

Introduction

In 1977 NASA launched two spacecraft, *Voyager 1* and *Voyager 2*, on parallel missions to explore the outer regions of the solar system and beyond. Having obtained vital information during close encounters with the four Jovian planets and several of their moons, in 1989 both passed beyond the orbit of the outermost known planet (Neptune). As of 2008, they are approaching an area known as the heliopause, some 14 billion kilometres from Earth, and proceeding at a rate of 17 kilometres a second. Even so, it will be many thousands of years before either vehicle reaches the vicinity of another star.

But what does all of this have to do with music?

Each *Voyager* contains a golden record, conceived as a greeting to any space-farers who may come across them, and concealed within those grooves is almost 90 minutes of music – 27 items in all – selected by a committee of scientists, musicologists and others chaired by the late Carl Sagan. The disc features several compositions by Bach, Beethoven and Mozart, an excerpt from Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Blind Willie Johnson, Chuck Berry, a token jazz piece (but what a token: Louis Armstrong's "Melancholy Blues") and, laudably, an assortment of material that today would be lumped under the corporate moniker "world music."¹ All selected to calm the extraterrestrial beast and show him, her or it the depth and breadth of our musical wares.

However, a further question arises: exactly who is likely to ever listen to this record? Sagan himself thought it quite possible that both spacecraft would still be wandering the Milky Way five billion years from now, long after the civilisation that launched them has ceased to exist (1995, 153). To hope that either probe might be intercepted by beings passing within the vicinity of our solar system, who just happen to have a phonographic hi-fi player on hand, would be like looking for a needle on a planet made entirely out of hay. Given all this, it has been sensibly argued that for Sagan and colleagues the selections on the *Voyager*

¹ For a full track-list and extensive discussion on the selection process, see Ferris (1979).

golden record are in fact a statement about terrestrial diversity, directed more at the population of our own planet than any other (Squeri 2004, 484).

In this earnest attempt to condense the entire history of recorded music into one hour-and-a-half long sampler, the enigmatic concept of audience looms large. Is it an unknown, in this case otherworldly, population? Is it each and every one of us as individuals? As a homogeneous mass? As a collection of communities or subcultures? Or, perhaps more tellingly, are the members of the *Voyager* committee themselves the real audience here, acting out the music lover's ultimate fantasy by anthologising their own listening preferences in an act of consecration likely to outlive humanity itself?

In a 1998 article published in the journal *Popular Music & Society*, musicologist Sammie Ann Wicks makes the following declaration:

The failure of both ethnomusicology and musicology to answer the most fundamental questions about the nature of music and its important relationship to human cognitive functioning means that our understanding of ourselves as a species ... is woefully incomplete. And whether or not any of this seems important to those working in areas that appear to be more crucial to our sheer physical survival, it must be admitted that we simply do not know yet – because we have not asked – whether a deeper understanding of expressions like music might significantly contribute to the amelioration of our current intractable social predicaments. (57)

Wicks' chief concern is to critique the perpetuation of a rigid, inequitable and increasingly remote Western canon in the American educational system, to the exclusion of the countless other musical cultures, genres and activities currently in operation. Yet with these words she articulates an even weightier philosophical conundrum, one that few have been prepared to approach. It can be argued that music mirrors greater society in so many ways: people defend their own tastes with a near religious fervour; the borders between genres are permeable in some ways but impregnable in others; a dominant mainstream all but conceals a disparate array of marginalised tributaries. Might it be that the rationale behind our musical categorisations, predilections and prejudices say more about us than many are prepared to admit? This is an issue which will remain under consideration throughout much of the discussion to follow.

My reference here to a dominant mainstream is important in so far as establishing a general position out of which the forthcoming arguments will emerge. I take it as given that in contemporary music, as with contemporary culture generally, there is an ascendant mainstream toward the centre of which the great majority of attention and thinking to date has been focused. It is a mainstream that may well be a fragmented or contradictory one, but a fragmented or contradictory mainstream is still a mainstream. In fact, if there is a mythical aspect to the standard mainstream/alternative dichotomy then it seems more likely, as Tom Frank (2001) suggests, to be associated with the latter term. The great thinker Theodor Adorno (whose work influences the pages to come perhaps more than any other) long ago recognised the reach of commodity capitalism to be essentially absolute, gathering up both highbrow and popular culture (as people commonly conceive of them) in its considerable grasp. Any attempt to think around mainstream narratives in contemporary music requires first and foremost an awareness of how crowded the mainstream actually is.²

In this dissertation I also take the position that, similar to how individuals are comprised of a broad combination of personal insights and social interactions, discussions on music need not be limited – as some of the scholarly literature would have us believe – to a focus upon specific musical texts or genres. How different texts and genres intersect and relate to each other, and how music itself intersects and relates with other art forms such as literature and film, indeed with all aspects of life, are just as important. In this manner, the narrative drifts to a certain extent from one encounter to another, at various moments intermingling music of all kinds with the likes of Jorge Luis Borges, *Seinfeld*, Virginia Woolf, Wassily Kandinsky, Raymond Williams, Charles Baudelaire, film studies, literary theory and much more besides. As Edward Said, referring to how critics should go about their work, terms it: “to be interested in as many things as possible: I think that’s what we are best at doing” (in Salusinszky 1987, 145).

² Thus when David Hesmondhalgh (discussing the concept of art as “symbolic creativity”) reminds us that though this “*can* enrich people’s lives ... it often doesn’t” (2007b, 5) [original italics], or when Andy Hamilton (giving examples of “current extremes of commodification”) says that not even in Adorno’s “worst nightmares [could he] have envisaged such paeans to inanity and imbecility as reality TV’s *Big Brother* and the manufactured democracy of *Pop Idol*” (2007, 174), my position would be that these comments if anything *underplay* how limited in scope the vast majority of what passes for culture in the 21st century really is.

A third important establishing point to make here is that this dissertation represents a somewhat peculiar take on the issue of contemporary music and its audiences, in that it is written from the point of view of an audience member not affiliated with any specific disciplinary or industry perspective. The non-professional audience can be regarded as the silent majority in modern music, and what follows is some attempt to give that silent majority more of an input than has previously been the case. On that note, any sense of isolation my position engenders no doubt sits well with the fact that the discussion emanates from an Australian setting, one Philip Hayward has referred to as “beyond the axis” so far as most dialogues on music are concerned (1998, 1-2).³

In February of 1990, the *Voyager 1* spacecraft, weighed down with its cache of musical greatness, was almost six billion kilometres from home when NASA turned its cameras back toward the earth one last time. The picture that resulted presents our world as an unidentifiable speck of light – in Sagan’s words “a mote of dust suspended on a sunbeam” – and he exhorts us to consider this fact in terms of certain aspects of the planet’s not-so-proud history:

Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. (1995, 8-9)

³ The axis Hayward refers to is essentially a UK-US one. That the music of the Oceanic region is almost completely ignored in international discourses is exemplified by the recent slew of (purportedly comprehensive) canonical texts and reference books on all types of music. Inevitably absent from these nonetheless Westernised histories is pretty well every important and influential musician or group Australia and New Zealand have produced, of which Warren Burt, the Laughing Clowns, Chris Abrahams, Essendon Airport, Warumpi Band, Dirty Three, Bernie McGann, the Verlaines, the Dead C, Robert Scott, Roy Montgomery and Birchville Cat Motel are but some of the more obvious.

Echoing Wicks, it is my firm belief that there is more of a relationship between a knowledge of and tolerance for “other” music and for “others” in general than has so far been given credit. There are millions upon millions of inhabitants of this tiny dot in space who listen to and enjoy music, and it is quite possible that every single one of them would, if given the opportunity, choose a different 27 pieces of music to accompany a 21st century *Voyager*-style mission. In what follows, I seek to consider some of the wider aesthetic and ethical implications of this fact, and of the unprecedented expansion in textual production in contemporary music and concomitant increase in interpretive possibilities available to its audiences.

Chapter One: Discourse

I

Slouching Towards Gomorrah, a 1997 book by law professor, former judge and arch-conservative Robert H. Bork that, according to its back cover, explores “the dark side of contemporary American culture,” includes the following summary of rock and rap music:

The difference between the music produced by Tin Pan Alley and rap is so stark that it is misleading to call them both music. Rock and rap are utterly impoverished by comparison with swing or jazz or any pre-World War II music, impoverished emotionally, aesthetically and intellectually. Rap is simply unable to express tenderness, gentleness, or love. Neither rock nor rap can begin to approach the complicated melodies of George Gershwin, Irving Berlin or Cole Porter. Nor do their lyrics display any of the wit of Ira Gershwin, Porter, Fats Waller or Johnny Mercer. The bands that play this music lack even a trace of the musicianship of the bands led by Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and many others of that era. (124)

Two years later, Terry Teachout, the resident authority on music at *Commentary*, prepared a critical guide to the classical compositions he regards as the “Masterpieces of the Century.” Teachout’s guide is tantamount to a road map for the rediscovery of a pre-modern tonal orthodoxy, and in it he gives short shrift to both the “simple-minded” minimalism of composers such as Philip Glass and the post-Schoenberg schools of serialism and atonality. The latter he derides in this way:

It is astonishing how much bad music has been called good in the course of the 20th century, and especially since the end of World War II. That is when such anti-tonal composers as Milton Babbitt, Pierre Boulez, John Cage, Elliot Carter and Karlheinz Stockhausen gained effective control over the new-music establishment in Europe and America ... in point of fact, the “innovations” of these composers were scarcely more than evasions – futile attempts to mask their own inability to renew and refresh the musical tradition they had inherited. (1999c, 55)

In a 1964 *New Statesman* article titled “The Menace of Beatlism,” Paul Johnson strays from the attack upon his principal target to sideswipe serious critics of jazz music:

To buttress their intellectual self-esteem, these treasonable clerks have evolved an elaborate cultural mythology about jazz, which purports to distinguish between various periods, tendencies and schools. The subject has been smeared with a respectable veneer of academic scholarship, so that now you can overhear grown men, who have been expensively educated, engage in heated argument on the respective techniques of Charlie Parker and Duke Ellington. You can see writers of distinction, whose grey hairs testify to years spent in the cultural vineyard, squatting on the bare boards of malodorous caverns, while through the haze of smoke, sweat and cheap cosmetics comes the monotonous braying of savage instruments. (327)

William Studwell and D.F. Lonergan’s book *The Classic Rock and Roll Reader* dismisses the entire genre of disco with these few words:

One of the main characteristics of the disco fad of the mid-to-late 1970s was the general absence of good and enduring songs ... disco and classic rock violently clashed in the mid-1970s, and neither was alive by the beginning of the 1980s. (1999, 262-263)

Hole in Our Soul is Martha Bayles’ much discussed tome on the decline of American popular music. Having identified the alleged lineage of rock’s destruction as beginning with the Rolling Stones and carrying on through to the Sex Pistols, Bayles has this to say about the post-punk era that followed:

Today the punk legacy persists wherever noise, shock and ugliness are cultivated for their own sakes, and wherever the fires of adolescent anger and aggression are stoked in ways that are almost totally destructive. (1996, 12-13)

Finally, this from one Clement Semmler, who, in a 1996 review of Donald Clarke’s book *The Rise and Fall of Popular Music*, synthesises his terse renunciations of punk, heavy metal, grunge and rap with the assertion that since the 1960s

the path of popular music has been akin to that of the Gadarene swine – downhill and fast, to boot. (83)

Pretty well everybody has strong opinions about music. One strikes people who simply do not read books, others who could not tell a de Chirico from a Hockney, those who have never attended a play in their lives; certainly, many around the world would find it difficult to gain access to literature, art or theatre, perhaps other than at a very local level. But it is reasonable to claim that there are few who do not engage with music on a regular basis. In developed societies in particular, where we are bombarded with new and used cultural productions on a daily basis, almost everyone exhibits firm musical predilections of some kind.

Each of the six judgments reproduced above amounts to the wholesale vilification, not of a specific work, nor even of a particular artist, but of one or more entire categories of musical endeavour. And each is based, despite being clad in the eloquent language and fortified with the perceived vigour of serious intellectual debate, upon nothing more than the author's own taste and opinion. Bork and Semmler dispatch a raft of rock and pop related genres in one fell swoop. Teachout removes minimalism and atonalism en masse from the 20th century art music equation. Johnson summarily dismisses jazz in the very decade that John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Charles Mingus and so many others were at the height of their powers. Studwell and Lonergan kill off disco and classic rock (whatever that is) around 1980. And Bayles does a similar hatchet job on three decades of post-punk exertion in the course of a single, overwrought sentence. At the beginning of a new century, when just about the only thing expanding and proliferating as quickly as new music are published opinions about it, it is worth asking just what it is about these and other official accounts that supposedly sets them apart, in both value and prestige, from those of the everyday listener.

There is a terribly well-worn cliché – attributable to Elvis Costello, though some say it originated with Frank Zappa – that, through its very overuse, says something about the limitations to this point of contemporary music criticism: writing about music is like dancing

about architecture.⁴ The many scholars who have recycled this line, even those who believe Costello's words to constitute an inalienable truth, just continue on writing (about music) as though the paradox has escaped them.⁵ Yet a subtle distinction is all that is required to lay this chestnut to rest once and for all, for while language must inevitably fall short of capturing the essence of music (it can never actually be what it is describing) what it *can* do is forcefully and eloquently express how people respond to musical experiences (language being the best descriptive tool we have).

A less-heralded but arguably more useful aphorism, in terms of how often such language actually means something, is more certainly ascribable to Zappa: "rock journalism is people who can't write interviewing people who can't talk for people who can't read."⁶ Although this barb is ostensibly aimed at a different target, academic critics ought not rest easy. Because while music journalists are often justly maligned for their gushing fandom and formulaic prose, there is at least some chance they will invite – in the words of Robert Dessaix (1998, 133) – "complicity in an unexpected adventure" by deftly treading that fine line between expert and enthusiast. In getting all serious about the art of music, many scholars, as I will shortly argue, are either so far removed from their subject they render it immaterial, or so entwined in it they inject their personal evaluations with a sovereignty that cannot be substantiated.

Any overview of scholarly and quasi-scholarly music criticism is likely to have to differentiate between two general research tendencies. In the first set of practices to be described, the focus is predominantly upon musical texts; this includes those analyses built upon the theoretical traditions and esoteric language of musicology. In the second, the sounds themselves are almost always subservient to cultural, political or other extra-textual concerns. Underpinning all of this is a wholly inadequate dualism that theorists of every stripe have consistently proved unable or unwilling to dismantle. That is to say, a strictly

⁴ It has been used by, amongst others: Goodwin (1992, 1); Cooper (1997, 105); Plasketes (1997, 133); Ryan (1997); Fink (1998, 164); DeCurtis (1999, vii); Brackett (2000, 157); Jones & Featherly (2002, 20); Mordue (2006, 1); Egan 2008 (528).

⁵ This appears at the beginning of Ryan's nonetheless lengthy paper on postmodern Irish music: "As Elvis Costello's quote ... suggests, any attempt to rationalise, analyse or intellectualise music is bound to fail. By its very nature, music is not suited to a written discourse."

⁶ Some hold that this comment by Zappa first appeared in print in a book titled *Loose Talk* by one Linda Botts [1980 (New York: Quick Fox Press)].

policed canon of Western art music – within which various secondary battles rage – is set apart from all other forms of musical endeavour collected together under the general descriptor “popular music.”

As Robert Fink (1998, 158-159) observes, some version of an outmoded textual-canonical versus contextual-popular opposition has underwritten virtually all of the learned discourse on music over the past few decades.⁷ Nonetheless, in this period the research lens has focused more and more toward examinations (contextual *and* textual) of what is deemed the popular, as the classical canon, around which formal-canonical discourse was originally based, retreats further into isolation and nostalgia (Fink 1998, 138-141; Taruskin 2007, 35). The following analysis of the recent history of (Anglo-American dominated) research into music emphasises how the literature on popular music in particular has tended to perpetuate the age-old dichotomies of classical-popular and textual-contextual. It will be argued that this has led to a distancing of contemporary music studies from the actual ways that people make and engage with music, and too often reduced the potential audience to a largely undifferentiated mass.

II

Those critics whose concerns are chiefly textual can themselves be usefully divided into two subgroups. On the one hand, it has long been argued that discussions of music are intrinsically flawed if they eschew technical analysis. This position can be found to have arisen within the tradition of Western art music, and its application to present-day compositions and audiences is severely constrained by the tendency for researchers still

⁷ The universal (and continuing) nature of this fundamental opposition is further exposed in Brackett (1997, 508) and Cunningham (2004, 17), the latter finding contemporary music “caught between a still largely conventional musicology, whose received procedures are patently ill-equipped to deal with a vast range of recent musical production, and a cultural theory which is generally content to reduce it to little more than a background noise for the formation of subcultural identity.” However, it must be stated at the outset that the division is not clear in each and every case. In a book such as Richard Middleton’s *Studying Popular Music* (1990), for instance, the discussion moves deftly between musicological/textual and sociological/contextual analysis. In what follows, I will be using the terms textual and contextual as ordering concepts rather than to imply an always strict division between the two styles of analysis; the discussion will move more or less along a continuum from texts to contexts, with the divide perhaps easier to perceive at either end than toward the middle.

operating strictly within that tradition to be irrevocably bound to both its texts and analytical methods. So though for all intents and purposes limited to studying a pre-modern canon that is receding ever more quickly into the past and contemporary compositional practices which appear ever more arcane when viewed in isolation from the non-art world, such critics continue doggedly to immerse themselves in the notational practices and autonomous works of artistic genius. At the same time, modifiers like classical, art and serious are usually omitted from the dialogue: without need for further categorisation “music” becomes a highly efficient marker of status, relegating all remaining ventures to some indistinct other that is not really music at all.⁸

Though mostly content to engage exclusively with the subject of their affections, the odd combatant at times sees fit to fire off a weak shot at the populist masses in the distance. This is the case with Julian Johnson’s (2002) book-length endeavour to reassert the heroic status of classical music, in which he makes all of the usual noises about the ephemeral nature of music-as-entertainment before proceeding to wallow in the incontestable superiority of his area of expertise, based upon personal claims as to the greater value of art music that are presented as universally verifiable.⁹ Similarly, Elizabeth Silsbury puts forward the belief that as well as classical music being superior to all other forms, it can not even be understood, much less appreciated, by anyone who does not possess specialist training (2006, 77). Such assessments remain by and large unremarkable, however, as they are unlikely to register outside of the heavily reinforced lodgings of the high art world within which they are ensconced.

Only when musicology begins to cross over into other realms, accompanied by the argument that its expertise is necessary to advance the study of non-art music, does the insistence on

⁸ This circumstance is easily discernible if one considers the titles of various periodicals in the field. For example, compare the primarily art music journals *Musical Quarterly*, *Music and Letters* and *Music Analysis* with *Popular Music*, *Popular Music and Society* and *The Journal of Popular Music Studies*.

⁹ The last few years have seen a rash of publications (of varying merit) with the principal objective of lamenting/reviving the flagging fortunes of art music; these include Andrew Ford’s *In Defence of Classical Music* (2005), Lawrence Kramer’s *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (2007) and Norman Lebrecht’s *The Life and Death of Classical Music* (2007).

text-based analysis become more widely problematic.¹⁰ Thus in Wilfrid Mellers' *The Music of the Beatles: Twilight of the Gods* (an early attempt to marry formal analysis with the rapidly proliferating world of rock and pop) the author states that "descriptive accounts of music *cannot be valid* unless they are based on what happens in musical terms" (1973, 15) [my italics]. Experts sharing Mellers' technical grounding have subsequently used their distinctive instruments to poke suspiciously at the alien specimen that is popular music, conducting many no doubt skilled but arguably bloodless examinations. In one stand-out example, William Echard (1999) provides an extraordinarily meticulous dismantling of Neil Young's "Powderfinger" from which it is nonetheless impossible to discern whether the author actually *likes* the song in question. In another, Sheila Whiteley (2000), having mysteriously conflated Jimi Hendrix with progressive rock,¹¹ calls upon a vast array of detached, specialist language in order to, decades after the fact, make solemn revelations like (the song) "The Wind Cries Mary" "encodes the effect of marijuana" (249) and "stoned = high" (257).

Elsewhere, musicologists have moved to pen gushing-yet-authoritative analyses of the categories of non-art music that interest them. The most noticeable theme of this development has been a concerted effort to re-evaluate the progressive rock genre, hitherto little more than a cursory blip on the popular music radar. For instance, Akitsugu Kawamoto (2005) makes the decision to apply literary theorist Harold Bloom's work on the anxiety of influence to the sounds of Emerson Lake and Palmer (ELP). This is somewhat paradoxical in that Bloom has used the derogatory term "school of resentment" to describe virtually all of the theoretical positions applicable to the study of popular culture.¹² Having done so, he comes to the hardly-startling conclusion that this early-70s so-called supergroup

¹⁰ Whilst cognisant of discussions concerning the distinction between musicology and music theory, and aware that in musicology analysis is not always chiefly score-oriented, I will hereafter follow Moore's example (2003, 2) and use the term musicology in the generalised European sense when referring to textual analysis of a technical nature. When used to describe the analysis of non-art music the field is usually referred to as popular musicology, in turn a specific branch of what is alternatively termed (in the US) "new musicology" or (in the Britain) "critical musicology."

¹¹ Whiteley presumably refers to Hendrix's music as "progressive" in respect to most of what preceded it, whereas "progressive rock" has long since been used to define a specific strand of artists who consistently apply classical elements to popular forms (commencing with, and exemplified by, such early-70s collectives as Yes, Genesis, Jethro Tull and King Crimson).

¹² For example, see Bloom 1994 (4, 310). Bloom has elsewhere remarked upon the intrusion of "professors of hip-hop" into academia, in a manner intended as a slight upon those who waste their time considering the aesthetic or cultural value of popular music.

played a different style of music to Keith Emerson's previous band, the Nice. The concept of applying a "Bloomian" method of analysis to stylistic changes might, according to Kawamoto, be of further use when analysing mid-career transformations in bands like the Beatles and Deep Purple, a suggestion that smacks of an attempt to set up an unnecessary framework for the intervention of formal musicology. That the Beatles retired full-time to the studio and Deep Purple replaced two key members could surely just as easily account for such transformations.

John Palmer does a similar resuscitation job on the band Yes with his assessment of the obscure 1977 track "Awaken" (2001). It is notable, however, that most of the performative tendencies Palmer highlights as setting Yes apart from the rest of the pop-rock crowd – "extended forms, prominent instrumental passages, a colourful harmonic palette ... instrumental and compositional virtuosity" (244) – exemplify progressive rock's position as the popular form closest to art music, while simultaneously distancing the genre from the kinds of music usually snubbed by musicologists. (Further venerating Yes for "lyrics that are positive in outlook and concerned with spiritual existence" would appear to be a less-than-subtle swipe at the disillusionment and angst dominant in the punk rock of the same period.) Otherwise, Palmer does little to dampen down an outsider's suspicion of musicology's intrusion into popular forms when he cites the dubious values of commercial success and longevity as evidence of the band's ongoing relevance (258).

Yes are further revitalised in John Covach's (1997) detailed examination of their 1972 track "Close To the Edge." Here the author provides a valuable history of the progressive rock movement, but in doing so barely conceals a fan's agenda of using formal analysis to validate his subject. Covach attaches much positive terminology to progressive rock – "compelling aesthetic effect," virtuosity," "complexity"¹³ – whilst bypassing the "musical amateurism" of punk, yet in an apparent legitimising move tries to pull certain "new wave" artists with abundant critical cachet in the pop-rock field, such as Elvis Costello and Talking Heads, closer to his subject by asserting that their music was "far more sophisticated than it

¹³ This has been a common strategy in the many discussions of progressive rock appearing over recent years: in addition to Covach and Palmer, Eric Hung, in another paper on ELP, speaks of "the stunning virtuosity of [progressive rock] performers" (2005, 257), while Bill Martin refers to the genre's "high level of instrumental skill [and] visionary romantic sensibility" (2002, 71).

may at first appear” (5). His analysis (and privileging) of intricate musical structures, characteristic of both his selected text (not a fault in itself) and the progressive rock genre generally, is unfortunately shot through with the kind of language that simultaneously distances musicology from the interpretations of outsiders. Covach’s work, like that of Kawamoto and Palmer, thus seems clear evidence of what fellow musicologist Fink (1998, 150) warns is the discipline’s “progress by annexation.”¹⁴

Further additions to the growing body of musicological excursions into the non-classical realm raise the issue of superfluity. As part of a compendium of studies concerning the Beatles album *Revolver*, Stephen Valdez (2002) discusses various aspects of the musical techniques of John, Paul, George and Ringo before coming to a solitary and much emphasised conclusion: *Revolver*, standing as it does on the cusp of the Beatles’ conversion from touring pop stars to studio-based musicians, is a successful melding of conservative and experimental musicianship that places it at the top of the rock pantheon. It is instructive to position Valdez’s findings, the consequence of a painstaking breakdown of harmonic progressions, modal tendencies and chromatic motions, alongside the following evaluation of the album by rock journalists Robert Christgau and John Piccarella:

And then, nine months after *Rubber Soul*, came *Revolver* [and] it seemed, well, revolutionary at the time. With its string octet and French-horn solo and soul brass, its electronics and tabla and sitar, its kiddie sound effects and savage guitar breaks, its backward tapes and backward

¹⁴ Robert Walser (2000) properly points out that using theory in such an isolationist, didactic manner means that Covach and like critics are reinforcing, rather than helping break down, the barrier between musicology and the outside world. Moreover, none of these writers attempt to engage with the long history of criticism of progressive rock in non-academic circles. For example, Wayne King (in *The New Rolling Stone Record Guide* [Marsh & Swenson 1983]), says this in the entry on Yes: “Classical rockers with hearts of cold, Yes ... left the decade as perhaps the epitome of uninvolved, pretentious and decidedly non-progressive music, so flaccid and conservative that it became the symbol of uncaring platinum success, spawning more stylistic opponents than adherents” (562). *Wire* magazine’s 1995 feature on the “A to Z of Prog Rock” is more succinct: “Culturally and musically, Yes remain irredeemable.” Of ELP, King says: “[their] failures show that egotism run rampant is no way for a group to function, and that the mixing of classical music and rock and roll can never work merely by harnessing the forms of one to the wattage of the other” (164). And Lester Bangs penned a notorious 1974 essay on the latter band, which includes the following observation on Emerson’s keyboard technique: “To make the crucial distinction, trained fingers might as well be trained seals unless there is a mind flexing behind them” (2003, 53). None of this is to say whether Kawamoto, Palmer and Covach are right or wrong in their interpretations – but, as Walser suggests, simply ignoring criticism from outside the musicological realm serves only to promote a type of rarefied fandom practised by members of a very exclusive club.

rhythms, its air of untrammelled eclecticism, mystic wandering and arty civility, this was where the Beatles stopped being a bar band. (Christgau 1998, 115)

What we have here is a succinct and generally accessible summation, in less than 100 words, of the same conclusion it took Valdez some 18 pages and much abstruse language to reach; what's more, Christgau and Piccarella took their stand on *Revolver* 20 years beforehand.¹⁵ This is not to contend that an examination such as that conducted by Valdez is inappropriate – it is simply directed at, and of potential value to, that very small percentage of the population who are trained in formal analysis. But in light of its journalistic counterpart, it is difficult to see how an article such as this amounts to evidence of the increasing scope and vitality of contemporary musicology.

Timothy Koozin (2000) and Lori Burns (2005) also flirt with redundancy when analysing the “finely wrought and immensely popular” (Koozin 2000, 247) work of Sarah McLachlan. Searching for complexity and mystique in run-of-the-mill pop music, both authors revel in the supposed beauty and emotion of McLachlan's narratives. Yet their meticulous unravelling of musical structure would surely seem unnecessary for the many fans who presumably require no technical explanation as to why they engage with her (in the composer's own words) “bonehead simple” (248) music. In a circumstance that recalls the previously-cited dissertations on progressive rock, the mystery of why McLachlan rates as a subject for musicological analysis might well have been solved by *Village Voice* critic Jane Dark, who observes her to be “an opera diva in reverse: a vocal exercise made flesh, but staged for peasants” (1998, 118).¹⁶

By pointing out here the dourness of Echard and Whiteley's research, the contentious marriage of form and fandom in Kawamoto, Palmer and Covach's re-evaluations of progressive rock, and the possibly redundant nature of the findings in Valdez, Burns and Koozin, I in no way mean to discount the important advances made by musicology in recent

¹⁵ The essay in question, on John Lennon, was first published shortly after his death in 1980.

¹⁶ Jane Dark is the pseudonym of academic and sometime *Spin* writer Joshua Clover, whom we shall encounter in a far less critical guise later in this chapter. Once again, it is interesting to compare the scholarly interpretations of Koozin and Burns to that of a journalist-critic such as Dark and Christgau; the latter summarily dismisses McLachlan as “a singer-songwriter of monumental banality” (2000, 200).

years. In particular, it cannot be denied that several “crossover” specialists – Robert Fink, Richard Middleton, Susan McClary, Rose Rosengard Subotnick, Max Paddison, Robert Walser and others – have made vital contributions to discourses on non-canonical music. Moreover, it is certainly true that these and other musicologists have discontinued the tradition of distrusting all research not grounded in technical analysis, instead sensibly relying upon sociological and journalistic accounts and historical circumstances to inform and supplement their own discipline. Nonetheless, when Derek Scott (in the General Editor’s preface to *Every Sound There Is* [Reisling 2002]), asserts that recent modifications in philosophical outlook, such as the shift in emphasis from textual analysis to cultural contexts and consumption, mean that popular musicology (as opposed to new or critical musicology in general) “is now a vital and exciting area of scholarship,” I would contend that the potential of those modifications still outweighs the achievements. In many cases, musicologists are crossing over without making the necessary changes to their methodology or implements, only choosing music that is amenable to analysis using traditional methods and tools, or merely finding new ways to present well-known or superfluous information.

There is also little doubt that, on the evidence so far, the discipline has taken on at least one of the undesirable traits of popular music scholarship emanating out of sociology and cultural studies (more on which shortly): that is, an almost exclusive interest in analysing mainstream activity (with a special emphasis on the rock music of the pre-punk era), as though what is popular and easily accessible adequately represents the entirety of contemporary music. Allan Moore notes that there have been four general collections of popular music scholarship with a primarily text-based perspective: Middleton’s *Reading Pop* (2000), Covach and Boone’s *Understanding Rock* (1997), Everett’s *Expression in Pop-Rock Music* (2000), and his own *Analysing Popular Music* (2003). The contents page of *Reading Pop* makes it obvious, with chapters focusing on, amongst others, Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix, Peter Gabriel, Bruce Springsteen, Buddy Holly, Prince, Irving Berlin and the video clip, that the book is dominated by both the easily observable and the generally dated. Covach & Boone’s anthology tells a similar tale: along with Yes, the Beach Boys, Cream, Paul Simon, Jimi Hendrix and the Grateful Dead are analysed, while the chapter on KD Lang refers to her 1985 cover version of a song from 1962. In Everett, the emphasis is split between older rock music with classical leanings (Frank Zappa, Genesis, another Covach

examination of progressive rock) and newer artists with high public profiles (U2, the Cure, Tori Amos and Sarah McLachlan). Only Moore's own book – with its tentative steps into jungle, hip-hop and TV soundtracks – shows much indication of progressing the discussion toward more neoteric, less fashionable (in terms of intellectual debate) styles.¹⁷ On the whole, then, it can be contended that musicology has thus far made only tentative steps into the world of popular music.

Nonetheless, while conducting meticulous post-mortems of musical performances might be of limited appeal to the non-specialist, at least no-one is likely to be hurt by the process. If most music lovers are still largely ostracised by musicological analysis, they are for all intents and purposes obliterated by the exploits of the likes of Robert Pattison (1987), Allan Bloom (1987) and Roger Scruton (1997; 1998). These authors – leading voices in a second sub-group of text-focused critics – treat modern musical works less as bodies on a dissecting table than exhibits in a freak show: a phenomenon to brood over rather than a distinct artefact worthy of thoughtful evaluation. This school of thought, emanating from a lonely island fortress mired in a perceived sea of mass-cultural pollutants, takes Frankfurt School culture industry critique to its (il)logical nadir by roping off high culture from its insidious opposite and claiming virtually all contemporary music to be inherently anti-intellectual.

The following excerpt from a review by one Michael Bywater sums up the attitude most succinctly. Exercising an almost-admirable lack of restraint, he laments an anthology of popular music writing thus:

¹⁷ If 1970s progressive rock has been the most examined genre amongst popular musicologists, then the Beatles (whose *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* some consider the precursor to that genre) are by far the dominant subject in musicological evaluations focusing upon specific artists. In addition to *Twilight of the Gods* by Mellers and the *Every Sound There Is* anthology, Everett (1999; 2001) has penned two entire books on the band, while Moore's 1997 text focuses specifically on *Sgt. Pepper's*. Also, the "Beatles 2000" cross-disciplinary conference in Jyvaskyla, Finland evidently featured a welter of formal/theoretical papers on their music (2001), as does the 2006 anthology *Reading the Beatles* (Womack & Davis). There are, however, increasing examples of musicologists making more adventurous forays into territories of non-art music that are neither pre-punk nor hugely popular; these include Timothy D. Taylor's *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (1997a) which explores the work of artists such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Pauline Oliveros and Youssou N'Dour, Eric Clarke's highly readable study of Frank Zappa and PJ Harvey songs (1999), Caroline O'Meara's original take on British post-punk band the Raincoats (2003), and "post-canonic musicologist" Robert Fink's connecting of Stravinsky with Kraftwerk, Afrika Bambaataa, techno and sampling culture in order to "begin to tell the post-canonic story of Western art music" (2005).

But this ... stuff, this un-music, witless drivel, smashed, debauched imbecility, is being sold. It is being pushed. It is inseparable from the decay on which it feeds: crudity, stupidity, brutality, inarticulacy, the short fuse, the crunched face, the snatched fuck, the solipsism, the hopelessness ... people are getting rich on it. They always have. And most of them have been the people who, in a civilised world, you wouldn't want to be rich. You'd want them to be poor. (1995, 45)

Ruthless though Bywater's assault is, it is Scruton who has been responsible for the most concerted wave of attacks upon contemporary music over the past decade. In his sustained diatribes *The Aesthetics of Music* (1997) and *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (1998), the backbone of Scruton's philosophy (buttressed in the former case with his own brand of musicology) can be easily discerned: a sneering distaste for the kind of relativistic attitude (typical of the cultural studies movement) that some latter-day musicologists do attempt to engage with, and an unstinting belief that his criteria for aesthetic evaluation is the only true and intelligent one to be had. Scruton thereafter wallows in the injustice of the circumstance that the more society declines in matters of aesthetic taste over the course of the 20th century ("those things dismissed by Adorno are better in every way than those dismissed by Bloom")¹⁸ the less people like himself are sanctioned to pass judgement upon its cultural icons ("in matters of aesthetic taste, no adverse judgment is permitted, save judgment of the adverse judge") [1998, 497].

The way Scruton conducts his demolition job on popular culture, modernism, postmodernism – in effect, anything that is not a continuation of the quasi-religious ideals of transcendent romanticism – is emblematic of its type. An intelligent lifestyle immersed in the artefacts of high culture, available only to the very few who are capable of appreciating it, is compared with a mindless other that suffices to encompass every form of artistic endeavour deemed its (and, hence, intelligence's) opposite. Scruton's philosophical "givens" – that great music exists in a realm autonomous from everyday culture and the common individual; that a redemptory "rediscovery of the tonal language" is now required (1997, 508); that a handful of obvious examples will do to exemplify all rock and pop music – are simply because he *says* they are, conveniently sidestepping any requirement for

¹⁸ Scruton is referring here to Allan Bloom's infamous *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and that author's lamenting of the popular culture of the post-Adorno era.

rigorous analysis and balanced discussion. Nevertheless, it would seem insufficient, as some have suggested, to ignore this kind of extreme prejudice as the last desperate move of an antiquated cultural aristocracy. Not only do Scruton's claims possess the incontestable authority of the academy (his books, always, I have noticed, subjected to high use, are housed in university libraries); upon publication, they have garnered mostly respectful, frequently sycophantic reviews both in the scholarly and popular presses.¹⁹

Theodore Gracyk is one respondent who has been able to point out the double standard underpinning Scruton's work. Of *The Aesthetics of Music*, he notes:

[Scruton] lambasts popular music precisely because ... sociological criticism makes no room for value distinctions grounded in aesthetic appraisal. The interesting twist to Scruton's argument is that he regards such criticism as perfectly appropriate to most recent rock music: there is no attention to the aesthetic dimension of rock for the simple reason that it does not invite aesthetic interest. (1999, 208)

Rather than unthinkingly hanging off every note and word of bands like Nirvana and REM (two of Scruton's primary rock targets), many listeners are clearly able to apply their own distinctive aesthetic criteria to the individual songs, albums, even career phases of these artists. It is ironic that while Scruton – with all his technical know-how – is unable to contemplate the many stylistic differences that set apart REM records like *Lifes Rich Pageant* (1986) and *Out of Time* (1991), many audience members, far from withholding judgement, appear to possess an acute appreciation of such intricacies (thus REM's move from underground cult band to major label chart-toppers, cemented with the release of *Out of Time*, led to some fans abandoning ship and many new ones climbing on board). And in referencing a Cole Porter song in order to formulate a dichotomy between those who understand “the experiences of melody, harmony and rhythm” and those who do not (1997,

¹⁹ See, for example, Cowley (1998), Iseminger (1999), Mellers (1998), Showater (1998), Logan (1999), Foster (1999), Roggeveen (1999) and Olson (2000). Significantly, one of Scruton's assertions was subjected to a far more rigorous examination in a legal forum: in 1999 he was forced into an out-of-court settlement with the British pop group Pet Shop Boys who sued him over the spurious allegation (1998, 93) that they played an insignificant part in the recording of their own songs.

502), one wonders what Scruton would make of *Red, Hot + Blue* (1990), a tribute album in which numerous pop and rock artists engage with and reinterpret the Porter songbook.

To encapsulate the brittleness of his philosophical position, one need look no further than a book that cements Scruton's conservative status away from the field of music. It is titled *On Hunting*, and on the very first page he states:

Most hunting people are brought up in the sport, and shaped by it into a kind of intermediate species, an ancient synthesis of horse, hound and human. (1999, 7)

What is, of course, missing from this dismal union is the participant without whom the hunt would not exist: the fox. And like the fox, those insignificant, faceless others in contemporary society, incapable of adopting Scruton's aesthetic criteria, are dismissed as irrelevant to the process of understanding music, doomed to be forever pursued by the slavering dogs of unimpeachable critical authority.

Only a half-step removed from Scruton, Bywater and company are those writers – Donald Clarke (1995), Martha Bayles (1996; 1998), James Miller (2000) and countless others²⁰ – whose dismay at rock and roll's loss of innocence circa the 1970s leads to orchestrated attacks on barn-door sized targets such as heavy metal, punk rock and gangsta rap.²¹ Here the focus begins to drift marginally toward issues of sociology, subculture and audience (the latter for the most part perceived as ignorant and unable to exercise good taste), although the primary target remains musical texts and their authors. Such critics set themselves apart from Scruton, Bloom and associates by creating the illusion that, rather than preaching their

²⁰ Including: Bruce Pollock (*Hipper Than Our Kids: A Rock and Roll Journal of the Baby Boom Generation* [1993], in which the author, despite professing to have no time for post-60s popular music, shows evidence of having attentively listened to hundreds of such songs as he makes tenuous associations between artists such as Jackson Browne and ELO, the Bangles and Hüsker Dü); Tony Tyler (a former assistant editor at *New Musical Express*, whose *I Hate Rock and Roll* [1984], a scathing indictment of the industry that formerly employed him, now looks like a precursor to this entire sub-genre); Fred Goodman (*The Mansion on the Hill* [2003]); and David Walley (*Teenage Nervous Breakdown* [2006]).

²¹ This is the starting point of an assumption about the death of authentic popular music (in the guise of rock) that verges upon being historical truth through sheer weight of repetition in the learned discourse (Regev 2002, 252).

sermons from within the fortress of the elite, they are actually immersed in, and sympathetic to, the culture that spawns popular music.

It is Bayles' assertion that contemporary music can be inextricably linked to an "intellectual brain drain" (1998, 36), as a critical assessment of the more popular forms must inevitably demonstrate. But neither in this paper nor the extended tirade *Hole in Our Soul* (1996), does such a critical assessment materialise: her argument, along similar lines to that of Scruton, consists of little more than the attempted validation of her own taste for non-confrontational, morally upright music. In Bayles' opinion, the worst excesses of modern pop and rock music evolved from those strains of modernism that were either hermetic or perverse (or both), a finding that brings down, along with pretty well every post-Beatles recording artist, such iconoclasts as Wassily Kandinsky (for his non-representational art), Anton Webern (for his obsession with twelve-tone music) and Marcel Duchamp (or anyone even remotely associated with Dadaism).

Hole in Our Soul, misleadingly referred to as "not *just* a history of popular music" (3) [my italics], is in fact a very private, very selective chronology that sounds authoritative when Bayles is referencing the music she loves but becomes positively emaciated when the discussion moves beyond 1968. The author constantly applies incompatible high art notions to popular art forms (as when she dismisses Deborah Harry, Brian Ferry, Janis Joplin and others as being unable to sing on the grounds, more appropriate to a judge on *Australian Idol*, that she knows a technically proficient voice when she hears one). She lampoons lengthy careers on the basis of entirely cursory examinations (such as her pathetic single-paragraph reduction of George Clinton's music to a series of "lustful adventures" [277]).²² And at no point does she consider the possibility that the angst, rage and explicit sexuality in much rock and pop music might be purposely grounded in humour, irony or ambiguity. All the while, her book acts as a kind of clearing house for every negative quote, disturbing lyric or controversial event that has ever been associated with the popular music scene. As Brian Doherty – in the best published review of *Hole in Our Soul* – points out, concern for her

²² For worthy antidotes to Bayles' take, see Peter Shapiro's (1998) comprehensive history of the P-Funk empire (in which he asserts that Clinton actually "exposed the belief that black music was only capable of expressing urges of the body as racist fallacy" [48]) and Mark Willhardt and Joel Stein's "Dr Funkenstein's Supergroovalisticprosifunkstication" (1999).

overriding philosophical stance far outweighs that which Bayles has for contemporary music (1994): the latter is instead the mostly incidental vehicle used to drive her steadfast neoconservative agenda.²³

Although less concerned with using modern musicians and their texts to account for worldly woes like racism and anarchy, Clarke and Miller essentially follow Bayles well-worn path of attempting to inject scholarly credit into the familiar old “pop/rock is dead” claim. Miller, for example, states:

The music I once found fraught with strange, even subversive meanings now often seems to mean nothing at all. Its essential possibilities have been thoroughly explored, its limits more or less clearly established. Though new variants of rock have continued to appear, from rap in 1979 to grunge, trance, house, and trip-hop in more recent years – and though new acts, from Queen Latifah and En Vogue to My Bloody Valentine and the Cardigans still sometimes catch my ear – I believe that the genre’s era of explosive growth has been over for nearly a quarter of a century. (2000, 18-19)

Miller’s half-in, half-out position is representative of the “rock authenticity” argument. As he himself acknowledges, similar arguments are made by those jazz traditionalists whose equation of growth and diversification with selling out is usually the cue for nostalgic reminiscence. To assert this position, all one is required to do is show that the music has somehow changed – that such change is for the worse is a critical given. Thus gangsta rap stands in for rap in general (349) because its eminently reportable violence and misogyny is the mass media face of the genre; thus when Clarke asserts that “the only band to survive from punk with any reputation is the Clash” (1995, 500-501), this fact is in his mind sufficiently established – no discussion required, no need for reasoning or proof: an outrageously grand and sweeping claim becomes a verified, printed fact.

