Dmitri Shostakovich.<sup>510</sup> The episode Saunders recounts seems to fit the description more of a New Left-style direct action than a CIA conspiracy – a number of intellectuals close to *Partisan Review*, those just on the cusp of post-Trotskyism, gathered in a suite to disrupt the conference, emphasizing a socialist and democratic critique of what was transparently a Soviet propaganda operation. Perhaps a few of them knew that the money was coming from the intelligence services, but to put this into context, this was a time in which even Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse were close to the American intelligence community. Yet having come prepared to be shut down by the ‘Russians’, the rag-tag bunch of what the agency called “non-com” leftists were actually allowed to participate in the conference, to, as it were, *intervene*.<sup>511</sup>

Nicholas Nabokov, a minor composer and the brother of Vladimir, sat in, on a panel that featured the great Shostakovich, who it is now known was heavily controlled by the regime,

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<sup>510</sup> Saunders (2013); Cate (2003).

<sup>511</sup> Saunders (2013), 52-57.



though planted esoterically Anti-Stalin motifs in his music. Nabokov, likely aware of Shostakovich's quiet opposition, asked him quite the pointed question, in regards to official Soviet policy around atonal music. In witness's accounts quoted by Saunders, Shostakovich went quiet at first, but then received some notes from those who appeared to anyone present as 'handlers' and he answered, "yes it was decadent and should be banned".<sup>512</sup> Saunders' account of this conference allows us a glimpse at the attempt to 'hothouse' encounters, yet in actual politics, 'both sides' were in some way, shape or form, on the Left, however compromised. Notably, Norman Mailer, a young intellectual with feet in both camps denounced both Soviet and US foreign policy in detail.

Then where does this leave those intellectuals, artists and theoreticians – on both sides – who constitute players in the Cultural Cold War? What, in turn, does this reveal to us about the impossibility of instrumentalizing art 'from above', and thus, of the flaws of dominant Marxist approaches, not merely to music, but to cultural production as a whole. Is the model of the cultural cold war even helpful? We can see it as a rational abstraction, a vantage point from which to examine the aesthetic and practical more than theoretical debates that existed *within* both sides. In short, both sides sought to have their cake and eat it too, Cultured intellectuals, Ivy League types or party cadre alike, were naturally drawn to the avant-garde whether they were OSS/CIA or NKVD/KGB. While there were obvious opportunities for embarrassment – such as the question to Shostakovich at the Waldorf or Soviets being able to show the treatment of Black people and Jews in the United States – intellectuals on 'both sides' were able to push the careers of some incredibly important artists, yet to conclude then, that Shoshtakovich and Lukács or Pollack and MacDonald were tools of Soviet or American foreign policy is to put the cart before

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<sup>512</sup> Saunders (2013), 56-57.

the horse. Likewise, is to reduce the Grateful Dead and Bob Dylan to American cultural imperialism due to, for example, the Grateful Dead's dealings with the US State Department.

So who were the players then, and were they aware and conscious of their use? Were the American players as much 'true believers' in the Wilsonian ideology of 'freedom', as were the Soviet and communist players true believers in communism? Likely not. In fact many of them were socialists – some who had come out of the Trotskyist tradition, in particular the Shachtmanites, as well as independent socialists like MacDonald and more social-democratic or 'democratic left' type forces who would later work with the likes of Harrington and Rustin, *Dissent Magazine*, and so forth. Contrary to the analysis of Petras, and keeping in mind the vantage point of the participants and constituents, is it historically proper and accurate to claim that this milieu was wrong to look at the United States and USSR in 1947, and see more of an opportunity to develop an anti-capitalist alternative in the USA than in the USSR? After all, the USA had its political freedom and a strong trade union movement, while the USSR, variously conceived as state-capitalist, bureaucratic-collectivist and so on, had a near-absolute lack of political freedom. So is it a fair comparison? Of course not. It is likewise active to claim that the likes of Brecht, Lukács, Picasso and Neruda looked at both the communist and capitalist worlds in 1947 less from the vantage point of a free America and a "totalitarian" Soviet Union, but rather as who was best positioned to ensure that fascism would not return. After all, the United States had already begun to rehabilitate former fascists. It is a cliché to make the point that 'both sides were right', but it is also immaterial.

The relative immateriality of geopolitics allows for much more cogent and supple analysis within Marxist and critical theory of most of the figures of the Cultural Cold War era, Petras notwithstanding. Dwight MacDonald and Georg Lukács, to name two theorists drawn

upon in this work, cannot in any logical sense be reduced to mere bearers of ‘free world’ or Communist agit-prop. Indeed, as has been seen, they had a remarkably similar aesthetic, and were engaged in debates with people on their own and the ‘other’ side as to the ‘sake’ of art, impressionism versus realism, jazz, high culture and so forth. That they were theorists organically connected to the world of cultural production beyond their fleeting affiliations (if anything MacDonald was well to Lukács’ left) shows them to have been far more adept at instrumentalizing those who attempted to instrumentalize them than vice-versa.<sup>513</sup>

Likewise, just as Lukács had his on-again, off-again relationship with the grandees of international Communism, MacDonald had his own run-ins with the powers-that-be. It is no small irony that after publishing more and more critiques of American culture and society, the CIA backed foundation world wanted to fire MacDonald from editing *Encounter*, that he was taking things too far by engaging not just mere instances of American social relations, but American and capitalist society as a whole. Indeed, these essays influenced the types of social criticism that were relished by the New Left: Marcuse and Chomsky; Norman Mailer and Hunter S. Thompson; Ellen Willis and Robert Christgau. Far from being instrumentalized, the critical achievements of MacDonald and Lukács continue to far outweigh their compromises. It is my hope that this project has attempted to do the same for rock music in the long sixties.