²³ In a brief passage Fink (1998, 160) provides another highly efficient dismissal of *Hole in Our Soul*, noting that “even the most powerful formal innovators are ruthlessly dismissed if their politics are wrong, or even just muddled; if their anger and hopelessness are too corrosive; if they seem too anarchic in their embrace of hedonism; if their critique of white middle-class mores and institutions is too ‘perverse.’”

Submerged within this loose subset of commentators is a further group that must be mentioned. These critics exhibit an analogous penchant for music that is both old fashioned and popular, while at the same time taking care to distance themselves from the ultra-elitist standpoint of the Blooms and Scrutons of this world. In their particular case, this is achieved by the tactic of presenting discussions of popular music texts in which contemporary artists are not decried but completely ignored. One example is Robert Gottlieb and Robert Kimball's *Reading Lyrics* (2000), in which the authors cite logistical reasons for halting an analysis of song lyrics around 1970, though it is implied that they see what followed as intrinsically inferior. Another is Professor William Studwell's *Popular Song Reader* (1994), where he prefaces a totally inadequate coverage of the last third of the 20th century with the unsubstantiated (indeed, impossible to substantiate) claim that "fewer good and lasting songs were written after 1970."

If the first subgroup of text-based examinations presented here, one too often characterised by an isolating esotericism, locks contemporary music inside the musicology building, then the second, burdened with an alienating didacticism, dumps it in the garbage can outside. Taken together, this body of work combines to ensure that the average audience member is, returning again to Dessaix, "silenced – but not by respect for authority" (1998, 129). But in scholarly efforts to demystify musical texts and deconstruct the traditional canon, has the everyday listener fared any better?²⁴

²⁴ At this awkward mid-point in the discussion it might be appropriate to remark upon the discipline of ethnomusicology, which occupies an uncomfortable and marginal position in the discourse partly because by often amalgamating textual and contextual strands of analysis it does not fit neatly into either camp. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate the various inter- and intra-disciplinary debates that have taken place over the past few decades (some have questioned its very existence as a distinct branch of learning; others have expressed concern about Western scholars imposing their methods upon non-Western music), it can be noted that journals such as *The World of Music* and the especially diverse *Perfect Beat: The Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture* (the outlook of which could perhaps be described as popular music studies with an ethnographic inflection) prove that much interesting work in the analysis of popular music occurs well away from the usual Anglo-American, mainstream discourses I am most concerned with critiquing here. The question that for me seems most problematic is: is it appropriate to harness examples of the "new ethnomusicology" (as Hesmondhalgh & Negus [2002, 5] refer to it), or for that matter examples of certain foreign-language studies of local popular musics, to the cause of the Anglo-American popular music studies movement? (Hesmondhalgh & Negus, for instance, appear to treat them as separate, whereas Frith [2004] appears comfortable treating them as one.)

III

Our second, again loosely-related, assemblage of music critics has as its chief influence the cultural studies tradition. This field of analysis is notable for the themes of rescuing the masses from defenders of tradition by shunning quality distinctions, focusing on contexts rather than texts and highlighting processes of reception. In doing so, the awkward designation of popular music studies is commonly evoked.²⁵

Following on from the various uses of the term popular alluded to in Raymond Williams' classic definition (1976, 236-238), the idea of popular music usually calls to mind those forms that are widely admired and enjoyed by the general population. At least two more important senses of the word frame its use in the musical sphere. It is taken to encompass the entirety of whatever musical activities do not constitute high art (effectively all music outside of the Western classical tradition). Also, it is regularly accused of possessing a comparative inferiority or triviality. The very existence of the popular music studies discipline is often seen as an overt challenge to the latter inference.

In an early attempt to pick apart the ambiguity inherent in the term popular music, Chris Cutler asks:

Does it mean numerically and statistically the most listened to, or bought? Does it mean 'of the people'? Or has it come to refer to a whole genus of music – a genus loosely bound by its particular means and relations of production, circulation and consumption; by its commitment to electric and electronic technology, to radio and the gramophone record; to what we might call a demotic musical use and language? (1985, 3)

²⁵ At the outset of this dissertation's engagement with the cultural studies movement two points should be made clear. First, I use the term to generalise about a method of scholarship that has been defined and practiced in different (albeit often subtly different) ways, by different scholars in different regions and in different eras, one seen by some as anti-disciplinary, others interdisciplinary (intersecting with, and often incorporating, subject areas such as sociology and media studies). Second, whatever criticisms I may make of the movement or of certain literature associated with it do not deflect from my overarching belief that its base premises – to expand the definition of culture beyond its highbrow origins and to destabilise notions both of unchallenged dominance and wholesale resistance – are valid and worthwhile ones. Furthermore, while popular music studies is usually considered an arm of cultural studies, it must be reiterated that these definitions are to a certain extent amorphous ones; the work of some of the popular musicologists, for instance, is sometimes incorporated into popular music studies.

That Cutler ultimately decides, after contemplating all of these possibilities, that “popular music simply does not exist” (12) in no way renders his work irrelevant today. It is in fact one of the few places where the insufficiency of the term – both as a catch-all for that which stands in opposition to classical music *and* as a definitive field of artistic endeavour – has been clearly articulated. Twenty years on, a virtual symposium in the journal *Popular Music* highlights this ongoing issue.²⁶ I will be returning to that event later in the chapter, but for the moment I want to set out some evidence to show how the problems inherent in much sociological or contextual theory can be identified through the two components of the very phrase that provides that major interdisciplinary journal with its title – “popular” and “music.”

Though popular is a concept intrinsically ambiguous on several levels when applied to music, presumably the most important aspect of this epithet concerns the field of inquiry it is meant to define. In other words, a basic understanding of the subject of popular music will depend on exactly what it is that academic critics have *embraced* as popular music. To this end, I want to argue that music scholarship in the cultural studies realm has in general mirrored the mainstream narrow-mindedness of both its sworn enemies (Scruton et al) and its new-found friends (popular musicology). Critics have far too often limited their inquiries to the lexicon of corporate culture, not only depriving themselves and their readers of whole other worlds of musical endeavour, but also contributing to the accumulation of a body of literature skewed in favour of commercial trends. Furthermore, although their work is at least more likely to be immersed in the culture of the present day, this is too commonly achieved by way of what Gripsrud calls a “symbolic ‘homecoming’” (1989, 197) that dispenses with the necessary critical distance in order blithely to legitimate mass taste or too-easily interweave pleasure with resistance (see also: Gitlin 1997). Thus the narrow scope of much popular music scholarship to date encourages suspicious or downright dismissive critics to lay bare its inadequacies (as, for instance, when Richard Middleton states that the ubiquity of Madonna in popular music and videos in the late 1980s coincided with a “rush of Madonna exegesis” [2000, 3]) and has overseen the creation of an authorised history that excludes or downplays far too many significant contributions. These outcomes

²⁶ “Can We Get Rid of the ‘Popular’ in Popular Music?” (published in 2005).

might well be considered a combination of two factors. First, there was the emergence – in the 1970s and 1980s – of a new and interdisciplinary category of research housing deeply-embedded biases toward (mainstream, pre-punk, Anglo-American) rock and pop music. Second, there was a concurrent development of theories concerned with interpretations of music as expressions of community and resistance amongst a specific and easily-observed youth population.

The work of B. Lee Cooper, an advisory editor for the journal *Popular Music and Society*, stands out in this regard. From a 1997 essay on the evolution of popular music scholarship, it can be established that his version of this history is strictly limited to those artists who have not sold out to inauthentic versions of rock and roll.²⁷ And a perfect example of how incomplete histories are documented comes from Cooper's own book on popular lyrics, where he buttresses a discussion on the subject of death with a list of recordings for which it is the major thematic concern (1991, 82-93).²⁸ In it, the artists credited with making important contributions on this topic in the first half of the 1980s include Bruce Springsteen, Elton John and former Eagle Don Henley; even the Band Aid project's "Do They Know It's Christmas?" is cited. Yet astonishingly, the list and associated text does not acknowledge the many explorations of death-related topics that arose out of the thriving post-punk scene of the same period. One outstanding absentee is the American band Hüsker Dü, whose debut *Land Speed Record* (1981) featured a cover photograph of the flag-draped coffins of US soldiers killed in Vietnam. Over the following years, the band's songwriters Grant Hart and Bob Mould returned time and again to issues and images concerning mortality, albeit

²⁷ Despite claims to the contrary, Cooper lingers in the territory occupied by Bayles and Miller: "so much of the rock music that followed [the 1950s] was counterfeit. So many artists lost the 'feel' while searching to reproduce the 'sound'" (102). He goes on to ensure readers that authenticity still exists, but only in the form of a list of artists who were either active in pre-Beatles rock and roll or else continue to embrace the values of that era. Ironically, an incredibly scathing review by Cooper (2000) of the Studwell and Lonergan text I cited previously shows the limitations of his own approach better than it does theirs. In it, Cooper admonishes the authors not for empowering the subject of their nostalgia with the term classic rock (and thus fostering the assumption that the music they ignore is not "classic") but instead for being *too* arbitrary in their selection of songs to discuss and failing to refer to record charts when resourcing the book.

²⁸ The book is also a notable example of the kind of sociological criticism that veers closest to textual interpretation by focusing exclusively upon the lyrics of specific songs (Middleton 2000, 7; Shepherd & Wicke 1997, 9). The main problems with analysis focusing exclusively upon song lyrics are that a) myriad new and hybrid forms of instrumental and ethnic music are inevitably excluded, and b) this downplays the reality that the best songs combine several usually equipollent ingredients, of which lyrics are but one.

with lyrics usually submerged in a guitar sound approximating a barrage of incoming missiles rather than the dirge-like strumming of the typical pop-chart threnody.²⁹ In fact, one could easily place Hüsker Dü at the forefront of a kind of Cold War-mentality, mass-carnage death motif to rival those of old age, automobile crashes, suicide, drug abuse and others as categorised by Cooper (83). But with his book posing as part of an officially sanctioned history (Cooper's professorial status is highlighted on both the front and rear covers) of an aspect of a meta-category (popular music) that has traditionally been defined by its status as other (that is, not serious or classical music), groups and artists who do not conform to traditional notions of rock authenticity are discounted.

David Pichaske's "Poetry, Pedagogy and Popular Music" (and accompanying "Compact Discography of Rock Poetry") continues the trend of reducing the pop-rock landscape to a meagre collection of over-represented artists (1997). Here the author (an English professor) deserts poetry for popular music after ascertaining that it is pop singers and not poets that the students of today are interested in. Unfortunately, in carrying out this archetypal baby-boomer move Pichaske confirms the worst fears of popular music studies' opponents by exclusively privileging those artists celebrated in the mass media. What is left is a peer-authorised discography that trivialises the early pop-rock songwriters of renown (Lennon and McCartney, Dylan, Simon) by placing them side-by-side with the arguably hackneyed compositions of the massively popular recording artists who followed in their wake (Sting, Sheryl Crow, Jewel, Dire Straits, Pat Benatar, Kansas). The point here is not to demand entrance into this official canon for the likes of Captain Beefheart and Nick Drake (pre-punk), Joy Division and the Minutemen (post-punk) or the Go-Betweens and XTC (alt-pop), to name just a few obvious examples of not-so-popular artists who have received critical acclaim in certain circles for their remarkable word-craft. It is rather to expose how popular

²⁹ *Land Speed Record* (1981) includes the titles "Guns at My School" and "Let's Go Die," whilst "Push the Button" has a bona-fide Cold War theme: "Hear the sirens in the afternoon / enemy missile gonna hit us soon / casualties will be gigantic / run down the street and panic." The morbidity continues with "Deadly Skies" from the 1983 EP *Metal Circus*: "I've seen the end / of the grand scheme / cause we all die / by our worst means," and reaches a pinnacle on the unforgettable "Turn on the News" from the 1984 album *Zen Arcade*: "I hear it every day on the radio / somebody shoots a guy he don't even know / airplanes falling out of the sky / a baby is born and another one dies." On the idea that the threat of death by nuclear destruction was important to US post-punk music, Michael Azerrad points out (in reference to "Deadly Skies") that virtually every underground act of that era wrote at least one song on the topic (2001, 171).

music studies too easily replicates market-driven sterility by taking the popular part of its moniker far too literally, leaving great swathes of underground activity – still essentially part of the popular landscape due to that term’s status as high art’s other – to drift untended in a vast cultural wasteland, absent from the considerations of the certified intelligentsia. Cooper and Pichaske appear either ignorant (or uncaring) of the vast changes that music has undergone in the decades since Beatlemania.

General histories that move beyond lyric-as-text analysis often fare little better in inquiring beyond the tinsel version of pop culture favoured by the electronic media. In his introduction to *Present Tense: Rock and Roll Culture* (1992), editor and popular music historian Anthony DeCurtis chronicles the 1980s from a rock perspective. Having cited the death of John Lennon as a pivotal entry point to the decade – pondering whether the ex-Beatle could have ultimately survived the “savage mainstreaming” of the 1970s – DeCurtis goes on to bemoan the fact that at that point in time “it hardly seemed as if music mattered at all” (2-3). After working through the arrival of MTV and the video clip and the regression from album-oriented music to a world that was all hit singles and choreographed imagery, he decides that:

By the mid-1980s, rock and roll was well on the way to becoming terminally safe. Joining a rock band had become a career move like any other, about as rebellious as taking a business degree and, if you got lucky, more lucrative ... and far from resisting the marketing demands made of them, artists seemed to be tripping over themselves in their eagerness to sell out, to lease their songs to sell products, to put their dreams in the service of commerce. (5-6)

DeCurtis’ grim history evokes a garden-variety popular music becoming increasingly geared to commercial interests, a proposition difficult to argue with on any level. Yet his (or, for that matter, any other) version of “rock and roll” (inclusive of, as the discussion under review later illustrates, genres such as world music and rap/hip-hop) ought not be watered down to a simple chronicle of the successes of the corporately-run entertainment industry. Amongst the emerging rock-inflected movements of the period that belie a history of the music burning out or becoming totally beholden to market forces were: post-punk in the UK,

US and elsewhere (associated with record labels like Rough Trade and SST);³⁰ the burgeoning underground DJ cultures of New York rap and Detroit techno; afro-pop (with artists like King Sunny Adé and Mahlatini and the Mahotella Queens becoming known to Western audiences); the independent music scenes in Australia and New Zealand (championed by labels such as Au Go Go and Flying Nun); the ambient/electronica/minimalism interface (Brian Eno, Harold Budd, Lustmord, Robert Ashley and others). DeCurtis later shows he is aware of some of the developments cited here, which makes it even more difficult to see why his retrospective account confuses a mainstream he finds for the most part to be redundant with the entirety of non-art music, allowing him to officially decree an important historical period as being one devoid of hope.³¹

With such streamlined histories firmly established as official versions, subsequent authors have been encouraged to take the concept of popular far too literally. Thus the way is paved for the likes of the University of California's Joshua Clover (2004) to reiterate pop music's status as a "metagenre" (one that includes "metal, fusion, punk, country, hip-hop" [246]) that stands in opposition to the high cultural ideals of the art music world:

Art forms tend to inherit ways of thinking and judging from older, similar forms, and it takes a certain amount of time to develop criteria proper to the new form. We haven't finished doing that yet for pop music. We still assume virtues that are by now anachronistic. The two I want to look at here are those of lasting value and difference; by the end I hope it'll be clear that these two assumed virtues are inextricable if not identical. It should take only a single gesture to shove them into the attic. (245)

³⁰ Post-punk was by far the most pervasive genre to evolve in this period and a hugely significant one. Yet as S. Alexander Reed notes in his review of Simon Reynolds' *Rip it Up and Start Again*, the post-punk of the late-70s/early-80s has for the most part "never been discussed (or even acknowledged) at all in serious music writing" (2007, 282).

³¹ It is notable that when DeCurtis does put forward an example of worthwhile 80s music – calling Sting's *The Dream of the Blue Turtles* (1985) and *Nothing Like the Sun* (1987) "ground-breaking solo albums" (8) – it constitutes yet another scholarly account that flies in the face of the prevailing attitude of non-academic critics. For instance, Ira Robbins (in the 5th edition of his *Trouser Press Guide to Rock*) refers to the latter as "one of the most self-important records on record," in which Sting's "pedantic instincts and bulging ego inform the lyrics at every turn with political dilettantism, literary namedropping and prolix pseudo-profundities" (1997, 700).

Clover employs a commendably humorous and readable style in this celebratory paper, but ultimately what he is celebrating is so trivial as to almost defy belief. Rather than identify the ground upon which pop music audiences might begin to operate outside of the sphere of conformity they are repeatedly limited to, Clover prefers to reinforce the concept of mass culture as high art's other, leaving all artistic endeavour not sanctioned by the dominant industry and media agencies in the too-hard basket. His strategy is not to look critically at top-40 culture and all that it excludes, but to instead see the products of corporately-driven consumerism as being as natural as the very air we breathe. Disposability and sameness are embraced, enduring value is jettisoned;³² and for the audience popular music is supposedly just another aspect of mass culture routine, like buying hardware or negotiating traffic jams.

In the same volume of essays, Ann Powers digs beneath the “nondescript essence” of pop music (237) to find out why artists like Enrique Iglesias and Enya are so widely loved:

When a woman swoons, enthralled, as Enrique Iglesias sings a ballad, she is not merely thinking, *Wow, this so outranks Ricky Martin's last one!* She's receiving some kind of sustenance or inspiration, despite the fact that by any critical assessment – even, perhaps, her own in a ‘rational’ moment – the music is utterly banal. (2004, 237) [original italics]

This is not a championing of unremarkable art so much as a meditation on non-musical issues such as celebrity, image, sexuality and sociality. Instead of going on to validate the ubiquity of one of Enya's “journeys into monotony” (242) in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, Powers might well be better off exploring the possibility that Western humanity's willingness to wallow obediently in “a safe simulation of the void” (243) is driven by the corporate control, hedonistic lifestyles, border tensions and global poverty that provide a breeding ground for ignorance, hatred and terrorism in the first place. But once again, popular music is celebrated only for its most facile traits.

A further recent paper concerning Australian popular music (Young 2004), one that discusses broader issues of masculinity and queer theory, shows how an exclusive focus on

³² This is, of course, exactly as the few major record labels that control the bulk of the (legal) market would want it, disposability and fleeting engagement being one of the keys to profitability in the 21st century pop music market.

mainstream texts not only eliminates many participants but also makes any resultant meta-findings questionable if not untenable. Here the author speaks of gender marginalisation in pop (roundly condemning the mainstream status quo), yet so distracted is he by the star power inherent in his partial history (pub rock through to Men at Work, INXS, Pseudo Echo and Savage Garden) that he declines to involve the many bands and musicians whose very absence from authorised discourses says much about Young's topic and contemporary music in Australia generally. Surely multi-gendered groups like the Triffids, Go-Betweens, Hummingbirds and Falling Joys would provide important insights into the issues Young is investigating? Surely the fact that Robert Forster of the Go-Betweens sometimes wore a dress and make-up in photo-shoots and on stage is as pertinent to Young's dialogue on sexual stereotypes and otherness as the calculated hetero-sexism of Skyhooks?³³

The various arguments discussed here constitute but a small sample from a raft of research by scholars who seem to have given up on the possibility of finding something of substance worth scrutinising in today's music. And this comes about because those very scholars, for whom value discriminations have (apparently) become anathema, combine to create an object of study in opposition to high art music that is too reliant upon the dominant media agents for its very existence, concurrently widening the chasm between elite and popular culture. In concentrating almost exclusively upon the goings on around those texts the mass media delivers straight to their door, researchers miss huge chunks of peripheral audience activity and find resistance only in the most commonplace listening cultures. One of the few critics (significantly, one from outside of the academy) to expose this situation has been Tom Frank, for whom "the real disappointment lies in [cultural studies scholars'] abject inability to recognise 'popular culture' anywhere but in the officially-sanctioned showplaces of corporate America [and in] their utter dependence on television to provide them with an imagery of rebellion" (2001, 100-101). Or, as Ben Watson (even more harshly) puts it: "like all concepts, pop depends on its binary opposite – unpopular music, or the avant-garde.

³³ To be fair, Young predominantly uses the term "pop music," which may suggest a determination on his part to discuss only that specific genre as opposed to Australian music generally. But at times Young reverts, without explanation, to other contradictory and/or all-inclusive terms like "rock music," "popular music" and "the Australian music industry." There seems to be a concerted attempt here to avoid referring to less popular music, yet nowhere does he explain why only music central to the mainstream is relevant to the topic under discussion.

Empirical ‘research’ into pop music is rendered banal to the point of imbecility by the exclusion of this conceptual opposite” (1999, 82).

Turning now to the second facet of the term popular music, there seems on the face of it no inherent ambiguity to be found here: the previously-cited passage from Cutler (1985), for example, ponders the indistinct nature of the popular but at no time suggests there should be any problem in understanding what music is. Yet the latter concept has time and again proven problematical for critics who shy away from texts in favour of the cultural practices that surround them. Cultural studies analysts have, in the words of Motti Regev (2002, 258), principally seen music as “an expression of rebellion, subversion, resistance and critique,” inadvertently supporting the view that the sounds themselves cannot be discussed with any authority outside of musicology departments.

There are two main consequences arising from this approach to popular music. First, there is a stated critical focus upon music when, in truth, very little interest is shown in sonic detail at all. Second, there has emerged a significant body of theory that essentially denies the worth of aesthetic deliberations even when these are integrated with cultural or historical analyses. This latter circumstance signifies an enormous, frying-pan-to-fire leap away from the notion of the autonomous and transcendent works of the great composers, indirectly helping maintain a false dichotomy in which aesthetic value is placed on one side and a naïve form of cultural relativism on the other.

The essence of contextual approaches to music can be found in James Lull’s influential anthology *Popular Music and Communication*. In his introduction, Lull advises that:

This book is about the role of music in human communication, especially as it pertains to the sociocultural behaviour that is characteristic of youth. For that reason there is far more emphasis given here to various forms of contemporary popular music (for instance, rock, soul, punk, dance, heavy metal) than to classical, traditional or period music. Popular music is a unique and extremely influential communications form that deserves serious analysis – not just on the street and in the popular press, but in the scholarly literature and in the classroom as well. (1987, 10)

What becomes immediately apparent from Lull's comments is that the music itself will hereafter be subservient to matters of communication and culture, a decision which aligns him with the philosophical outlook of the Birmingham School and the cultural studies movement (as far as these are amenable to generalisation). Furthermore, the final sentence in this passage can be taken as a kind of ultimatum to those involved in popular music scholarship – to bring something both original and relevant to an already existent, thriving (though decidedly informal) discourse amongst the general audience. Although there is undeniably work in the field that is both fresh and enlightening, twenty years on I think it is necessary to argue that popular music studies has often failed Lull's challenge.³⁴ The scholarly dialogue, commonly limited (as I have argued) to the most conventional examples, too readily bypasses the redoubtable pleasures of the very art form that brings us all to the same table in the first place. At the same time, discrete consumers are categorised using collective concepts such as subculture, community, youth and market – concepts amenable to a sociological approach but not to the possibility of individual discrimination. Here I will briefly consider two authors – one British, one American – who have been significant contributors to the ongoing discourse concerning the politics of popular music.

Dick Hebdige's important book *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979) remains the standard-setting text on subcultural analysis. In Hebdige's semiotic world, the value of a work of art is purely symbolic (Gracyk 1999). Moving from Malcolm Arnold through to Raymond Williams and beyond, Hebdige brings the history of cultural theory up to a stage where all notions of artistic worth can be jettisoned in favour of an anthropological approach to understanding what he terms the "moving equilibrium" – hegemony (1979, 5-19). The punk rebellion that concerns Hebdige comes about through the creation of a style – the gathering together of numerous symbols. Punk rock music is one of these, safety pins are

³⁴ As with my discussion on musicological research, in the contextual-popular field there are, of course, examples that stand out, fitting only awkwardly into the category in that they inquire into some of the hidden spaces for the most part unexamined in the wider literature. Two of the finest and most wide-ranging of these are Andy Bennett's *Cultures of Popular Music* (2001) and Tony Mitchell's *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (1996), the latter of which is also notable for never allowing the music itself to recede too far into the background. Following Lull, edited collections of essays in popular music studies generally attempt to cover an extremely wide field of inquiry; not surprisingly, these are almost always – as Frith (2004) also suggests – of a hit and miss nature. Some of the best chapters or journal articles (ostensibly) arising out of popular music studies (for example: Goodwin 1991; Bloomfield 1993; Regev 2002; Hesmondhalgh 2007a) will come under discussion later in this dissertation.

another. Although one might easily question whether punk would exist at all were it not for punk rock, as far as the creation of a fully functioning subculture is concerned the music and the safety pin are here afforded equal symbolic value.

Not surprisingly, musicologists like Middleton (1990) and Walser (2000) take the view that subcultural theorists have a great deal to say about cultural practices but not much at all about the music that surrounds and informs them. This is so, Middleton notes, even when it is the art form in question – in Hebdige’s case, punk rock – around which the entire subculture has coalesced (1990, 166). When authors like Hebdige do try to discuss music on its own terms, they often appear (consciously or otherwise) to gloss over or simplify musical history somewhat so that it may better fit in with their cultural order. So when Hebdige connects punk rock and reggae by asserting that the latter “carried the necessary conviction, the political bite, so obviously missing in most contemporary white music” (63), the primary desired effect seems less to paint a picture of the punk aesthetic in terms of a greater musical history than to marshal evidence of the formation of a distinct subculture.³⁵ To then further verify the scientific rigour of his analysis, Hebdige underplays the possibility that listeners function as aesthetically-discriminating beings, instead preferring to see art as mattering only in the communicative sense. The problem this leads to is that while ignoring individual taste discriminations might be very convenient for forming the kind of group identities necessary for a fully-functioning subcultural theory (complete with the in-built rebellion of styles that qualify as “appropriations, thefts, subversive transformations, as *movement*” (129) [original italics]) it is a strategy that must be considered fatally debilitating as regards the

³⁵ While not quibbling with Hebdige’s astute version of the alignment between punk and dub/reggae, nor disputing the reality of punk’s subsequent disavowal of most aspects of the rock industry, this take on the “contemporary white music” of the pre-punk era has always amounted to a simplification. “White” pop-rock artists who, I would contend, produced music of undeniable “conviction [and/or] political bite” in the first half of the 1970s include Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Richard and Linda Thompson, Randy Newman, Faust, Joni Mitchell, Gram Parsons, Soft Machine, Roxy Music and Brian Eno. Indeed, a record like *No Pussyfooting*, Eno’s 1973 collaboration with Robert Fripp, would seem especially significant to Hebdige’s discussion as it signals the radical diversification of a former glam rock star and might be considered as much of a “[puncturing of] glam rock’s extravagantly ornate style” (63) as punk ultimately was. Though Kevin Dettmar sensibly argues that “the greater challenge has been to recover what was genuinely innovative and compelling about the music made ... between the break-up of the Beatles and the first Sex Pistols 45” (2006, 81-82), most writers since Hebdige have either viewed the period between 1967 and 1976 as the end before the beginning (excluding of course those champions of progressive rock), or instead seen it as the beginning of the end (Bayles, Clarke and others).

kinds of considered evaluations most of us make on a daily basis (Goodall 1995, 173-174). The history of music as an important art form, therefore, is compromised precisely because music is entirely bound up in the subcultural style (in this case, punk) which qualifies as art only incidentally. Since Hebdige, even the best music-generated subcultural theory has struggled to deal with this wedge inserted between form and context.³⁶

More recently, Lawrence Grossberg has been one of the most cited authors in the cultural studies-led rush to position contemporary music as just another facet of everyday life. His conception of the “rock formation,” encapsulated in the following passage, refers to

the entire range of postwar, ‘youth’-oriented, technologically and economically mediated music practices and styles. By describing it as a formation, I want to emphasise the fact that the identity and effect of rock depend on more than its sonorial dimension. Speaking of rock as a formulation demands that we always locate musical practices in the context of a complex (and always specific) set of relations with other cultural and social practices; hence I will describe it as a cultural rather than a musical formation. (1997, 102)

As well as laying bare Grossberg’s ongoing commitment to using popular music as a conduit through which to expand cultural theory, this neatly captures the main aspects of an approach that, I would argue, unavoidably degrades and distorts the very art form without which there would be no discourse in the first place. To begin with, the author’s conception of rock strictly aligns the genre with the concept of youth. While doubtless useful in positioning this amorphous focus group as the subject of further anthropological inquiry, this common strategy has the twin negative consequences of inexorably associating rock with the characteristics of naivety and immaturity *and* marginalising older audience members (Hesmondhalgh 2002, 117-118; Kruse 2002, 140-141; Bennett 2006). In a closely related outcome, a preoccupation with youth leads to rock being simplistically framed (as a

³⁶ Thus Ruth Finnegan, whose minute study of the local music scene in Milton Keynes constitutes a groundbreaking analysis of everyday musical practices, feels it necessary to express a fear of being “swept away by the *facile* romanticising of art” (1989, 11) [my italics]. On this point, Iain Chambers (in Frith 1992, 183) makes it clear that even within the cultural studies movement there is often an acute awareness of how aesthetic evaluation has typically been silenced. My discussion of Hebdige here centres only upon his use of music as a prop for subcultural theory; others have criticised his work for being too urban-centric, too Anglo-centric, overly concerned with the working class and/or inappropriately polysemic (for a detailed summary, see Bennett [2001, 58-66]).

“celebration of movement, change, energy; that is, fun ... lived out in and inscribed upon the body – in dance, sex, drugs, fashion, style, and even the music itself” [Grossberg 1997, 114]) in a fashion that is grist for the mill of Alan Bloom and his sympathisers: “rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire” (Bloom 1987, 73). Ironically, as the distance between the subsequent youth generation (X) and his own became palpable, in steadfastly setting his gaze upon mainstream cultural activity Grossberg came to rail against “the increasing power of popular conservatism” (1997, 8) through the trumpeting of a “death of rock” narrative for which the relationship between listening habits and aesthetic value suddenly becomes relevant again.³⁷

Second, Grossberg’s definition of rock is framed so as to encompass virtually all contemporary music, with two closely-related consequences. In his writing, outdated concepts of rock and roll and (later) rock are dragged forward to encompass the bewildering array of rock-inflected music of the past two decades, overlooking the fact that many of the new genres identified and deliberated upon by non-academic critics and fans no longer bear much, if any, resemblance to the form that spawned them. If, as claimed, any music whatsoever can be co-opted under the Grossberg version of rock (1992, 131), then one wonders if the term has any use value at all in his conception. Furthermore, his demand in relation to musical practices is most opportune in the way that it legitimises his own particular methodology, while at the same time relegating the music itself to a kind of background muzak for cultural critique. The net effect of this has been to privilege contextual processes that everyone who isn’t a cultural analyst (including those who understand that music does not emerge out of a cultural vacuum) would likely consider secondary in nature (Shepherd & Wicke 1997, 32-33; Walser 2003, 21-22). Whilst Grossberg is no doubt genuine in his prescribed position as a fan who believes that good music is an ongoing reality regardless of his own taste preferences, his continual claim that

³⁷ See Dettmar (2006, 105-122) for a thorough criticism of this aspect of Grossberg’s thinking. Though Grossberg has reasonably argued that cultural studies needs to trouble the static line between high and popular culture (1997, 2), his own methodology for going about this is limited by his absolute refusal to discuss music as music. Thus it is interesting that while his strategy of valorising mainstream culture and overtly disregarding aesthetic value radically opposes that of Adorno’s on popular music (something he achieves not by disputing Adorno so much as completely ignoring him), Grossberg in the end reaches a position on contemporary music that seems Adorno-like in its disdain; that is, he believes rock music has altered to the point where it has little relevance, or revolutionary potential, for the lives of those of Generations X and Y.

the sounds themselves can somehow be partitioned off from his ideological investigations seems disingenuous. Timothy Taylor (1997b, 168), for example, is surely correct to argue that a pessimistic critique concerning the absence of anti-hegemonic attitudes in everyday practices related to much contemporary music does not deny the possibility that the sounds themselves (especially those coming from outside of “youth-oriented,” industry-mediated notions of rock and pop) might be steeped in subversive meaning.³⁸

This leads on to a third issue, namely a reliance on totalising abstractions – in addition to youth, Grossberg (1997; see also 1992, 131-242) concentrates on the collective logic of scenes and formations – that themselves further push critiques of individual texts (by individual audience members) into the background. This type of sociological analysis is insightful in terms of tracing the durability of group formations and the mostly market-connected activities and “hyperalliances” that define and invigorate them, yet inadequate in acknowledging the fluidity of the musical and listening practices that flow constantly through the scenes and subcultures under discussion. In particular, it seems that for Grossberg the tastes and activities of the individual fan constitute “predictable judgements” that make sense only within the broader, extra-musical context of his rock formation (1997, 183-185). Therefore, he is content to reduce audience activity to a “fandom” that is allegedly immediate, affirmative and less reflective in nature than serious criticism (6).

The neatest summation of the cultural and ideological accounts crossed with music that Hebdige and Grossberg (along with others)³⁹ provide comes from Fink, in the form of an

³⁸ The titles preferred by Grossberg (“We Gotta Get Out of this Place;” “It’s a Sin;” “Rock and Roll in Search of an Audience;” “Is Anybody Listening? Does Anybody Care?” “Another Boring Day in Paradise;” “Where the Streets Have no Name”) seem themselves clear evidence of the pessimistic outlook Dettmar (2006) speaks of. Otherwise, I think Grossberg conflates what is actually a quite redemptory version (that of Simon Reynolds) with ongoing attempts to kill off rock music (1997, 103-104). Reynolds’ later declaration that “rock’s grand narrative has petered out into a delta of microcultures” (2004a, 361) actually serves to position the genre as part of a vital and evolving aesthetic, whereas Grossberg’s account is of a supposedly authentic (in both politics and sound) rock evolving into something that is no longer either rock or authentic. (This aspect of the rock grand narrative is discussed further in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.)

³⁹ Such as John Fiske, who has written much on popular music and believes that because popular art generally can never mirror the depth of complexity of serious art it should be studied and revered for its ideological value (1989, 120-123). As Shusterman (2000, 172) notes, many theoreticians of this ilk owe a great debt to Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984), especially his belief that because the

imaginary reaction from Susan Sontag: “Interesting sociology, she might murmur, but bad aesthetics” (1998, 160). Yet Grossberg in particular has thrived upon his status as an academic *music critic par excellence*, even though the art form itself (which he appears content to discard once it has served its purpose)⁴⁰ always plays second fiddle to what is going on around it.

At least two serious paradoxes arise, then, when one considers how music has been treated in popular music studies. While such approaches have often been criticised for too-easily unearthing subversion and resistance to the status quo in rock and pop (Leppert [in Adorno 2002, 347]; Regev 2002, 259),⁴¹ it is evident that the great majority of this research has in fact been only epiphenomenally concerned with actual music. Furthermore, with so much of this research coalescing around what is commonly termed popular music, in regularly correlating the culture of the masses with rebelliousness critics have ironically ignored the music with the most potential links to social and political agency – unpopular music.

IV

Thus far I have separated the last forty or so years of academic and quasi-academic research on so-called popular music into two rough categories. In the first discussed, musicologists and others have, to a large extent, followed on from the earlier prominent trend in music and the arts of focusing upon the formal qualities (or alternatively, deficiencies) of the musical texts and genres under examination. Some of these critics have grounded their (often celebratory) investigations in techniques of analysis initially developed with regard to the

concept of aesthetic value belongs exclusively to an elite class, popular art ought be legitimated for other reasons.

⁴⁰ Grossberg departed the field some years ago, with his biography on the UPCS website claiming that he “does not expect to do lots more work on popular culture or popular music – somehow popular politics (rather than the politics of the popular) seems to be more urgent” (http://www.ibiblio.org/upcs/faqs/contact_us.html#LG [accessed 05/08/05]). The argument concerning the direction of popular music studies and Grossberg’s own disillusionment with the entire exercise comes to a head in Frith (2004), in a manner which (though some of Frith’s points are compelling) in my opinion brings little distinction upon any of the parties involved. Furthermore, apart from the obligatory song title co-opted as essay title it is once again often not so obvious in Frith’s discussion that music is that which the whole debate supposedly centres around.

⁴¹ A criticism that has been levelled against cultural studies generally (see, for example: Morris 1990; Morley 1997).

music of the Western classical tradition. Others have conducted their (often disapproving) assessments of contemporary music using little or no technical methodology, instead relying upon assumptions as to the aesthetic and ethical inferiority of the omnipresent pop and rock meta-genres.

The second, and most prominent, category examined, commonly referred to as popular music studies, concerns approaches to late 20th century music grounded in cultural studies. Two recurring themes have underpinned this style of approach. Analysts have focused almost exclusively upon the most obviously visible products of the first world culture industries – in other words, music that has proven widely popular. Simultaneously, there has been fostered a division of popular music criticism which in truth uses music only as a convenient backdrop for sociological and/or political inquiries. Either way, while these types of investigations may have been superficially aimed at rescuing the taste cultures of the populace from the position formerly assigned to them as a matter of course (namely that of the lesser other to high culture) those conducting them have been reticent to consider music's aesthetic dimension. By and large, academic researchers in sociology and cultural studies have deferred overt discussion as to the intrinsic worth of popular music to the countless journalist critics, although the line between journalistic and scholarly debate is sometimes a fuzzy one. The final point to note here is that beyond the professed subject of all these various arbiters – that which has collectively been termed popular music – there remains a tacit understanding as to the existence of a second (dichotomous) category of music worthy, depending on the respective author's standpoint, of the epithet classical, art, genuine or elite.

To conclude this opening chapter, I want to delve more deeply into the recent history of music research by considering more closely the two basic questions that have emerged as crucial to the discussion thus far: what is “music” and what is “popular” music? The essence of the first question is, I believe, aesthetics and aesthetic valuations; the crux of the second is terminology, as played out in ongoing disputes concerning the definition and various uses of the term popular. To attempt to answer either question is to once again confront the opposition between high and popular culture that has been ever-present in the debate to this point.

In the church scene from Federico Fellini's 1973 film *Amarcord (I Remember)*, young Titta's spontaneous, absurd confession to Father Balosa is interrupted when the indomitable priest takes umbrage at a nearby altar boy's efforts at flower arrangement:

Balosa: Not like that. [*demonstrating.*] The white flowers here, the yellow flowers there.

Altar Boy [*confused*]: Is it not all the same?

Balosa: No! It is a matter of aesthetics.

Like Father Balosa, we humans have always placed a great deal of importance upon aesthetics. This is the case whether one is thinking about still-commonplace notions of beauty and pleasure as carried over from the romantic era, or various later theories developed in the wake of modernism, such as Theodor Adorno's negative aesthetic and Jean-Francois Lyotard's postmodern sublime. If the 1960s can be seen as a decade during which the long-standing division between art music and popular music was re-energised, then that period also saw the emergence of efforts within the academy to associate non-art forms like rock and jazz with ideals of aesthetic significance hitherto associated only with classical composition.

One of the first significant attempts to fix to this new(er) music the halo of scholarly approval was Richard Poirier's "Learning from the Beatles" (1967), an article concerned with the appearance of that year's *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. Up until that point, the intelligentsia's interest in the rock and roll phenomenon had been almost exclusively limited to the likes of Paul Johnson's "The Menace of the Beatles," in which he describes the band as not worthy of "30 seconds of our precious time" and its young devotees as "pitiable victims" (1964, 327). By contrast, Poirier seeks to justify why the best new music deserves to be dealt with on the same terms as any other art form. In his discussion, he refers to a number of contentious aspects of popular music and popular culture generally that have been central to the debate ever since. Poirier notes that the great popularity of *Sgt. Pepper's* would be taken by many as evidence of its lack of aesthetic

worth, going on to dispute the authority of those whose definition of art remains limited to that of a rarefied high culture. He also asserts that the popular arts are always discussed in ways that constrain all examples, regardless of quality, to a single meta-category the opposite of the fine arts. Poirier acknowledges the then-burgeoning trend of popular music writing in magazines such as *Crawdaddy*, noting their genuine attempts to ask serious questions about the nature of the form. Finally, he reminds the reader how the prominence of this then-new music reveals similarities to that of the novel in the 19th century and film in the early 20th, in that those were at the time of their initial surge in popularity similarly shunned by “proper” critics. In sum, Poirier argues for suitable discourse on the merits of this and other examples of popular music. He treats the music as music while concurrently placing it into social and historical context and, above all, is not afraid to admit that he likes something or to say why.⁴²

Despite this early example of serious analysis into the aesthetic possibilities of popular music, minimal progress has been made in academic circles on the matter of exploring the intrinsic worth of that which is neither art music nor popular music steeped in the Western art music tradition. As already shown, most critics have been content to accept that the principal value of popular music is to be found somewhere outside of its sonic reality, confining their aesthetic judgements to private moments removed from the world of lecterns and peer reviews.⁴³ The influence of an interdisciplinary (or anti-disciplinary) cultural studies has been critical here, fostering for popular music an anti-aesthetic attitude situated on a continuum somewhere between the two extremes of total avoidance and radical reconfiguration. Thus in the former case Tony Bennett rails against the “lure of those debates whose contrived appearance of ineffable complexity makes them a death trap for practical thinking” (1992, 33), while in the latter Ian Hunter argues against the aesthetic imperative of the extraordinary, instead urging us to think about the “aesthetic domain ... as one of the contingencies that make us what we are” (1992, 349).

⁴² Poirier’s argument in many ways resembles that put forward by Susan Sontag in “Against Interpretation,” first published in 1964 and especially remembered for its famous final line: “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art” (1982, 104).

⁴³ Few scholars have embraced Poirier’s method of understanding and evaluating new music primarily as music and adapting the kind of aesthetic outlook typically restricted to the high art realm, but in a fashion that does not exclude the layperson from the debate. Some of the very best general critiques of this nature are in my opinion provided by Eric Lott (1994), Robert Fink (1998), Theodore Gracyk (1999), Susan McClary (2000, 139-169) and Richard Shusterman (2000, 169-235).

For many, the strategies of either debunking or completely rethinking traditional notions of aesthetic worth are justifiable, in light of the denigration of the cultural predilections of the majority by such critics as have already been encountered in this chapter. However, an unwelcome outcome of celebrating contemporary music primarily for its functionality, ordinariness and/or political agency has been the locking in of its status as aesthetically trivial other to high art music. Here I would argue that the pendulum has swung too far the other way: the (important) finding that meaning is culturally grounded has not supplemented aesthetic debate so much as completely overshadowed it. After all, can it seriously be argued that millions of people actively seeking out music in record stores, on the internet and in their local communities are not doing so primarily because they like the way it sounds? Surely audiences for music, as for any of the arts, consistently search for what is *for them* extraordinary, delving into the vast ocean of cultural productions confronting them in order to embroider their lives with that which satisfies on the basis of its musical fundamentals. Such processes are clearly apparent in the complex aesthetic discourses taking place outside of the academy, as in the persistence of debates concerning the canon of pop-rock music as originally formulated by a select group of Anglo-American journalist critics (Regev 2002). Yet scholars have on the whole ignored outright or overtly disparaged these discourses,⁴⁴ or else seen them only as a further subject for detached empirical

⁴⁴ In addition to the various examples touched upon previously (involving such disparately-situated scholars as Covach, Scruton and DeCurtis), I would note Stephen Nugent's (1985) review of several collections of rock journalism (books he claims are only concerned with "a set of conventions according to which certain records, artists or musical instruments may be granted celebrity" [235]), Deena Weinstein's (2004) article on heavy metal (wherein she accuses non-academic critics of disparaging her favourite genre and says that "bad music isn't about music at all" but rather the status and insecurities of the critics themselves [307]) and Christopher McDonald's (2002) similar essay defending (yet another) progressive rock band – Canada's Rush. None of this, of course, is to deny the many flaws and prejudices inherent in journalistic criticism (to be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3); in the present chapter I have only sought to emphasise that the kinds of interpretations and evaluations journalist critics and everyday audience members routinely make have rarely, as Middleton (2000, 1-19) acknowledges, flowed down into formal academic writing. And when they occasionally do, the scholars' own (contrary) evaluations are often presented as a corrective to the poor taste of non-scholarly critics.

observation,⁴⁵ even if none have been able to completely erase the overwhelming spectre of value discriminations from their own work.⁴⁶

To provide a definitive answer to the question of what is music, then, would be to suggest that it is a definitive and stable category of study: it is not. In the present epoch the possibilities have greatly expanded, and what is, has been, or might become music now depends on a great many matters of both aesthetic and political relevance, and has at times been the subject of much debate.⁴⁷ But with many academics following the influence of Bourdieu (1984) by treating the term popular culture aesthetic as an oxymoron,⁴⁸ the field of popular music studies has cultivated a relativistic stance that reinforces the functional and political aspects of music, to the detriment of an aesthetic dimension with incontestable links to the objectives and activities of audience members.

⁴⁵ Several essays in Jones (2002), as well as the journal *Popular Music's* 2006 special issue on canons, suggest that this is the case.

⁴⁶ On this point, Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1984, 10) observes that the mere selecting of objects to study implicates critics in the practice of exercising judgement.

⁴⁷ One case in point is the recent proliferation in compositional practices involving found sounds and various forms of field recording, showing how notions of what is music have expanded (at least in terms of what is available to the Western consumer). Examples include: Australian composer and research scientist Alan Lamb's contact microphone recordings of outback high-tension telephone wires (as heard in the soundtrack to the Rowan Wood film *The Boys* [1998]); the Matmos album *A Chance to Cut is a Chance to Cure* (2001), comprised chiefly of the sounds of plastic surgery and other medical procedures; the pieced-together recordings of radios, conversations and other street sounds typical of releases on Seattle's Sublime Frequencies label (such as *I Remember Syria*, *Bush Taxi Mali* and *Radio India: The Eternal Dream of Sound* [all 2004]); songs consisting solely of insect noises and "water drums" (people slapping the water in a stream) on *Heart of the Forest: The Music of the Baka Forest People of Southeast Cameroon* (Hannibal, 1993). A second (closely related) is sampling culture. Despite such "appropriations" having an extended lineage – from Charles Ives through to Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio, from Pierre Schaeffer through to Glenn Gould's *Solitude Trilogy* (1967-77) and Gavin Bryars' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed us Yet* (1971), from dub and rap through to latter-day artists who create entire works out of samples appropriated from other sources (Double Dee & Steinski, DJ Shadow, John Wall, John Oswald) – many detractors claim it to be non-music or anti-music. (For further discussion on some the issues involved here, see Beadle [1993] and Cutler [2004].) A third is the so-called noise genre – artists such as Einstürzende Neubauten and Merzbow – which troubles the usual distinction between sound as interference or distraction (noise) and sound as art or entertainment (music). (This topic is discussed by Baumann [1999] and in several chapters under the heading "Music and its Others: Noise, Sound, Silence" in Cox and Warner [2004, 5-61].) And a fourth is laptop music, as debated in a 2003 special edition of *Contemporary Music Review*, where editor Kim Cascone relates how the audience reaction to laptop performances "has been mostly one of distrust" (2).

⁴⁸ The work of Bourdieu is pursued in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

The frame of mind to which popular music originally appealed, on which it feeds, and which it perpetually reinforces, is simultaneously one of distraction and inattention. Listeners are distracted from the demands of reality by entertainment which does not demand attention either. (Adorno 2002, 458)⁴⁹

Popular music is such a ubiquitous notion in contemporary music research that so far in this dissertation I have had little option but to use it even as I have tried to disrupt it. The paradox in popular music studies is that Adorno's original use of the term in reference to the standardised, mass-consumed musical products of a dominant culture industry has not so much been disturbed or upturned as it has been co-opted, in that today scholarly accounts are just as likely to celebrate many of the traits Adorno scorned. Here I briefly examine two recent additions to the literature that are instructive so far as the currency of the epithet popular in the new century is concerned.

On 8 November 2004, Leon Botstein, President of Bard College and music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, gave an invited address to the United Nations in New York. A transcript of the presentation, in which Botstein seeks to confirm the universal value and innate sanctity of complex musical systems, subsequently appeared in the journal *Musical Quarterly*.⁵⁰

In articulating his claims, Botstein has this to say about popular music:

The question of whether music matters might be more easily answered in the affirmative if the power and universality of popular commercial music could be construed as forces for enlightenment and human progress. But they have not been ... In its commercialized form, music has been reduced to far more passive listening with far less active participation. This essentially 20th century form of universal music, despite its appropriation by individuals as an emotional vehicle, is like fast food: prepared by others, limited in scope, admirable, safe, easily forgettable and replaceable, and without much transformative power ... It does no great good but by the same token cannot be said to do much harm. (2004, 181-182)

⁴⁹ From the essay "On Popular Music" (originally published in 1941).

⁵⁰ Botstein is editor of this journal. The transcription is titled "Why Music Matters."

Botstein goes on to use descriptors such as “elaborate” and “sophisticated” to characterise the music that matters in the 21st century: art music. It is significant, however, that his version of the familiar high-low divide draws upon the very same principles commonly adhered to by advocates of popular music studies – that popular music should not be judged by aesthetic criteria; that lyrics are paramount to developing an understanding of the form; that it should be studied predominantly as a mode of mass communication; that listening is often passive or incidental to other activity. Instead of dismissing popular music out of hand, Botstein takes a conciliatory approach that confers upon it a legitimate place in the world. Ethically and aesthetically the form is treated with virtual contempt – as music which does *not* matter – but such a move is unlikely to cause much controversy when it simply echoes the approach of many popular sympathisers.

It is imperative to note that Botstein further modifies the term popular music, which in his presentation becomes “popular *commercial* music” [my italics]. As I have already shown, many, no matter what the disciplinary background, hold this erroneous belief – that popular music is purely the product which the mass media brings to their doorstep. That there is already a widely understood category called pop that fans use to encompass mass-mediated, corporate-sponsored music-as-entertainment (from the occasionally satisfying to the undeniably impoverished) is largely ignored in a literature where pop music and popular music have long masqueraded as interchangeable concepts. Aware that his fellow scholars are for the most part happy to join him in downplaying the intrinsic value and generic complexity of their subject, Botstein steps easily across the divide separating the counterintuitive music of the great civilizations from that which is “the easy, the evident, ... entertainment and commerce” (182). That there is non-art music being made that might lead us to doubt the very existence of this divide – music that is, using Botstein’s analogy, closer to “philosophy and literature [than] ordinary speech” (183) – is deemed an unnecessary consideration.

The virtual symposium “Can We Get Rid of the ‘Popular’ in Popular Music” appears in a 2005 edition of *Popular Music*, a journal that encourages an amalgam of approaches to its title subject, from sociological and industry studies to musicological analysis. Leading off the symposium, Simon Frith gives the following definition of popular music, calling it

music made commercially, in a particular kind of legal (copyright) and economic (market) system; music made using an ever-changing technology of sound storage; music significantly experienced as mass mediated; music primarily made for social and bodily pleasure; music which is formally hybrid. There is a specific object of study here that must be approached differently from other kinds of music. (PM: 134)⁵¹

Two aspects of Frith's definition stand out. The first is that he follows Botstein in emphasizing the commercial aspect of popular music and all of the negative connotations of mass product and immediate gratification that accompany it. Secondly, his final sentence confirms that for many the significance of the popular modifier is primarily its function of maintaining the ongoing cultural studies project as it relates to contemporary music. Subsequent correspondents follow a similar line: Peter Manuel's conception is of a "useful working definition that may be handy for rough taxonomies in discussion" (PM: 134); Marcus Breen says that to discontinue with the term is to "remove the range of possibilities for inventing new meaning in music's cultural production" (PM: 137).⁵²

Deena Weinstein (PM: 137), however, injects two alternative possibilities into the discussion, both of which clearly (though the first does so unintentionally) articulate where the problem with the popular lies. Her examples of an exploding popular/elite binary (evidenced by bands like Metallica recording with symphony orchestras and the classical leanings of progressive rock) do little more than confirm the either/or concept she appears determined to render obsolete – these are not so much crossovers as alarm-raising intrusions, inserting classical into popular (or vice versa) without in any way blurring or reducing the boundary between the two.⁵³ (Nevertheless, the point Weinstein is trying to make – about the back and forth flow of creative ideas between elite and everyday culture – is a valid one.) On the other hand, her suggestion that popular is a word simply incapable of encompassing in any way music not co-opted (for whatever reason) by the corporate

⁵¹ Subsequent references to this symposium are identified by the abbreviation PM.

⁵² Not surprisingly, two of the musicologists involved in the debate instead argue that their own acceptance into the interdisciplinary dialogue surrounding popular music would only be assisted by the jettisoning of the popular qualification (Björnberg [PM: 134]; Moore [PM: 142]).

⁵³ An instructive discussion on the troubling of these boundaries, by artists such as Sonic Youth, Wu-Tang Clan, La Monte Young and Matthew Hindson, is provided by Richard Wolfson (2001).

entertainment industry is right on the mark. As Jason Toynbee (PM: 138) asks, “what is the nature of the music which is left outside [of popular music]?” The answer to this question has never been properly articulated.

Phillip Tagg (PM: 135-136), Barbara Bradbury (PM: 136) and David Laing (PM: 142) are therefore right to expose the ironies of a supposedly liberating concept that is not only unable to cope with sounds that fail to meet Frith’s definition (or is able to do so only on a tenuous basis), but is also complicit in the maintenance of canons and histories that privilege the products of successful entertainment industry marketing strategies. On this basis, that the category popular music describes nothing more than an indefinable other to art music suits the purposes both of those trying to maintain their dominant cultural position (Botstein) and those reluctant to disturb the foundation upon which their (alternative) sociological and political paradigms have been constructed.

The trajectory of research into music over the past fifty years has moved along parallel paths: on the one is the rarefied aesthetic of transcendental art music and on the other the popular music of the majority. Over this period of time the two have been reconsidered and re-evaluated, with the unquestionable superiority of the former being rightly disputed in the face of the undeniable universality of the latter. Classical music has stagnated while popular music has exploded, yet the boundary between the two remains steady: though there are occasional incursions from one side across to the other, though now and then a prima facie highbrow text achieves relative popularity (as with the 1992 Electra-Nonesuch edition of Henryk Górecki’s 3rd *Symphony*), the opposition, as Andreas Huyssen (2002) confirms, is as clear-cut as it has ever been. More generally, the accumulation of aesthetic capital, as opposed to cultural capital, remains rooted in supposed highbrow forms, while the postmodern strategy of mixing high with low in reality serves only to confirm the distinction it is alleged to overcome.

However, what is just as clear, as Andrew Goodwin (1991, 17) also argues, is that there is in contemporary music a very considerable between-space, a liminal area where artists, texts and genres that fail to comply with either definition congregate.⁵⁴ The distinction between pure art work and saleable commodity, one that may have made sense in Adorno's lifetime (though in the 1960s musicians like Terry Riley, John Coltrane and the Velvet Underground, to name just three, were already seriously troubling it) today surely founders on this very fact. In the full flowering of multinational capitalism, where even oppositional culture is susceptible to being integrated into the dominant system, it is crucial to investigate more closely how audience members might negotiate this middle ground between the high and the popular.

It is in the area of reception that the learned discourse has to date proven most inadequate. For one group of critics, today's music is so far beneath contempt that its listeners are automatically categorised as either sadly naïve or irredeemably stupid. For another, contemporary musical texts are evaluated using the esoteric language of academic musicology, often holding true understanding of its aesthetic qualities beyond the reach of the average listener. For yet another, to discuss popular music in terms of its aesthetic properties is to mistake it for high art and to go against the anthropological principles dear to many latter-day cultural theorists. This final group, content to accept Grossberg's finding that the value of contemporary music is entirely contingent *and* has little to do with art in the first place (1997, 67), subordinates individual interpretations to communal ones in order to further their general social theories. In all three instances, the problem is compounded by scholars focusing upon the same obvious (typically British and American) examples over and over again until these come to relate to an agglomerate audience, one for which individual (most especially marginalised) interpretations are omitted.

⁵⁴ I have intimated in this chapter that a similar between-space can be discerned in contemporary music *research*: an intermediate zone for work that is beyond the central narratives of popular music studies and musicology (popular and otherwise) – narratives mostly based around one-dimensional, Anglo-American versions of categories such as classical, popular, rock, indie rock, and so forth. More than a decade ago, Mitchell (1996, 263-265) spoke about the importance of investigations into musical styles, cultures and environments outside of the dominant Anglo-American axis – whilst the importance of such inquiries remains obvious, it likewise appears that not much has changed so far as their relative marginality is concerned.

To speak of music in a way that is sensitive and relevant to audiences, something Allan Moore (referring to rock) rightly sees as the most important aspect of all research,⁵⁵ is foremost to consider its aesthetic power. That is not to say that agreement can ever be reached concerning quality judgements: Eric Lott (1994) is right to call for a revival of the aesthetic in scholarly musical analysis but wrong to suggest that this can be done only by applying high art standards to non-art music. As I will go on to argue, only by focusing on audience activity and the potential for audience mobility it is possible to reconcile the textual with the contextual and begin to disengage the high-popular dichotomy. Therefore this dissertation is not interested in following the well-trodden paths of either music as transcendent art or music as an incidental aspect of a popular culture that is either flourishing or descending into the void, as the case may be. The approach from this point onward will be to variously contemplate the postmodern musical text (Chapter 2), present-day canons and criticism (Chapter 3) and the concepts of audience and reception (Chapter 4), with a view to suggesting new ways of looking at how people engage with music in the 21st century (Chapter 5).

⁵⁵ The following statement by Moore is especially relevant to the spirit of this dissertation: “My emphasis on the listener I regard as central. We are not all performers, writers, producers, critics or followers of any of the other activities supported by rock, but we are all listeners” (1993, 5).

Chapter Two: Text

I

One of the wondrous places Marco Polo describes in Italo Calvino's *La Citta Invisibili* (*Invisible Cities*) is Esmeralda, where travellers are faced with an infinite number of routes, via land or water, by which to reach their destination. After making a careful distinction between the manifest journeys of the everyday inhabitants and those of Esmeralda's clandestine population of cats, thieves, conspirators and illicit lovers, he concludes his account with the observation that

a map of Esmeralda should include, marked in different coloured inks, all these routes, solid and liquid, evident and hidden. It is more difficult to fix on the map the routes of the swallows, who cut the air over the roofs, dropping long invisible parabolas with their still wings, darting to gulp a mosquito, spiralling upward, grazing a pinnacle, dominating from every point of their airy paths all the points of the city. (Calvino 1997, 88)

In "The Statue," a 1991 episode of the television comedy *Seinfeld*, the show's four main characters – Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer – are locked in an impassioned discussion about the theft by Jerry's cleaner of a small statue of indeterminate value, that has been promised to George as a replacement for an identical one owned by his parents that he accidentally broke as a child. Despite having advised the police and confronted the suspect, the friends cannot come up with a way to retrieve the stolen item. The recognition of this impasse leads to the following exchange:

George: There's no justice. This experience has changed me. It's made me more cynical, more bitter, more jaded.

Jerry: *[surprised.]* Really?

George: *[suddenly losing interest.]* Sure ...why not.

Can there be anything to link these two apparently random examples *other* than the fact that both *Invisible Cities* and *Seinfeld* are widely accepted as constituting postmodern texts? The

former calls to mind such familiar postmodernist ideals as non-linear progression, alternative networks and unpredictability, here subtly played out through reference to the discrete movements of the regular citizen, the exile and the swallow respectively. The latter deals with no less contemporary concerns: a minor event (the theft of a statue no-one really wanted in the first place) becomes the subject of an absurdly overheated response, but when George finally teeters on the edge of attributing some identifiable structure to life as a result he can't be bothered following through with it. In both the labyrinthine pathways of *Esmeralda* (a fictionalised Venice) and the complex, mostly inconsequential narratives of a typical *Seinfeld* plot such as that of "The Statue" (played out in a New York that is, in reality, Los Angeles), the final destination, if there is one, proves less important than the many possible ways of getting there. Metanarrative is shunned – the world is a series of interconnections with no discernable order or hierarchy, resembling, in the well-known conception of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a "rhizome [with] no beginning or end ... always in the middle, between things" (2004, 27).⁵⁶

Yet the two examples are linked in another way, one so obvious that it may not seem worth mentioning. That is, they are *my* examples – I chose them as texts worthy of discussion in this context, and the assumption might easily follow to the effect that I find both *Invisible Cities* and *Seinfeld* aesthetically pleasing and relevant to the matter at hand (as I indeed do). My judgement appears to accord in this instance to the more widely accepted canonicity and/or popularity of the two, although such generalisations are never as universal as they might seem.⁵⁷

The twin concepts of canonicity and popularity arise time and again in discussions of the artefacts of postmodernism, and relate closely to a widespread belief that the canonic or

⁵⁶ The rhizome (being a kind of plant that moves horizontally, not vertically, sprouting from different points and in multiple directions and adapting to its circumstances) is used by Deleuze and Guattari to evoke a heterogenous alternative to the traditional, root-like hierarchy of linear logic and ontological thought generally (27-28).

⁵⁷ *Invisible Cities* is included in Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994), whilst the popularity of *Seinfeld* amongst viewers is well documented; the latter has also been the subject of laudatory scholarly critique (for example, Pierson 2000). On the other hand, Rapping (1995) is scathing in her condemnation of *Seinfeld* (albeit whilst nonsensically claiming that *Mad About You*, *Ellen*, and *Friends* are *Seinfeld* "clones" [37]), while an anonymous reviewer at Amazon.com calls Calvino's volume "boring and pretentious," invents a doubtless unintentional association with *Seinfeld* ("If you are itching for a book about nothing, then you will love this book"), before finishing with: "I give this book a big ol' zzzzzz."

classic text has been usurped by the popular in contemporary society, to our general cultural detriment.⁵⁸ One of the more public recent versions of this debate in Australia – instigated by, amongst others, Sydney Catholic Archbishop George Pell, (former) Prime Minister John Howard, (then) Federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson and journalist-critic Kevin Donnelly – surrounds what Pell terms “relativism’s intrusion into the classroom as postmodernism,” his complaint being that the “greats” such as Shakespeare and Dickens are being set to one side whilst students deconstruct “films, magazines, advertisements and even road signs” (2005).⁵⁹ Arguments thus continue to rage not only over what constitutes a postmodern text, but also over what constitutes a worthwhile postmodern text.

Concentrating on the cultural productions of postmodernism (in particular, those of postmodern music), this chapter will consider the first of these two important issues.⁶⁰ Conducting an excursion into the very heart of postmodernism might at first appear an ill-advised move – on David Morley’s account at least four disparate meanings can be attributed to the concept. Postmodernism, he claims, can be thought of as the social period coming after modernity, as a general cultural sensibility, as an aesthetic style or simply as a mode of thought (1996, 50).⁶¹ Yet how can it be avoided when not only is the concept so ubiquitous as to be inescapable, but furthermore any attempt to avoid it is seen to constitute one of the most characteristic of all postmodern strategies (Frow 1997, 22-23)? Nonetheless, the suggestion of Matthew Collings, in reference to the contemporary art world, provides a suitable caution for the arduous terrain that lies ahead:

Jackson Pollock is somewhere toward the end of modernism, Jasper Johns is somewhere at the beginning of postmodernism. Picasso and Matisse are the heart of modernism. Postmodernism doesn’t have a heart, we think. (1999, 123)

⁵⁸ Though this is only one version of postmodernism – specifically a neoconservative, antimodernist version – it is arguably the most prevalent in public discourse.

⁵⁹ Such claims are often made more scandalous (and media friendly) by involving the allegation that the texts being studied by students include the likes of road signs, bus tickets and graffiti.

⁶⁰ The chapter that follows (Chapter 3) is concerned with the second, although there will necessarily be some intersection between the two.

⁶¹ Although this chapter is mostly concerned with the third possibility, as is appropriate to a dialogue on postmodern texts, a focus upon aesthetic style will nonetheless both involve and inform the other three concepts of postmodernism Morley identifies. There are numerous other takes on the postmodern that go beyond (or elaborate upon) those of Morley (see for example Hebdige 1988, 181-185).

II

A string of unanswered (unanswerable?) questions frame the debate: “What is Postmodernism?”; “What Was Postmodernism?”; “When Was Postmodernism?”; “What’s Wrong With Postmodernism?”; “Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?”⁶²

Whether postmodernism is considered to be a breaking-away from or an extension of modernism, or something else entirely, critics have been consistent in one particular activity: their attempts to group together often ostensibly heterogenous examples into a body of texts relied upon to represent the values and concerns of aesthetic modernism or postmodernism as the case may be. As far as the former is concerned, there is a well-established core list that,⁶³ in view of the focus of this chapter, might best be illustrated by reference to certain key works: in music, Arnold Schoenberg’s *Erwartung* (1909) and Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* (1913); in art, Pablo Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1911), Wassily Kandinsky’s *Improvisation VII* (1910), Giorgio de Chirico’s *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street* (1914) and Piet Mondrian’s *Pier and Ocean* (1915); in literature, Franz Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” (1915), James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927); in poetry, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) and Wallace Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (1923); in film, Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

Contrary to what the mere two decades of artistic endeavour sketched by this collection may suggest, there is nowhere near a consensus on either the chronology or exact nature of stylistic modernism. For most art forms, the germ of the modernist project has been dated back to the latter half of the 19th century.⁶⁴ On the other hand, its demise has been variously

⁶² These are the titles of discussions on the topic by Jencks (1996), Frow (1997, opening chapter), Davis (2001), Norris (1990) and Foster (1996) respectively.

⁶³ For example, see: Greenberg (1961, 7-8); Bradbury (1973, 117-119); Boyne & Rattansi (1990, 6); Jameson (1998, 128); Tucker (2002, 24); Goldman (2004, 256-271); Hamilton 2007 (154).

⁶⁴ Thus the neo-impressionist principles expressed in Georges Seurat’s *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1884-6) and the anxiety palpable in Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* (1893) make those works important precursors to modernism in painting (Hughes 1991, 114; 285); Claude

timed down to the exact minute – the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe building in St Louis at 3.32pm on 15 July 1972 (Huysen 1984, 14) – or else denied absolutely (Habermas 1998). Although modernism is clearly an extensive and diverse undertaking, there is nonetheless something fulfilling about these dozen texts organised into a discrete group, a feeling that while they fail as a periodising concept – something that David Cunningham (2004, 18) implies is best avoided to begin with – each nonetheless stands in stark contrast to the music, art, literature, poetry or film that came before,⁶⁵ while together they meld to form a clear and satisfying representation of the “shock of the new.”

The tendency to create some kind of order by way of the citing of textual exemplars carries on into the realm of postmodernism.⁶⁶ The important works here are all but buried under a veritable telephone book of dropped names, but indubitable examples extracted from the pile might include: in music, Terry Riley’s *In C* (1964), an early example of minimalist composition, Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Hymnen* (1967), a melange of disassembled and reconstituted national anthems, Brian Eno’s *Another Green World* (1975), a landmark combination of experimental rock, ambient and electronica, and Minutemen’s *Double Nickels on the Dime* (1984), a post-punk jumble sale; in art, Barnett Newman’s *Onement VI* (1953) [colour field], Jasper John’s *Target With Plaster Casts* (1955) [collage], Andy Warhol’s *Marilyn* (1967) [pop art] and Bridget Riley’s *Orphean Elegy I* (1978) [op art]; in

Debussy’s experiences at the Paris World Fair of 1889 and, in particular, his subsequent composition *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un Faune* (1894) have been cited as the foundation of musical modernism (Griffiths 1978, 7-9); while Charles Baudelaire’s collection of poetry *Les Fleurs du Mal* [*The Flowers of Evil*] and Gustav Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary* (both 1857) are prominent in discussions concerning the emergence of modernism in poetry and literature (Marder 2001, 4). Raymond Williams (1989) takes this a step further by contrasting a “modernism” defined in hindsight – the “absolute modern [of] 1890-1940” with those “modern” writers and artists of the preceding (romantic) period whose innovations effectively set the stage for what was to come (“without Dickens, no Joyce” [32]). Frank Kermode (1968) instead prefers to distinguish between the paleo-modernism of Debussy, Yeats, Proust, Eliot and so forth and a later neo-modernism beginning with Dada and Surrealism. An excellent overview of the various positions taken on the nature and extent of aesthetic modernism is provided in the opening chapter of Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane’s *Modernism: 1890-1930* (1976, 19-55).

⁶⁵ I agree with Bradbury and McFarlane (1976, 19-21) when they claim that modernism constituted a cultural upheaval far more significant than any which preceded it.

⁶⁶ For example, see: Butler (1980, 7-8); Denzin (1991, 447); Frow (1997, 28); Hassan (1993, 146-147); Jameson (1984, 54); Jameson (1998, 127-128); McCaffery (1995, xxx-xxxi); Barth (1980); Sim (2001, 177-384). Frow, it should be noted, appropriates his list from Gitlin (“Hip Deep in Postmodernism,” *New York Times Book Review*, 6 November 1988) but acknowledges that in doing so it in effect becomes his own.

literature, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), and collections of stories such as Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969), Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and Donald Barthelme's *Forty Stories* (1987); in film, works as diverse as Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1959), Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966), Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) and David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986).

There are undeniable connections to be teased out here – consider the similar narrative concerns of Coover's "J's Marriage" and Barthelme's "The Temptation of St. Anthony;" the unveiling of the then little-known Stockhausen in *The Crying of Lot 49*;⁶⁷ the homage to film noir in both *Breathless* and *Blue Velvet* – and all of the archetypal postmodern traits can be discerned: a softening of the divide between high and popular culture, an absence of linear logic, hybridity, bricolage, paranoia, pastiche and so on. But what can this collection of texts really tell us other than the fact that most analysts appear to find it difficult to engage with latter-day poetry, or that the perceived shift from modernism to postmodernism has encompassed a quite distinctive embracing of post-war American culture?⁶⁸

For one thing, there would be arguments (albeit emanating from variously opposed positions on the continuum of cultural authority) that each of these texts comprises a work of art – that is, culture with a capital "C." This appears to be one of the ties that bind the significant texts of the modern and postmodern aesthetics. In that light, as Dave Eggers notes in his introduction to Barthelme's *Forty Stories*, the distance between the archetypal postmodernist and his or her immediate forbears may not be as great as some have suggested:

Barthelme could probably have been happy among the High Modernists: marching shoulder-to-shoulder in the vanguard with Joyce and Woolf, Eliot and Pound, making it new. Kicking over the played-out paradigms, twisting linear narrative into a Möbius strip, making the haunt and main region of his song the consciousness of his consciousness of his consciousness, cutting up

⁶⁷ David Toop goes so far as to suggest that Pynchon, along with J.G. Ballard and Phillip K. Dick, in effect "predicted Brian Eno" (1995, 10).

⁶⁸ Huysen (1984) sees the initial flowerings of postmodernism, if not the entire movement, as a distinctly American phenomenon.

Baudelaire, Wagner, Jacobean drama and contemporary pop songs and shoring the fragments against his ruins, building Homeric/Dantean epics out of blocks of text carved from Confucius and John Adams. (2005, xiii)⁶⁹

But approached from a different angle, the chasm between contemporary culture and the aesthetic philosophy of the modern era looks altogether more daunting. Consider this very different postmodern inventory, compiled with encouragement from the lists in Denzin (1991), Frow (1997) and Jameson (1998): fast food restaurants; *Australian Idol*; MTV; FTV; E!TV; Andrew Lloyd Weber; Bunnings Warehouses; FM radio “morning crews”; extreme sports; *The Da Vinci Code*; Elvis impersonators; Andre Rieu; Gold Lotto; *Woman’s Day*; multiplex cinemas; *Crossing Over With John Edward*; Enya; horoscopes.

Can there really be anything on earth that links together Robert Rauschenberg, shopping malls, MTV and Jacques Derrida? Yes, according to Frow, although this is immediately followed by the rider that any catalogue of the postmodern is “infinitely extendable, without boundaries and without any definite criterion of selection other than a sort of epochal intuition” (1997, 28). It is thus apparent that a list of texts exemplifying the postmodern can include anything from the most celebrated works of aesthetic endeavour (a trait of modernism carried on into postmodernism) to what are apparently the most functional, facile examples of cultural production under ingrained capitalism (a trait of modernisation or modernity carried on into postmodernisation or postmodernity).⁷⁰ Then again, for many aligned with cultural studies, a primary characteristic of the postmodern condition is the

⁶⁹ John Barth (1980) makes a number of similar connections between the modern and the postmodern in his memorable essay “The Literature of Replenishment.” Others have emphasised how semantically the term postmodern is unavoidably tied up with the modern: “modernism as that from which postmodernism is breaking away remains inscribed into the very word with which we describe our distance from modernism” (Huyssen 1984, 10). And Jean-François Lyotard actually suggests that for a text to be modern it has to *first* be postmodern (1984a, 79).

⁷⁰ These ontological connections – modernism/postmodernism, modernisation/postmodernisation, modernity/postmodernity – are set out in Frow (1997, 34). Elsewhere, he suggests that texts used to represent the postmodern in essence function to illustrate the different possible definitions of that term (27). So, from the examples cited here, one could contrast a postmodernism characterised by a sublime aesthetic, continuing the modernist project while simultaneously breaking from it in some respects (Stockhausen), an avant-garde postmodernism that moves further away from the concept of the artist as transcendent genius (Warhol), a neoconservative postmodernism that is, in truth, antimodernist in its quest to restore pre-modern values (Rieu), and a commodity-driven postmodernism caught up in philistinism and kitsch (*Australian Idol*).

breaking down of the kind of aesthetic hierarchy that separates supposed high art from the commonplace and the kitsch in the first place.

III

More questions without answers: here Jonathan Kramer reminds us that the uncertainty surrounding postmodernism extends to its association with music:

Does the term refer to a period or an aesthetic, a listening attitude or a compositional practice? Is postmodern music still seeking to define itself, or has its time already passed? Does postmodernism react against or continue the project of modernist music? Is it a positive or negative force? Is postmodern music original, or does it recycle older music? How widespread is it? Why does postmodernism seem to embrace many cultural values previously thought to be inimical to successful art and even to simple good sense? Is postmodern art serious or frivolous? (2002, 13)

One thing that stands out in the postmodern inventories examined thus far is the cursory manner in which each critic deals with contemporary music. In Frow's sizeable list (1997, 28) music is essentially off limits. A few examples are thrown in for local colour (Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, The Kronos Quartet), but there seems little to unify these other than persistent citing in intellectual debate. Neither does Ihab Hassan (1993, 146-147) appear too concerned with the issue of postmodern music (three examples compared to literature's 29) and when he is it is only to expose – through his chosen examples of John Cage, Pierre Boulez and Stockhausen – a prerequisite for any serious discussion to be limited to recent versions of Western *art* music. The composers referred to by Christopher Butler (1980, 7-10) reveal a similarly restrictive penchant. Ultimately, what Frow, Hassan and Butler allude to is a musical version of aesthetic postmodernism that maintains a strict divide between high and popular culture.

Frederic Jameson's lists (1984, 54; 1998, 127-128) make for a more interesting case study, though this does not mean that his grab-bag of postmodern musicians is any easier to justify, nor his discussion of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism in music any

more nuanced. For instance, Andrew Goodwin (1991, 177-178), Steven Connor (1997, 206) and Allan Moore (2003, 171) all have considerable difficulty comprehending Jameson's assertion that the Beatles and the Rolling Stones now signify popular music's "high-modernist moment" (1984, 54). Jameson goes on to claim (1998, 127-128) that the Clash, Talking Heads and Gang of Four are representative of a punk/new wave axis that was a direct reaction to the pop and rock music of a decade earlier – in other words, the postmodernists who countered modernism. This simplified chronology does not acknowledge that many of the precursors to these punk/new wave bands – the Velvet Underground, the Stooges, the dub and reggae artists who influenced the Clash – existed contemporaneously with the Beatles and the Stones and on occasion reacted explicitly to their music.⁷¹ Moreover, there is a failure here to take into account the apparent differences in orientation between artists that Jameson alternatively lumps together as modern or postmodern: most obviously, Goodwin argues, a striking contrast can be made between the compositional methodologies and lyrical concerns of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in the late 60s (1991, 177-178).⁷² There is a sense here of music being caught up quite unsuspectingly in Jameson's attempts to explain postmodernism and support the idea that it constitutes a "radical break" from modernism (1984, 53). His brief encounter with music stabilises his overall theoretical position yet simultaneously throws any notion of an unambiguous musical postmodernism into disarray.

Goodwin counters all of this with a list of his own, one that foregrounds the paradoxes surrounding postmodernism in music and allows him to place John Cage and Philip Glass alongside Madonna, Scritti Politti, Los Lobos, punk rock, world beat and hip-hop under the one all-encompassing rubric (1991, 177). In the process of querying the catch-all nature of postmodernism as it has been applied to music, Goodwin raises several questions about the various examples he juxtaposes. Most notably, he ponders the eclecticism of a concept that

⁷¹ "Who Loves the Sun" from the Velvet Underground's 1970 album *Loaded* was an obvious retort to the sentiments expressed in the George Harrison song "Here Comes the Sun," which appeared on *Abbey Road* (1969) less than twelve months earlier.

⁷² Goodwin goes further in suggesting a "crude" categorical separation between the Beatles' "pop artifice" and the Rolling Stones' "rock authenticity" (178), but even this standard take does not hold up to close scrutiny. For example, three different versions of the one Beatles' title ("Revolution") showcased the sensibilities of rock ("Revolution" as the scabrous B-side to the "Hey Jude" single), pop (the folkish "Revolution 1" on *The White Album*) and avant-garde experimentation (the lengthy "Revolution 9" from the same record) respectively.

allows different musical forms, emerging from impossibly diverse philosophical, artistic and/or geographic circumstances, to be gathered together in such a haphazard manner. If, in essence, these artists and genres have nothing more in common than their very contemporaneity (their state of existence in the period after modernism) then the lists previously contemplated and the discussions surrounding them are, on Goodwin's argument, collectively without substance when it comes to the musical examples cited therein.

On those occasions where scholarly critics appear to come together to agree on what constitutes postmodernism in music, the effect is barely less obfuscatory. The one outstanding example is "crossover" performer Laurie Anderson.⁷³ She balances delicately on the cusp of the different subcategories of the postmodern that separate John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen from the likes of Philip Glass and William Duckworth, not to mention Talking Heads and U2, although nobody seems in agreement as to exactly what it is that she does. Anderson's work is just as commonly debated in theatre periodicals as it is in musicology or cultural studies, while the *All Music Guide to Rock* (Bogdanov, Woodstra & Erlewine 2002, 28) comes up with a variety of classifications for her work that include "songwriter," "mixed media," "experimental," "avant-garde" and "performance art." And one could easily name another dozen musicians similarly operating within such indeterminate spaces, the critical difference perhaps being that none of them has been frozen in the academic headlights by virtue of a surprise hit single (as Anderson was in the early 1980s, courtesy of "O Superman").

IV

Postmodern music. Post-punk. Post-rock. Indie rock. Avant rock. Space rock. Math rock. Garage rock. Art rock. Alt-rock. Alt-pop. Alt-country. Alt-rap. Lo-fi. Hardcore.

⁷³ Texts where Anderson is cited as exemplifying postmodernism in music include: Connor (1997, 207); Denzin (1991, 447); Frow (1997, 28); McClary (1989); Mitchell (1989, 283-286); Sim (2001, 182-183); Taylor (2002, 94).

Slowcore. Darkcore. Electronica. Ambient. Industrial. Death metal. Black metal. Thrash. Drone. Cut & paste. Mash-ups. Plunderphonia. Drum & bass. Dubstep. Grime. Free jazz. Acid jazz. Improvised music. The new tonality. The new accessibility. The new simplicity. The new complexity. World beat. World music. Quiet is the new loud.

Thus far, it has been determined that efforts to contextualise the postmodern through the commonplace strategy of formulating a representative list of texts have at best drawn attention to paradigmatic examples that recur time and again. This process, names being passed on down the line from one critic to the next until an alliance is cemented in the collective mindset, runs contrary to Jean-François Lyotard's conceptualisation of the postmodern as panacea to the historical accumulation of knowledge in the form of the grand narrative (1984a, 20-21). At the same time, these lists have contributed to the uncontrolled expansion of postmodernism, to the point where it is difficult to make any logical connection between many of the individual artists and texts included. When Goodwin uses this popular trope to encapsulate a specific postmodern art form (music), he is able to show how postmodern music and contemporary music are in truth presented as interchangeable concepts.

Yet the urge to list, list, list does not stop with those seeking out a general definition of postmodernism as an aesthetic or socio-cultural force. The strategy has spread to various scholarly critics who use it as an aid to roping off genres and sub-genres within the wider field of contemporary music and to give support to their more precise theories within musical postmodernism. For instance, Bill Martin (2002, 236) provides an "avant rock" manifesto that is intended to function as a summary of experimental music in a postmodern context, while Ryan Hibbett (2005, 77) sees in his selected texts the epitome of the "indie rock" aesthetic of the past two decades. But closer examination suggests these drop-in-the-ocean versions of an explicit postmodern rock aesthetic again pose far more questions than they claim to answer.

Martin's avant rock directory (2002, 236) is comprised of albums by the following artists: Sonic Youth; Yoko Ono; RL Burnside; Tortoise; Stereolab; Radiohead; King Crimson; White Out (with Jim O'Rourke); Björk; William Hooker (with Christian Marclay and Lee

Renaldo).⁷⁴ His overarching thesis – articulated in a chapter titled “Rock Music in Postmodern Times” – is that in the late-1960s, urged on by the countercultural undercurrent of the period, rock music was evolving in a manner that was by its very nature experimental. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the population was prepared to listen along with this evolution, a circumstance Martin sees as unprecedented in history. However, he finds that subsequently experimental music became “an inconvenient idea from the standpoint of marketing” (182), which opens the way for his identifying a divide between universal pop-rock and avant rock, one that continues through to the first decade of the new century.

Today, Martin firmly believes a flourishing avant-garde can be found hovering around the imaginary interface between “post-rock” instruments, such as laptop computers, and rock’s traditional core of guitar-bass-drums. There is a strong sense in Martin’s writing that the latter is indispensable to any worthwhile version of contemporary rock music, hence his desire to know exactly who is playing what instrument and his unrelenting focus upon “musicianship” and “technique” (236-249). His understanding of the term rock also betrays a belief in oft-repeated claims as to that genre’s authenticity, as opposed to pop music’s inherent superficiality (for example, see Keightley 2001, 128).⁷⁵ Yet the question remains: what is achieved by presenting these ten artists as the cutting edge of rock music via a closed list that by its very nature (the nature of most lists) inevitably imposes firm restrictions on the scope of Martin’s argument, casting off as it does the many genres and thousands of artists not included?

As it turns out, the concept of rock authenticity espoused by Martin has its roots in what is essentially a linear paradigm for which the one unavoidable pit-stop on the trajectory from the late 1960s through to the current avant-garde is the progressive rock of groups such as

⁷⁴ If in Martin’s eyes there is a prototype avant rock band then it would have to be Sonic Youth: as well as his list including two of their albums (*Goodbye 20th Century* [1999] and *NYC Ghosts & Flowers* [2000]), Lee Renaldo and Jim O’Rourke are current and former members of the group respectively. Also, a Yoko Ono piece appears on *Goodbye 20th Century*.

⁷⁵ It is interesting to juxtapose Martin’s version of avant rock with Larry McCaffery’s “Random Sampling of Avant-Pop Works” (1995, xxx-xxxi); in doing so, neither the meaning of the epithet “avant” nor our understanding of the rock versus pop differential become any clearer. McCaffery’s list (which arrives unfettered by any textual explanation for his choices) also includes Sonic Youth, along with a jumble of examples (John Zorn, NWA, the Beatles and Pussy Galore) which might go to suggest that avant pop not so much opposes avant rock as subsumes it.

Yes, Jethro Tull and Emerson Lake and Palmer. Indeed, Martin goes so far as to claim that “almost everything that is interesting and creative in rock music that comes after about 1970 is influenced in one way or another by progressive rock” (69). And therein lies a problem: Martin’s concept of contemporary experimental rock music – epitomised in his list and associated discussion of ten artists – evolves from a version of rock history that privileges his favoured genre whilst questioning the authenticity of any style (electronica, turntablism, sampling, laptop music) that does not foreground traditional rock values.⁷⁶ In forming this divide, Martin aligns himself with the new musicologists of a progressive rock bent while essentially dismissing the remainder of popular music in the period in question as “most often providing pop drivel and product” (70). The question previously posed about the limits of Martin’s avant rock discography now has an answer: it derives from a highly personalised notion of what constitutes a forward-thinking attitude to music-making.