### **10.5 Chaos and Anarchy**

At the peak of the long sixties, millions of American youth were convinced of the revolution being around the corner, “should have been done long ago”,<sup>514</sup> in Neil Young’s words. In a similar historical juncture, with the election of a far-right president in the United

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<sup>513</sup> McLemee (2015); Saunders (2013); Lukács (2014); MacDonald (2015).

<sup>514</sup> Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young (1970), “Ohio”.

States, youth culture is once again turning left, while not necessarily as starry-eyed as a half-century ago. Similarly, popular music, rock music as well as hip-hop, has contributed to this emerging common-sense. To return once more to Anderson, Fernbach and rock criticism, it would seem that one of many requirements, not merely for theory, but for popular writing, is to take into account these necessary internal relations. This is not to say that having a more ‘sophisticated’ understanding of why one enjoys the music of A Tribe Called Quest will automatically turn aficionados into activists and, thus, hothouse an encounter.

It is, however, to point out that at a moment in which an encounter may once again be possible, perhaps in similar form to the punk era, but with more of an emphasis on hip-hop, those who write about popular music have their work cut out for them. Critics, whether in *Red Wedge* and *Jacobin*, or *Pitchfork* and *The Source* cannot rest on the laurels of commenting briefly on the affective resonance of this or that cultural form. We must engage on a multidimensional level, and not be afraid to enjoy ourselves in the process. We must dialogue with musicians and other cultural producers and help them realize the significance of their practices, as they help us realize the significance of ours.

The Social History of Cultural Production, as I have called it, illuminates the sake of art, the purpose of Pelagian ecstasy and the cultivation of ‘tuning in and turning on’ but not ‘dropping out’. A rock aesthetic can identify not merely the generality of the affective contagion, but its specificity to conjunctural social property relations. The dialectic of the encounter, the interplay of political and artistic praxis, has yet to completely play itself out. The mole continues to burrow, and we continue to need it to come up to the surface and build a new form of opposition and new forms of cultural practice, in resistance to the Trump/Trudeau spectrum.

Only then can the encounter no longer be missed, rather, it can “form like Voltron”<sup>515</sup> and lend itself to a victory over ‘the man’.

“We are forces of chaos and anarchy”, sang the Jefferson Airplane.<sup>516</sup> Perhaps they were right, yet not in the sense that they intended. The forces at work, economic, cultural and geopolitical that determined the specificity of the long sixties is what gives the music its charm. The instinct to either dismiss the grandiosity of this era as naïve is as cavalier as the instinct to elevate it as a form of ‘cultural revolution’. At a time in which cultural production is once again coalescing with forms of resistance to reactionary governments and continued exploitation and oppressions, there may be potential for a consummated encounter in 2017 and beyond, an alliance of youth, cultural producers, intellectuals and indeed, the working class as a whole. Millions of British youth have taken to chanting <sup>517</sup>“Oh, Jeremy Corbyn”, to the tune of The White Stripes’ *Seven Nation Army*, something no doubt significant whatever one’s ‘take’ is on the Corbyn phenomenon. Whatever its very real flaws, the Movement for Black Lives in the United States is inextricably intertwined with hip-hop, as is Idle No More in Canada. Let us hope that this time the encounter is in complete lockstep, that it is not a missed encounter.

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<sup>515</sup> Wu Tang Clan (1993), “Shame on a N\*\*\*\*\*”.

<sup>516</sup> Jefferson Airplane (1969), “We Can Be Together”.

<sup>517</sup> One of the most important hip-hop groups working right now, A Tribe Called Red, are Indigenous, from Turtle Island/Canada. Indigenous liberation is just as much a part of their aesthetic as is partying and dancing.

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## Music

A note on the Music Bibliography. Songs and albums referenced and/or quoted will be listed by album, and in turn, by song, except in the case in which a song either is primarily well known as a 'single' and/or on a compilation. In the latter case, years will be provided when differing from the year the compilation was issued. Albums will be referenced by artist, while songs will be referenced by songwriter. If no specific songs from a given album are referenced, only the album will be listed. Artists have been alphabetized, but their albums, compilations and singles are listed chronologically both album by album and on albums themselves. For a guide to various issuances of songs and albums, see [www.discogs.org](http://www.discogs.org). Over 40 key songs have been hyperlinked within the document for those reading this on a computer or tablet.

For an exhaustive Spotify playlist based on this project, see

<https://open.spotify.com/user/222xymh36ko7gqarqamv6cbdq/playlist/64ZASz92aoyzEDBAQiSdeH>

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