Another recent instance of the listing tactic, one that again proves contentious, is found in Hibbett’s investigation of the concept of “indie” rock (2005). The discography (77) that stakes out the musical ground for this discussion includes albums by the following artists: Dirty Three; Godspeed You Black Emperor!; Lou Barlow and friends; Pavement; Sebedoh; Sentridoh; Sigur Rós; the Folk Implosion; the Silver Mt Zion Orchestra; They Might Be Giants. In his paper, Hibbett (64-69) identifies post-rock as the genre that epitomizes the independent music aesthetic of the past decade and is at the vanguard of its current version. Post-rock is unequivocally positioned as the late-90s successor to a lo-fi, home recording style of music, ushered in by the American musician Lou Barlow, that was in turn some sort of response to the incorporation into the mainstream of 1980s alternative acts such as the Minneapolis-based Hüsker Dü and Barlow’s own former band Dinosaur Jr.⁷⁷ Again, one can easily make out a linear aspect to such a narrative.

However, post-rock as a generic descriptor actually has a much deeper history than Hibbett allows. In 1988 Talk Talk, a band from the United Kingdom, released an album titled *Spirit*

⁷⁶ Martin has in fact authored an entire book on Yes (*Music of Yes: Structure and Vision in Progressive Rock*: Open Court 1996), as well as another general tome on the genre (*Listening to the Future: The Time of Progressive Rock 1968-1978*: Open Court 1997).

⁷⁷ Representatives of the lo-fi aesthetic in Hibbett’s discography are Lou Barlow (founder of Lou Barlow and friends, Sebedoh, Sentridoh and the Folk Implosion, Barlow is to Hibbett’s indie rock what Sonic Youth are to Martin’s avant rock), Pavement and They Might Be Giants, while the post-rock artists are Dirty Three, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Sigur Rós and Silver Mt Zion (Godspeed and Mt Zion being on the same record label and comprised of much the same personnel).

of Eden. Up until that point, Talk Talk may have best been described as a more cerebral, moderately successful example of the British new wave pop of the time, operating in a vaguely similar zone to bands like Aztec Camera and ABC. *Spirit of Eden*, however, constituted such a dramatic step away from Talk Talk's previous style it sounds as if it was recorded by a different band altogether. Featuring difficult-to-decipher vocals, vastly extended song structures and other elements more akin to jazz or classical music (or, indeed, progressive rock), *Melody Maker's* review of the "Albums of the Year" for 1988 described the record as "Talk Talk's severance from chart pop made irrevocable" (57).⁷⁸ The initial stirrings of the early-1990s post-rock movement can arguably be traced back to this album, which not surprisingly dropped Talk Talk right out of the commercial spotlight and led to the group being dropped by their multinational record label.

Six years later, music journalist/critic Simon Reynolds, writing in *The Wire*, was the first to attempt a detailed survey of the post-rock field (1994, 28).⁷⁹ It is indicative of the by that time sprawling territory of the genre that Talk Talk are not even mentioned amongst the dozens of artists that Reynolds cites as precursors to post-rock. Groups such as Lull, Orang (comprised of former members of Talk Talk), Flying Saucer Attack and Bark Psychosis were at the forefront of the movement evolving in Britain at this time. Simultaneously, journalists and fans were referring to like-minded North American artists as post-rock, with Labradford, Bowery Electric, Cul de Sac and Stars of the Lid amongst the most notable. Two compilation albums released on Virgin Records – *Isolationism: Ambient 4* (1994) and *Monsters, Robots and Bugmen: A User's Guide to the Rock Hinterland* (1996) – featured

⁷⁸ Information on the recording sessions for *Spirit of Eden* (as reported in *The Mojo Collection* [Irvin & McLearn 2003, 525]) gives an even clearer idea of how far removed the album was from the everyday pop-rock world: "Focusing on subtlety and restraint, they constructed new, transparent basic tracks and invited guest musicians to embellish them. One was violin prodigy Nigel Kennedy, who found it hard to break out of his virtuoso noodling. [Producer] Friesse-Greene made him play less by gaffer-taping together the fingers on his left hand. On another occasion that has entered into studio lore, the team spent a long and expensive day recording a large brass section, [but] kept [for the completed album] only the sound of a trumpeter clearing spit from his mouthpiece."

⁷⁹ Whilst various articles Reynolds wrote in this period (in *The Wire*, *Village Voice* and elsewhere) are cited as evidence of the fact that he was responsible for coining the term, it is interesting that in a much earlier conference paper Chris Cutler, whilst discussing "progressive popular music," said that "the music to come will have to appropriate everything of value from its old exclusive owners and put it to service in building the new. I believe that we can see this process beginning in certain forms of rock and post-rock recorded music" (1985, 11).

many of these artists and at the time served to define the landscape for what was a burgeoning scene.⁸⁰

The implication of Hibbett's discography – situated at the conclusion of an article titled "What is Indie Rock?" – might seem obvious: *this* is indie rock; this list constitutes a functioning alternative to mainstream rock and pop music in the (postmodern) period under review. Perhaps this is a little too obvious, however, as, to be fair, the author makes it clear that he has not set out to conclusively define the subject of the article's title (2005, 55). That is why I have dwelt more closely here on his treatment of post-rock, which the narrative does centre around and which Hibbett does seek to define through a discography referencing specific artists from that genre (along with the Scottish group Mogwai, which he discusses in the text). As such, Hibbett's claim that post-rock musicians are "displacing [the lo-fi aesthetic] at the core of indie culture" (65) suggests a straightforward progression that goes against the documented history of post-rock as a genre that entered the lexicon more or less contemporaneously with the lo-fi style of Pavement, Sebadoh and others. He sees Dirty Three, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Sigur Rós and Mogwai (hailing from Australia, Canada, Iceland and Scotland respectively) as "geographically marginal" and thus "dislocated from the British-American rock tradition" (65), but this does not add up to a great deal in view of the Anglo-American post-rock core that emerged in the early 1990s and has continued through into the new century. The positioning of these four artists at the forefront of the genre is further clouded by the allegedly unique traits of non-rock vocal inputs and absence of band photos from album sleeves that Hibbett (66) says are fundamental to the post-rock philosophy. This may be so, but in fact Bark Psychosis' *Hex* (1994) and Labradford's *A Stable Reference* (1995) each feature barely-intelligible lyrics,

⁸⁰ The Virgin connection is a mostly spurious one. The British groups were a scattered collective until Reynolds united them under the post-rock banner. In the US, however, the majority of artists labeled post-rock, including the four named here, were associated with Kranky Records out of Illinois – Labradford's *Prazision* [1994] was in fact the first LP ever released by Kranky. Some discussions of post-rock (though not Reynolds') incorporate early-90s "slowcore" artists like Slint and Coedine. Others evoke the "shoegazer" bands (thus named for their propensity to stare downwards whilst playing guitar on stage) following in the wake of My Bloody Valentine's *Isn't Anything* (1988), with a wall-of-sound approach in which the vocals, if any, are consumed in an ethereal instrumental melee. One crucial, usually overlooked precursor to the post-rock movement were the British shoegazers Slowdive, particularly their innovative self-titled EP of 1990. Another is the German band Popul Vuh's scores for the classic 1970s Werner Herzog films *Aguirre: Wrath of God* and *Nosferatu*. Nonetheless, as with Talk Talk all of these examples should perhaps be more properly considered inspirations for a scene that was not widely identified prior to 1994.

while the sleeves of both of the former band's 1994 albums (*Hex* and the early singles compilation *Independency*) are notable for the superb landscape and street scene photography of Peter Morris and Maria Mochnacz.

Furthermore, the history posited by Hibbett seemingly fails to account for the continued prominence of lo-fi or DIY as a musical style that remains to some extent disenfranchised from mainstream rock. For example, Pavement are still lauded some years after their demise (with tenth anniversary re-issues of *Slanted and Enchanted* [1992; 2002] and *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* [1994; 2004] garnering further critical praise). And many newer artists (such as Moldy Peaches, Handsome Family, Joanna Newsom, Stafrænn Håkon and Mountain Goats) have emerged out of an understated and fundamentally marginal home recording aesthetic that dates back, through the likes of Beat Happening in the 1980s and Nick Drake in the 1970s, to Bob Dylan and the Band's Big Pink recording sessions of 1967 and beyond.⁸¹ Lo-fi therefore is a genre in progress, not one that has been indisputably "[displaced] at the core of indie culture" (65). In particular, it can be emphasized that the especially rhizomatous nature of postmodern music means it is almost impossible (and unwise) to specify the precise telemetry of any specific genre or sub-genre, lo-fi, post-rock or otherwise. Each is to a great extent a work in progress (or, more correctly, in a constant state of mutation) and can be found to have arisen from numerous, sometimes nebulous, sources; none has boundaries that can be defined with certainty.⁸² The important point (one that will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4 of this dissertation) is that the various notions of rock music that post-rock appears to abandon are, in truth, evidence of a plurality of versions of the original rock narrative mutating into a plurality of rock afterlives.

⁸¹ See Greil Marcus' (1997) book on Dylan and the Band's *The Basement Tapes* (1975) and associated recordings emanating from the basement of the Saugerties, New York house known as the Big Pink, which connects these to the music on Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952; reissued 1997). In following here Hibbett's "indie rock" version of lo-fi/DIY, I am disregarding the recent history of home recording practices in sampling, rap music, electronica and turntablism, all of which could arguably make an at least equal claim to the lo-fi/DIY monikers.

⁸² For example, while I have cited *Spirit of Eden* as critical to the emergence of post-rock in its first identifiable phase (Hibbett, I argue, focuses on what might be termed the second phase of post-rock and ignores the first), there are nonetheless many further examples to be found of artists operating at the height of the rock era in the 1960s and 1970s as precursors to, or at least parading characteristics similar to, post-rock as it later came to be identified in the 1990s. (Reynolds himself cites Brian Eno, the Velvet Underground, Kraftwerk, King Tubby and AMM, amongst others [1994; 2004a].)

Ultimately, Martin and Hibbett's respective précis can be seen to constitute personalised histories which do not necessarily shed a great deal of new light upon the circumstances of contemporary music. What needs to be stressed is that their annotated lists are scholarly ones that come dressed in all of the authority of the academy. While both writers display a commendable knowledge of (and affection for) the kind of music that flourishes well away from most intellectual discussions, this is insufficient to assist the casual observer in understanding why their pocket histories merit sanctioning over and above those which emerge from journalistic and non-professional discourses. Although Martin does bring the laudable characteristic of what he calls a "general musical awareness" (2002, 192) to his overall discussion, his list of modern-day avant rock albums is in part aimed at legitimising one particular and much-maligned genre: progressive rock. And Hibbett constructs his own (incomplete) historical paradigm for the purpose of justifying his investigation of (and answer to) the question "what is indie rock?"

Moreover, the idea of musical postmodernism is rendered even more obfuscatory in these accounts. For Martin, avant rock is, per Adorno, the site of a resistant postmodern aesthetic that carries on the values of experimentalism and innovation formerly associated (in the modernist period) with certain art music (2002, 196); thus Martin's version of postmodernism stands in opposition to antimodernism. For Hibbett, indie rock in the form of post-rock implies similar high-cultural values but *is not* postmodern for the very same reason: because, per Bourdieu, its innovative characteristics are, in the fashion of modernism, a marker for the elitist hoarding of cultural capital (2005, 69); this presumably situates Hibbett's understanding of the postmodern within the popular and everyday. Martin and Hibbett are in essence talking about innovative music, but only Martin believes he is talking about postmodern music.

Where does one turn when all attempts to clarify the nature of the postmodern text, the postmodern musical text, even texts within specific postmodern musical genres have ended in uncertainty, when the representative lists of various scholarly critics, laid out side-by-side, resemble aesthetic manifestos drawn up for utopian lands that nobody will ever actually visit? One strategy would be to go right back to the beginning of things: to revisit the pioneers, as it were, of music criticism prior to postmodernism. And the giant amongst those early explorers was undoubtedly Theodor Adorno.

Richard Leppert (in *Essays on Music*) says:

Adorno's crediting of the Culture Industry with take-no-prisoners power as regards the degradation of both musical taste and human subjectivity can be neither wholly subscribed to nor outright dismissed ... we can take his point that the 'badness' common to popular music as a whole is not excused by the small amount of it that is notably good, in the same way that the aesthetic 'goodness' pro forma ascribed to classical music masks the fact that enormous amounts of it are what he regarded as little more than trash. (in Adorno 2002, 345)

Many theorists concerned with the cultural production and reception of modern music have sought to counter the ever-looming shadow of Adorno by attributing oppositional politics to all manner of practices, most of which have very little to do with the actual music itself. On the other hand, those who broadly concur with his views on mass culture and commodification continue to bemoan the vapidness of so-called popular music *en bloc*, with little thought for the complex diversifications that have taken place since Adorno's death. In his commentary to *Essays on Music*, Leppert's approach is to keep a healthy critical distance from each of these polar positions. Problems inevitably arise for those who race pell-mell to apply Adorno's concepts to a vast musical landscape that did not exist during his lifetime; Leppert, careful as he is to differentiate between what Adorno said *then* and what his theories might tell us *now*, provides an excellent entry point into his immense and often difficult-to-decipher body of work.

Richard Middleton notes that "anyone wanting to argue the importance of studying popular music has to absorb Adorno in order to go beyond him" (1990, 35). He goes on to emphasise that Adorno's theoretical insights are far more valuable when applied to texts

(and their production) than to their interpretation (61).⁸³ With these two sensible provisos in mind, I will consider here two major implications for the modern-day musical text that arise from Adorno's work and are informed by Leppert's critique of it. They are based upon the two overarching distinctions – reflecting for the most part intense personal predilections – that buttress Adorno's philosophical worldview. The first of these once again returns us to the partition between classical, art, or serious music and popular music. The second concerns the opposing ideals of a modernist (negative) and popular (affirmative) aesthetics.

The key work concerning this first divide is "On Popular Music," an essay organised into three sections Adorno respectively titles "The Musical Material," "Presentation of the Musical Material" and "Theory About the Listener."⁸⁴ The opening section, which, being concerned with musical texts, is of chief interest here, puts forward the argument that popular music is "highly standardised, in essence cliché-ridden" (Leppert in Adorno 2002, 336). The second considers the power of marketing in popular music – how corporate strategies reflect this standardisation in individual song configurations and how each song fits into the overall structure of commodity capitalism. The final section, which critiques popular music audiences, concludes with the listener metamorphosing, Kafka-like, into non-human form.⁸⁵ Almost 70 years later, these three base arguments, no matter how far they can be qualified (Adorno, for instance, never acknowledges how difficult it must be to create a *great* pop song), are impossible to disregard.

Criteria for the difference between serious and popular music are set out in the first pages of the essay. As is customary in Adorno, serious music is exemplified through reference to the

⁸³ Leppert concurs with Middleton: "[Adorno's] concerns are social, aesthetic, and philosophical; any response to these concerns comes from the musical works directly: immanently – not the least reason that Adorno is far more concerned with music's production than its reception" (in Adorno 2002, 515).

⁸⁴ "On Popular Music (With the Assistance of George Simpson)" – reproduced in Adorno (2002, 437-469) – was originally published in 1941. Robert Hullot-Kentor (1991, 109) emphasises the point that Adorno's writings on popular music constitute a tiny percentage of his total output. Moreover, Adorno barely revisited the subject once he had departed America for good in 1953 (Leppert in Adorno 2002, 11).

⁸⁵ Adorno evidently sees this transformation as a misdirection of otherwise valuable energies rather than as passive, preordained submission: "In order to become a jitterbug or simply to 'like' popular music, it does not by any means suffice to give oneself up and to fall into line passively. To become transformed into an insect, man needs that energy which might possibly achieve his transformation into a man" (2002, 468).

work of a composer from the Austro-German classical tradition (on this occasion, Beethoven). Conversely, popular music is not represented by any specific examples – this, as Leppert (336-337) explains, is because Adorno finds the same formula behind each and every popular song, a point he reinforces through reference to the 1939 book *How to Write and Sell a Song Hit* (authored by Abner Silver and Robert Bruce). As such, popular music is reduced to a product for sale in a market. This fundamental distinction can be grasped even by those who do not share Adorno's musicological training: individual pieces of serious music, in his view, can and should be analysed for their intrinsic qualities, whereas the standardisation apparent in each and every popular song makes these amenable to analysis as socio-cultural phenomenon but largely irrelevant aesthetically.

Two years before the appearance of "On Popular Music," American art critic Clement Greenberg published his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." It amounts to a more general version of Adorno's argument vis-à-vis popular music, with Greenberg lamenting the rise of a commodity form of culture infecting genuine, pure art:

The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture. Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of general culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide. (1961, 39)

Greenberg's approach – emphasising as it does a parasitic relationship whereby kitsch thrives upon the established cultural tradition, while "peasants" have the temerity to become literate and aspire to cultural status – barely conceals a derision toward the masses that is never so obvious in Adorno, the latter being more inclined to the view that systematic capitalism creates only victims. Nonetheless, both essays are primarily about highlighting the emergence of a mass culture that contaminates high art and diminishes (with dire consequences) the status and relevance of the true artist. Adorno, Greenberg and Dwight MacDonald (who advocates a fortification of the high/low dichotomy as a desperate last

move to save the world from rampant populism [1957, 70-71]) are by some seen as constituting a triumvirate railing against an erosion of cultural standards gathering pace in the middle of the last century.⁸⁶

It is therefore most paradoxical that “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” and “On Popular Music” may also be seen as signalling the beginning of the weakening of the high-popular barrier. Adorno’s audiences for standardised popular music, along with Greenberg’s insensible advocates of kitsch, have always constituted the vast majority of potential cultural consumers; that is, those supposedly without the class background, education or leisure time to be substantially indoctrinated into a life of high culture. As long as involvement in capital-C culture remained in essence confined to a refined, upwardly mobile cognoscenti, with something called folk art deemed the appropriate level of cultural engagement for everyone else, then the barrier separating elite from popular could scarcely be traversed. By certifying popular music and kitsch as emerging forces on the cultural scene, however, Adorno and Greenberg set in motion an intellectual debate that still resonates today, because popular music and kitsch must on one level be considered emancipatory – ushering in the conditions under which each and every person, and not just an elite minority, might gain access to a more sophisticated culture. As Adorno and Greenberg were highlighting the emergence of mass art and thus reinforcing the division between high and popular culture, they were simultaneously opening the way for the two to move closer together.

All of this takes nothing away from the prophecy-value of Adorno’s “On Popular Music” in particular: that today’s musical terrain is cluttered up with enormous piles of unremarkable product valued only as light entertainment is, I would argue, beyond dispute. This, however, is an issue of cultural quality, one that necessitates examining individual artefacts in specific contexts. If the boundary between serious and popular music has not dissolved entirely by now then it has at least become highly pervious, regardless of how reticent critics have been to acknowledge it. Now any process of sweeping away this divide once and for all comes

⁸⁶ This should in no way obscure the many differences between Adorno, Greenberg and McDonald, or imply that they now hold equivalent status as 20th century critics. Nonetheless, Markus (2006) loosely aligns these three, along with T.S. Eliot, Ortega y Gasset and F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, as epitomising negative attitudes toward mass culture in the early to mid-20th century, and cites Allan Bloom and Paul Johnson as continuing this conservative critique in more recent decades (one could certainly add the likes of Roger Scruton to this list).

down to retiring Adorno's (indeed, most post-Adornian) definitions of both serious and popular music and acknowledging that a great many musical texts can simply no longer be constrained within such a binary logic. As Fink points out, this by-product of postmodernism means not only that classical music has "lost even its symbolic or ritualistic power to define hierarchies of taste within the larger culture" (1998, 139), but more importantly that today "serious art music [can be] tracked down all over the cultural landscape" (147).

The second theme in Adorno's work to be considered here arises from his championing of musical modernism. More specifically, there is a need to focus on what Adorno says about the concept of ugliness in music, which he dwells upon in two works discussed by Leppert (in Adorno 2002, 329): *Aesthetic Theory* (1997, 45-61) and the essay "What National Socialism has Done to the Arts."⁸⁷

In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno states:

In the penchant of modern art for the nauseating and physically revolting – in objecting to which the apologists of the status quo can think of nothing more substantial than that the world is ugly enough as it is and art therefore should be responsible for idle beauty – the critical material motif shows through: in its autonomous forms art decries domination, even that which has been sublimated as a spiritual principle and stands witness for what domination represses and disavows. (1997, 49)

As a philosopher, musician and listener with complete faith in the principles of aesthetic modernism, Adorno is acutely aware of the increasing gulf between new forms of serial and atonal composition – exemplified during his lifetime by the music of the second Viennese School – and the general population of musicians and audience members firmly dedicated to the preservation of the great romantic tradition (Leppert in Adorno 2002, 92-93). According to Peter Hohendahl, the conception, valorised by Adorno, of a natural progression from tonal to atonal music, necessitated a radical change in attitude:

⁸⁷ This essay, originally published in 1945, is reproduced in Adorno (2002, 373-390).

While the idealist philosophy of art insisted on the priority of the beautiful and treated the ugly as a negative second term, the transition to modern music unhinges this opposition from its conventional place and reverses the priority. Together with the rounded artwork, the beautiful as the aesthetic ideal has to be given up, since its preservation would be false. (2005, 173)

In advocating this reversal of priorities, Adorno expresses an antagonism toward art and music that does not address reality but rather encourages an uncritical retreat from the problems of day-to-day existence.⁸⁸ Once again, one is struck by the prescience of Adorno's base argument. Today, surface beauty and the commercialisation of art almost completely dominates mainstream culture, from the music (or muzak) on the radio and in cafes and shopping malls to fashion catwalks and the "art" of billboards and airbrushed magazine covers, while atonal music, experimental literature and film, abstract forms of painting, in fact most art which embraces or flirts with the reprehensible, the bizarre or the disorienting, exists almost exclusively in the margins. The ubiquity of facile pleasure in the popular arts seems, on the face of it, clear evidence of what Adorno saw as "the infantile twist" (2002, 381), the belief that the representation of the ugly in art is unnecessary, even inflammatory (there being already enough horror and repugnancy in the real world).

The most important element to be extracted from Adorno's work on this subject – and, as Hohendahl's paper shows us, there are several – is his foregrounding of ugliness and dissonance as an oppositional tool, as a quality that subverts conventional aesthetics and sets the genuine art work apart from that which typically finds appreciation within the culture industries (2005, 171). In art music, this aspect of Adorno has been dragged into the 21st century in the form of an ongoing squabble between those who see the modernist project, or something like it, as a continuing one (this position might be seen to embrace composers such as Harrison Birtwistle, Pierre Boulez and Brian Ferneyough) and those who advocate a return to pre-modern values of tonality.⁸⁹ In other words, a startling advance is again reduced to endless pot-shots fired back and forth from behind forever-static binary positions.

⁸⁸ Around the same time, George Orwell was taking a like stance on unpleasant art. Discussing the work of Salvador Dali, he says of its opponents: "Such people are not only unable to admit that what is morally degraded can be aesthetically right, but their real demand of every artist is that he shall pat them on the back and tell them that thought is unnecessary" (1968, 189).

⁸⁹ See Terry Teachout (1999) and Frederick Stocken (1992) for evidence of the antimodernist point of view; in 1994, Stocken, an otherwise nondescript composer, formed a group called the Hecklers,

Elsewhere, however, the flight from traditional aesthetic notions (art's "throwing off [of] false veils of harmony and beauty in favour of ugliness, dissonance, fragmentation and negation" [Kellner 2002, 92]) has been complicated by a common tendency toward the incorporation (and in some cases outright commodification) of this aspect of the modernist aesthetic in the post-Adornian, postmodern era. No more so is this evident than within the realm of film. For instance, David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, a film played out in a depressing industrial setting that nobody in their right mind would want to live in, remains at best a late night "cult classic" in terms of popularity. By contrast, a comparable tableau can be presented in a manner palatable to a general audience: think of how director Mike Hodges skilfully incorporates the grim backdrops around Newcastle in northern England into the mise en scène of *Get Carter* (1971), a film voted Britain's greatest ever in *Total Film* magazine and subsequently remade on two occasions. Similarly, in horror movies focusing on perpetrators of wanton murder where the prima facie unattractiveness of the subject matter seems undeniable, one could contrast the marginality of a film such as *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (John McNaughton, 1990) with the overwhelming success of *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) or *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996). The popularity or otherwise of these various filmic depictions of ugliness, then, appears to depend on matters such as narrative style, context, marketing and publicity.

The situation is hardly less obfuscating in music. For example, a composition may be acceptable at a lower volume level but deemed unpleasant if played too loudly. A rock or pop song with disturbing lyrical content can be clothed with jaunty, palatable instrumentation, or a quaint lyric may be hidden under a cacophonous heavy metal barrage. Rap music is alternatively decried as ugly on the basis of lyrics, sounds, even associated lifestyles. As it happens, one of the few places where musical dissonance finds general

who attended a performance of Birtwistle's music and voiced their distaste for what they referred to as his "sonic sewerage" (Hubble 1994, 24). For an example of the alternative position, see Richard Toop (1993), who loftily claims: "Schoenberg once wrote that the middle path is the only one that does not lead to Rome. Personally, it's not only the middle path that I would discard, but the hypothetical 'lower' one too (in my terms, a simplistic path). It is possible that radical simplicity, to the extent that it is potentially free from compromise, the perpetual whorehouse of the 'via media,' might also lead to some kind of *urbs aeterna* (given the theological preoccupations of a Pärt, a Tavener, or a Górecki, where else would it lead?). But for the most part, it's a dull, dumb path, and I doubt whether its Rome is worth reaching" (44).

acceptance is in the film soundtrack (Subotnick 1996, 169). In this context, avant-garde or atonal compositions are almost always associated with the deviant behaviour of monsters and murderers – of the irrational other (Brophy 2004, 10) – classic cases being Bernard Hermann’s score for Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) and the use of Krzysztof Penderecki’s *Polymorphia* (1961) and *De Natura Sonoris No.2* (1971) in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980).⁹⁰ All of which suggests that music which deviates from the tonality of the pre-modern Western classical tradition, at least, is widely accepted only when there is a clear extra-musical context for it. Certainly, Penderecki’s atonal compositions placed into a popular radio program or played in a café or restaurant would likely garner far different, predominately negative responses.

These musical and filmic examples show that modern culture finds ways to integrate the ugly or unpleasant into its artefacts – even to somehow render such artefacts aesthetically pleasing on occasions – via forms and contexts that somehow disrupt or screen any oppositional aspect. At the same time, that art which, for whatever reasons or in whatever circumstances, defies conventional aesthetic expectations is condemned or at least repressed. Lyotard (1984a, 71-79) perceives in our current condition the triumph of various movements both sympathetic and antagonistic to postmodernism (antimodernism, neoconservatism, eclecticism) which are nonetheless united against Adornian philosophy in their call to replace experimentation, avant-gardism and an aesthetic of the sublime – that which might “enable us to see only by making it impossible to see” and “please only by causing pain” (78)⁹¹ – with unity, identification, populism and an aesthetic of pure pleasure. As with the

⁹⁰ It should be noted that Brophy is mistaken in his recollection of one pivotal scene (from *The Shining*) involving Penderecki’s music. He states that “as Jack creeps up the stairs swinging a baseball bat at his wife Wendy (Duvall), Penderecki’s strings slice the air like deadly bursts of steam expelled through Jack’s flaring nostrils” (2004, 213). In fact, in the film it is Wendy who is defending herself with the bat, swinging it at Jack in time to the music. Though one might legitimately ask whether Brophy’s idea of atonal music being associated with some demonic other (in this case, Jack) is actually eroded, not reinforced, by the evidence of this scene, I would contend that the error does not alter his overall thesis.

⁹¹ The difficulty and pain in the sublime is “a feeling of displeasure that arises from the imagination’s inadequacy” which is nonetheless (because of the power of this sensation) “at the same time also a pleasure” (Kant 1987, 114-115). For Adorno, true art goes beyond a “tasteful savouring,” beyond even Kant’s disinterested interest, to an “aesthetic autonomy” that is evoked (as evidenced in the great works of Schoenberg, Kafka, Beckett and others) by the “force of negativity” (1997, 12). The sublime is closely related to Adorno’s concept of ugliness: Lyotard (the latter-day philosopher who has written most often on the sublime) often uses the word monstrous in reference

concept of popular music, then, Adorno's position on oppositional or negative art still resonates as a radical alternative to the dominant cultural themes of postmodernity. However, it is equally necessary to move beyond his concept of an aesthetic haven immune from the hegemony of the culture industries, a place where the most radically oppositional art rules unchallenged, for again this leads only to an incontrovertible divide between an exoteric culture for the many and an esoteric culture for the few.

In "What National Socialism has Done to the Arts," Adorno juxtaposes the conformity of a composer like Richard Strauss with the negation inherent in the work of Arnold Schoenberg, whose modern music is "radically antagonistic to the audience and to the whole sphere of commercialised musical life" (380). Setting up dialectical conundrums with no hope of resolution was for Adorno an acceptable strategy in combating a universal and debilitating culture industry, signalling his determination to never allow critical thought to peter out into false outcomes or "truths."⁹² As Max Paddison puts it:

Adorno warns us that the dialectical method is by no means merely 'the serene demonstration of the fact that there are two sides to everything.' Adorno's formulations always have a quite deliberate 'irritation value.' His intention is not to restore an illusory equilibrium, wherein all tension (what he calls the force field) between the extremes is conveniently neutralised. (2004, 84)

In my view, it is now possible to consider such resolute support for the modernist grand narrative as both liberating and restricting. Adorno's ideas on ugliness and dissonance in art today appear both visionary (advocating in the face of an ever more prevalent cultural conservatism an authentic aesthetic highly resistant to commodification) and outmoded (leading art down an ever-narrowing path toward obscurity). When this is carried forward

to it. For Lyotard, the ugly and the monstrous in art go beyond the simple question of taste to evoke the pleasure with pain that is the sublime – the key aesthetic sensibility in modernism (1984b): as Hebdige puts it, "[Lyotard] takes the relatively subordinate, residual term, the 'sublime' in the binary coupling upon which 'modern' (i.e. Enlightenment) aesthetics is based (the beautiful – [the sublime] where the sublime functions as that-which-is-aesthetic-but-not-beautiful) and privileges it to such an extent that the whole edifice of Enlightenment thought and achievement is (supposedly) threatened" (1988, 198).

⁹² Notwithstanding Adorno's steadfast support for only a handful of modern composers, writers and artists, this particular aspect of his thinking – his disdain for the unearthing of ultimate truths – aligns closely with the postmodern philosophy of the likes of Lyotard and Richard Rorty.

into postmodernism, as continues to occur in debates internal to art music, the result is typically an unsightly standoff between the modernists and the antimodernists.⁹³ But the work of Adorno is surely most valuable when viewed from a position that is both admiring and sceptical. Under the influence of cultural studies, it is more often than not the case that scepticism toward Adorno far outweighs any admiration, such as when critics compare his negative dialectics to the more redemptive accounts of Frankfurt School colleagues Walter Benjamin (McRobbie 2005, 303) and Ernst Bloch (Koehne 2004, 166-167). Yet the two related dichotomies arising out of his oeuvre as discussed here – popular versus serious and affirmation versus negation – remain very significant because, no matter how rigorously each has been questioned they still constitute the starting point for most arguments about aesthetic worth in music and in culture generally. Contemplating Adorno becomes a matter of applying his still resonant arguments to a now postmodern cultural environment, so that in what Jameson (1990, 231) calls the “perpetual present” of our current epoch, Adorno still prompts in us the “sense of something grim and impending within the polluted sunshine of the shopping mall” (248). After Adorno, one can imagine the possibility of a middle ground between avant-garde art and throwaway kitsch, a place of endless possibility in which a hundred flowers might bloom. The challenge is in working out how to articulate this middle ground in a postmodern phase that is both implicated in yet somewhere beyond the high modernist narrative of the early 20th century; a phase that is variously – as the term postmodern implies – viewed as a continuation of, a modification of, a discrediting of, or a regression from, modernism itself.

⁹³ Further evidence of this comes from the “style wars” as played out in *Sounds Australian* in the early 1990s, a battle of words between traditionalists and supporters of the new complexity in which “few of the correspondents did themselves much lasting credit” (Ford 2002, 30). Despite attempts at the time by Ford and others to bring some rationality into the debate [see “Style Wars: The New Complexity and Australian Music,” in *Sounds Australian* (1990, 6-14)], protagonists from both sides continued to haunt the opinion pages of the journal over the following months, with vitriolic statements showing how pervasive the divide between the two camps remained. For instance, a composer from the avant-garde school described all postmodern music as conservative, to which an antimodernist replied in a letter to the editor: “Give me the supposed ‘sneering anti-intellectualism’ of [radio presenter] Mr Cargher to the puffed-up, elitist, sneering intellectualism of [musicologist] Mr Toop any day.” Of course, there is a long history of attacks upon modernist/abstract art in Australia: consider the poet A.D. Hope’s infamously vitriolic review of Patrick White’s novel *The Tree of Man* in 1956, or three years later the manifesto of the Antipodean group (Arthur Boyd, John Brack and others) criticising non-figurative painters for supposedly withdrawing from society.

VI

In his 1990 essay titled “The Evolution of Jazz,” Gary Giddens makes the following statement about the aesthetic potential of a category of music Adorno neither properly understood nor afforded any credibility to, a category that is today seen by many as being trapped in a “kind of cultural purgatory”:

[Jazz] is now passing through a phase with a potential for great and, in some respects, unexampled aesthetic fulfilment. Never before has jazz been so utterly liberated from the debate over modernism. Jazz is now poised on a plateau where past achievements can be enjoyed without apology, and new ones tasted in the absence of rhetorical contexts. (38)

Giddens argues that the new and composite forms of jazz-inflected music collecting together under the guise of postmodernism do not invalidate, but in fact only add to, the store of tradition out of which the genre emerged. This positive trait is equally manifest in all forms of contemporary music and across the present cultural milieu generally. I do not think, however, that it is interesting or necessary to debate whether jazz is now, or ever has been, a postmodern genre, or to attempt to set out to define postmodernism by recourse to specific examples of jazz (what Giddens terms its “achievements”) or any other kind of music for that matter. The key point to take from Giddens’ statement is that the *potentially* liberating nature of postmodernism exists in the form of an aesthetic and cultural sensibility no longer limited to antiquated oppositions – between high and low, tonal and dissonant, old and new, and so forth – that scholars, critics and audiences have nonetheless as yet found it almost impossible to break free from. In fact I would go so far as to say that perhaps the most heralded characteristic of postmodernism – that it involves a mixing of high and popular cultures – is articulated in a way that actually reinforces the divide; that is, the two levels of culture are only confirmed, not interrogated or erased.

So far in this chapter, I have examined the inclination in latter-day critical thought of using examples of texts to define either postmodernism generally, particular postmodern genres, or

particular strains of postmodernism.⁹⁴ Having exposed this process as more obfuscating than enlightening, I went on to discuss two aspects of Theodor Adorno's work that in my view suggest how the historical transmutation of modernism into postmodernism might best be observed from a critical perspective that is simultaneously optimistic and suspicious. But even via this perspective postmodernism remains an unregulated and impossibly wide-ranging notion, with the questions of what constitutes a postmodern text and why nowhere near resolved. Reference to one final postmodern inventory, one with specific links to Adorno and modernism, will, I hope, confirm that these questions are in fact unanswerable, a finding that inevitably leads one to take a quite different approach to contemplating the postmodern text.

In his 1993 essay "Resisting Songs: Negative Dialectics in Pop," Terry Bloomfield attempts to bring Adorno into the postmodern age by correlating a number of specific popular music texts of the late 20th century with a resistant, anti-capitalist aesthetic sensibility. Bloomfield's discography (31) shows that those (circa 1990) artists who in his view consistently set out to undercut the traditional pop song form include Cocteau Twins, Cowboy Junkies, Curve, My Bloody Valentine, Sinéad O'Connor, Mary Margaret O'Hara, Slowdive and Throwing Muses.

Bloomfield's account is refreshing in that it is based upon the shrewd recognition of two circumstances. First, he understands that because the commodity form is today endemic at all levels of cultural engagement, any "enduring struggle" against monopoly capitalism must occur on capitalism's own grounds – on "the terrain of culture itself" (28).⁹⁵ Second, Bloomfield allows that the kind of subversive interventions called for by Adorno can and do occur in a musical form originally taken to be antithetical to modernist-type strategies such as dissonance and abstraction (28). Having decided that "the modernist work of art has repeatedly canonised itself into a blind alley," Bloomfield develops his own canonical list of ostensible pop songs that conform with the modernist trait of "oppositonality" (29). The

⁹⁴ Incorporated in this strategy has been the tendency to list by name those artists (such as Robert Rauschenberg and Philip Glass) whose entire output is considered postmodern.

⁹⁵ Frederic Jameson: "Every position on postmodernism in culture – whether apologia or stigmatisation – is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (1984, 55) [original italics].

argument here is that under the circumstances of systematic mass reproduction in ingrained capitalism, resistant music has essentially the same characteristic Adorno identified in the compositions of Schoenberg: an intrinsic awareness and questioning of the “contradictions of capitalist social relations” (19).

Be that as it may, it remains unspecified as to whether these texts and artists that supposedly echo modernist attitudes in the period after modernism (or at least beyond the pinnacle of the high modernism that Adorno championed) are in fact postmodern? One thing is certain: Bloomfield believes them to be of high quality. His list of artists and records follows those of Martin and (to a lesser extent) Hibbett in being closer to a private canon – a list of texts that he recognises to be amongst the best music of a period in postmodernism (if not emblematic of postmodernism per se). It is in no way certain, however, that these were necessarily the only or even the most notable artists negating traditional song form in the period in question (for instance, Martin would presumably argue for a Sonic Youth album like *Daydream Nation* [1988] to be included, and Bloomfield bypasses genres such as rap altogether). Nor is it clear that, under postmodernism, notions of oppositionality or intransigence are limited to the kind of essentially modernist negations that Bloomfield describes.⁹⁶ In the end, I am entirely sympathetic with his trying to destabilise or break away from the perpetual present of ingrained capitalism yet totally unconvinced as to whether putting forward a personal selection of textual examples is the best way to go about it.

If postmodern music is, in the words of Kramer (2002, 14) an “attitude,” then what I want to suggest here is that it is more properly a number of often contrasting attitudes. On the evidence of the discussion so far, such attitudes may be either radical or conservative, and may or may not embrace intertextuality, contradiction or whatever other strategies appear prevalent in a sufficiently wide range of contemporary musical texts. But in putting forward selections of texts that exemplify postmodernism generally, as Frow, Hassan, Jameson and

⁹⁶ Furthermore, Bloomfield’s assertion that moving from an independent to a major record label caused the Californian band X to “lose their intransigence” (28) concerns in that he appears to equate the aesthetically epiphenomenal issue of record labels with intransigence generally. I would argue that *the music* of X and countless other artists – such as Hüsker Dü, Nirvana and PJ Harvey – did not necessarily become any less uncompromising or subversive after such a move.

others do, or supposedly exemplify specific (innovative) directions in music in the postmodern period, as in the discussions of Martin, Hibbett and Bloomfield, critics leave themselves open to a very postmodern question: what has been left out? In the former case, the criteria for inclusion are too general (their lists implying that pretty well any text might have been included); in the latter, the criteria seem too specific (begging the question what constitutes innovative music). When combined with the sheer uncertainty surrounding definitions of postmodernism per se, it may well be concluded that there is in essence no such thing as a postmodern text because there is no way of unequivocally classifying a text as postmodern.

A universal postmodern ethos might (as Kramer comes close to suggesting) be better captured in terms of a general interpretive position: in music, not just a way of listening but also a process of *discovering*. Here it is possible to narrow Kramer's version of postmodernism down to a specific attitude combining optimism with suspicion and past with present, embracing certain postmodern features without denying that there are potentially many others. A sense of this attitude captured by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*, when he passes beyond Adorno's stalled utopian critical model (1984a, 13) to instead attack the capitalist hegemony from within by celebrating traits of heterogeneity, non-conformity and unpredictability. It is captured by Rorty in his *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, when he emphasises processes of "making rather than finding" (1989, 77) and "continual redescription" (80) in the individual (the person he calls an "ironist") who, beset by self-doubt, becomes open to a wide range of aesthetic and cultural possibilities as a result. And it is captured by Huyssen in his "Mapping the Postmodern," the image of a past and present "stored for instant recall in the computerised memory banks of our culture" (1984, 25-26) evoking a postmodern moment saturated with textual possibilities for the individual to explore and evaluate.

Each of these "access points" into an interpretive attitude highlights a supposed postmodern trait without in any way exhausting the remit of possible definitions of the term or necessarily even cementing its author into the canon of postmodern spokespersons.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Rorty, for instance, has been criticised for his postmodernism without ever having claimed association with the term.

Collectively, they highlight a general ethos that can lead the debate away from producers and texts toward a consideration of patterns of engagement and consumption amongst audience members, one that also does not continue to rely upon the opposition between elite and consumer culture.

This is not, however, a simple matter of stepping across from one side (text) to the other (interpretation). Still unexamined is the issue of how aesthetic value is attributed to certain texts, musical or otherwise, a process which historically has constrained the discourse surrounding audience activity. As such, there is a group of individuals – the critics – who, operating as a conduit between postmodern text and postmodern audience, are often authorised to speak for the majority in matters of ascertaining quality. In the following chapter, the focus shifts from the representative list to the (outwardly) more stable critical canon in an attempt to negotiate the bridge between text and audience that is criticism.

Chapter Three: Canon

I

A recurrent theme in the celebrated short stories of Jorge Luis Borges might be termed that of the infinite finite – evoking the conditions whereby ostensibly bounded concepts exceed human comprehension and order descends into chaos. It permeates such tales as “Funes the Memorious,” “The Book of Sand” and, perhaps most conspicuously, “The Library of Babel.” The library of the latter title is comprised of an orderly but impossibly vast number of hexagonal rooms, one atop the other, believed to contain the totality of all books (or, at least, *410 page* books). In the story, the joy that this understanding brings quickly becomes despair as patrons realise this definitive cache of human knowledge, in which there is “no personal or world problem whose eloquent solution [does] not exist,” is, for all intents and purposes, inaccessible:

thousands of the greedy abandoned their sweet naïve hexagons and rushed up the stairways, urged on by the vain intention of finding their Vindication. These pilgrims disputed in the narrow corridors, proffered dark curses, strangled each other on the divine stairways, flung the deceptive books into air shafts, met their death cast down in a similar fashion by the inhabitants of remote regions. Others went mad ... the Vindications exist (I have seen two which refer to persons of the future, to persons who perhaps are not imaginary) but the searchers did not remember that the possibility of a man’s finding his Vindication, or some treacherous variation thereof, can be computed as zero. (Borges 1970, 82)

“What the library needs,” notes John Sturrock, “is to be reduced” (1977, 103). But ultimately there is no known reduction, no catalogue, no index capable of rationalising or overcoming the disproportion between the enormity of the undertaking and the time that one human being has in which to comprehend and conquer its incessant passageways:

Perhaps my old age and fearfulness deceive me, but I suspect that the human species – the unique species – is about to be extinguished, but the Library will endure: illuminated, solitary,

infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret.
(Borges 1970, 85)

That certain books survive far beyond the individual human lifespan is also fundamental to the idea of the canon, that elusive but nonetheless inescapable catalogue of great books central to the preservation of the Western literary tradition. And the canon, like the Library of Babel, is indelibly linked to the notion of time. As those in Borges' tale seek to unlock the mysteries of the library before being launched into the shaft that will become their "grave [of] fathomless air," so those who would contribute to the formulation and preservation of the canon do so in the belief that there is limited time in which to encounter "the best that is known and thought in the world."⁹⁸

The literary canon further resembles the Library of Babel in that it is easy to envisage but difficult to define. Jan Gorak's extensive investigations into the matter lead him to the understanding that "no homogenising entity called 'the Canon' ever existed" (1991, ix). John Guillory's finding is that the canon is "never other than an imaginary list" (1991, 45). Colin MacCabe explains that on one level the canon lives on only in the form of an ongoing discussion as to what authors and texts should be excluded (1987, 5). Lawrence Levine believes that a canon is "composed not merely of subject matter but of attitudes toward and ways of approaching that subject matter" (1996, 76). It would appear at the outset that all efforts to debunk, contest or replace the catalogue of great authors and books result only in its existence being confirmed, yet equally all efforts to mark out and defend the canon down to the very last detail serve only to render it ever more nebulous.

In the preceding chapter, it was shown that a characteristic critical strategy in attempts to bring order to the bewildering array of cultural productions under postmodernism has been the representative list. Yet while it is one thing to define or organise a cultural epoch by

⁹⁸ These famous words hail from 19th century scholar Matthew Arnold. The extended quotation, from his essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," is characteristic of the canonical disposition as it centres around the notion of limited time: "I am bound by my own definition of criticism: a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world ... There is so much inviting us! – what are we to take? What will nourish us in growth towards perfection? That is the question which, with the immense field of life and literature lying before him, the critic has to answer; for himself first, and afterwards for others" (1962, 283-284).

way of an exemplary inventory, it is quite another to do so with the greater motive of attributing lasting value to the objects included. The Library of Babel is overrun by billions upon billions of books of indecipherable verse; the history of Western literature, while an infinitely lesser, more or less legible body of work, is in some ways equally daunting. Any effort to order or rank authors and texts would, on the face of it, appear a most reasonable endeavour if humanity is to avoid the despairing fate of those wandering endlessly amongst Borges' fictional volumes.

One thing is certain: to speak of critical practice is to consider matters of aesthetic judgment and standards of taste – there is no way that one can be set apart from the other. Despite Northrop Frye's best efforts to argue that literary criticism and the knowledge base upon which it is established should remain independent of subjective values, it is plainly evident that the selection of an object of study, and any subsequent critical analysis concerning it, are to some extent evaluative practices.⁹⁹ Evoking the canon leads to considerations of what is contained in, and what is absent from, this catalogue of necessary books, which must in turn lead to the question: whose judgment counts?

Though in the 21st century all art forms are besieged by prospective canons and counter-canons, with both professionals and laypersons queuing up to certify the aesthetic masterpieces of their particular field of interest, I have spoken thus far of a literary heritage. This is because scholarly theories on canon formation and the closely related matter of authorised syllabi in educational institutions have built up largely around debates in the discipline of English literature. In what follows, the issue of critical evaluations and approved canons in contemporary music will be entered via a consideration of the equivalent debate in literary circles.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Frye's claims to this effect are set out in the introduction to his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). A most erudite countering of this position can be found in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's essay "Contingencies of Value," wherein, after assessing Frye's argument, she concludes that "the structure of criticism cannot be so readily disengaged from the history of taste because they are mutually implicating and incorporating" (1984, 10). In a similar way, the tendency in cultural studies to bypass as irrelevant questions of quality arguably does not eradicate value judgements, rather only conceals them.

¹⁰⁰ It is surprising that comparisons to the literary canon have to date been of little interest to researchers focusing on music. For example, in the journal *Popular Music's* special issue on canons (2006: 25/1), there is barely any mention of the parallels between the two. By contrast, Edward Said

II

There are a number of reasons why canons have in recent decades been the subject of so much debate within the humanities. It is certainly true that in today's society there are simply so many more cultural products to classify and assess. It is also the case that discourses concerning the attribution of greatness have been popularised to the point where the mass media – books, newspapers and magazines, television and the internet – appears obsessed with such ordering manoeuvres. But above all, canonical practices in literary studies in particular have been reconsidered in terms of the alternative, often purportedly non-evaluative approaches of many prominent critics who bring the very existence of the canon into question and the response to this supposed politicisation of the issues by more traditional scholars and/or conservative spokespersons of various stripes.

The genesis of the former, essentially sociological approach to literary studies may be found in Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution*, where he questions the worth of political debate that perpetuates an unimpeachable divide between high and popular culture:

It is true that certain cultural forms have been used as a way of asserting social distinction, and that much wholesale condemnation of new forms has been a way of demonstrating the inferiority of those two groups who have regularly to be put in their (lower) place: the masses and the young. This habit has to be resisted, but there is an equal danger in a popular form of demagoguery which, by the use of selective examples, succeeds in avoiding the problem of bad culture altogether. (1961, 336)

From such quite profound beginnings – where Williams laments the wholesale condemnation of working class culture that goes hand in hand with the deification of elite art *and* foresees that a problematical strategy of popular canon-making might evolve in response – have derived reams of new historicist, poststructural, post-colonial and feminist

highlights the importance of considering connections between disciplines such as literature and music when he says that the “relationship between literature and certain types of music is a fascinating one. Those are the sorts of things I am interested in; not the extent to which one can isolate literature from everything else” (in Salusinszky 1987, 141).

writing¹⁰¹ that in one manner or another challenge the longstanding eminence of the so-called great tradition (especially as championed in the new criticism of F.R. Leavis and others). Since the late 1960s the highly political, by and large extra-aesthetic arguments of these various emerging traditions have encouraged a conservative backlash, one that seems to be gaining momentum in recent times.¹⁰² And the supposed waning status of the masterpieces of literature is always a prominent issue in such debates.

The conventional attitude to literary scholarship is embodied in Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994). In his book, Bloom sets out to both justify the existence of the canon generally and consecrate his personal version of it.¹⁰³ In doing so he lays out for the reader the principles (some would call them limitations) most valued by connoisseurs of the canonical disposition. First, Bloom contends that great literature "acquires all of humanity's disorders" (19), one of these being a desire for immortality that, according to Bloom, is present in any poem, book or play that continues to be read long after its author has passed on. This finding further leads him to dismiss any injection of ideology into literary debate and to insist that the great authors should be revered for their artistic innovations regardless of any perceived moral flaws (29). On this argument, for example, the works of Rudyard Kipling are not diminished in any way by the outdated colonial attitudes both the man and his writings are said to have espoused. It follows that the canon should not only not be read in the service of a particular ideology – neither should it be *constructed* with any such

¹⁰¹ Such methodologies regularly draw sustenance from the continental criticism of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and others, which brings into question the very idea that the analysis of literary forms can proceed as though the novel, poem or play somehow exists in a realm removed from day-to-day consciousness or experience (de Man 1983, 3-19).

¹⁰² Book-length examples of the extreme (but also extremely popular) face of this backlash include *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* by Allan Bloom (1987), *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and the American Decline* by Robert Bork (1997) and *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* by Roger Scruton (1998).

¹⁰³ The book concludes with a four-part canon (specific texts organised under the name of each author), beginning with what Bloom calls the Theocratic Age, and moving through the Aristocratic and Democratic ages to a final Chaotic Age (the 20th century). Apart from being one of the foremost advocates of the canonical disposition in the present age, Bloom is an interesting critic to focus upon because his work encapsulates what is for me the paradoxical nature of consecratory practice: though I am often repelled by the way in which he goes about justifying his own aesthetic principles while rejecting all others, I find myself simultaneously drawn to explore (or rediscover) those authors and texts he so passionately endorses.

ideology in mind. Thus for Bloom recent concerns that the great literature of the Western tradition is restricted to a catalogue of works by “dead white males” are misguided:

The idea that you benefit the insulted and injured by reading someone of their own origins rather than reading Shakespeare is one of the oddest illusions ever promoted by or in our schools. (522)

Second, the canon is unavoidably hierarchical. One who consults Bloom can but marvel at the incredible lengths to which his criticism goes – he challenges F.R. Leavis in this undertaking – in attempting to formulate a precise literary chain of command. At the very apex of this imaginary order stands Shakespeare, a position that is not only incontestable but eternal, as Bloom is certain his originality will never be surpassed (25; 50). Below him are myriad writers of varying aesthetic power, and Bloom weighs in to arguments concerning their canonical status with little hesitation. Thus *Nostramo* and *Emperor and Galilean* qualify for his Western canon, but *Heart of Darkness* and *A Doll's House* do not; Pulitzer Prize winners such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Rabbit is Rich* and *Beloved* are absent, as are Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich and others championed by what Bloom terms the “school of resentment.” Authors who do qualify take their place in a divine order that is incredibly exacting: Shakespeare is above Dante, who himself exceeds Chaucer (but only just); Whitman’s greatness nudges him ahead of Browning and Baudelaire; Faulkner (“*The Sound and the Fury* seems to me a lesser work than *Light in August*, or than *As I Lay Dying*, which is Faulkner’s masterwork” [1988, 5]) hovers over Hemmingway and Fitzgerald. And so it goes. Bloom’s approach to canonical exactitude – wholly immune to any extrinsic or contextual concerns – leaves little room for doubt as to what literature should be retained in our collective memory. And this is despite his own suspicion that his or any other reading list can be neither stable nor unifying (1994, 37).

Having bolstered the existing transcendent hierarchy with his own updated version, it is a natural progression for Bloom then to insist that a close and critical engagement with literature is not only a highly personal but also an unashamedly elitist occupation:

The strongest poetry is cognitively and imaginatively too difficult to be read deeply by more than a relative few of any social class, gender, race or ethnic origin. (520)

Questioned in court as to whether the majority of society met his definition of philistines or illiterates, Oscar Wilde replied: “I have found wonderful exceptions.”¹⁰⁴ One hundred years on Bloom takes a comparable (though less gloriously facetious) position in defence of a traditional scholarship overcome by the expanding ranks of sociological, feminist and multicultural criticism. Here, the ability to recognise aesthetic greatness is limited to those who are prepared to embrace (Bloom’s version of) greatness to the exclusion of all extra-aesthetic concerns; those, meanwhile, who are “amenable to a politicised curriculum ... can be abandoned to it” (17). Those to be abandoned, incidentally, include not only the common reader but also those leaders of high-cultural institutions responsible for implementing such a curriculum in the first place (Guillory 1995, 87-88).

Finally, *The Western Canon* is accorded its permanent place in history primarily because permanence is denied to us:

We possess the canon because we are mortal and also rather belated. There is only so much time, and time must have a stop, while there is more to read than there was ever before ... the Western Canon, despite the limitless idealism of those who would open it up, exists precisely in order to impose limits, to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political or moral. (Bloom 1994, 30; 35)

With his ample yet finely honed reading list of great books, Bloom has apparently succeeded where those in the Library of Babel were doomed to fail: *The Western Canon* reduces confusion to order and stands as the author’s version of one of Borges’ “Vindications.” In this its most distinct form, the canon is a tool with which to conquer time and reduce several centuries of literary endeavour to a closely-guarded catalogue of aesthetic eminence.

These four concerns – that great literature is not necessarily compatible with social liberation; that the canon is innately hierarchical; that it ratifies the divide between elite and lesser culture; that the bounds of time demand only the greatest writers transcend their own mortality – constitute the fortifications behind which those combating the cultural approach to literary scholarship have set their stall. “The Remaking of the Canon,” a panel debate

¹⁰⁴ *The Artist as Critic* (1968, 438); the quotation in question comes from Wilde’s obscenity trial of 1895.

transcribed in a 1991 issue of *Partisan Review*, consists largely of statements that give sustenance to this outlook (although the critics involved seem less inclined than Bloom to endorse firm grounds for the inclusion of specific authors or texts). In the discussion, both Cleanth Brooks and Gertrude Himmelfarb attack the politicisation of art as indicative of a descent into moral relativism. The speed of the descent, they believe, has been hastened by a cultural studies project that casts doubt upon the time-honoured methods of asserting aesthetic value and exhorts the rise of the reader to a position of authority equal to, if not exceeding, that of the author.¹⁰⁵ When a dissenting voice emerges in the debate – by way of David Thornburn, who makes the point that historically celebrated works have been consecrated by a “tiny group identifying a relatively tiny group of texts” – Himmelfarb responds to the effect that aesthetic merit is in no way beholden to matters of social equality (379). In other words, a largely patriarchal, white Anglo-Saxon canon is the result of the elevation of the most esteemed authors by the most esteemed judges: that both authors and judges have across time consisted almost exclusively of Caucasian men is seen as an altogether incidental disparity.¹⁰⁶

This disparity is made to appear even less relevant by the habitual tendency of traditional criticism to see the literary or art work as the sole subject of our attention and contemplation. To engage in the correct aesthetic approach to a work of art one should, according to Jerome Stolnitz, “follow the lead of the object and respond in concert with it” (1998, 81). The person interacting with the work must on this view suppress all extra-aesthetic concerns at the time of engagement. Although writing from within the Marxist tradition, the influential critic Herbert Marcuse (1978) provides support for Stolnitz’s position. For Marcuse, those taking a sociological or political stance against aesthetic determinacy make the mistake of disregarding the subversive potential of the art work itself. The aesthetic greatness of certain novels, poems and paintings resides, he says, in their *innate* ability to disrupt and ultimately transcend the very social relations under which they were created. Through

¹⁰⁵ This latter contention is the theme of Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” (in *Image, Music, Text* [1977]), perhaps the most infamous expression of doubt concerning notions of the author as transcendent genius.

¹⁰⁶ Fowler (1997, 143) provides the example that “historically, only four per cent of British canonised writers have been women.” In addition, Robinson makes the important observation that the exclusion of female authors is only part of the problem; it is inevitably exacerbated, she argues, by the consequent dominance in canonical literature of masculine ways of seeing and depicting women (1993, 213).

reference to Stolintz and Marcuse, it is easy to see how the lack of feminine and non-white representation in the agreed catalogue of great works of literature – a lack which is even more striking in classical music – can be sidestepped in the name of aesthetic value.

Gorak notes that the literary canon, in the recent efforts of Harold Bloom and others to defend it, combines two concepts. The first is the more general program of reinforcing Western cultural tradition with a tangible inventory of classic books. The second is the perpetuation of a standard curriculum to ensure that students continue to be exposed to the great authors of the past. He goes on to suggest that these combine to fortify the conservative strategy of declaring the great texts to be the “key to national unity and advancement,” which inevitably leads to the debate becoming even more political in character (1991, 253-254). The celebrity of books like *The Western Canon* and *The Closing of the American Mind* certainly shows that proponents of a universal, incontestable literary tradition, whilst often quick to stress their own exile in the face of “oncoming waves of multiculturalists” (Bloom 1994, 525), continue to possess considerable political and institutional clout. And, as the recent Australian version of the great books debate confirms, politicising the discussion continues to be the favoured response of those rallying against what they perceive as moves to politicise the canon.¹⁰⁷

Despite all this, it is patently not the case that all or even most of those alternative theories, grouped together by Bloom as the “school of resentment,” can simply be boiled down to a single movement to politicise literature and eschew quality for relativism. Amidst the general push toward a scholarly focus upon those authors and groups that have been habitually denied a voice in capital-L literature, there have been many considered arguments put forward contesting the make-up of the Western canon and the basis for canonical

¹⁰⁷ Though the great books debate continues in the academy it has been particularly heated in political circles and the mass media, revolving as it does around the supposed “dumbing down” of secondary education English syllabi across the country (for example, see: Callick 1995; Melleuish 2005; Pell 2005; Donnelly 2006). The final sentence of the latter, an opinion piece in *The Australian* newspaper, typifies the conservative response to this postmodern refurbishment of the canon: “As such, great literary works such as *Macbeth*, the poetry of Wordsworth and novels such as *Hard Times* are reduced to simply being one text among many and deconstructed as cultural artefacts” (26). Moreover, the authors in each example emphasise their point via a comparison, along similar lines to this by Callick, that (mis)represents the opposing view by depicting it in its most rudimentary form: “[Cultural studies] argue[s] that Shakespeare’s work has no intrinsically higher merit than slogans for deodorants” (19).

discourse. Here I want to consider briefly two critics – Lillian Robinson and Edward Said – who have made significant contributions in this regard.

In “Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon,” Robinson articulates what has become perhaps the greatest sticking point for those attempting to question the patriarchy and/or racial inequality undermining perceptions of Western literature. Referring to Nina Baym’s questioning of universal standards of aesthetic quality, she makes the following point:

Yet a commentator like Baym has only to say ‘it is time, perhaps ... to re-examine the grounds’ [of literary tradition], *while not proceeding to do so*, for feminists to be accused of wishing to throw out the entire received culture. (1993, 218) [original italics]

The defensive position that Bloom and others occupy raises a number of considerations, and here Robinson makes the most significant of these abundantly clear. It is evident that any approach that questions the make-up of the canon, or the very grounds for attributing status, is immediately seen as an attack upon traditional aesthetic values. Robinson realises this and also understands that any potential challenge, whether it, in feminist terms, involves casting doubt upon the received criteria for aesthetic quality *or* pushing for the inclusion of more female authors, will do little to alter the reality or structure of the canon per se. Ultimately, she advocates a reformative approach to the Western literary tradition that raises legitimate concerns about, without summarily dismissing, “even the most sexist literary classics” (223) and seeks to include issues of female authorship and female representation in the debate. What Robinson ultimately desires is the reconsideration of canonical discourse based upon diligent research and hard evidence, rather than simple gestures aimed at the consecration of more female writers. She and other commentators are not trying to argue for the aesthetic *devaluation* of a *Hamlet* or a *Moby Dick*. More accurately, theirs is a call to reinvigorate canonical practice by considering these and other (mostly ignored) literary creations “in *all* their human dimensions” (223) [my italics].

The criticism of Edward Said, while mostly informed by a different history of inequality (imperialism), is underpinned by a similar concern to avoid simple answers to complex

questions on canonicity. Said disputes the isolationism of critical meta-narratives that somehow elevate literature to a rarefied consciousness untainted by routine social practice. In *Beginnings*, he explains how the sequential narrative of the traditional discourse of letters has become jaded because both history and tradition (and, consequently, critical approaches to these) can no longer be thought out in terms of a simple, forward-moving linearity (1975, 3-17). In the subsequent *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Said reiterates the point that the Western canon and the systems of learning that have been constructed around it can be seen to represent “only a fraction of the real human relationships and interactions now taking place in the world” (1983, 21). As such, approaches to literary criticism that privilege one or another reading method can no longer be sustained.

Like Robinson, Said believes that confronting literary tradition armed with an alternative grand narrative of reform, or with a view to replacing one set of transcendent texts with another, is wrongheaded. He finds that the cloistered, self-perpetuating academic rituals endemic to all levels of the canon debate are too often divorced from, and therefore of little relevance to, the complex society that is constantly evolving around them. For Said, criticism should in response move beyond mere (though not irrelevant) questions of literary quality. This can occur, Gorak suggests, by way of a series of interventions juxtaposing “climactic episodes and polemically reconstructed fragments” (1991, 189) through which not competing, but rather complementary, historical and social associations are made. Using this methodology, one that has close associations with Walter Benjamin’s work in the 1930s, the critic may be able to destabilise the canon and connect literature to all manner of potential interpretations and subversions.

Implicit in the arguments of Robinson and Said is the idea that the problem with canonical practice centres on exclusions instead of inclusions. Neither is about to denounce out of hand the core of the Western literary tradition. Their alternative strategy is to open up the dialogue surrounding the great authors and texts, to highlight the limitations of received aesthetic standards, and potentially to make room (whether by expanding the canon or to some extent collapsing it) for voices until now occluded or ignored. In light of this, a book like *The Western Canon* need not be dismissed outright. The in-depth knowledge of literature and literary forms Bloom possesses is the very foundation of connoisseurship in

any field, and only the most cynical reader would fail to discover new delights in his vast catalogue of valuable texts.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the drawbacks of his archetypal formalism are inescapable – Bloom’s refusal to tolerate any alternative method of assessing literary value despite the overwhelming evidence of gender, race and class bias in the traditional hierarchy, coupled with the rigidity of the order he constructs (most notably at the centre of the canon),¹⁰⁹ serves only to stifle debate before it can even begin.

To believe that discussing literature in terms of contingences or contexts somehow trivialises the enterprise is, I would argue, wrongly to assume that aesthetic judgment necessarily becomes somehow redundant as a result. In other words, Bloom and others take the argument against cultural studies to the opposite extreme by denying *entirely* the significance of extra-aesthetic matters. Furthermore, to assert steadfastly that there is only one criterion for ongoing relevance in literature (one’s *own* criterion, aesthetic or otherwise), or to regulate literary worth on the basis of collective opinion without asking how that opinion has been vested with authority in the first place, is to naively cordon off criticism from everyday life. On the first of these points, Wilson Moses makes a sound argument for the benefits of a pluralist critical methodology:

The contextualising of poetry does not denude it of meaning; on the contrary, it adds layers of complexity and irony, and ambiguity to the meaning with which an active mind may endow it.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Richard Rorty’s “ironists,” whose philosophical position would on the face of it seem antithetical to critics such as Bloom, nonetheless read them “simply because such critics have an exceptionally large range of acquaintance” (1989, 80).

¹⁰⁹ “Shakespeare remains the most original writer we will ever know” (1994, 25). Here and elsewhere Bloom, whose theory of the anxiety of influence finds later writers striving to create something original in the shadows of their precursors, shuffles greatness further and further back in time and implies that today’s authors are more or less fated to merely emulate their counterparts of previous epochs. Consequently, he balks at admitting their works into his canon for fear that they will turn out to be “period pieces,” though for all that Bloom is at least ready to discuss critically and assess modern writers. In “The Remaking of the Canon” (1991, 364) Himmelfarb, following Lionel Trilling, makes the quite astonishing declaration that, in the absence of a historically inscribed body of collective evaluation, “contemporary literature should not be taught in schools and universities.” Canon formation has an inherent nostalgia, and the process of updating syllabi and creating space for newer texts – a process that simultaneously opens up and reaffirms the existing hierarchy (Guillory 1991) – is often resisted by academics, politicians and commentators who associate postmodern society with a decline in aesthetic standards.

¹¹⁰ In “The Remaking of the Canon” (Panel Discussion: *Partisan Review* [1991, 372]).

On the second, the following statement by Colin MacCabe is illuminating:

How far does it continue to make sense to talk of a national culture in an era which sees a growing internationalisation and localisation of cultural production? And a further theoretical question: is it possible to construct a shared culture on differences rather than identities? Once these very important questions are properly couched, it is a difficult but perfectly feasible task to construct the appropriate syllabi. (1987, 8)

Moses (who demonstrates that it is possible to embrace, interrogate and renew received history all at the same time) and MacCabe (who goes on to suggest that a modern reading list might consist of “a tradition of classics as well as a variety of contemporary media and would include the possibility of local variation [8]) point toward a future for literary studies (and any associated concept of a literary canon) that gives voice to multiple traditions. As with Robinson and Said, theirs is a vision for which exclusive claims to canonical governance on behalf of any single critical position make little sense.

Despite the persistence of such arguments, it is worth asking whether a great deal is changing in terms of what authors and books are being revered in the 21st century – whether such approaches to evaluating literature have had any noticeable effect upon long-established practices of canon formation. Using the most easily-demonstrable measuring stick available – that is, whether female and non-white authors are more prominent in contemporary practices of literary consecration – there is evidence to suggest that any disruption to the traditional standard by which aesthetic greatness is endowed is yet to have widespread effect. Barry Oakley’s choice of the 40 great writers of the 20th century (1999) includes only two female (Virginia Woolf and Anna Akhmatova) and one non-white (Chinua Achebe) authors. Beyond the almost universally recognised upper reaches of his list (Proust, Joyce, Kafka, James and Lawrence) it becomes difficult, for example, to conceive of any specific criteria by which Oakley involves Arthur Miller, John Updike, Gunter Grass and Malcolm Lowry but not Eudora Welty, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood or Iris Murdoch. Elsewhere, *The New York Times Book Review* recently asked over 100 judges to vote for the best work of American fiction published in the past 25 years.¹¹¹ Of the

¹¹¹ “In Search of the Best” (21 May 2006, 17-19).

22 novels that received multiple votes only two were written by female (Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*) and two by non-white (*Beloved* and Edward P. Jones' *The Known World*) authors. Evidently literature's core canon remains astonishingly resilient, astonishingly white and astonishingly patriarchal despite the important questions that have more recently been asked of it. What is more, the mere continued existence of critical orders of this kind indicates that the Western tradition has not been greatly altered by the rise of non-traditional critiques in the postmodern period.

III

There is to be found in music a comparable urge toward canon formation – determined attempts to exercise control over a compositional output that has in recent times challenged the Library of Babel for sheer immensity. A previously omnipotent classical tradition having long since been destabilised by a plethora of competing versions, it seems that the pop-rock canon, if only by dint of the extent of the discourse it generates, now holds sway as the supreme measure of musical achievement in the new century.¹¹² This contrasts greatly with the situation in literature, where critics like Harold Bloom preside over a traditional canon that for the most part retains its authority over popular forms. Regardless of what Robinson, Said and others have done to challenge assumptions of literary greatness in their attempts to augment or deconstruct the accepted canon, there is no real evidence of an alternative or popular version rising up to challenge it. On the same note, no matter how many people are reading authors like Stephen King and J.K. Rowling, few seem overtly concerned with asserting that their works stand alongside those of Dickens and Woolf as aesthetic peaks in the history of literature.¹¹³ In music, however, scholarly attempts to restate the ascendancy of art music over other forms are now less common, with only a relative few maintaining that such a distinction is necessary and valid. Instead, the

¹¹² I will be using Regev's (2002) term pop-rock to broadly define a field that is, in truth, a confused amalgam of a number of contested terms, including rock, rock and roll, pop and (favoured in academic circles) popular music. As we shall shortly see, the pop-rock descriptor (with an emphasis on rock as the supposed "authentic" or canonical form of non-art music) is able to admit pretty well any genre or example of music when critical consensus allows.

¹¹³ Peter Goodall makes the important point that the "real chasm between cultures" came about in the 20th century (1995, 15-16), and that comparing Dickens and Eliot (his example) is something altogether different from comparing, say, King and J.M. Coetzee in the present age.

concerted efforts of a specific group of (mostly) men associated with legitimating the pop-rock tradition holds centre stage, and as such the deification of certain pop-rock records, artists and styles continues to be taken seriously both within the academy and beyond.¹¹⁴

Some further contrasts between the pop-rock and literary traditions are immediately evident. While the latter is more or less wholly a construct of academic debate, the pop-rock canon, so far as it can be clearly defined, is shaped almost exclusively by journalists, critics and artists operating in a space somewhere between the academy and the everyday music consumer. This may well be explained by the simple fact that the journalist-critics got there first in treating the music as an art form worthy of serious discussion. However, it is also true that the move to involve popular texts in academic debate has coincided with the fostering of an environment in which many academics have called into dispute the very idea of cultural quality (Schrøeder 1992, 201). In general, any scholarly attempts to formalise the field of inquiry in pop-rock music – to evoke a canon of great works worthy of closer study – have either replicated the basic list already in place or tended toward the sanctification of a select few artists or styles thought to have been unjustly overlooked.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the contents of the Western literary canon are mostly inferred from a long history of broader critical debates and from the setting of curricula (Bloom's *Western Canon* being no more than a subsequent effort to synthesise these). Indeed, many consider the formal organisation of a list of worthwhile masterpieces unnecessary if not, as in Cleanth Brooks' estimation, "nonsense;"¹¹⁶ even those who deign to create such lists acknowledge the depth of this sentiment.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, the more recent pop-rock canon has always been articulated by way of ordered lists and critical polls that reinforce the status of specific texts. Yet despite all this, the literary and pop-rock canons are in the end analogous in that both

¹¹⁴ At the outset of this discussion, it is worth flagging the irony inherent in processes of canonisation/legitimation that have built up around a body of music commonly thought to be characterised by a certain *illegitimacy*, as well as a specifically anti-establishment disposition.

¹¹⁵ The abundance of laudatory musicological studies of progressive rock groups such as Yes and Emerson, Lake and Palmer constitute a prime example of the latter phenomenon.

¹¹⁶ In "The Remaking of the Canon" (1991, 384).

¹¹⁷ In his introduction to *New York Times Book Review's* "In Search of the Best" edition, A.O. Scott admits that seeking formally to recognise the greatest American books of the past 25 years risks "feeding the deplorable modern mania for ranking, list-making and fabricated competition," something that might "distract from the serious business of literature [or] worse subject it to damaging trivialisation" (2006, 18). Of course, such misgivings did not stop the project being undertaken anyway.

amount to a nostalgic, patriarchal, first world standard enforced by a small minority of authorised gatekeepers.

So far as the pop-rock canon is concerned, this can be confirmed through the example of *Rolling Stone* magazine's "500 Greatest Albums of All Time" issue (first published in 2004).¹¹⁸ At the outset, it will be noted that one such version of the pop-rock canon is for the most part sufficient to account for virtually all of them. Comparing the 30 highest-ranked albums in the RS 500, it can be seen that 16 of these also appear in the top 30 of *Acclaimed Music*'s "The All Time Top 2000 Albums" [2005] (a web-site that compiles a constantly evolving meta-list of published canons). Moreover, 16 of the top 30 in the RS 500 are to be found in the top 30 of the meta-list of Von Appen and Doehring [2006] (which combines a number of lists including the RS 500). The canonical discourse reflects a strong consensus across various examples, particularly toward the top of the order where consecration is permanently secured (Von Appen and Doehring 2006, 22-24).¹¹⁹ Thus while critic Ann Powers may claim that the pop-rock canon is "exploding" (1999, 1), as with the literary version nothing could be further from the truth – the hierarchy of greatness is set in solid foundations and virtually impregnable to change.

The supposed canonical pre-eminence of the RS 500 is implied in the editorial board's collective explanation of how they went about constructing the list. *Rolling Stone* employed the twin devices of enlisting only "expert" opinions and involving the Ernst and Young accounting firm as an independent monitor (the organisers no doubt cognisant of the allegation, discussed in Draper [1990, 351] that *Rolling Stone* chief editor Jann Wenner

¹¹⁸ Henceforth referred to as the RS 500.

¹¹⁹ The record album – from vinyl LP to compact disc – has been the focus of the pop-rock canon since its inception (Richey & Dettmar 2002, 170; Regev 2002, 254), a circumstance that the MP3 is yet to significantly alter. Furthermore, critical consecration in pop-rock music is, in reality, the consecration of specific albums, not artists. For instance, the output of the Rolling Stones in the 30-plus years since *Exile on Main Street* (1972) is not treated with anywhere near the same reverence as their material up to and including that point, while to speak of Bob Dylan's canonical works is to refer to only a small portion of his catalogue (essentially several mid-1960s records plus *Blood on the Tracks* [1975]).

personally altered a similar poll held in 1987).¹²⁰ As a result, its creators are impelled to make the following statement:

Look no further: between these covers is the ultimate rock and roll library chosen by a blue-ribbon jury of experts and the sort of fans that practice what they preach: the singers, songwriters, musicians, producers, managers and critics who have shaped the rock and roll world from its start and are on its leading edge today. The five hundred albums represent the absolute finest in popular music selected by the best in the business. (Levy 2005)

This claim – taken from the inside dust jacket of the subsequent book version of the poll – elaborates on that made in the February 2004 (Australian) edition of the magazine, where the list originally appeared. There, the editors refer to the “singers, songwriters, musicians, producers, label executives, artist managers, historians and critics” polled for the exercise as “a five-star electorate of experts and *true* fans,” and to their subsequent canon as “crucial to the history of rock and roll” (“Inside the RS 500”, 8) [my italics]. In both cases, such didacticism serves to maximise the corporately sanctioned authority of those who “practice what they preach” while simultaneously devaluing all other potential interpretations. Critics are collectively positioned not as helpful guides but rather as the ideal audience – ensconced in the music business yet somehow apart from it – whose knowledgeably arranged order of merit does most of the prospective listener’s work for them. This has the effect of raising aesthetic valuation in pop-rock music to a higher plane, beyond the reach of the everyday audience member.¹²¹ Though in truth a musical version of the omnibus anthology – essentially a fragment of an even larger list that remains indeterminate (Guillory 1991, 45) –

¹²⁰ Whilst there is always the possibility of manipulation occurring in purportedly democratic surveys conducted by organisations with one eye fixed firmly upon sales figures and advertising revenue, meta-lists like that of Von Appen and Doehring suggest that any such manipulations have had no effect upon the standard make-up of the pop-rock canon. Otherwise, it is revealing that “Inside the RS 500” places so much emphasis upon the involvement of musicians and “behind-the-scenes figures” (producers, session musicians and industry heavyweights like David Geffen and Warner Brothers CEO Roger Aims), whereas the full list of voters (revealed on page 75 of the RS 500 Australian edition) reveals that the majority are in fact journalist-critics.

¹²¹ Given this, reader polls not surprisingly reinforce the core pop-rock canon, as the results of *Rolling Stone’s* 2002 survey (“The Readers’ 100”) show. Eleven of the first 30 albums in this list appear in the first 30 of the subsequent critics’ poll, including 6 of the top 10 (the same four Beatles records made the top 6 of both polls). The main discrepancy between the two is that newer bands and customary fan favourites such as Weezer (2 albums), Radiohead (3 albums) and U2 (3 albums) are dominant at the high end of the reader poll.

the RS 500 functions to convincingly minimise the authentic status of those artists and records that did not make the cut.

If the RS 500 equates to the “official” history of pop-rock music¹²² (and, given the agreement between it and other similar lists, it is difficult to argue otherwise), then the true nature of the pop-rock canon becomes clear to all. To begin with, there is a nostalgic bent amongst critics who balk at making room for newer works in the canon (in this specific case, the calculations have been performed by Schmutz):

The median age of the 500 albums on *Rolling Stone*’s list is 28 years, and among the top 100 albums on the list, none were originally recorded fewer than ten years ago and only eight were originally recorded fewer than 20 years ago. (2005, 1515)

As with Harold Bloom’s literary tradition, the primacy of influence makes greatness something the modern artist may aspire to, even (rarely) achieve; but never to a level where they escape from the shadows of their most illustrious canonical predecessors. In pop-rock it is the Beatles who (like Shakespeare) set standards that even the best of those following in their wake will supposedly never quite be able to match. Von Appen and Doehring’s study of the pop-rock canon, for example, finds that in the 21st century the classic status of the Beatles has “not only been maintained, but has become even more evident” (2006, 23). In their meta-list, compiled from 38 separate ranking projects, Beatles albums occupy the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 6th positions. Circa these four records – *Revolver*, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *The White Album* and *Abbey Road*, all associated with the band’s retirement from touring and engagement with avant-garde and found sounds and Indian music – the

¹²² In keeping with the commonplace understanding that rock is somehow authentic while pop is more disposable, the RS 500 is a rock canon that incidentally involves pop. Although few records – none by the Beatles, for instance – could be decisively housed under one or the other of those fuzzy categories, nevertheless the only albums toward the top of the poll that most would definitively regard as more pop than rock are *Thriller* by Michael Jackson and perhaps *Pet Sounds* by the Beach Boys. That in reality not even the creators of the RS 500 know what rock, or popular music, or rock and roll actually stand for is made evident in the way the rock grand narrative sucks up certain specific records from seemingly disparate genres, enshrining them within the pop-rock canon until their presence there seems perfectly natural – that is, they become “rock” (for example, the RS 500 includes Miles Davis’ *Kind of Blue*, Hank Williams’ *40 Greatest Hits* and *The Anthology of American Folk Music*). This circumstance seems to parallel with Lawrence Grossberg’s belief that “there are no musical limits on what can or cannot be rock” (1992, 131).

Beatles are seen to have been in effect discovering the sound that would become pop-rock music, much as in literature it is said that Shakespeare discovered new ways to use language. That more recent music purportedly must stand the test of time before a group consensus is reached as to its lasting quality only shores up the durability of the core list in which the Beatles are so prominent.

The composer/performer demographic of the RS 500 reveals more disturbing trends. That the pop-rock canon is a patriarchal affair is hardly breaking news (McLeod 2001; Johnson-Grau 2002) – this version only serves to strongly confirm that circumstance. Of the first 80 albums in the RS 500, three (Joni Mitchell's *Blue*, Carole King's *Tapestry* and Patti Smith's *Horses*) are primarily the endeavours of a female performer, with only three others (*The Velvet Underground and Nico*, *Rumours* by Fleetwood Mac and Phil Spector's *Back to Mono*) featuring any kind of sustained female presence.¹²³ African-American artists are, not surprisingly given the pedigree of pop-rock music, reasonably visible in the upper reaches of the hierarchy (eight in the top 30) and throughout the survey. However, the myopic, first world focus of the critics polled is a lot harder to comprehend. In the entire ranking, there is incredibly not one album that hails from beyond the Western European-North American axis.¹²⁴ Considering the cachet that so-called world music has accumulated in pop-rock circles over the past two decades, as well as the many influential musicians emerging out of Australia and New Zealand over the same period, this is a most troubling statistic.

Though constructed in very different circumstances and with an entirely different cultural agenda in mind, the pop-rock canon, epitomised in the RS 500, reflects its literary equivalent

¹²³ Of course, the patriarchy runs deeper than mere representation as artists: consider the idea that the canonised Aretha Franklin would not be there at all if it were not for the musicianship and song-writing of men (Johnson-Grau 2002). And following on from the point Robinson makes with regard to literature (1993, 213), it goes without saying that many consecrated songs by males *about women* are ideologically steeped in gender stereotypes, if not outright misogyny.

¹²⁴ Discounting reggae (a genre long since co-opted into the grand narrative of Anglo-American rock) the closest any record comes to troubling this extreme first world bias is probably Cuba's *Buena Vista Social Club* (organised and produced, of course, by the American Ry Cooder). Otherwise, Paul Simon's *Graceland* and the bizarrely-included Stan Getz record *Getz/Gilberto* feature major input from South African and Brazilian artists respectively. And all of this is despite the fact that many African, Asian and South American artists clearly qualify for inclusion in the pop-rock canon, as evidenced by their persistent citing in general reference books (such as the 4th edition of *The New Rolling Stone Album Guide* [Brackett & Hoard 2004], which features entries on the likes of King Sunny Adé, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Caetano Veloso).

in a number of ways. It is firmly hierarchical, inherently nostalgic, distressingly patriarchal, not by any stretch of the imagination international, and, finally, the province of an elite minority of powerful connoisseurs.¹²⁵ The RS 500 provides a streamlined version of pop-rock history, one which barely hints at the potential diversity of that almost limitless field of musical endeavour.

As with the chronicle of Western literature, the massive increase in recorded music over the forty years since the pop-rock canon first took shape evokes the question of mortality. Regardless of what prejudices are at play in acts of cultural consecration, the critical ranking process functions to ascribe value to specific works which are subsequently installed into the collective memory of the greater public. A conundrum of Library of Babel-sized proportions is resolved through a reductive system of canon formation, and the coterie of mostly male critics who make this possible are, like the mysterious librarian who located the compendium of all books, “analogous to a God” (Borges 1970, 83). There is, they are saying to us, so much music yet so little time: this is what is most worthy of your attention.

Before going on to consider a possible antidote to current practices of consecration, it may be instructive to look beyond this shared process of attributing greatness by contemplating more closely the solitary voice of the critic. We have thus far seen that the authorised history of a cultural practice is always written and maintained by a handful of powerful individuals. In the case of the literary canon, these people are chiefly academic scholars, although teachers and others involved in constructing reading lists, and even political and media commentators with access to a broad audience, may wield secondary influence in terms of wider curriculum reform. For the contemporary pop-rock canon the process is even more refined, with consecration mostly overseen by an elite group of journalists and critics, some of whom traverse the border regions between journalistic and academic criticism. Historically, a close-knit fraternity of American writers – including Robert Christgau, Lillian Roxon, Dave Marsh, Greil Marcus, Ellen Willis and Lester Bangs – has been credited with

¹²⁵ The comparative process of canonisation in art music can also be compared here, particularly as far as the involvement of women is concerned: see *Classical Music: The Rough Guide* (Stains & Buckley 1998) for evidence of the scarcity of consecrated female composers, though this is perhaps less a consequence of editorial selection than the almost complete absence of female composers per se prior to the mid-20th century.

making popular music criticism a legitimate activity.¹²⁶ Does the work of these and other influential critics, when viewed in isolation, tend to reinforce or upend the hierarchical, retrograde, patriarchal, Anglo-American pop-rock canon?

As far as a divine order in contemporary music goes, the fact that different critics not surprisingly put together their own (slightly) modified canons has little impact on the universal hierarchy: Von Appen and Doehring's findings support this. What seems more interesting is that critics are not only so enamoured of attributing greatness, but in doing so in a very precise, pyramidal fashion. The ordered list may be fun to do and easy to make, as Marcus, who swears by them, claims (2003, 17), but it also ensures that the artist or text anointed – à la Bloom's Shakespeare – as the "greatest" gets to peer down like a deity from the top of the pile. Outside of the communal pop-rock canon (or each near-identical version of it, in which *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper's* forever jostle for supremacy), critics strive to raise one cherished record above all others: their "desert island record." An early version of this phenomenon is the book *Stranded* (1996) [edited by Marcus; first published in 1979], in which Marsh, Christgau, Willis, Bangs and sixteen others divulge the one album they would most like to accompany them to a desert island. Although perhaps not intended as a charge toward absolute consecration (Marcus says that the concept provided people with a rare format in which to write in an uninhibited fashion on the subject of their doting [xv]), *Stranded* nonetheless stands as the embodiment of canonical precision in modern music and a classic exemplar (and vindication) of the kind of US-based rock criticism that fortifies the pop-rock canon in the first place. After all, the book is celebrated as a source document in the history of the pop-rock tradition, constructed by those believed to have both recorded and contributed to that history – the blurb on the back cover of the 1996 edition asserts that the authors within hold "the original squatters' rights to rock and roll." And Marcus fills in

¹²⁶ It is those and other American journalist-critics (though Roxon was born in Italy and raised in Australia) who have been at the coalface of canonical practices in Western pop and rock, despite the fact that the major British publications in the field – *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker* – commenced prior to the rock era. The failure of many prominent new music magazines in the UK and Australia (*Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, *Rock Australia Magazine*, *Juice*), seems only to have strengthened the authority of US publications such as *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*. The internet does now host many different critical forums, however the major ones (*Pitchfork*, *All Music Guide*) for the most part mirror the traditions and strategies of their print cousins. Finally, it remains unfortunately true that the most heard voices in pop-rock criticism (despite the role that Roxon and Willis played in its development in the US) continue to be male ones (McLeod 2001).

all of the historical gaps by ending the book with an annotated discography that gives “everyone who’s rightly earned it a place in the romance” (xxii). Ever since, most music critics compare to Harold Bloom in their dedication to construct a top-down individual hierarchy that differs from, yet at the same time reinforces, the meta-canon the RS 500 so lovingly upholds.¹²⁷

Next, it seems incongruous that pop-rock criticism, supposedly directed toward an innovative, vibrant, ever-evolving field of musical endeavour, is so backward-looking in its avowals of sanctification. This nostalgia has in no small part been supported by the rhetoric of baby-boomer fans and scholars disillusioned by the collapse of the classic rock hegemony in the late-1970s. The example of the RS 500 shows that for various reasons official consecration is most likely to be retrospective no matter what contemporary critical reception an album receives. *Nevermind* (1991) by Nirvana and *OK Computer* (1997) by Radiohead are, as the meta-list in Von Appen and Doehring confirms, rare latter-day examples of an almost instant canonical acceptance.¹²⁸ It may also be that the general decline in the standards of pop-rock criticism over recent years – a combination of

¹²⁷ The desert island question remains at the forefront of discussions on all kinds of music. *Stranded* was reissued in 2007 in concert with a follow-up/homage version edited by Phil Freeman (*Marooned: The Next Generation of Desert Island Discs*), *Meanjin* journal’s 2006 special issue on rock and roll features an essay on the topic by novelist Christos Tsiolkas, and the BBC Radio program *Desert Island Discs*, where selected guests confront the question, has been in production since the 1940s.

¹²⁸ *Rolling Stone* did not initially admit *Nevermind* and *OK Computer* into the canon by way of their shorthand system of consecration (the 5-star rating). The magazine gave them 3 and 4 stars respectively, with its 1991 review of *Nevermind* (by Ira Robbins) a particularly dismissive one. An organisation like *Rolling Stone* is in fact constantly able to re-evaluate and rewrite their own version of pop-rock history in line with wider canonical trends. Schmutz (2005) shows how consecration in the RS 500 is six times more likely on the back of an earlier 5-star rating in Marsh and Swenson’s 1983 3rd edition *New Rolling Stone Record Guide*. What he does not go on to say is that the 4th edition *New Rolling Stone Album Guide* revisits with 5-star ratings virtually all albums in the upper reaches of the RS 500 poll which did *not* receive 5-stars in 1983 (for example, the Rolling Stones’ *Exile on Main Street* and *Let it Bleed* [both received 4 stars in 1983], Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* [4 stars], Fleetwood Mac’s *Rumours* [4 stars], David Bowie’s *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* [3 stars], the debut albums by Led Zeppelin and Ramones [4 stars] and *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols* [4 stars]). The same is true for many, initially even less well received albums from lower down the list: Television’s *Marquee Moon*, Neil Young’s *Comes a Time*, Grateful Dead’s *American Beauty*, Black Sabbath’s *Paranoid* and *Wild Gift* by X went from being 1 or 2-star irrelevancies in 1983, via inclusion in the RS 500, to 5-star classics in the 2004 edition. Meanwhile, important artists surely deserving of assessment or reassessment (Soft Machine, Anne Briggs, Radio Birdman, Ed Kuepper, the Clean, Died Pretty, Not Drowning Waving, Slowdive, Rachid Taha, Low and many others) fare worse in having been completely erased from *Rolling Stone*’s version of pop-rock history, not even rating an entry in the 2004 guide.

widespread banality of content (Dell'Antonio 1999, 70; Nelson 2002), blurred distinctions between criticism and advocacy in all forms of cultural commentary (Morris 1988, 115; Frith 2002) and a general lack of editorial respect in the contemporary media for the art of reviewing (Draper 1990, 348-349; Rose 2005, 31-32) – is a factor in encouraging a nostalgic outlook. Yet *individually*, even many of the pop-rock critics who came to prominence decades ago do spend a lot of their time searching for new examples of canonical work and can be seen to have made important contributions to the dialogue surrounding new music post the 1970s.

It is when the twin evils of a male and Anglo-American dominated pop-rock history are considered that the worth of the solitary critic becomes most apparent. Robert Christgau, for instance, in an extensive and widely-read Consumer Guide that has been in production since the late 1960s, has recommended for consecration works by a great number of artists from social and ethnic groups otherwise marginalised by conventional pop-rock narratives. Female musicians who have consistently appeared in Christgau's end-of-year best albums lists include Laurie Anderson, Lucinda Williams, Kathleen Hanna, Amy Rigby, Sleater-Kinney, PJ Harvey, Northern State and Oumou Sangare. Moreover, Christgau has at least scratched the surface of the enormous wealth of music existing outside of Britain and the United States (something he began doing long before world music became a fashionable commodity), consecrating artists like King Sunny Adé (Nigeria), Tom Zé (Brazil) and Ástor Piazzola (Argentina) and rating numerous compilations such as *Africa Dances* (1973), *Phases of the Moon: Traditional Chinese Music* (1981), *The Indestructible Beat of Soweto* (1986), *Tougher Than Tough: The Story of Jamaican Music* (1993) and *The Rough Guide to the Music of the Sahara* (2005) amongst the very best albums of their particular year. However, as the RS 500 proves, virtually none of the music acclaimed by Christgau (and co-opted by himself and others into the pop-rock grand narrative) has gone on to be recognised within wider canonical discussions. All value-based discourse is bound up in the eternal processes of commodification that define the pop-rock industry, the patriarchal, Anglo-American, backward-looking basis of which is unlikely to be disrupted by the predilections of any particular voice operating within it.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ This is not to deny that individual critics tend to parade generic prejudices (usually) of a generational nature. For instance, Christgau – despite Dettmar's claim that he "must be nearly alone

So though it can be seen that in pop-rock music there are often valuable insights to be found in the personal narratives of the authorised critic, these do not translate well into the formal canon these critics have as a group helped to construct. In investigating the history of connoisseurship in rock music as a gendered discourse, Kembrew McLeod (2001) shows how the collective consequences of critical evaluations are far more powerful than any individual voice. It is that persistent dialogue *amongst* critics that leads to determinations of musical authenticity and aesthetic value and, most importantly, has a major impact upon how notions of audience are constructed in the literature. In her influential 1991 book *Desperately Seeking the Audience*, Ien Ang makes the observation that “the streamlined ‘television audience’ exists only in discursive form: it is nothing more than a statistical construct, which does not reflect a pre-existent, real entity, but evokes it” (94). Over fifteen years later, the modern music audience, as with television, remains just as amorphous a concept. I want to suggest here that the collective interpretations of those relative few Simon Frith refers to as the “opinion leaders” and “ideological gatekeepers” in contemporary music (McLeod 2001, 47) too often lead to the assumed presence of a wider community that is, in truth, no more than a discursive concept. As such, McLeod’s belief that critics “articulate the ideas held by the population of which they are a part” (47), or Regev’s claim that the core pop-rock canon is a key marker of “the tastes of popular music consumers” (2002, 254), imply a nexus between critic and audience that cannot actually be proven. Both statements are part of a widespread tendency to overlook the circularity of an arrangement in which the critical discourse is assumed to be a reflection of general listening preferences and vice versa. The truth of the matter is that the very concept of criticism in modern-day music, exemplified by the practices of consecration discussed here, relies upon a series of enduring suppositions that must now be called into question.

in having kept faith with the [pop-rock] music he grew up with, demonstrating an admirable willingness to change as the music changed” (2006, 109) – defends the rock tradition that feeds him by consistently expressing disdain for artists in any way associated with a post-rock aesthetic (his reviews of albums by Mogwai [2000, 208-209] and Tortoise [311] being evidence of this).

IV

But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiass'd, or by favour, or by spite,
Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right;
Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;
Modestly bold, and humanly severe?
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
Bles'd with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
A knowledge both of books and human-kind;
Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
And love to praise, with reason on his side? (Pope 1951, 402)

Almost 300 years on from his “An Essay on Criticism,” Alexander Pope’s exaltation of such necessary critical faculties as knowledge, reason, humility and impartiality would not likely be called into question. His learned and well-bred man of exacting taste and with reason on his side is, however, a more disconcerting proposition in light of the question posed earlier in this chapter: whose judgement counts? Is it possible that there is a single correct aesthetic standard, and, if so, by what means have we attributed God-like status to the few (mostly) men who throughout history have proscribed and maintained it?

The concept of a ruling standard of aesthetic taste was the subject of a famous essay by Pope’s near-contemporary David Hume.¹³⁰ Long before postmodernism became the scapegoat for so many of Western society’s ills, Hume considers the consequences of a relativistic world in which multiple standards of human taste prevail. Such a world, he suggests, must at times necessarily come into conflict with the higher goals of “civilised society” (1997, 351), a finding that leads him to seek out a single paradigm of aesthetic quality whereby divergent tastes may be reconciled and any opinion at variance with universal rule set aside. To arrive at a position whereby a universal standard can be

¹³⁰ Hume was born in 1711, the year “An Essay on Criticism” was first published.

affirmed, Hume brings to light the conditions under which, to his mind, the relativistic approach fails in the face of ostensibly normative, logical taste valuations. One example posited is the common sense understanding of artistic worth that sets the work of a canonical poet (Milton) above that of a minor one (Ogilby) [352]. This point of view is nonetheless not totally reliant upon the intrinsic qualities of the poem (or novel, painting or musical composition) under examination. Hume places some weight upon subjective evaluation by arguing that only that most rare and refined of individuals (the proper critic) is able to consistently apply common sense standards of taste and beauty *and* set those standards when required. The latter ability is considered indispensable in instances where the opposing positions may not be as straightforward as Milton versus Ogilby.

At the heart of Hume's attempt to circumscribe an absolute standard of taste is a paradox, one that Barbara Herrnstein Smith considers to be an inexorable outcome of all axiological logic. In any case in which the primacy of one aesthetic position is asserted over another, she finds that "what is implemented by the standard is not ... a general interest or communal goal but the evaluative authority of some members of the community over others" (1988, 56). Herrnstein Smith goes on to stress that

intrinsic qualities of objects plus universal, underlying principles of human nature are invoked [by Hume] to explain stability and convergence; historical accident and error and the defects and imperfections of individual subjects are invoked to explain their divergence and mutability – and also, thereby, to explain the failure of universal principles to operate universally. (61)

This passage demonstrates how the critic is in fact the key to positing one correct standard of evaluation in the face of many, because the critic's transcendent stature must be first established if any natural standard is to emerge from what are *prima facie* arbitrary circumstances (that is, the reality of differing taste preferences). Herrnstein Smith thus argues that the further Hume tries to verify "underlying normative principles" of taste, the more diverse and conditional taste in reality becomes. In his essay Hume speaks of "established models" of beauty and "just criticism" in the arts, calling to mind those God-like men who, in addition to possessing all of the qualities admired by Pope, are able to exercise these faculties, sans bias, at a level beyond the reach of the average person (Herrnstein Smith 1984, 23). Just criticism, after all, requires "just" critics. The problem is

that established models and just criticism are each conditional upon authenticating certain preferences and/or condemning others, acts inherently reliant upon qualifications that erode any notion of universality in the first place (Herrnstein Smith 1988, 63). In the end, Hume's logic positions the critic as an instrument of the power base in society and an advocate for a consensus of opinion that is likely to be more politically than aesthetically significant (72).

Herrnstein Smith (1984) goes on to ask similar questions about the supposed universality of the literary canon. She notes that when the appropriate standards of aesthetic judgment are widely ratified, then the critical discourse will serve both to explicitly and implicitly reaffirm these. In the former case, the core works of the canon are acclaimed for specific inherent qualities that only certain specifically equipped individuals are able to discern (7); in the latter, the "masterpieces of literature" are assumed as the subject of the discourse even when the intrinsic qualities of those masterpieces are not the subject of overt evaluations (11-12). Either way, in the 200-plus years since Hume set his standard canons have continually been reinforced by the absence of alternative or marginal texts from the discourse and by certain critics renouncing all culturally, politically and historically influenced readings. Herrnstein Smith establishes how canonical authenticity cannot be disentangled from critical authority, showing that processes for asserting the latter have always been institutional not natural.

But despite the inexorability of this entanglement and Herrnstein Smith's justifiable concern about it, critical practice continues on unabated. The critic remains – considering the huge array of texts available for consumption – a seemingly indispensable intermediary between the aesthetic object and the wider audience.¹³¹ What, then, if any, are the fundamentals of critical practice that can provide an escape route from the notion of the critic as arbiter of taste standards and ultimate interpreter of the work? Roland Barthes makes several key points about the nature of criticism today, most importantly noting that

¹³¹ Here I hold to Bourdieu's understanding of critics as the archetypal example of what he terms cultural intermediaries; for a discussion on how various other roles related with the production process, including those of managers, advertisers and even accountants, have sometimes been considered to qualify as cultural intermediaries, see Hesmondhalgh (2006, 226-227).

the critic separates meanings, he causes a second language – that is to say, a coherence of signs – to float above the first language of the work ... what controls the critic is not the meaning of the work, it is the meaning of what he says about it. (1987, 80-81)

This statement moves the concept of criticism away from those notions of “intrinsic qualities of objects [and] universal, underlying principles” previously delineated by Herrnstein Smith, emphasising that the critical discourse is not an extension of the aesthetic object but instead an entirely separate production from it. In this way the relationship of the critic to the work is neither a parasitic nor condescending one; rather, the critic is engaged in a performance, practiced in the spaces between work and audience, which provides a possible interpretation not an unequivocal one. As Robert Brustein rightly points out, good critics are respected not for their judgements but for their arguments.¹³² Thus the critic posits a certain meaning in the work, perhaps even prescribes to it a certain value, but this critical assessment is in no way intrinsic to the work itself – it is the critic, in effect, confronting language through the work (Barthes 1987, 85). The art of criticism, then, constitutes not a finding of truth (“the function of the work cannot be to seal the lips of those who read it” [87]) but a further text that occupies that zone between the original work and the potential audience.

Put another way, criticism is *a search for truth* undertaken by the critic. But it must always be regarded as a search: as soon as criticism purports to have discovered unequivocal truths (and the RS 500 and the rhetoric underpinning it is an example of this) then the contemporaneous critical faculty of the audience – whom, after all, both the work and the critic are concerned to communicate with – is fatally compromised. This is the problem that must be confronted in any interrogation of the traditional role critical gatekeepers – both individually and collectively – play in marshalling the ground between text and audience. As far as the project of legitimating pop-rock music is concerned, a project carried out through a combination of identifying an authoritative critical community and establishing a

¹³² “What Happened to the Arts” (*Partisan Review* [2002, 633-634]). Barthes makes a similar point when he says that we ought to say to the critic not “*make me believe what you are saying* but, even more, *make me believe in your decision to say it*” (1987, 90) [original italics], as does Robert Crosman with his claim that “any ‘expert’ guidance we get from critics should be accepted on the basis of its usefulness, not its authority” (1980, 161).

respected catalogue of masterworks, there are a number of reasons why it is now necessary to doubt the assumptions underlying it.

Firstly, it can be seen that the conventional narrative of pop-rock music, hugely influential in the discourse surrounding the associated canon, is really but one of a plethora of contemporaneous (intertwined) narratives that together provide a significant (though barely acknowledged) challenge to the alleged critical consensus of that canon. That both scholarly and journalist-critics are so immersed in this primary narrative is, as I have previously intimated, evidence of the coming together of two circumstances: that is, the recording in the 1960s and 1970s of “classic” albums (by performers such as the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Pink Floyd) and the concurrent emergence of cultural studies, popular musicology and rock journalism as legitimate modes of inquiry led to the widespread codification of an “ideology of rock” (McLeod 2001, 49) amongst cultural commentators of that generation. The difficulties to be confronted in questioning this consensus are, I believe, analogous to those seen in almost any case where a specific art form apparently evolves into or is superseded by a new or different art form, one associated with a new generation of performers and fans.¹³³ In a closely associated circumstance, critics loyal to the rock tradition are constrained to celebrate above all others the key works of that tradition, leading to a nostalgic tendency whereby variation and innovation are shunned and the value of old favourites constantly reiterated.

Also, contemporary versions of the pop-rock canon boast claims to comprehensiveness, both declared and implied, that simply cannot be justified in the context of 21st century music. They are, in truth, vestiges of a bygone era when critics could truthfully lay claim to an authoritative knowledge, beyond the reach of the average individual, of an entire field of musical endeavour. Today, no music critic can properly subsist without acknowledging the complex fragmentation of his or her cherished scene – pop-rock, classical, jazz or otherwise. No single person (scholar, journalist, or otherwise) can hope to possess comprehensive knowledge of *all* aspects of contemporary music. The critic working nominally in the pop-rock field who is unaware of trends in afro-pop or dubstep, or the supposed art music writer

¹³³ Thus at various historical moments classical music, jazz music, the novel and so on have, like rock music, been the subject of “death of” narratives.

who does not possess a working knowledge of European improvisation or gamelan music, surely forfeits his or her claim to general authority. The discourse around the pop-rock canon is severely compromised by the fact that long-accepted generic boundaries, made porous only in the most guarded of circumstances, now hold limited relevance outside of the most banal of interpretations. Thus when sanctioned critics can no longer hope to speak for the entirety of a potentially more-and-more mobile listening population, neither is it possible to make the case for a definitive, homogenising canon (or counter-canon)¹³⁴ that verifies what music people are or should be attending to.

Finally, the language of criticism is more and more becoming intertwined with the language of commodity and marketing, a circumstance that, though not fatal, must nonetheless have major implications so far as the authority of critical practice is concerned. For the average audience member, to face head-on the omnipresent landmarks of the pop-rock canon is, in the words of Meaghan Morris, to confront “the grubby conventionality of the language of lavish praise” (1979, 565). At a time when terms like work of genius, classic and masterpiece are trundled out with such regularity as to be virtually exhausted of all meaning, where it is becoming more and more difficult to separate serious criticism from the kind of advocacy that flourishes in so many published reviews,¹³⁵ audiences will naturally become more sceptical of claims made in the name of critical authority.

For Barthes, criticism must not seek to interpret the work to a “standstill;” rather, it should “[lay] bare language itself, not its object” (1987, 88-89). The master narratives of the literary, classical music and pop-rock traditions may each be said to encompass a specific ethos of connoisseurship which, by foreclosing canonical dialogue and overplaying its own authority, leads to the circular inscription of accepted standards that Barbara Herrnstein

¹³⁴ Though an indie/alternative rock aesthetic is still evoked by some (for example: Hibbett 2005) as evidence of a genuine counter-canon, in truth not since the 1980s has the concept actually meant anything. In the context of Australia and New Zealand this was the era of the great independent bands, both virtually ignored (Died Pretty, Not Drowning Waving, Triffids, Chills, and so on) and totally ignored (Essendon Airport, Laughing Clowns, Moodists, Dead C). Post-Nirvana, so-called alternative music has all but been incorporated into the mainstream, with those interested in genuine alternatives to market-driven traditions left more often than not to rummage around at the fringes of post-rock, alt-country, rap, electronica, “world” music, jazz and contemporary composition.

¹³⁵ See Rose (2005, 32) on the issue of public relations material impacting upon critical reviews generally; see Evans (1998, 42) on the at best “symbiotic” relationship between the record industry and the music press.

Smith and others warn against: in effect, criticism at a standstill. Perhaps a different focus on the canonical disposition, one that forefronts the critical faculties of the everyday cultural interpreter and brings connoisseurship back in touch with its audience, is needed to get things moving again.

V

In rock music, every year has its masterpieces and timeless classics, but no year showcased as much brilliance as 1967. It was music that changed the world. (Juddery 2007, 9).

In this, the final two sentences of Mark Juddery's paean to the music of 1967, most of the key traits of the canonical disposition in contemporary music can be discerned. In the article, he uses the terms rock and rock and roll interchangeably, involving pop only peripherally. He speaks of the rock tradition as though it has not altered in 40 years. He focuses in on a single canonical exemplar that can never be upstaged ("1967 was rock music's greatest, most significant year and the Beatles were the era's greatest band"). And he speaks of "greatness" with an authority that explicitly rules out possible counterarguments (though the assertion that *Sgt Pepper's*, *Are You Experienced?* and *The Velvet Underground and Nico* are great might not be worth troubling, can the possibility that *Abbey Road*, *Electric Ladyland* and *White Light, White Heat* are of equal import be discounted?).

It is easy to see here how stages crucial to the validation of an art form – and this harks back to Harold Bloom's line on Shakespeare – are fenced off by critical discourse as essentially unrepeatable, so that the artefacts in question and the arbiters who deify them each become essential to the history of the form. The sense again is of a conundrum solved, of Babel's library conquered – from the canonical apogee one can only descend into the vast swamp of (inferior) pop-rock music gathered below.

Kevin Dettmar (2006) posits two possible attitudes to take when the ideology of the rock grand narrative is set so implacably in stone. One is to get all bitter and twisted about the

inability of the music to maintain its earlier canonical standards. This, as I have already said, is the road taken by Martha Bayles, Lawrence Grossberg and others. It is the road taken by Nick Hornby, presently a leading voice amongst the many lamenting how 21st century pop-rock music fails to follow the blueprint previous generations drew up for it. Hornby's notorious *New Yorker* review of the Radiohead album *Kid A* – where his concerted efforts to denounce all music that flirts with experimentation and/or impinges upon the everyday concerns (careers, relationships) of grown-ups like himself first came to light – venerates the “old-fashioned dynamics of rock” (2000, 105) and “conventional pop music” (106) while dismissing *Kid A* as music “for 16-year-olds” (105). Dettmar rightly suggests that this type of stance (with echoes of Georg Lukács' and Philip Larkin's comparable attitudes toward modernist literature and post-war jazz respectively) equates creativity and change with a treasonable selling out of the “standard repertory [of the] classic rock” tradition (7).¹³⁶ As a rock elder and official spokesperson, part of a coterie whose opinions are often seen as “professional,” Hornby's experience of the music becomes the only valid history of rock while rock itself becomes the only valid strain of popular music.

But the direction Dettmar takes of seeing challenges to the accepted canon as evidence that rock is “so obviously, threateningly, joyously alive” (158) is, whilst admirable, still premised on the idea that the rock grand narrative lives on in (and thus the traditional canon remains in place because of) albums like *Kid A*. Bearing in mind that rock is essentially the public face of the meta-category (popular music) that dominates contemporary music discourse, Radiohead were already well within the rock tradition (as a result of their earlier canonised records *The Bends* and *O.K. Computer*) by the time they changed tack with *Kid A*. Undoubtedly this makes it a lot easier for Dettmar to celebrate *Kid A* as exciting new rock music and the same could be said with respect to his eulogising of rap that references/samples canonical pop and rock (7). However, it also serves to perpetuate a teleological narrative for which a single authorised canon remains central.

¹³⁶ Such attitudes can carry over to other genres caught up (to a large extent unsuspectingly) in the rock grand narrative. Dettmar continues: “In an irony lost on those who declare rap the illegitimate offspring of rock and roll, it is arguably rap that has most successfully dealt with the burden of tradition: through sampling. In a stylistic move made popular by the literary figures of high modernism, rap alludes, by means of samples, to the ‘canon’ to redeploy it in a new context; at its best, sampling acknowledges its debt to, achieves an accommodation with, and sometimes even manages to breath new life into the works of the tradition” (7).

A quite different take on greatness in rock is suggested by Simon Reynolds:

Let's consider the Stones' "Gimme Shelter," described by Greil Marcus as the greatest piece of recorded rock 'n' roll ever (I agree) ... for a multitude of reasons, the historical conditions that made "Gimme Shelter" not just possible, but of oracular significance, are gone; not only has rock's grand narrative petered out into a delta of microcultures, but the possibility of writing a redemptive narrative itself seems to be fading. (2004a, 361)

This is the canonical monument not as pinnacle to be forever worshipped but rather as starting point from which to branch out. The crazy proliferation of genres and sub-genres and huge increase in available music – Malcolm Arnold's "there is so much inviting us!" has never seemed so germane – are seen not as a corruption or distortion of tradition, nor in isolated cases as its extension, but rather as an exciting and multifarious landscape of new and evolving traditions for the critic/listener to explore. Of the consecrated text (in this case "Gimme Shelter") what is portrayed here is less a sense of an abrupt ending or unsurpassable achievement (after all, the Stones themselves followed up with "Sway," "Moonlight Mile," "Rocks Off," "Torn and Frayed" and many other songs arguably its equal) than the beginning of a slow fade into a post-rock wilderness (what Reynolds terms the "limbo-land between bliss-scape and paranoia-scape" [361]). Indeed, I would take this even further by suggesting that two certainties of present-day music under ingrained capitalism – the inevitable dissolution of genres that begins almost as soon as they are widely identified as such *and* the rhizomatic, uncontrolled expansion in music available to all listeners – eventually and inevitably leads to a sense of canonical *uncertainty*. The concept of a greatest song/album/performance ever, of a desert island disc or discs, reverts from a static catalogue of past triumphs (of a Hornby-esque backtracking) to an ongoing expedition into a postmodern unknown. Armed with the knowledge that almost certainly something just as good or better is out there somewhere, the pursuit of canonical perfection (or something like it) becomes a pursuit with no hope of (or need for) a conclusion.

Amongst other things, this chapter has implied a blurring of the boundaries between critics and their audiences – each critic is but another audience member and each audience member is themselves in some way a critic. Edward Said’s conception of the modern-day literary critic is most applicable here. The multiple and intertwined pathways of contemporary music put paid to any simple notion of a rock (or pop-rock) tradition opposing a classical one. These categories are mere starting points for a huge range of global narratives in music, not to mention connections with other narratives outside of music. Confronted by all this, the individual who is interested in music follows Said’s critic in being something of an autodidact, “a wanderer [who remains] essentially between homes” (1975, 8).

Not surprisingly, however, ideas of mobility and nomadism have had little currency in the context of a discursive environment wherein the rhetoric is for the most part concerned with canonical certainty and the centring of the critic within an established tradition. Keeping the idea of a now-blurred boundary between critic and audience in mind, the chapter that follows will go on to consider how audiences in music have been conceptualised in ways that specifically rule out interpretive activity contrary to the traditional cultural hierarchy.

Chapter Four: Audience

I

When, in the period leading up to World War II, the term middlebrow was becoming prevalent in British cultural debate, Virginia Woolf penned a letter to *The New Statesman* that left little doubt as to her position on the subject:

But what, you may ask, is a middlebrow? And that, to tell the truth, is no easy question to answer. They are neither one thing nor the other. They are not highbrows, whose brows are high; nor lowbrows, whose brows are low. Their brows are betwixt and between ... the middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige ... I myself have known duchesses who were highbrows, also charwomen, and they have both told me with that vigour of language which so often united the aristocracy with the working classes, that they would rather sit in the coal cellar, together, than in the drawing room with middlebrows and pour out tea.¹³⁷ (1943, 115)

It is, then, most coincidental that in March of 1941, as Woolf struggled through the final days of a malaise that was to culminate in her drowning herself in the River Ouse in East Sussex, a lively polemic on the pros and cons of middlebrow culture was being played out in the pages of *The Times* of London. The back and forth, conducted, as *The Times* itself confirms, amidst frequent air raid sirens and mounting fear that a poison gas attack was imminent, commenced on the 25th of that month with an anonymous article titled “Eclipse of the Highbrow.” Having identified a “pedantic and deliberate obscurity” that the author claims quarantined the high art of the twenties and thirties from the ordinary citizen, the article concludes:

¹³⁷ Woolf’s letter – in the event not published until well after her death – was written, according to Radway (1990, 708), sometime in the mid-1930s. The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the first appearance of the term middlebrow to 1925, when in *Punch* magazine it was claimed that the type “consists of those people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like.”

What changes of taste this war, and the reactions following it, may produce no one can foresee. But at least it can hardly give rise to arts unintelligible outside a Bloomsbury drawing-room, and completely at variance with those stoic virtues which the nation is now called upon to practice. (1941, 5)

Two days later, Kenneth Clarke, then director of the National Gallery in London, replied (via a letter to the editor)¹³⁸ on behalf of a highbrow population apparently outraged at the implication that the esoteric art, music and literature of high modernism flourished only by virtue of the void left by those ordinary souls dying on the battlefields of Continental Europe:

I suppose we should all like to see appreciation of the arts rest on a broader basis of popular approval – not least the artists themselves who find it hard to exist on the restricted patronage of ‘highbrows.’ But in our desire for a popular art we must not be led into thinking that the average man, whatever his qualities of ‘endurance, unselfishness or discipline,’ is, or can ever become, the ultimate authority on artistic merit. The poet and the artist are important precisely because they are not average men; because in sensibility, intelligence and power of invention they far exceed the average. (27 March, 5)

The battle lines having been drawn – between the outnumbered yet omnipotent artistic geniuses on the one side and the massed, struggling proles too ignorant to appreciate them on the other – the skirmish continued with a number of letters retaliating against Clarke and fellow highbrow spokesperson Stephen Spender (then co-editor of the journal *Horizon*). The following is from one Maurice Headlam:

Mr. Stephen Spender’s letter in *The Times* of March 27 shows that your excellent leading article on the highbrows touched those self-satisfied people in the raw ... to lovers of English literature and its great tradition your article appealed because it struck at those who have attempted to dignify by the glorious name of poetry common-place, or obscure, prose arranged in lines of arbitrary length. Though the highbrows seemed to have frightened off some of the critics, let us hope that your article will have done something to dissipate the fiction of the “Emperor’s New Clothes” which the highbrows bid us admire. (29 March, 5)

¹³⁸ All subsequent letters to the editor quoted in this section appeared in *The Times* between 27 March and 9 April 1941.

Further missives venting an anti-highbrow spleen appeared in subsequent editions. With a merciless bashing of modernism being conducted by those for whom it seems the term middlebrow had been coined, the sentiments expressed in the following passage of Virginia Woolf's obituary (appearing in *The Times* of 3 April) could hardly have been more topical:

Her subsequent novels, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* and *The Waves* rightly earned her an international reputation. These books broke away from the orderly narrative style of the traditional English novel, and are sometimes baffling to minds less agile than hers; but their subtle poetry and their power of inspiring intense mental excitement in imaginative minds are qualities which far outweigh occasional obscurity. (7)

Perhaps fittingly, on the very same day a letter by one Hartley Kembell Cook, radio presenter and self-confessed middlebrow, threatened to add some semblance of civility and reason to the ongoing debate:

A middlebrow, I take it, is one who tries to understand and appreciate creative art whatever its period ... through anthologies broadcast by the BBC I have tried in a small way to bring a little of the work of the new poets to the notice of a wider public; I do not love the old poets less because I find things true and beautiful in the work of some of the moderns. (3 April, 5)

Nonetheless, the slanging match continued unabated, with later writers advocating the replacement of highbrow with the term "shambrow" (9 April, 5) and Clarke himself retaliating with another attempt to justify the minority appreciation of high culture that included a significant reference to "our problems of taste" (7 April, 5).

As is hardly surprising considering the style of much of the polemic reproduced here – giving the impression of a distrustful and increasingly isolated elite on the one side and an equally distrustful, backward-looking sub-elite on the other – the middlebrow debate seemed to peter out over subsequent years. When it did arise, it was in mostly derogatory references to what were perceived as second rate literary forms infecting the rarefied atmosphere of high culture: this strand of thought culminates in Dwight MacDonald's infamous "Masscult

and Midcult” twin essays for *Partisan Review* in 1960.¹³⁹ Decades later the subject returned to some prominence chiefly through two exhaustive historical investigations, each of which sought to document the proliferation of book clubs and associated critics thought to epitomise a middlebrow outlook in the between-wars period.¹⁴⁰

As far as the present era is concerned, the concept of middlebrow, or of midcult, or simply of an intermediate space separating conventional allusions to high and low culture, remains a largely unexplored one.¹⁴¹ The ongoing currency of the elite-popular distinction, a distinction that is only cemented in place by interminable claims as to the value and relevance of the latter, in effect guarantees the existence of a middle ground of some kind. But what is the true nature of the cultural consumer whose tastes supposedly reside there? Do those individuals represent, after Woolf, the undignified highbrow aspirations of certain of the lowbrow masses? Do they represent, after Lukács, a core of traditionalists fed up with the “Emperor’s New Clothes” of high art since modernism? Or do they stand for something altogether outside of the classic definition of middlebrow, namely a core of neglected individuals who, like Hartley Kemball Cook, are disposed to appreciate artistic endeavour of every flavour and epoch?

This chapter will proceed with three questions in mind. The first is to ask how assumptions of middlebrow have been made over more recent times, most particularly at the level of aesthetic valuations where certain texts and artists continue to be characterised by the term. The second brings in the issue of audience engagement: in what ways has the term

¹³⁹ MacDonald summarises his position on the middlebrow in this way: “This intermediate form – let us call it Midcult – has all the essential qualities of Masscult – the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity – but it decently covers them with a cultural fig-leaf. In Masscult the trick is plain – to please the crowd by any means. But Midcult has it both ways: it pretends to respect the standards of high culture while it in fact waters down and vulgarises them” (1960b, 592).

¹⁴⁰ These are Joan Shelly Rubin’s *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1992) and Janice Radway’s “The Scandal of the Middlebrow: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Class Fracture and Cultural Authority” (1990).

¹⁴¹ The title of a recent essay on the subject – part of a sustained study of middlebrow culture in an Australian context – alludes to this: “The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow or The C(o)urse of Good Taste” (Carter 2004). Otherwise, perhaps the most commonly held view on the type’s alleged demise is expressed by James Gilbert (in a review of Rubin’s book) when he asks: “what are the relationships between middlebrow culture and mass culture *which seems to have replaced it?*” (1992, 547) [my italics].

middlebrow come to represent a certain type of cultural consumer? Thirdly, and most importantly, what is the real nature of the uncharted space between traditional notions of elite and popular culture, and how might we begin to understand the audience subset that occupies it? As the chapter unfolds, it will become apparent that the middlebrow concept is in many ways a Trojan horse by which I attempt to penetrate the fortress of an omnipresent cultural hierarchy and repatriate from within a species of consumer that has until now gone unnoticed. For if middlebrow, as David Carter suggests, provides a name for the “in-between space” (2004, 175) that separates the cultivated from the banal, then in my contention it is that which the term *fails* to capture that constitutes a way forward for thinking about audiences that is not inhibited by outmoded classificatory practices.

II

It is invariably the case that when contemporary writers apply middlebrow ideals to contemporary themes, attempting to validate a category of works neither transcendent nor mundane, the result is an even more confusing than usual muddling of cultural classifications. Tad Friend (1992), for instance, in his attempt to inject some critical cachet into mainstream culture, makes the following categorisations and comparisons: “tear jerkers” and “beach reads” (middlebrow); Stevie Wonder (middlebrow) versus Erik Satie (highbrow); *Koyaanisqatsi* (highbrow) versus *Porkys* (lowbrow); Groucho Marx taking a pulse in *A Day at the Races* (Wood, 1937) [“Either this man is dead or my watch has stopped”] (“textbook middlebrow”); Janis Joplin performing “Me and Bobby McGee” (middlebrow); *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrik, 1980), Patsy Cline and Jim Morrison (highbrow); *The Godfather* (Mario Puzo, 1969), *The Shining* (Stephen King, 1977), the Beatles, Pet Shop Boys and U2, Andrew Lloyd Weber and *Hamlet* (middlebrow); Elvis Costello (highbrow); Madonna (middlebrow); Metallica (lowbrow).

Friend’s (1992, 24) conceptions of high and low (fancifully illustrated as a choice between “works contrived to tickle the rarefied palates of the few and those constructed to microwave the permafrozen brains of the many”) and middle (“reconnecting the intellectual

with the emotional”) deftly if unintentionally prove the arbitrariness of traditional cultural distinctions and the futility of sorting artists and texts into such stiff categories. When the Doors become highbrow and Madonna and *Hamlet* are each deemed middlebrow it is presumably time to reconceptualise the entire cultural spectrum.

In endeavouring to do so, and keeping in mind that cultural practices concerning music are the overriding theme here, it will be useful to consider the work of Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁴² Chapter 3 in part looked at critical standards through the work of Barbara Herrnstein Smith, finding evidence of a tradition that, in her estimation, regularly overlooks contingent factors in establishing normative criteria for aesthetic evaluations. To a certain extent Bourdieu’s work carries this argument into the area of cultural consumption, by way of a theory that identifies the *prima facie* arbitrary nature of aesthetic evaluations and considers this in light of the sociological circumstances that contribute to the divide between high and mass or popular culture. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu undertakes a lengthy empirical inquiry into the unrecognised hierarchies of power that underpin both cultural production and consumption (as is foretold by the subtitle of his book: *A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*).¹⁴³ His principal strategy is to show how the (minority) dominant culture is perpetually legitimised by way of ideological distinctions that simultaneously attribute minimal value to the ordinary, everyday cultural practices of the people.

Bourdieu’s position vis-à-vis these two contradictory levels of cultural engagement is neatly summarised in the essay “Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception”:

It follows on the one hand that, unlike ‘primary’ needs, the ‘cultural need’ as a cultivated need increases in proportion as it is satisfied, because each new appropriation tends to strengthen the mastery of the instruments of appropriation and, consequently, the satisfactions attached to a new appropriation; on the other hand, it also follows that the awareness of deprivation decreases in proportion as the deprivation increases, individuals who are most completely dispossessed of the means of appropriating works of art being the most completely dispossessed of the awareness of the dispossession. (1993a, 227)

¹⁴² As well as his own discussions on music containing some interesting arguments, Bourdieu’s work generally (particularly as espoused in *Distinction*) has provided impetus for a good number of texts in popular music studies.

¹⁴³ The empirical data used in *Distinction* was collected in France in the 1960s.

Here one can easily see how Bourdieu arrives at his famous dictum: “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (1984, 6). That is, audiences are continually defining themselves (as cultivated or common) by their taste preferences, and Bourdieu believes that the social and class aspects of this process have over time been ignored in favour of higher aesthetic priorities that engender a “systematic refusal of all that is human” (4). The more intellectuals and the upper classes are drawn into this “game” of artistic appreciation, the more they become aware of their own authority within it. Conversely, in the case of the wider populace disconnection from the world of authentic art becomes more and more inevitable, the result being an ever-deeper immersion in the supposed banality of popular culture. The outstanding example of this process in action remains the art, music and literature of high modernism. The abstract painting of Wassily Kandinsky, the atonal music of Anton Webern, the difficulty of a novel such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* – in each case the aesthetic properties of the work (principally connected to form and not amenable to straightforward interpretation) require, in the words of Bourdieu, “a break with the ordinary attitude of the world” (4). Those with the cultural and educational capital to make this break are therefore seen as separable from the majority whose interpretive world is outside of (*below*) that of legitimate culture. Bourdieu goes on to describe, through empirical surveys, how the refined tastes of the upper classes are arbitrary and more properly understood as a factor of economic conditions and class dominance, as opposed to intrinsically-located aesthetic qualities.

Yet it might be argued that Bourdieu’s identification and analysis of this cultural hierarchy of dominance is ultimately more descriptive than emancipatory. In particular, his discussions of the classic divide between high and popular culture centre around an acceptance and understanding of the sociological means and institutional processes by which that situation is maintained – at no time does he actually reject the dichotomy between art and entertainment or open the way to the possibility of appreciating works of supposed popular culture for their aesthetic qualities (Fowler 1997, 154-155). To a similar end, Longhurst and Savage (1996) point out that Bourdieu’s focus upon certain relationships – such as that between occupation, class status and audience – provides evidence of patterns of

cultural consumption without going on to contemplate how individual consumers might perform outside of, or in variation to, the hierarchical paradigm that underpins them.

Any uncertain middle ground in the hierarchy is therefore not cultivated by Bourdieu to any significant extent. The cultural audience is split into two distinct sectors in his work, each explicable by circumstances of social class. In the case of art appreciation, the privileged position (held by those few culturally competent to negotiate the institutional rules and attain the required competencies) though in essence arbitrary becomes universally accepted. At the other end of the scale is that position which necessitates engagement with the facile and vulgar products of popular culture. For Bourdieu there is a middlebrow culture (“the minor works of the major arts” and “the major works of the minor arts” [1984, 16]), but this is no more than a characterisation of the space in which the middle classes try (he uses typical instances like light opera) to gain access to official culture. The non-representative art of the early 20th century – art “unintelligible outside a Bloomsbury drawing room” – cemented in place the dichotomy between the aesthetic and the political, hence Bourdieu’s demand that the latter be honoured for its connection to everyday life rather than for any intrinsic aesthetic qualities. Regrettably, there remains one aspect of this argument that appreciative critics like Schrøeder (1992) continue to downplay; in Bourdieu, the challenge to the social superiority of high culture occurs only in concert with an unqualified acceptance of the inferior aesthetic quality of the popular.

Bourdieu’s overall position is made clearer by some of his specific comments with respect to the world of music. In an interview with Cyril Huvé, he calls the art form

the opportunity *par excellence* for flaunting the range and universality of one’s culture [and] the most radical, most absolute form of denial of the world, and especially the social world, that is achieved by any art form. (Bourdieu 1993b, 103-104)

From a statement such as this, one can comprehend why sociological and subcultural critics of music have, following Bourdieu, often been loathe to engage directly with the formal and historical aspects of their (professed) subject matter – that is, they have largely treated music as the subtext to what are, in truth, investigations of society in action. Ultimately, it is

possible to uncover two distinct processes occurring here. *Within* the discussion, Bourdieu goes on to claim that musical taste is always a critical aspect of the make-up of a person's taste preferences (and thus, in his view, their social or class standing). Furthermore, he rightly notes that variations in styles and genres are most often objected to in the musical domain, especially when these result in the juxtaposition of "the sacred and the profane" (104). *Extraneous* to the discussion, however, is the problem that Bourdieu really speaks only of the art music tradition. Popular music, indeed popular culture, for the most part he treats with disdain (Bennett, Emmison & Frow 1999, 171; Fowler 1997, 10-11; Shusterman 2000, 192-200), assuming it to be aesthetically illegitimate in its privileging of content over form.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu recognises "three zones of taste which roughly correspond to educational levels and social classes," giving as his musical examples Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier" (legitimate), Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" and Jacques Brel (middlebrow) and "The Blue Danube" by Johann Strauss (popular) [1984, 16]. This is crucial as the author here is highlighting different class positions *within* a specific meta-genre (classical music) that itself typically stands as a marker for highbrow culture. In other words, he breaks up an ostensibly high culture form into high, middle and low levels of engagement, while all other styles of music are ignored completely. Bourdieu's work is undeniably beholden to the hierarchical meta-categories of high, middle and low, and although he specifically exposes and deals with an economy of cultural goods in which the transcendental is opposed to the human, he never fully questions the legitimacy or otherwise of such assertions. Rather, in *Distinction* popular culture is "a pleasure of the senses," intrinsically facile yet able to be celebrated as the culture of the people (486).¹⁴⁴ The great drawback of this conclusion has rightly been exposed by Richard Shusterman:

¹⁴⁴ This somewhat schizophrenic approach to popular culture – acknowledging it is less complex formally and less valuable aesthetically than legitimized culture, while simultaneously celebrating its accessibility, use-value and alleged role in liberating the populace from the constraints of elite forms – is worked out in further detail by John Fiske: "Of course, popular culture does not resemble a highly crafted sonnet or lyric poem, nor does it attempt to reproduce the psychological depth and density of texture of a novel by Henry James (for which we should all be truly grateful) ... behind the criticism of the poverty of popular texts lies the uninspected assumption that a text should be a highly crafted, completed, self-sufficient object, worthy of respect and preservation" (1989, 120;123). Once again, all of this leaves unanswered the question of who decides (and how) that a

Intellectual apologists of popular art tend to be too apologetic about its aesthetic shortcomings. Uncritically subscribing to the aesthetic ideology of high art and its aesthetic critique of popular culture, they defend popular art by appeal to ‘extenuating circumstances’ of social needs and democratic principles, rather than making a case for its aesthetic validity ... such social apologies for popular art undermine its genuine defence, since they perpetuate the same myth of abject aesthetic poverty as the critiques they oppose, just as they foster the same sort of social and personal fragmentation. (2000, 171)

In effect Bourdieu’s is a thesis that reiterates and reinforces the boundaries between high and low culture, even as he simultaneously attempts to validate the much-maligned latter by showing it to be a construct of unequal power relations. It is my contention, having due regard for the even more complex landscape of symbolic goods and artefacts which has developed in the intervening decades, that the majority of sociological and cultural studies research carried out subsequent to *Distinction* has not adequately questioned the ethical and aesthetic basis of the fixed categories of highbrow and lowbrow (and, by extension, middlebrow).

To emphasise this point, I move on now to look at two important projects that use *Distinction* as a stepping-off point for a socio-cultural critique of audience practices as they relate to music. Based on survey data collected in the United States and Australia respectively, both build upon Bourdieu’s original study – the results of which, according to some critics, have been difficult to extrapolate outside of their specific French cultural environment (Fowler 1997, 9-10; Peterson 1997, 76). In examining these projects, the goal is not to pull apart their empirical conclusions so much as to look at the landscape of classifications and genres around which they have been constructed, with a view to further understanding how audiences – the subject of their inquiries – continue to be conceptualised by way of the conventional tripartite ordering system.

Richard Peterson and Roger Kern (1996) argue that class-based distinctions have altered in recent decades, at least at the higher level of engagement. They identify a move from

text or artifact is popular as opposed to complex, a not-so-simple question away from the kinds of obvious juxtapositions (like Henry James versus *Dallas*) made by Fiske.

highbrow snob (one who rejects all lesser forms of culture) to highbrow omnivore (one who, whilst still favouring the fine arts, is becoming more and more interested in lowbrow culture). This historical shift in highbrow behaviour, Peterson and Kern claim, can be explained by a number of linked factors: the increasing ubiquity of mass culture; a trend towards greater tolerance of those with different value systems; altered aesthetic criteria in the world of art; the impact of generational and status-group politics. For all of these reasons, highbrows are said to be becoming more eclectic in their cultural choices.

Using musical taste as the basis for their inquiries, Peterson and Kern come up with the following generic categories for identifying an individual's basic level of cultural commitment: classical and opera (highbrow); mood/easy listening, Broadway musicals and big band (middlebrow); and country, bluegrass, gospel, rock and blues (lowbrow). For instance, if a person is identified as favouring classical music out of a list of possible genres to select, then that person is automatically rated highbrow in the authors' overall estimations.¹⁴⁵ Peterson has previously explained how these three levels of commitment are in received theory linked with the fine arts, derivative works and sensationalist, mass-mediated entertainments respectively (1992, 246).

The findings of Peterson and Kern lead to speculation that a "discriminating omnivorousness" might be associated with a new form of cultural relativism in which the traditional high-low boundaries are questioned (that is, where "cultural expressions of all sorts are understood in what relativists call *their own terms*" [1996, 904; original italics]). Yet be that as it may, their methodology arguably contains a significant flaw in that the survey data upon which they base their inquiry support the maintenance of questionable generic distinctions in music, which in turn places in doubt the validity of the conclusions reached.

There are two aspects to this. First, genres themselves are linked to particular "levels of brow" in often doubtful ways. For example, the assertion by the authors that jazz music has lowbrow roots, is taught as highbrow yet nowadays consumed as middlebrow seems totally

¹⁴⁵ Peterson and Kern (1996, 901) note that this definition of highbrow, indexed by musical taste, appears to be confirmed through associations across the wider cultural spectrum (that is, those surveyed who prefer highbrow music also attend plays, visit museums, and so forth).

at odds with what they elsewhere describe as the music's "unusually diffuse evaluation" (901). Considering the undeniable flexibility of such a term in contemporary music – are Peter Brötzmann, John McLaughlin, John Zorn and Michael Bubl  all simply "jazz"? – one wonders how it can so easily evolve from a way of loosely connecting like musicians and scenes to a secure marker of social stratification. Peterson and Kern's understanding of classical music is just as problematic, considering that Bourdieu himself shows how the genre can be split into further sub-sections which reinforce cultural stereotypes. In this light, the organisation of Peterson and Kern's own meta-categories – "highbrow is operationalised as liking both classical music and opera" (1996, 900) – can be considered suspect. Just as significantly, their inquiry makes no allowance for the possible sectioning of lowbrow genres along the same lines as Bourdieu does with classical music.¹⁴⁶ Two supposedly lowbrow respondents classified as such on the basis of their preference for rock music, for instance, might have completely divergent understandings of what constitutes rock, let alone good and bad (or authentic and inauthentic) rock.

Second, genre fluidity is downplayed, if not totally ignored, in a survey where respondents are asked to make distinct choices about genres that survive only at the most basic level of inquiry. The results of the survey might therefore be seen as part of a self-perpetuating operation whereby genre distinctions (and related social stratifications) are maintained, rather than questioned or re-considered, because participants have no other choice but to respond within those (too restrictive) distinctions. By the end of the 1980s, there was already a widespread belief that descriptors like rock and classical no longer held to the more one-dimensional definitions previously applied to them. It is therefore easy to question the validity of a finding of omnivorousness in a participant whose overriding preference for classical music is supposedly supplemented by a dabbling in the rock genre.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Simon Frith (1996, 9-10) has suggested that Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is equally relevant to supposedly low cultural forms, as evidenced by the exercising of discrimination and creating of hierarchies of value amongst followers of pop and rock music (see also Hibbett 2005).

¹⁴⁷ One can for instance recall some of the examples of musicological analysis of progressive music discussed in Chapter 1. A description such as rock may well have, for a person steeped in the classical music tradition, little meaning outside of the specific realm of art rock, meaning that the omnivorousness of a person's involvement with rock music might be more properly identified as a form of snobbishness if the respondent rejects related styles that have no obvious connection with high-art (such as country rock or punk rock).

The problem of musical taste cultures and related social distinctions is examined in an Australian context in chapter seven of the *Accounting for Tastes* project of Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow (1999). Reiterating the belief that music remains “one of the most sensitive measures of cultural capital and of its relationship to class,” the authors assess patterns of musical taste by documenting the “favourite and least favourite musical genres, performers and composers” of various respondents (5). Bennett, Emmison and Frow follow Bourdieu in their investigations by attempting to establish associations between listening habits and class factors such as education and occupation; they also follow Peterson and Kern in considering how their results might support the idea of cultural omnivorousness amongst certain categories of consumer. In reaching their conclusions, the authors identify an omnivorousness which should be “understood in terms of a knowledge base rather than any deep affinity for a range of music genres” (1999, 199). Otherwise, their findings generally reflect those of Bourdieu concerning the relationship between cultural competencies and cultural capital, although it is further posited that when determining musical taste cultures, age and gender are just as relevant as class and education.

Here it is once again possible to discern methodological procedures that call into question the applicability of the study to the state of music in the current era. The authors themselves identify how permeable genres, especially rock, are, through the results of a specific questionnaire item which asks respondents to name their favourite musician (174-175),¹⁴⁸ This certainly tallies with notions that the rock grand narrative has collapsed and dissipated over the past three decades. More generally, however, the difficulty in understanding how specific respondents come to categorise favourite or least favourite genres is highlighted by the difficulty one would have in characterising many modern-day artists using the range of options provided to them. For instance, by the time of the survey (1994-1995), options such as rock, alternative rock, classical, country and western and techno might well have been considered to no longer define a field of musical endeavour specific enough to be used as evidence of a distinct preference in an individual listener. It is also evident that the

¹⁴⁸ For example, some respondents categorised the Beatles as “rock,” others as “top-40.”

respondents in Bennett, Emmison and Frow were restricted¹⁴⁹ – in a similar way to those in Peterson and Kern – to genre-specific replies that themselves go towards defining and limiting the very field the authors are attempting to understand. It is startling, for instance, to note that this survey allows no option for a respondent to choose rap music as their favoured or most disliked genre.¹⁵⁰ Also, the suspected omnivorous nature of some of the respondents in the survey can be considered doubtful. The authors, for example, refer to the “catholic tastes” of an interviewee when on the face of it his preferences are grounded wholly in the art music tradition.¹⁵¹ Finally, the very requirement to select “favourites” from a list rules out the possibility of respondents declaring an engagement with music based not upon ordering practices and genre distinctions but rather upon a complex and open understanding of a wide range of compositional practices and historical interconnections.

It is instructive to note that Bennett, Emmison and Frow commence their chapter on musical taste and knowledge with a quotation from Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Reinforcing the view that music is the field of cultural endeavour most affected by the traditional high-low hierarchy of aesthetic value, Nowell-Smith describes how

on the one side stands the classical repertoire of mainly eighteenth and nineteenth-century music which continues to be performed, in a manner unaffected by changes all around, with twentieth-century music occupying a restricted and uncomfortable place on the fringe; and on the other side is the frenetically innovative world of the pop business. (in Bennett Emmison and Frow 1999, 170)

¹⁴⁹ This circumstance is, I would argue, only slightly mitigated by the questionnaire providing the respondent with the option of “other (please specify)” at question D3: “Which are your three favourites from the following types of music?” (278) [“other” not being one of the 20 responses tabulated in the results provided (177)]. In particular, limiting a description of musical preferences to genre *per se*, without any further elaboration, in turn sets limits on the possibility of identifying and understanding the more mobile or omnivorous audience member. (This point will be worked out in greater detail later in this section).

¹⁵⁰ As long ago as 1992 Richard Shusterman identified rap as “today’s fastest growing genre of popular music, and the most maligned and persecuted” (2000, 201).

¹⁵¹ The respondent (Andrew) describes his favourite two pieces of music as Mozart’s *Requiem* and Metallica’s *Master of Puppets* album; he says that he “tend[s] to look at music a lot from a technical point of view” and links his rock preferences to anything “vaguely orchestral” (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999, 192).

For Bennett, Emmison and Frow, this circumstance requires them at least to commence their inquiries by engaging with the meta-categorisations of highbrow and lowbrow embodied within Nowell-Smith's statement. It is true they make it clear that if such categories are to be questioned, it will be on the basis of disputing the conventional wisdom of any assumption that high equals good and low equals bad, such as has traditionally dogged aesthetic theory and scholarly discussions of taste cultures (170). Nevertheless, it is impossible to argue that these authors do not end up endorsing this core standard of taste categorisation, considering that they, like Bourdieu and Peterson and Kern before them, go on to ascribe specific genres or styles of music to one of the three specific meta-categorisations highbrow, lowbrow and middlebrow (189-190). In other words, even if they to a certain extent dispute the value judgements implicit in the high-popular dichotomy, their very use of those meta-categories constitutes a tacit acceptance of it.

But it is important to look more closely at Nowell-Smith's claims. On face value, it is impossible, even two decades on, to dispute the first part of his statement. Classical music, as it is typically understood, remains an entity shrouded in nostalgia, with contemporary composition very much relegated to the fringes; this claim is borne out by the listening practices of the majority of those who continue to identify themselves as consumers of the genre.¹⁵² As for popular music, Nowell-Smith's reference to a "frequently-innovative ... pop business" creates an interesting juxtaposition in that he uses a positive adjective (innovative) to describe what, in Adornian terms, is considered a negative aspect of popular culture and music (that is, its association with mass production and consumption – the "business" nature of the enterprise). As we have already seen, the commercial facet of that which is traditionally opposed to classical music – popular music – is almost always seen as

¹⁵² For Gingell and Brandon, the situation in classical music is one "unparalleled in history [in that] most contemporary interest in the genre is centred upon music of the past rather than on classical music of the present" (2001, 72). Classical music is also, despite its usual highbrow associations, becoming more and more defined by populism. In Australia, an outstanding example of this is the metamorphosis of the magazine *Limelight* (formerly *ABC Radio 24 Hours*) from music and arts journal to undisguised fanzine for followers of immensely fashionable performers such as Rieu, Pavarotti, Bocelli and Bubl . And Robert Fink elegantly identifies the same turn of events in the US: referring to P.T. Barnum's mid-19th century hyper-marketing of Swedish singer Jenny Lind (whose fame was such that a steam train was named after her), he concludes that "if the American classical music scene looks like a circus today, it is simply returning to its roots" (1998, 143).

a key defining component of the type.¹⁵³ Nonetheless, Nowell-Smith's definition, while constituting something of an advance upon the usual face-off between transcendent art music and vulgarised, commercialised popular music (in that he rightly portrays classical music as a largely historical notion and at least recognises the potential for aesthetic innovation in so-called popular forms) leaves a massive between-space unexplored.

It is a space that none of the critics discussed so far concern themselves with, beyond clichéd references to middlebrow consumers. They instead revert to a retrograde approach to cultural meta-categories and specific musical genres that only ends up reaffirming the high-popular distinction, apparently unwilling or unable to conceive of modes of production and interpretation that simply cannot be captured by conventional ordering methods. Furthermore, neither it seems are Bennett, Emmison and Frow or Petersen and Kern sufficiently alert to a concurrently developing postmodern fragmentation that ensures modern music no longer conforms to genre categories previously taken as inevitable (Mitchell 1996, 12-13; Shuker 2001, 149-151). In the end, the eclectic highbrow, the highbrow or lowbrow omnivore, the "ideal type omnivore" who has knowledge of both highbrow and lowbrow forms (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999, 199) and the universal but mysterious middlebrow are all types of consumer defined through their relationship to a tripartite ordering system that oversimplifies interpretive practices in a remarkably complicated and fragmentary musical environment.

It is almost fifty years since Theodor Adorno delivered his now infamous lecture at a conference in Tübingen, Germany in which he attacked the entire basis of sociological research. Adorno's antipathy to what he terms positivism has its roots in his pre-war observations of Nazi propaganda and subsequent (brief) involvement with Paul Lazarsfeld's surveys of American radio audiences (Leppert; in Adorno 2002, 213-216). In the lecture (subsequently published as the essay "Sociology and Empirical Research") Adorno laments the absence in the sociological method of any inquiry into the underlying logic of the system out of which its subjects, and thus its empirical data, emerge – the absence of any desire to

¹⁵³ Recall from Chapter 1 Frith defining popular music as, amongst other things, "music made commercially" (in "Can We Get Rid of the 'Popular' in Popular Music?" [2005]).

“raise the stone under which the monster lies brooding” (2000, 176). He goes on to reason that

if a questionnaire inquires into musical taste, and, in doing so, offers a choice between the categories “classical” and “popular,” then it rightly believes that it has ascertained that the audience in question listens in accordance with these categories. Similarly, one automatically recognises, without reflection, when one turns on the radio, whether one has found a popular music programme, or what is considered serious music, or the background music to a religious act. But as long as the societal conditions for such forms of reaction are not met, the correct finding is also misleading. It suggests that the division of musical experience into “classical” and “popular” is final and even natural. (181)

It can be argued that empirical studies of the type I have discussed here continue to be undermined by the propensity to uncritically and in a circular fashion ascribe meta-categories to specific texts, genres and audience members. In response to Adorno, Bennett, Emmison and Frow suggest that the cultural studies project to which they align themselves gives rise to a necessary suspicion as to the “distinctive rhetorical properties” (1999, 15) of empirical data. There is in their view an uncharted space between cultural policy and actual cultural practices that only quantitative surveys are able to explore (14-15). The multidisciplinary (or anti-disciplinary) nature of cultural studies can, they say, be relied upon to deflect accusations that such surveys are intertwined in a “technology of control” (Hartley in Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999, 14) or otherwise implicated in positivist attempts to “abolish the subjective” (Jameson 1990, 248). Nevertheless, unable to deny the major limitation of their empirical method – essentially that the questions asked structure the answers received – Bennett, Emmison and Frow in the end can only agree that projects such as their own shape opinions and tastes even as they reflect them (1999, 16-17).

It is not my intention here to follow Adorno in devaluing all sociological research due to its rationalist bias, or to deny the important contributions to demystifying the sphere of cultural capital made by Bourdieu and those who have followed him. Also, it can hardly be denied that much of Adorno’s work gives rise to an impression of his being overly beholden to meta-distinctions such as classical music and popular music. Yet neither can it be denied that the work of Bourdieu, Bennett, Emmison and Frow and Petersen and Kern remains

“fundamentally ideological,” most particularly in its inability to deal with “the impact of the survey’s design itself in eliciting particular responses” (Leppert in Adorno 2002, 216) – responses that are framed by, and thus perpetuate, genre distinctions that function primarily to sustain corporate interests.

Though each of the sociological inquiries discussed here reveals real facts about patterns of individual taste (facts Adorno would no doubt dismiss as epiphenomenal), they at the same time provide evidence of a mostly unreflective reproduction of the restrictive systems of categorisation through which those tastes are defined. Because of this, a more critically subjective approach to “the division of musical experience” (Adorno 2000, 181) is required if the complex nature of interpretative practices is to be more fully understood.

III

Inquiring into what he considers to be the “law of genre,” Jacques Derrida tells us that

every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. (1992, 230)

Genres act to help us organise a vast and complex world, in the case of music a world that would be impossible to speak of or write about coherently without recourse to some form of classificatory system. Yet one can take the utility of genre only so far: a text can be said to participate in a genre or several genres, yet as soon as one tries to turn that participation into a belonging, the notion of genre has been taken too far. For as sure as a text will feature certain characteristics linking it to a specific genre, a closer examination, in all but the most rudimentary of examples, is likely to uncover some other characteristic turning it away from that genre and toward another.¹⁵⁴ This circumstance is a prominent feature of what has come to be known as postmodernism, where in all art forms there is a melding and blurring

¹⁵⁴ On rare occasions, a text will mix and subvert existing categories to the extent that a new one is required to be coined. This is close to what Jauss (whose work is discussed in greater detail in the following section) finds in literary works that subvert a reader’s “horizon of expectations” (1982a, 23-24).

of genre boundaries resulting in multi-faceted texts that often appear to disturb highbrow-lowbrow distinctions. In music, any understanding of genres like classical and rock as “fixed and traditional orthodoxies” (Mitchell 1996, 10) has, especially over the past two decades, been completely eroded by the appearance of new and amalgamated genres and sub-genres amidst the concurrent fragmentation of older ones.¹⁵⁵

In light of this, it is inevitable that some of the most interesting and inventive music of the 21st century thus far totally upends traditional notions of musical genre. The *prima facie* rock-oriented Electrelane, given to augmenting songs with a male choir, manage at once to sound like the four horsewomen of the apocalypse and the gentlest folk group imaginable. Japan’s Koji Asano, a classical musician only in the loosest sense, incorporates a vast range of experimental computer and electronic music into his modern compositions. Australian piano-bass-drums triumvirate the Necks are usually deemed jazz but have no real parallel in that category, their hour-long concert excursions being equally evocative of rock, electronica and minimalism. Chuck Cleaver leads two bands (Ass Ponys and Wussy) steeped in country and alt-pop whose sounds and lyrics nonetheless obfuscate received notions of both styles. The Thirsty Ear label’s *Blue Series* of recordings – curated by pianist Matthew Shipp – take jazz and drum and bass, amongst others, into hitherto uncharted territory. Montreal’s Constellation Records houses collectives – such as Godspeed You! Black Emperor and Do Make Say Think – plying a uniquely orchestral form of post-rock, while fellow Canadian Buck 65 (a.k.a. Richard Terfry) embellishes his hip-hop substructure with country, blues, folk and other unexpected trimmings.

In addition to their distinctive styles, the relative anonymity of these artists means that it is difficult to situate them within the overarching dichotomy of academic musical discourse, where classical or art music continues to be set apart from other forms. Yet there are also widely appreciated modern musicians whose propensity for innovation and disruption of

¹⁵⁵ The great paradox of genre distinctions – they possess great rhetorical power *yet* are at the same time endlessly fluid and unstable – is emphasised by the perpetual “death of” polemics (as discussed in Chapter 3) that tend to appear at epochal moments in the evolution (or decay) of widely recognised genres. Mitchell (9) refers to three of the most-commonly cited musical examples of “genre-desertion,” each bound up in some way to wider narratives of genre demise, from the careers of Bob Dylan, Miles Davis and Philip Glass respectively. Dylan’s case in particular (his supposed abandonment of a folk movement with which he only ever had a tenuous relationship) highlights the absurdity of associating specific individuals too closely with a specific category or style of music.

genre rules makes just as questionable their place in the latter category. For example, the hugely fashionable Radiohead polarized its audience with the (minor) avant-garde turn of the albums *Kid A* (2000) and *Amnesiac* (2001), while higher-profile rap musicians like Outkast and the astonishingly-eclectic British-Sri Lankan Mathangi Arulpragasam (MIA) experiment in and expand a category that remains as hybrid as it is popular.

Such cases make it clearer that the categories and genres relied upon by much of the learned discourse perpetuate a singular and simplistic model of a musical culture dominated by marketing concerns,¹⁵⁶ a finding that concurs with the review of popular music studies carried out in chapter 1 of this dissertation. It is equally apparent that the divisions of highbrow, lowbrow and middlebrow, based around the classification of vague genre-types and, thus, of doubtful utility in terms of categorising texts and artists, fail abjectly when it comes to understanding everyday interpretations and the potential for mobility amongst audience members. My argument is not with the use of genre distinctions, which are, as Ralph Cohen argues, inescapable (1989, 25), but with how far they are taken: how the fluidity and instability of genres in the postmodern period has nonetheless failed to rein in assumptions as to how fans individually and collectively interact with contemporary music.

If we are, as Andreas Huyssen points out, stuck for now with what has proven to be an incredibly durable opposition between high art and the culture industries (2002, 29), then it is that space between a hopelessly isolated and backward-looking elite culture on the one side and an uselessly congested and imprecise popular culture on the other that needs to be re-thought. Up until now, this between-space has been mostly used to classify derivative texts and consumers with ill-conceived hopes as to their own upward-mobility – the middlebrows. There is virtually nothing in the work of Bourdieu, Petersen and Kern or

¹⁵⁶ Perhaps the most obvious example of a genre-type created exclusively for the purpose of marketing is that of world music. It is surely impossible for a term that encompasses Cuban son, Balinese gamelan, Algerian rai and Brazilian tropicalia to have any other purpose. It is even less likely that the term makes musical sense at an intra-national level. Consider the example of Italy, a country in music uneasily situated between the dominant Anglo-American market and the undeveloped world: ought such thriving scenes as Italian jazz, Italian folk, soundtrack music (Ennio Morricone and abundant others), rap and related styles (detailed in depth by Mitchell [1996, 137-172]) and post-rock/electronica (exciting artists such as ³/₄HadBeenEliminated, Port-Royal and Guiseppa Ielasi) be lumped under this single category? In the end, the unquestioned use of terms like world music in scholarly surveys only serves to perpetuate first world, corporate biases.

Bennett, Emmison and Frow, for instance, to challenge this stable and overarching hierarchy, a hierarchy that is insufficiently nuanced to cope with the myriad interwoven sound worlds and listening possibilities of the 21st century.¹⁵⁷

How the meta-genre of middlebrow has been conceptualised in the scholarly literature, and how various genres have been considered to epitomise the middlebrow outlook, is evocative of two important issues. Firstly, it has long been routine for critics to formulate their arguments concerning the antagonistic relationship between high and popular culture through reference to artistic exemplars populating the very extreme ends of the aesthetic spectrum (Williams 1999, 47; Moses 1991, 369 [“The Remaking of the Canon”]). Secondly, and most crucially, it has too often been critical practice to underplay or ignore the way in which categorisations of different texts and cultural commodities – both high and popular – have been reliant upon, or at least somehow implicated in, the interpretive practices of the individual consumer. This problem is prominent in Peter Goodall’s mind when he says that

not only have critics falsified the complex interplay of high art and popular art in the practice of authors and performers, they have failed to see this interplay at work in the way audiences actually read. The customary divisions between high culture and popular culture have little to do with the reality of reading experience. (1995, 42)

The moment when the dominant oppositional logics of high versus low, art versus entertainment, avant-garde versus popular and so on become most vulnerable is at the moment of reception. It is then, in the context of interpretive strategies that are intrinsically less stable, and less obviously visible, than the text itself, that the meta-categories highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow become most problematic. In the next section of this chapter, I will briefly review and contrast the aesthetics of reception of Hans Robert Jauss with the

¹⁵⁷ This inclination continues on in empirical studies concerned with the consumption of music and culture generally. For example, van Eijck refers to a transcendent art discourse, a “fun” pop discourse and an integrative folk discourse as “underlying principles structuring patterns of musical taste” (2001, 1168), while Holbrook, Weiss and Habich consider the discussions of cultural preferences in Bourdieu and Petersen and Kern before deciding only that future researchers need to ask “what measurable features or definable meanings make a cultural activity more ‘highbrow’ or ‘lowbrow’” (2002, 355). (It is most significant, as Adorno would surely agree, that the work of Holbrook Weiss and Habich was published in the journal *Marketing Letters*.)

reader-response theory of Wolfgang Iser. By doing so, it might be that certain key aspects of each approach – both of which are almost exclusively concerned with readers of literature – can be isolated and applied more generally to include interpretations of music and other cultural productions.

IV

Hans Robert Jauss' aesthetics of reception responds to what he sees as a Marxist-formalist dichotomy within which literary theory tends to be either too dependent upon the social, economic and historical circumstances of its creation (Marxism) or too far removed from them (formalism). In the former case, the reader is considered on the same terms as the author, but those terms are essentially the struggle between the dominant and dominated classes; in the latter, the reader is more or less effaced in that he or she is considered to be wholly directed by the structure and content of the text itself (Jauss 1982a, 18-19). The answer to this problem is, for Jauss, the implementation of a practice of investigating production and reception in literature dialectically (Holub 1984, 57). Right away, it can be seen that his reception aesthetic is offered not as a stark alternative to theories that focus upon the text, but rather as a way of introducing processes of reception, hitherto ignored, into literary debate.

According to Jauss,

in the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees ... the perspective of the aesthetics of reception mediates between passive reception and active understanding, experience formative of norms, and new production. If the history of literature is viewed in this way within the horizon of a dialogue between work and audience that forms a continuity, the opposition between its aesthetic and its historical aspects is also continually mediated. Thus the thread from the past appearance to the present experience of literature, which historicism has cut, is tied back together. (1982a, 19)

Reception is here determined to be an ongoing process, one which emerges out of a continuous dialectic between text and reader. What an author has written in the past and all the texts a reader has previously interpreted, as well as any relevant critical interpretations, go together, in the context of the present reading experience, to form what Jauss terms the horizon of expectations around a text – circumstances that go to make up the “reciprocal interaction of work and mankind” (15). As might be expected, this horizon of expectation is both amorphous and unstable, supposing as it does a “dialectic of understanding as a complex interplay between knowing and not knowing” (de Man in Jauss 1982a, xii). As we have previously seen, texts are typically regarded as highbrow or lowbrow on the basis of form alone. Jauss acknowledges that before undergoing such classification (being incorporated into a canon, for example) a text goes through a complex array of mediations during which the process of reception is integral. Moreover, because the history of a text’s reception is inclusive of myriad interpretive events past, present and future, its formal classification can alter over time as the horizon of expectations itself alters. For instance, Jauss notes that certain works “break through the familiar horizon of literary expectations so completely that an audience can only gradually develop for them” while others diminish in consequence as time progresses and standards change (26-28); he provides Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Feydeau’s *Fanny* (1858) as respective literary examples of these phenomena.¹⁵⁸

Perhaps the key demand in Jauss, one which goes toward freeing interpretations and presenting the text not as a “fact” but as an “event,” is that the “individual work [be inserted] into its ‘literary series’ to recognise its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature” (32). This is significant in, that the understanding of a text here goes beyond a (pre-structured) reading in what is essentially a historical vacuum – as in, for example, a reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) which seeks to uncover the meaning concealed in the text itself. Instead, in an aesthetics of reception the event that is

¹⁵⁸ In music, the atonality and/or dissonance of early modernist compositions – most notably Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* and Schönberg’s early twelve-tone works – provide an excellent example of how the horizon of expectations alters over time. After initial indifference and even (in some quarters) outrage at such music, *The Rite of Spring* was incorporated into the accepted canon and Schönberg’s techniques later became the basis around which Western institutions of higher education moulded their students. In both cases, it can be said that audiences for the works developed gradually over time.

the interpretation of *Heart of Darkness* commences from the “historical standpoint of the present observer” (34), at which time the full interplay of form and history comes into play. This process is not an evolution but rather a complex array of mediations both past and present. Thus *Heart of Darkness* is read in light of the history of modern literature, the literature of imperialism, the chronology of Conrad’s oeuvre, contemporaneous and subsequent critical analysis, and so forth.

Jauss’ reception theory is also very much keyed to understanding the potential for positive aesthetic experiences across all strata of society. Responding to the foundations of *Aesthetic Theory*, Jauss seeks to deny the universality of Adorno’s negative aesthetic. He does this by conceiving (or re-conceiving) of the horizon of expectations as capable of incorporating an aesthetics of pleasure (Holub 1984, 70-75), such as has been reinvigorated (after modernism) by, amongst others, Roland Barthes. According to Jauss, experimental works such as the art of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman and the prose of Samuel Beckett “acquire the lonely pathos of their legitimation through their opposition to the consumer art of the modern mass media” (1982b, 28). He thus sees the tendencies, since modernism, of isolating art from the general public and renouncing aesthetic pleasure as the last recourse of the (middlebrow) philistine, as having tipped the balance too far in favour of the ascetic, a circumstance he attempts to redress by reviving the communicative function of literature for which enjoyment is the primary reaction (22-36). Jauss, however, certainly does not go so far as to dismantle the dichotomy between the fine arts and popular culture. Instead, he only suggests that by absencing the pleasurable from his aesthetic theory Adorno incorrectly dismisses the practical value of certain fine artefacts (18-19).

In contrast to Jauss’ aesthetics of reception, Wolfgang Iser is the originator of what has come to be termed reader-response theory. His is a more intimate view of the relationship between text and interpreter in which

the text itself simply offers ‘schematised aspects’ through which the subject matter of the work can be produced, while the actual production takes place through an act of concretisation. From this we may conclude that the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the aesthetic: the artistic pole is the author’s text and the aesthetic is the realisation accomplished

by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with the concretisation, but must be situated somewhere between the two. (1978, 21)

In Iser, the critical relationship is that between the reader and the text and how meaning is subsequently derived from this. As this passage confirms, by focusing upon this “virtual” interaction he seeks to understand the experience of the reader without on the one hand affording absolute primacy to the text itself, or on the other allowing for readings that are not anchored in some way to the textual material. This places Iser’s theory into a middle ground between text and reader, where the reading event is “activated” (22) by the meeting of the two (the text activates the reader and the reader activates the text). It also confirms his goal of overcoming any debate between subjectivism and objectivism by denying both the unshakable authority of the author’s intended meaning and the untrammelled relativism of arbitrary readings (20-27). At the heart of reader-response is the notion of interactive or two-way communication as described in Wilbur Schramm’s 1954 2nd model of communication (described in Watson 2003, 36), a notion integral to the concept of the active audience as it developed, more or less simultaneously with reader-response theory, within the Birmingham school.¹⁵⁹

Like Jauss, Iser engages with the concept of the negative aesthetic as prioritised in Adorno. He too is expressly concerned with responses to canonical literature over those less complex, even “anticlimactic” interactions with what he terms “light reading” (46). Negation is a vital concept for Iser, but while Jauss later made space for an aesthetics of enjoyment to coexist with an aesthetics of negativity in the field of responses to serious literature, Iser rather exhorts the function of negations (both primary and secondary) as a communicative force that alerts the reader to other possibilities in the process of interpretation (Holub 1984, 94-96). Iser’s strategy for distancing himself from Adorno and allowing for the practical function of literature is, in essence, to resolve the traditionalism versus modernism dilemma by arguing that the reader should approach the text from an ideologically neutral standpoint (Holub 1984, 96-98).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Stuart Hall’s 1981 essay “Encoding/Decoding” (2001).

¹⁶⁰ Here Iser evokes Kant’s (1987, 44-54) notion of disinterested interest.

In summary, Jauss is concerned with the history of a text's reception and the reader's interaction with that text within a perpetually altering horizon of expectations; Iser is interested in the act of reading itself as determinant of a meaning that is not inherent in the text in question (Holub 1984, 148-149). Both Iser and Jauss have justly been credited with directing the focus of literary theory away from the author and toward the hitherto undervalued role of the reader in constructing meaning. However, I would contend that there is one important aspect of both Jauss' aesthetics of reception and Iser's reader-response theory that has not been satisfactorily explored in literary criticism or in the wider field of reception theory as it has been embraced by various postmodern and post-structuralist critics.

Both Jauss and Iser have as their basis the interaction of the subject (the reader) with an object (the text), although it is true, Holub argues, that the aesthetics of reception and reader-response theory have each to some extent been unable to escape the ideological status of the text as a "stable and determinate structure" (1984, 149). Yet both exhibit a further limitation in that their consideration of the reader is in relation to a specific text and not *multiple texts* – neither theory focuses at all upon the idea of the reader's interaction being but one in an ongoing series of interactions with all manner of cultural productions, not just literary texts. Instead, Jauss' concept of a "dialogue" between text and reader and Iser's concept of the "concretisation" of the text by the reader are centred on interpretive practices involving specific (canonical) texts. Moreover, with Jauss and Iser each working within the conventional dichotomy of highbrow versus popular texts, clearly privileging the former presumably helps account for the lack of interest in exploring or incorporating the reader's full range of cultural engagements. On that note, and notwithstanding the similar problems (following Bourdieu, Petersen and Kern, and Bennett, Emmison and Frow) that his sociological, genre-based inquiry may exhibit, I agree with Koen van Eijck when he says that research into taste preferences or consumption patterns (and one can include here studies concerning reception and/or response) "is probably increasingly less informative if one does not assess the full breadth of a person's taste" (2001, 1181). In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that this is the only method through which one can unequivocally evade the "stable and determinate structure" that is the text, and begin truly to evaluate and understand interpretive practices amongst audience members.

In a 1971 volume of his collected essays to that point, American literary critic Leslie Fiedler – in the introduction to a section titled “Cross the Border – Close the Gap” – muses on the difficulty he feels in reconciling the need to deal seriously with popular literature and his own circumstance as an intellectual grounded in the modernist canon of Joyce and Mann:

I am quite aware that there is a kind of politics implicit in the critical position I take in these essays, a populist, even anarchist stance based on an impatience with all distinctions of kind created on the analogy of a class-structured society. I feel myself more and more pressed these days toward the position so outrageously expressed by Tolstoy in his essay *What is Art?* I am still resisting the temptation, however, finally to embrace the point of view which urges that the only art worth preserving and praising is the art which joins all men together at their deepest and simplest level of response. In fairness to my own past and my own work as a novelist and poet, I feel it necessary to retain still a respect for traditional high art. Nonetheless, I grow more and more uncomfortably aware that the cult based on the appreciation of works available only to a few has proved not only repressive in a political sense, but even more damaging in a psychological one. (404)

What appeals in Fiedler’s statement is the sense of a member of the intelligentsia, in the spirit of Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams and Susan Sontag before him, trying seriously to engage with that which is not traditional high art. His situation of being torn between the two cultural poles in some sense evokes Virginia Woolf’s individual who “ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that” (1943, 115). Yet there is something very different happening here, a sense of dissatisfaction with the prevailing cultural milieu that the antiquated but still lingering middlebrow concept – then as now the standard descriptor for a position between those poles – fails completely to come to terms with. Over the ensuing decades more and more analysts have come to embrace like sentiments, the crucial difference being they have expressed their arguments from a position apparently *within*, and thus in complete empathy with, popular culture.¹⁶¹ Of course, in the

¹⁶¹ Paradoxically, these latter-day cultural critics have covertly legitimised high culture through their general avoidance of aesthetics and agenda of justifying its popular other. Some of the problems

period since World War II numerous thinkers of major standing – including, as discussed in this chapter, Bourdieu, Adorno, Jauss and Iser – have no matter what their ultimate position proven far less concerned than the likes of Leslie Fiedler with the political and psychological implications of seeing only high art as aesthetically legitimate.

The persistence of middlebrow provides good evidence for how scholars have mostly failed to come to grips with, or to genuinely disrupt, the high-low dichotomy underpinning all cultural discourse. Whether the term maintains the kind of negative connotation Woolf gave it some 70 years ago, is seen in a more positive light à la Tad Friend, or is as James Gilbert claims now simply incorporated into mass culture, in reality it provides no option at all for escaping the standard hierarchy. In particular, the middlebrow concept symbolises a failure to come to terms with the potential for audience members to operate in unexpected ways – an inability to see the middle not as the dead centre of modern culture but rather as the place “where things pick up speed” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 28). This is most obvious in debates concerning music, where conceptions of audience are usually rooted firmly within the established hierarchy. Even the best efforts of musicologists, popular music analysts or aestheticians to destabilise this operate essentially within the hierarchy (Gracyk 1999; Shusterman 2000, 201-235),¹⁶² or are otherwise limited in applicability to everyday audiences by tending to be only peripherally concerned with audience interpretations (McClary 2000, 139-169; Mitchell 1996) or reflecting the experiences of “expert” musicians and critics not those of ordinary listeners (Frith 1996; Walser 1994). In particular, it is with respect to ordinary, non-specialist audience members – by far the majority – that new ways of examining the uninspected spaces between high and popular culture are required.

In the realm of popular music studies, where the potential for focusing upon audience activity seems greatest, David Hesmondhalgh is one scholar making determined and worthwhile arguments about the need to apply the concept of everyday life to audience activity (2002; 2007a). His concern is with a hitherto largely ignored sphere of musical

with this approach to analysing mass culture are discussed in the introduction to Modleski (1986) and in Chapter 2 of Frow (1995).

¹⁶² Shusterman does make it clear that he uses the binary terms high and popular only because they are so universal, hoping instead that by standing up for popular art he will help begin to dismantle the dichotomy (169-170). In my view, however, any defence of popular culture *as* popular culture cannot hope to achieve this.

aesthetics, namely the investigation of “ordinary discourse about music by non-professionals” (2007a, 515). Hesmondhalgh rightly discerns that such discourse is worth pursuing for evidence of both commonality and difference amongst listeners. Though comparable to the kinds of empirical inquiries, steeped in sociology and/or cultural studies, already examined in this chapter, Hesmondhalgh gets beyond these, and thus closer to the audience in question, by focusing on personal aesthetic valuations (what people say about music) in favour of merely organising taste preferences into preordained categories.

Hesmondhalgh’s use of the term “everyday” evokes Michel de Certeau’s classic research into the practices of everyday life (1984). In Certeau, audiences are seen as more fragmented, as less grounded in specific aesthetic hierarchies, as capable of engaging in various “tactics” that are the “art of the weak” (37). In a model that is in turn reminiscent of van Eijck’s “full breadth of a person’s tastes” (2001, 1181), he speaks of the notion of “select fragments taken from the vast ensembles of production in order to compose new stories with them” (35). For Certeau, studies that are too closely intertwined with the “categories and taxonomies” of production (arguably those of Bourdieu, Petersen and Kern and Bennett, Emmison and Frow all exhibit this characteristic) are unable to reflect the tactics of individuals everywhere who construct personal narratives that seem in some way to resist the established order (34-35).¹⁶³

In particular, Hesmondhalgh makes valuable observations on the complexities of normal aesthetic discourse otherwise downplayed in popular music studies. The respondent Ashley’s in truth relatively mild dismissal of the television phenomenon *Pop Idol* (the British precursor to *Australian Idol*) may well, according to Hesmondhalgh, be less an elitist attitude toward public tastes (as cultural studies would tend to categorise it) than evidence of his discomfort with the facile entertainments the culture industries routinely dish out (2007a, 521-522). And the disdain that Beatles fan Dorne expresses for contemporary music – “I don’t think music is as good nowadays” – is identified both as a familiar attitude (one, as I

¹⁶³ Certeau goes on to say that “what is counted is *what* is used, not the *ways* of using. Paradoxically, the latter become invisible in the universe of codification and generalised transparency. Only the effects (the quantity and locus of the consumed products) of these waves that flow in everywhere remain perceptible. They circulate without being seen, discernible only through the objects that they move about and erode. The practices of consumption are the ghosts of the society that carries their name” (1984, 35) [original italics].

have previously shown, also prevalent in the authorised discourse) and illustrative of aesthetic debate that “reinforce[s] social divisions” (522-523) (the predominant trend in sociology and cultural studies being to celebrate social connections).

I do, however, find Hesmondhalgh’s *modus operandi* unconvincing on two closely-related counts. First, as a corrective to previous research tendencies I feel that his focus shifts too far in the direction of the “mundane and the banal” (2002, 127). This is where Hesmondhalgh departs significantly from Certeau’s concept of the everyday: he is not inclined to follow the latter’s emphasis upon “the potential for resistance” (120), feeling that cultural studies theorists have already overplayed their hand in this respect. This move away from a concentration on youth, rebellion and collective political action (though I certainly agree with Hesmondhalgh that these have been over-represented in the research) to my mind tilts excessively toward merely reporting upon a certain monotony of existence under ingrained capitalism – a “respectful attention” to ordinary lives (2007a, 524) that whilst laudable ends up downplaying the extraordinary as it constantly intersects with the ordinary. Something of this intersection is, for example, conveyed in Simon Frith’s dinner party sequence (1996, 3-6): despite the mundane nature of the event and the discussions taking place, the aesthetic claims of the participants are shown to be for them anything but banal or inconsequential.

For my own part, I remain convinced that the majority of people who engage with music to any great depth, whether in close attendance or as an adjunct to other activities, look to embellish their lives with music that is *for them* both aesthetically significant and of lasting value – music that is, and will continue to be, worth listening to for its intrinsic musical qualities. To argue otherwise – and the cultural studies method inevitably, if not always intentionally, does so by treating aesthetics with suspicion – surely leads to the conceptualisation of a general audience beholden to the worst traits of the culture industries. This is a matter of degree: Hesmondhalgh himself seems aware of the danger of going too far in distancing “the everyday experience of music [from] passionate advocacy over value and meaning” (2002, 125), his later research (2007a) seeking in part to address this. But the danger remains significant, for when popular music studies embraces banality, the riposte to quality disputes and related power struggles too often ends up being like that of Joshua

Clover: an illogical attempt to take “lasting value and difference [and] shove them in the attic” (2004, 245).¹⁶⁴

Second, in analysing comments like those of Ashley and Dorne from a sociological standpoint, Hesmondhalgh remains within a popular music studies convention that ends up leaving music too far in the background.¹⁶⁵ This results in his methodology being more open than needs be to the kinds of questions Adorno poses of the sociological method, tending as it does to avoid inquiring into the fundamental logic of the overall system. In the case of the respondent Ashley, for instance, I would see as an important question concerning the pleasures or otherwise of *Pop Idol* whether we are still talking about music *at all* here?¹⁶⁶ Alternatively, Dorne’s biased (as she herself acknowledges) stance on all contemporary music raises important questions about how aesthetic valuations in music so often and so easily degenerate down to comparisons between entire meta-categories (such as highbrow versus popular), genres (such as classical versus rock) and generations (such as then versus now). In this respect, it is interesting that latter-day social analysts seem so unperturbed by everyday aesthetic prejudices, such as Dorne’s, that are expressed in a positively Adornian fashion.

These familiar questions return us to the statement of musicologist Sammie Anne Wicks that appears in the introduction to this dissertation, who wonders “whether a deeper understanding of expressions like music might significantly contribute to the amelioration of our current intractable social predicaments” (1998, 57). It is necessary to ask why these

¹⁶⁴ I see this as illogical because claims to have completely removed the concepts of lasting value and difference from popular music are chimera. A prime example comes from La Trobe University’s Lawrie Zion, who, in an otherwise erudite memoir on his former career as a radio personality, exhorts the “momentary euphoria” (2006, 149) of the pop-rock epiphany *in spite of the fact* that he was himself integral to the conception of (radio station) Triple J’s surrogate pop-rock canon – the Hottest 100.

¹⁶⁵ The subtitle of Hesmondhalgh’s (2007a) study is, after all, “Talking about Good and Bad Music.” Furthermore, if questioned, would the respondents not say that they had been asked to talk about music, not aesthetics or politics?

¹⁶⁶ I would strongly argue that *Pop/Australian Idol*, most commercial radio programs, background music in shopping centres and the like are too-readily spoken of as musical phenomenon when they are not really about music at all. In the case of *Idol*, already pared down to a very small aspect of the art form (the claimed perfect singing voice), music is largely incidental to what is a contrived television drama: a strategic effort to entice viewers to tune-in, be “entertained” and, ultimately, consume and/or purchase associated media and products.

types of arguments, so often couched in dichotomous terms, seem socially acceptable in music despite the fact that they are little different from, and as easy to make as, comparisons such as white versus black, male versus female, or Christian versus Muslim. To what extent, it might be asked, is a commonly-heard sweeping statement such as “I can’t stand rap music” more than just an expression of musical taste?¹⁶⁷ To what extent would a wider understanding and appreciation of Islamic music amongst Westerners assist in breaking down greater social barriers? Merely to record and discuss without favour musical predilections and prejudices seems to me an admission of defeat, akin to tacitly accepting as natural and inevitable the deeply flawed social system out of which they emerge.

As Robert Witkin’s seminal paper on Adorno and the culture industry suggests, somewhere in between the extraordinary and the everyday there is a significant battleground yet to be properly articulated. According to Witkin, rather than falling into the trap of debating Adorno on his own terms (as seeing “serious art and the products of the culture industry as two torn halves that *don’t add up*” [2000, 168; original italics]), it is possible to allow that “the greater the degree of commodification, the greater is the degree of opportunity for genuine aesthetic creation to occur in the margins of that process” (166). That is, subsequent to the almost total denudation of high art’s ritual status it might be better to focus on individual moments and improvisations that do not need to be framed by an outdated cultural hierarchy. Witkin goes on to propose a need for “genuine empirical research concerning actual aesthetic practices in everyday life and their relationship to the culture

¹⁶⁷ General denunciations of rap (the Bork quote that opens Chapter 1 is a prime example) are representative of two issues in discourses on music underpinning this dissertation. First, anti-rap sentiments often reference the music’s (alleged) privileging of rhythm over melody and harmony in a way that assumes the Western musical tradition to be the only legitimate one. Second, expressing a dislike of rap is to presuppose that it is a single, easily-definable entity, when of course it is not; such assertions are almost always made in reference to specific (commonly violent and misogynistic) mainstream styles of rap that have been colonised for the consumption of white, middle class males (though those who lament the violence and misogyny in certain rap music seem able to, at the same time, disregard the violence and misogyny of contemporary culture generally, evident in much of mainstream music, film, television, fashion and magazines). A very recent exemplar of these prevalent attitudes toward rap is “Hip-hop Hell” by *The Spectator*’s popular music columnist Marcus Berkmann. He claims that “hip-hop [is] self-evidently ugly music – jagged, harsh, aggressive – and after 20 years in the mainstream, it hasn’t moderated any of these characteristics one jot,” going on to note that almost all of the “music obsessives” he is acquainted with dislike it as much as he does. Berkmann and his friends have also, he says, pondered whether this attitude is in any way racist: “Of course not, we agreed. Well, it might be for some people but it wasn’t for us” (2008, 50).

industry as a counterweight to an almost ideological level of assertion from critical theorists” (166).

With Witkin in mind, I want to posit an alternate way of thinking about music audiences that I believe is complementary to the kind of empirical research both he and Hesmondhalgh advocate.¹⁶⁸ It is to focus on ways that individuals (albeit individuals to some extent socially determined) can and often do operate so as to render the traditional tripartite cultural hierarchy more or less irrelevant. In this conception the notion of everyday life remains central, but it is predicated upon an attitude to the everyday that is always just beyond the reach of the “wider administrative structures” (Witkin 2000, 166) that frame it. It is a concept inspired by Certeau’s specific notion of “users” creatively avoiding the directives of the powerful and the moneyed through the “art of being in between” (1984, 30). It is also inspired by Edward Said’s idea – introduced in the previous chapter – of the critic as nomad operating outside of linear tradition (1975, 8-9), moving back and forth amongst an endless array of objects and subjects in a manner that better acknowledges the futility of unequivocal truths in the present cultural milieu. And it is inspired by David Toop’s brilliant book *Ocean of Sound* (1995), in which he conjures up the notion of a musical life that follows no set pattern other than a kind-of perpetual drift, a life of “journeys, some actual, some imaginary, some caught between the two”.¹⁶⁹ In Toop’s book, genre distinctions recede into the distance as the narratives of a hugely disparate array of artists – from British guitar band My Bloody Valentine and Indian vocal master Pandit Pran Nath to avant-jazz great Sun Ra and minimalist/ambient composer Harold Budd – are interwoven in a fashion rarely seen in musical discourse. Nor is Toop confined, as many academic and journalistic writers are, by temporal constraints. Focusing on the music’s history not his own, *Ocean of Sound* wanders through a century of generic twists, turns and transformations so as to open the readers’ mind to his or her own personal journey.

¹⁶⁸ It could also be complementary to sociological examinations of consumer culture and individuality such as Andy Bennett’s innovative aligning of musical tastes with “late modern lifestyles in which notions of identity are constructed [and] fluid” (1999).

¹⁶⁹ In “Prologue: Fragments and Mantras” (no page number).

Toop, however, for the most part talks about the musicians responsible for creating this ocean of sound. In the final chapter, I intend to take the concept of between-spaces, of wandering, of drifting in an ocean of sound, and apply them more conclusively toward everyday, individual interpretations, using Walter Benjamin's notion of the flâneur as a guide. This might in one sense appear a naively utopian way of looking at the issue of everyday audiences; but it may also be seen as an antidote to the almost universal strategies of either positioning individual responses wholly in light of specific texts, or else categorising individuals as highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow on the basis of specific interpretations. Furthermore, it might be seen as an antidote to the habitual framing of individual interpretations as part of an ongoing social or communal dialogue. In the latter case, I would point out that situations where people consume music in a social setting as part of particular musical (or music making) scene are but part of the story; it is probably far more common for listening to take place in the relative solitude of people's own personal spaces, as they explore (whether intentionally or by happy accident) new worlds, construct individual canons and make connections between music and all manner of other experiences. These are individuals to a large extent cut off from any organised musical culture or scene; individuals composing, in Certeau's theory, their own stories; people hoping, to paraphrase Buck 65, "to do some damage in their own subtle way."¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ From the song "463" (*Talkin' Honky Blues* [2003]).

Chapter Five: Flânerie

I

In a memorable scene from Sidney Lumet's 1976 film *Network*, television anchor man Howard Beale (Peter Finch) provides the following derisory monologue on the fate of the individual in American society:

What is finished is the idea that this great country is dedicated to the freedom and flourishing of every individual in it. It's the individual that's finished. It's the single solitary human being that's finished. It's every single one of you out there that's finished. Because this is no longer a nation of independent individuals. It's a nation of some 200-odd million transistorised, deodorised, whiter-than-white, steel-belted bodies totally unnecessary as human beings and as replaceable as piston rods.

The individual, or the subject, has received tremendous attention in philosophical, sociological and psychological debate since the age of the Enlightenment. Today, the concept of individuality continues to be an enigmatic one. On the one hand, poststructural and postmodern theory would appear to be empowering of the subject in that they encourage a move away from linear, one-way processes of communication. Derrida's ideas on deconstruction and the indeterminacy of meaning and Lyotard's proposed breakdown of grand narratives each signal a renewed focus upon self-determination and the authority of the individual. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard suggests that, in the absence of a universal metalanguage, individuals must eventually become aware that "legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction" (1984a, 41); hence the belief that monopoly control of knowledge can be succeeded by more localised, personalised forms ("little narratives"). The reception-based theories of Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss and others, as well as Roland Barthes' seminal essay on the death of the author, are further evidence of increasing theoretical concern with the autonomy of the individual in more recent times.

Yet there is another (overtly postmodern) way of considering the subject: that which finds the very idea of the autonomous individual to be a hangover from the (supposedly) failed project of modernism. Challenged here are both the transcendent nature of high art (the artist as genius) and the concept of the individual who is able somehow to remain above the social and cultural forces around them. Postmodernism thus becomes emblematic of a decentring of the subject (Allan and Turner 2000, 377), a circumstance which encourages further both positive and negative considerations. On the former side, this outcome might be seen as a natural one in light of much postcolonial, feminist and queer theory, in which it has been correctly observed that throughout history the autonomous individual in Western thought has been synonymous with a white, masculine heterosexual of middle-class or above. In addition, this point of view has developed as a corrective to the stance on mass culture taken by the likes of Dwight MacDonald, for whom free thought is to be encouraged as long this does not extend to the kind of relaxation of standards associated with cultural relativism. Conversely, the individual often becomes, in effect, absent from intellectual discussions in which the emphasis has been on attempts to liberate popular culture on behalf of a previously silent majority. For example, popular music studies most often sees fit to ignore individual interpretive practices in favour of group concepts signified by descriptors such as communities, subcultures, markets and genres.¹⁷¹ In this way, individual behaviour is inextricably linked to collective behaviour, being either itself socially constructed or else only of interest as a precursor to social interaction (Frith 1996, 276-277).

At the same time, however, there is much critical commitment toward the kind of sentiment expressed in Beale's pessimistic diatribe. By this view, individuality is seen to have been more or less obliterated in a society where the majority display an unthinking acceptance of everything that those in control present to them, most notably via the mass media. A

¹⁷¹ Examples of this approach and vernacular can be found in Straw (1991; 2001), Finnegan (1989) and Grossberg (1997). The strategy of these and other critics is to avoid questions of aesthetic value and individual autonomy in popular music. Instead, audiences are usually discussed within generic parameters such as rock or punk and identified as members of specific scenes or listening communities, while the actual interpretation of music is almost always submerged within a collection of associated signs given equal or greater weight in the discussion. In each case, it is more or less impossible for individual listeners to be thought of as operating outside the social framework that has been constructed for them. The primary focus of sociological and cultural studies research into audiences, comprising what Jensen and Pauly (1997) call the "textual turn" and the "ethnographic turn," is encapsulated in their conclusion that audience studies "struggle to convey ... a feel for the cultural practices that make *group life* distinctive, meaningful, and worthwhile" (166) [my italics].

contemporary theorist with much to say in this area is Jean Baudrillard, whose less buoyant take on the postmodern condition describes a weakening of the subject/object dichotomy in a society caught up in an “obscene ... ecstasy of communication” (1998, 150). For Baudrillard, the authority of the subject has for all intents and purposes dissolved in a world where reality has been replaced by simulacra of reality. Communication is played out on a non-reflective surface (of which television is most emblematic), a process we observe without actually taking part in it (146). Thus the paradoxical nature of modern technology becomes apparent: though objects such as the personal computer and the mobile telephone might appear to bring the solitary person closer to the outside world, these can ultimately be seen as isolating and symbolic of an effacement of the time people might otherwise spend in contemplative thought or more direct social interaction. Individuality, if it survives at all under this scenario, remains largely submerged within what Marxists would conceive of as alienation and false consciousness.

To build upon this brief consideration of the individual in modern society – one that certainly only skims the surface of the many competing positions taken by intellectuals of multiple disciplines – I wish to introduce here work of sociologist David Riesman. Although his major treatises in the field – *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and *Individualism Reconsidered* (1954) – date back over half a century, they retain much of their force and relevance today.

Riesman’s balanced attitude toward the complex matter of the subject in post-World War II society is encapsulated in the following passage from *Individualism Reconsidered*:

Social science has helped us become more aware of the extent to which individuals, great and little, are the creatures of their cultural conditioning; and so we neither blame the little nor exalt the great. But the same wisdom has sometimes led us to the fallacy that, since all men have their being in culture and as a result of the culture, they owe a debt to that which even a lifetime of altruism could not repay ... sometimes the point is pushed to the virtual denial of individuality: since we arise in society, it is assumed with a ferocious determinism that we can never transcend it. All such concepts are useful correctives of an earlier solipsism. But if they are extended to hold that conformity with society is not only a necessity but also a duty, they destroy that margin of freedom which gives life its savour and its endless possibility for advance. (38)

From this we get a good sense of the author's determination at least to allow for the possibility that difference and self-assertion can prosper in an environment tending more and more toward conformity, conventionality and group-focused behaviour.¹⁷² This approach does not reject out of hand Alfred North Whitehead's reasonable hypothesis that the notion of an existence independent of outside influence is chimera. Yet nor does it advocate a resigned attitude to the possibility of independent action in the face of an ostensibly uniform mass cultural landscape. Today, advertising undeniably does "monopolise public life in its exhibition" (Baudrillard 1998, 149). Much of contemporary culture is caught up in a perpetuation of inanity and sameness, sustained chiefly by an organisationally-driven desire for increased profits.¹⁷³ A predominant theme in the critical discourse is one of claiming empowerment on behalf of consumers who supposedly use the electronic media to participate in culture on their own terms (Jenkins 2006, 169),¹⁷⁴ while the appropriation of critical language for corporate gain has made it difficult to differentiate between genuine analysis and hyperbolic advocacy. What is more, an acceptance of these basic truths underlies philosophical positions as apparently oppositional as those of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (for whom the culture industry is a "machine [that] rotates on the same

¹⁷² It is salient to note that the publication of *Individualism Reconsidered* coincided with the controversy in America surrounding the Senate Investigating Committee hearings into alleged Communist activities, where the right of each person to maintain the political affiliation of their choosing came under a sustained challenge.

¹⁷³ In Australia, one of the best signifiers of this phenomenon continues to be what has been called "heritage rock" (Potts 1992) or "radio bland" (Turner 1993): increasingly dominant practices of formatting in commercial radio, reinforced by strategies of rationalisation and synergy, that lock-in audience participation by limiting alternatives. If anything, the situation appears exacerbated in the Australian radio industry of the new century; even non-commercial outlets such as the ABC make strategic decisions on the basis of increasing audience share, while "alternative" styles in non-art music are now quickly subsumed into the commercial sphere as soon as the industry senses any opportunity for profit (as forewarned in Frank 2001).

¹⁷⁴ I am not disputing here the notion of the new electronic media increasing audience participation, but rather assertions that such participation is in most cases somehow liberating. Outstanding examples include: ubiquitous yes/no polls offered by news carriers (a standard question such as *Do you believe the US should use military force against Iran?* forecloses absolutely the possibility of nuanced debate or dialectical reasoning); *Wikipedia* (a user-managed database that dissolves any distinction between verifiable information and personal and institutional propaganda); "interactive" fan communities (in discussing the myriad fan groups that have appeared in the wake of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Jenkins does not consider the mysterious forces that have led to this one specific fantasy series taking on such "a central place in our culture" in the first place [2006, 170]) and television (typified by reality shows like *Big Brother* and *Australian Idol*, where the format more often than not controls the nature of the interaction in what Hamilton [2007, 174] terms a "manufactured democracy").

spot” [1979, 134]) and Michel de Certeau (whose tactics for reclaiming autonomy oppose the institutional strategies characteristic of a dominant, efficient, calculating, homogenising sphere of cultural production [1984]).

Yet if all of this seems to validate Adorno’s undeviating opposition to the culture industry, an important distinction must be made between endorsing a necessary critique of everyday culture and condemning it absolutely. Riesman is adamant that a complex, multifarious society cannot be summed up by reference to a single dominant process, no matter how undeniably omnipresent that process might be. One of his principal tactics is to identify loopholes – ways in which individuals can and do assert themselves by operating against the dominant grain. As Howard Beale’s requiem for the individual looms ever more prescient thirty years on, it in turn becomes crucial to demonstrate that possibilities for alternative action do still exist.

For a more specific example of how Riesman envisages such loopholes (an example that is especially appropriate to this dissertation), one need look no further than the chapter “Listening to Popular Music” from *Individualism Reconsidered*. Writing at the dawn of the rock and roll boom that propelled popular music into the cultural spotlight in America, Riesman (calling to mind Adorno) bemoans the evolving music industry’s propensity to “mould popular taste and ... eliminate free choice by consumers” (1954, 184). However, avoiding the typical polar positions analysts take in the face of this situation – that is, to either deplore mass consumption and mass taste altogether, or alternatively to accept it as inevitable and structure one’s investigations accordingly – he instead points to a flourishing (albeit minority) attitude operating in resistance to the cultural norm. This attitude is found to be indicative of those “more active listeners” who demonstrate eclectic and exacting taste patterns, shun commercialisation (and the industry tactics that come with it), show an enduring interest in the musical output of ignored or marginalised social and ethnic groups and greatly value idiosyncrasy of performance (188-189). Riesman’s description of an alternative audience that appreciates a broad range of music and applies rigorous standards of judgement continues to resonate in modern-day critical thought. Fifty years on, Bill

Martin's avant-rock subculture, for instance, is predicated upon generic diversity, depth-of-knowledge and what he terms "general musical awareness" (2002, 192-202).¹⁷⁵

Nonetheless, I believe there is one significant aspect of Riesman's argument that requires modification. In "Listening to Popular Music," the author is concerned that a self-reflective study of popular culture – "to make oneself the relevant audience and to look imaginatively at one's own reactions" – brings with it the problem of potentially overemphasising the passive or vulgar taste patterns of others (1954, 184). In this regard his theory is more or less a consideration of individuality as it is manifested in a group setting, opposing a majority audience for popular music with a minority (youth) one in which certain traits oppositional to mainstream listening practices are highlighted. So when, for instance, Riesman states that "most of the teenagers in the majority category have an indiscriminating taste in popular music" (187), it would be better to imply that *listening practices* are on the whole indicative of an indiscriminating taste in popular music. To say today that there is one group that is indiscriminate in its taste and another (smaller) group that is discriminating is to apply an elitist, teleological narrative that, in effect, further diminishes the power of the individual. Avoidance of the dominant culture is virtually impossible in 21st century Western society, so while the ubiquitous and banal nature of the bulk of it is very likely indicative of most people exercising little or no real discrimination in their cultural choices, it must be allowed that audience members may operate within and around this prevailing cultural paradigm at specific times. Thus while Theodore Gracyk is no doubt correct to say that many listeners consume contemporary music in the same way that they consume products such as candy bars – that is, in the largely unthinking pursuit of gratification (2001, 157) – it would be wrong to automatically assume that every person who has some positive engagement with an item of music associated with majority taste, such as a chart-topping

¹⁷⁵ Unfortunately, Martin more often than not identifies this concept of general musical awareness in musicians (Martin is one) rather than music consumers generally. Nonetheless, I argue that this distinction can be jettisoned without doing damage to the general tenet of his argument, which, following Riesman, allows for a significant minority audience that takes much more than an incidental interest in the music available to them and associates critical authority with an ongoing quest for knowledge.

pop song, either does so unthinkingly *or* is necessarily unwilling or unable to otherwise engage with more sophisticated or less popular forms of music.¹⁷⁶

In the previous chapter, I intimated that it is preferable to critique aspects of contemporary culture *per se* rather than to do so by organising its recipients into highbrow, middlebrow or lowbrow categories. It was also stressed that discussions of personal taste patterns only make sense when one considers the full range of an individual's taste. Accordingly, it should be possible to identify majority and minority interpretive practices but much more difficult (and controversial) to organise individuals into majority and minority categories. It is apparent that how individuals are *thought of* in modern society involves a multitude of complex, sometimes competing philosophical positions. Instead, it is my intention to focus upon what individuals *are capable of doing*, releasing the concept of the individual from a high/popular (or minority/majority) binary and allowing for freer movement across the full spectrum of cultural alternatives.

Thus far in this dissertation, I have consistently argued that the traditional dichotomy between high and popular culture can no longer be justified as a framework for intellectual discussion. However, taking this position in no way constitutes a defence of those now ascendant cultural practices usually subsumed under the heading of popular or mass culture. Faced, as has already been determined, with a deluge of so-called postmodern textual examples (Chapter 2), buffeted with a huge abundance of critical argument as to the canonical status or otherwise of these texts and their creators (Chapter 3), and organised into a predetermined hierarchy of cultural class on the basis of an inadequate consideration of their cultural preferences (Chapter 4), the individual audience member has been for the most part obliterated. More specifically, terms which have been coined in an attempt to order the cultural strategies and artefacts of particular epochs, or else to define a pull away from an earlier dominant order (modernism, postmodernism) are far less useful when applied to interpretive patterns. Processes of critical canon formation – culminating, in music, in present notions of an historical art music canon opposed to a latter-day rock-pop canon – are unable to account for how each individual engages with a wide-range of texts both historical

¹⁷⁶ Consider, for example, the “Starburst” incident discussed in Huber (2004); here the author shows how many “top 40” fans actively campaigned against a hit single that was found to be a (barely) concealed advertisement for (coincidentally) a confectionery product.

and contemporary. And the three “levels of brow” (high, low and middle) remain in common use but are manifestly inadequate as tools of audience classification.

This chapter will proceed toward an understanding of how individual victories in the face of the dominant culture – and, most crucially, in the face of the dominant high-low opposition – are more common, more complicated and more important than cultural critics usually allow.¹⁷⁷ George Simmel, an immensely influential sociologist in the first two decades of the 20th century, believed that

the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life. (1997, 174-175)

Simmel’s reference to modern life is most of all an evocation of the metropolis – that teeming mass of humanity and tremendous abundance of signs that, in this new century, with its bigger, more closely-connected cities (and so many more of them), with its ever-increasing technological sophistication, threatens to overcome independent action on behalf of the individual once and for all. In what follows, I will be exploring this problem of autonomy in the face of overwhelming forces through the writings of Simmel’s contemporary Walter Benjamin, whose intimate relationship with the modernity of his own past and present continues to provoke new ways of thinking about the future, and Theodor Adorno, whose special critical relationship with Benjamin has had such a profound influence on culture and aesthetics in the intervening decades. Having done so, I hope to be able to return to the example of music in order to postulate an alternative way of conceiving of the individual audience member in the 21st century.

¹⁷⁷ That my argument is very much concerned with moving beyond the high-popular distinction – with evading any kind of celebration of popular or everyday culture per se – is where it differs so greatly in kind from the work of Michel de Certeau, John Fiske, and others.

II

Commenced circa 1927 and halted only by his sudden death in 1940, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is his attempt to construct an alternative history of modernity based upon the urban experience of 19th century Paris. Amongst the most significant images of his version of metropolitan life is that of the flâneur. Benjamin's impression of the flâneur and "his" activity of flânerie¹⁷⁸ (strolling and observing) is informed by the work of the French poet Charles Baudelaire, whose vision of modern life – as presented in the volumes *Les Fleurs du Mal (The Flowers of Evil)* and *Le Spleen de Paris (Paris Spleen)* – was unheralded in terms of language, style and the depictions of contemporary Paris contained therein. It is in Baudelaire's Parisian scenes that the origins of the urban flâneur (along with closely-related types such as the detective, the collector and the rag-picker) are to be found.¹⁷⁹

The following excerpt from *The Flowers of Evil* (originally published in 1857) provides a powerful insight into the nature of Baudelaire's vision:

Old Paris is no more (the form of the city changes faster, alas! than a mortal heart);

it's only in my mind I see that field of hovels, the herd of rough-hewn cornice and chimney, the grass, whole blocks the colour of puddles and, glittering at corners, odd bric-a-brac.

A menagerie once sprawled there, where I saw one morning, at the hour labour wakes to cold clear skies, while traffic makes a dull hurricane in the still air,

a swan, escaped from his cage, webbed feet scuffling the dry pavement, white plumage trailing the rough ground. Near a waterless brook the beast, with open beak

bathed irritably in the dust, saying – heart full with the beauty of his native lake – 'Waters, when will you rain down? when, lightning, will you thunder?' I see that wretched creature, strange myth of fate,

¹⁷⁸ In Baudelaire and Benjamin the flâneur is always male.

¹⁷⁹ Baudelaire's flâneur in turn has his genesis in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd" (originally published in 1840).

sometimes, like Ovid's humans, tilt a greedy head on a quivering neck, toward the sky, toward the cruelly blue ironic sky, as if reproaching God!¹⁸⁰

Rarely before had such images, juxtaposing natural beauty with the menace and depravity of the large city, been placed upon the page. But nor had any writer to that point suggested that the metropolis – overcrowded, polluted, volatile, ostensible antithesis of nature – might be somehow evocative of nature itself; a place where one, whether abandoned by choice or necessity, can *dream* nature by imagining the gutters to be rivers, the street lights to be stars, the laneways canyons above which only a strip of blue sky can be seen. This recurrent pattern in Baudelaire's poetry, one of seeking to uncover beauty where few thought beauty could exist, is regarded by Wiggerhaus as "an attempt, in a time without dignity, to find a trace of genuine dignity" (1994, 209). Yet there is much more happening in Baudelaire's representations of the brave new modern world that was 19th century Paris, not least a jettisoning of much of the morality and sentimentality characteristic of the prose and poetry of the romantic period. In his sinuous lines, the jammed streets and tightly-packed buildings of this monument to the industrial age become the locus for a quite unique take on the human condition.¹⁸¹

The flâneur is, amongst other things, witness to the cruel reality of modernity, making, for instance, something wholly unexpected out of a hitherto pitiable class found wandering the streets of Paris in *The Flowers of Evil*:

Behold them, my soul: they are truly frightful! like mannequins, vaguely ridiculous, terrible, singular as sleepwalkers, aiming their darkened orbs who knows where ...

O city! while all around us you sing, you laugh, you bawl, smitten with pleasure to the point of atrocity, look! I drag myself along also! but, more bewildered than they, I ask, All these blind men, what are they looking for in the sky?¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ "The Swan" (Baudelaire 2006, 115).

¹⁸¹ "Jules Laforgue said of Baudelaire that he was the first to speak of Paris 'as someone condemned to live in the capital day after day'" (Benjamin 1973, 54-55). And Laforgue further captures something of Baudelaire's singular approach to metropolitan life by noting that "he is always polite to what is ugly" (Benjamin 1999, 247).

¹⁸² "The Blind" (Baudelaire 2006, 122).

For the flâneur, the disorienting new world that is the modern metropolis is both a subject of endless enchantment and the site of a dismal reality. He is, in Tester's terms, the "hero of modernity" (1994, 6); possessed of a certain detachment, he is set apart from the very crowd he immerses himself in and observes by a "nobility" that comes with a special knowledge: that he is but one of that crowd (3-4). Benjamin identifies here a key distinction between Baudelaire's urban nightmare and that of his predecessor Shelley, whose "Peter Bell the Third Part" directly portrays the grim reality of London circa 1800 without the benefit of a mediating flâneur reporting from the scene, self-consciously revelling in the life of the city even as his observations seem often to condemn it (Benjamin 1973, 59-60).¹⁸³ Eyewitness to the simultaneous growth and decay of the 19th century metropolis, the flâneur is a marginal figure at one with the crowd (look! I drag myself along also!) yet remote from it (what are they looking for in the sky?); but it is his need to immerse himself amongst the gathered masses in order to find meaning that makes him the consummate observer of modern life.

There is one specific aspect of Benjamin's characterisation that must be emphasised here, for it is critical to the transformation of the individual audience member that will be contemplated in the proceeding pages: the figure of the flâneur is fundamentally ambiguous in nature (Parsons 2003, 223; Frisby 1994, 82). Much of this ambiguity arises from the notion that he is a conduit through which numerous other types are activated. This apparent flexibility of definition gives rise to further possibilities when the prototype of the flâneur travels forward from his original domain of "the streets and arcades of mid-19th century Paris" into the modern period and beyond (Tester 1994, 1).

¹⁸³ Coetzee disputes the idea that Baudelaire first "revealed the modern city as a subject for poetry" (2001, 30-31), providing the example of William Wordsworth in what is presumably a reference to "Residence in London" in *The Prelude* (1805). However, "Residence in London" (as read in Wordsworth 1969) seems confirmatory of a total rejection of modernity ("Rise up, thou monstrous ant-hill on the plain of a too busy world!"[539] in favour of the unspoilt beauty lying beyond the city's outskirts (the book that follows in *The Prelude* is titled "Retrospect: Love of Nature Leading to Love of Man"). Benjamin's (1999, 21) assertion is not that Baudelaire is the first poet of the city in the industrial age, but rather that his style is wholly original in being one of allegory, of melancholy, of "place [not] soil." (And of controversy: Baudelaire and his publisher were charged with offending public decency upon the initial publication of *The Flowers of Evil*.) Baudelaire's poet is in the end unique in that he immerses himself in the crowded streets, whereas Shelley's and Wordsworth's remain essentially removed from them.

Baudelaire, in his famous essay on the then-obscure French artist Constantin Guys, specifically ties the emerging flâneur-type to the almost simultaneous onset of modernity:

Thus he goes, running and searching. What is he searching for? To be sure, this man, such as I have depicted him, this solitary with his active imagination which is ever travelling across *the great desert of men*, has an aim more lofty than that of a mere loungeur, an aim more general than the fugitive pleasure of the incidental. He searches for a certain something which, if I may, I shall call modernity, since I cannot think of a better word to express the idea in question. (1930, 63) [original italics]

Explicitly related to the phenomenon of glass-covered arcades that sprung up all over Paris in the 1820s and 1830s, it might be said that the death – or, more exactly, metamorphosis – of the flâneur commences as soon as Baudelaire brings him into being. For the flâneur is witness to an urban existence that is evolving at a rapid pace – *The Arcades Project* is both a window back in time and a study of the rapid progress of industrial capitalism (McRobbie 2005, 315). To speak of a 20th or 21st century flâneur is to attribute certain aspects or idiosyncrasies of flânerie to what must in reality be an entirely new kind of urban wanderer. Just as the *promeneur* of “the garden landscape [took] refuge in the shadow of cities” (Benjamin 1999, 442) and emerged as the flâneur, so with the intensification of modernity post-Baudelaire the flâneur must be superseded by another figure, one of whom it might still be asked: what is he searching for? Benjamin underscores this prophetic aspect in Baudelaire’s original flâneur, noting that his endeavours conceal “behind a beneficent mirage the anxiety of the future inhabitants of our metropolises” (21).

Tester sees the initial succession of the flâneur as taking place in the early 20th century work of Jean Paul Sartre and Robert Musil. He refers to Roquentin, the central character in Sartre’s 1938 novel *Nausea*, as a “kind of flâneur” (1994, 8), active in a Paris where the echo from the footsteps of Baudelaire’s prototype has barely subsided. But in Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities* (1930-42), the metropolis (now Vienna) is expanding, the arcades are gone, the automobile is flourishing. The excursion through modernity is now undertaken by someone other than the traditional flâneur, for Tester demonstrates how as soon as Musil “turns him into a generic rather than a Parisian figure, the flâneur begins to disappear” (1994, 12-13).

The activities engaged in by Baudelaire's flâneur – observing, investigating, reporting – go toward legitimating his presence amongst the multitudes, but when Benjamin turns his attention to the subject, any consideration of the flâneur moves beyond his being a witness to what occurs in the crowded streets and arcades. This is not least because by now the streets are becoming ever more crowded and dangerous and the arcades have been superseded by the spectacle of the department store. Furthermore, Benjamin's own in-library explorations – epitomised in *The Arcades Project* – present as reminiscent of flânerie; of the work of the rag-picker, the role of the collector, the stubbornness of the detective. This circumstance elevates the flâneur from mere spectator to one whose activities signify a loftier intellectual goal (Frisby 1994, 91).¹⁸⁴ It is ultimately possible for one to consider an array of complex entanglements – between flânerie, its various associated types (at once observed by the flâneur *and* an integral aspect of flânerie themselves) and those, like Benjamin, who in exploring the realm of the flâneur somehow become one – when proposing a contemporary adaptation of the type.

Since Benjamin there is ambiguity, then, both in what the flâneur might be doing and exactly where he (or, as can now be allowed, she)¹⁸⁵ might be doing it. By its very nature, flânerie should evolve as cities themselves do. If there is a single aspect of the flâneur's character that holds stable after Benjamin, it is his or her marginal nature as one who resists the status quo of class politics within capitalism and remains existentially aware of a burgeoning modernity threatening to overwhelm at any moment (Patke 2000, 12-13). Otherwise, for the type to retain relevance any discussion of flânerie in the present day has to be bound up with the progress of global capitalism post-World War II. Benjamin's world was as far removed from Baudelaire's as our new century, in which the individual is under

¹⁸⁴ “Benjamin seems unsure whether to separate or condense the various urban nomads with whose spirit he communes as much as did the poet Charles Baudelaire from whom he inherits them; the dandy, the rag-picker, the prostitute, the beggar. He may attempt to exhaustively catalogue Paris as the ‘capital of modernity’ but, as Adrian Rifkin warns, ‘his arduous process of demystifying Paris has turned into a part of its mystery’” (Parsons 2003, 3).

¹⁸⁵ One good reason for updating the flâneur is to expunge the category of its traditional masculinity and thus acknowledge the potential existence of the flâneuse (Wolff 1989; Wilson 1992; Parsons 2003).

threat of being besieged at every turn, is from Benjamin's.¹⁸⁶ To conceive of a modern-day flânerie is, most critically, to conceive of the practices individuals might engage in to position themselves somehow apart from the metropolitan flux and the ever-present force of ingrained commodity capitalism.

At first glance, it would seem that flânerie, as it was conceptualised by Benjamin, survives in modern culture only in fragmented form: in philosopher Michel de Certeau's various tactics for individual autonomy, especially as espoused in the spatial practice of "walking in the city" (1984, 91-110); in Paul Auster's book *City of Glass* (1985), in which narrator/investigator Quinn tracks the mysterious Stillman with Poe-like tenacity through the streets of New York; in Iggy Pop's 1977 song "The Passenger" (he "sees the city's ripped backsides" while being driven around "under glass"); in Wim Wender's 1984 film *Paris, Texas* (Travis' wanderings gain purpose as the narrative develops and moves from rural to urban settings). Each of these partial nods to flânerie hint at certain facets of the activity only: consider the individual in Certeau's vision of New York, who becomes a voyeur *apart* from the crowd only when elevated to the top of the World Trade Centre (1984, 92).

Much has been made of the idea that *The Arcades Project* approaches the modern city by way of its ruins: "history from below rather than from above" (Coetzee 2001, 33). The ongoing project of modernity means that new versions of the metropolis rise up amidst the old, spawning a confusion of the pristine and the derelict – this is the crux of an approach that privileges chaos over order and "renders discourse into debris" (Patke 2000, 5). Accordingly, a 21st century extrapolation of flânerie involves rummaging through the history of despatches on the topic from Baudelaire onward, extracting certain useful features from earlier sources and bringing these, by way of an imaginative leap forward, to bear upon the present circumstances of a post-industrial society in which the idea of city centre as nexus of human activity and interaction has been rendered to a certain extent obsolete by rapid advancements in technology and the ubiquity of the electronic media.¹⁸⁷ In juxtaposing,

¹⁸⁶ This circumstance is foretold in Edmond Jaloux's "Le Dernier Flâneur," in which he speaks of the new-found hazards of a city where one has to take "a hundred precautions" before setting out, only to still be inundated by the press of humanity and commodity capitalism that is "a torrent where you are rolled, buffeted, cast up, and swept to one side" (1936 [in Benjamin 1999, 435-436]).

¹⁸⁷ Patke: "Cities have become bigger, dirtier, richer, and scarier. They are also more exciting and more enervating" (2000, 13), to which one is tempted to add that most of these adjectives can be

deconstructing and, finally, re-imagining the themes of rag-picker, collector, detective and flâneur, one can consider ways in which the latent individuality of the flâneur class survives into the 21st century. For if flânerie remains Benjamin's "antidote ... to the fever of living in cities" (13), then an updated notion of flânerie can be conceived as a remedy for more generalised, acutely modern-day maladies.

If one imagines the piles of notes or "convolutes" that Benjamin acquired in working out the various themes for *The Arcades Project*, then it is possible to also imagine creating a new pile that brings together, in a new constellation, concepts relating to modern-day flânerie. This procedure of creating something new out of fragments of the old has a relevant precedent in contemporary music: that of sampling culture. As a multitude of unanchored quotations go to make up the unfinished *Arcades Project*, so in sampling new music is created out of the (often unrecognisable) leftovers and debris of the old.¹⁸⁸

Looking through the various collected comments of Benjamin and others it is possible to see a progression toward greater social legitimacy that begins at the rag-picker (like the beggar and the prostitute a desperate figure, yet one whose single-mindedness exudes an undeniable dignity) and carries on through the collector and the detective before arriving at the determined, unique flâneur. The following four sampled quotations give, I think, some sense of this progression, while at the same time emphasising the marginality inherent in each of the four types:

The rag-picker is clearly 'constructing' a counter-reality from capitalism's debris. (Rolleston 1996, 43)

applied to 21st century life generally. Ultimately, the opposition of urban and rural means something less in an era when the electronic media has unprecedented global reach and the realities of war, crime and pollution are not, as they once largely were, palpable only in those specific regions around the great metropolises of Western civilisation.

¹⁸⁸ A brief chronology of sampling in music is set out in Chapter 1 (note 44, p.43). The practice has precedents in other art forms: consider as prime examples T.S. Eliot in poetry (*The Waste Land* incorporates direct quotations from, amongst others, Shakespeare and Wagner) and Jackson Pollock in painting (certain of his works containing deferential references to Picasso's *Guernica* and associated studies).

In the essay on Edward Fuchs, the historian and collector ... Benjamin argues that Fuchs' interest in caricature, erotic art, and 'manners' (what we would now call popular taste) pushed him into developing a language which was at odds with the official language of art criticism. The objects which Fuchs was interested in were not reconcilable with the vocabulary of high art. (McRobbie 2005, 300)

We can read Benjamin's suggestive comments on detection not merely with reference to the origins of detective literature but also as an explication of dimensions of *flânerie* that illuminate the nature of social investigation [...] such an interpretation thereby challenges the largely negative interpretation of the *flâneur* which confines the figure to that of seeing, observing and, in general, being confined to a mere spectator. (Frisby 1994, 90-91)

His [the *flâneur*'s] eyes open, his ear ready, searching for something entirely different from what the crowd gathers to see. (Pierre Larousse 1872 [in Benjamin 1999, 453])

Key to the rag-picker's existence is that this by all accounts pathetic figure is a complication in the face of modernity and the metropolis. A remnant of Baudelaire's era still present on the streets of Paris in the first decades of the 20th century,¹⁸⁹ he is bewildered by, yet still rebellious in the face of, growth and prosperity. It is this combination of victim and survivor, entrepreneur and primitive that engenders the fascination of Baudelaire, Benjamin and others, and leads to appreciation of the fact that culture cannot afford to forget its own underside (Abbas 2005, 223). The "counter-reality" of the rag-picker connects to the concept of the autonomous individual as one who operates in the margins, recycling and renewing culture, defiant of the system though still obliged to work within it as "a kind of parasite on the productive economy" (Chambers 1997, 181).

Likewise, through the activities of the collector we are again confronted with the individual, albeit now in a more socially acceptable guise, exhibiting a marginal, ambivalent relationship with universal commodification. The collector is contradictory in that he or she on the one hand fetishises the objects of modernity, while on the other "[stripping them] of their commodity character" (Abbas 2005, 214). The propensity on Benjamin's part to

¹⁸⁹ The rag-picker or *chiffonnier* is the subject of a number of studies by Eugène Atget, the pioneering photographer of early 20th century Paris.

ponder this contradiction provides a microcosm of his problematical relationship with Frankfurt School colleague Theodor Adorno: Benjamin senses a correlation between art and commodity where Adorno sees only antithesis (Abbas 218-219). In any event, collecting, as Benjamin's own gathering of materials for *The Arcades Project* allows, has the positive effect of modernising flânerie so that it becomes a productive, rather than a passive, occupation (Frisby 1994, 91). The figure of the collector occupies an ambiguous, peripheral zone in modern life, indulging in the products of the material world yet in certain ways transcending it.¹⁹⁰

Moving on to the figure of the detective, however, brings the full promise of autonomous action on the part of the individual into focus. The decisive shift is identified by Frisby: now the watched becomes the watcher and "harmless physiognomies" give way to the "directed observer and investigator" (89). With the detective-type, flânerie moves another step toward being a self-directed pursuit. The most unremitting characteristic of the activity of the detective is suspicion: nothing is quite as it seems; everything is open to question. In this light, the type's standing is that of a more penetrating (continually searching and inquiring) *and* more reputable (Frisby refers to the flâneur being "elevated" to the status of detective) figure than either the rag-picker or the collector. However, the detective remains in the ambiguous position of being immersed in the multitudes yet somehow apart from them. Sceptical, analytical, intent on constructing a "meaningful constellation" (99) out of the events and fragments of modern culture, the detective is an individual closer in type to Baudelaire's own poet.¹⁹¹ The figure is, I think, usefully associated by Benjamin with the *underside* of society: with "resistance to controls" (1973, 47) such as the advent of house

¹⁹⁰ As far as the Benjamin of the essay "Unpacking My Library" (1969, 68) is concerned, the collector's days, much like those of the flâneur, are numbered. Like flânerie, however, it can be suggested that collecting survives into the current age, albeit in a different guise – not only as an attempt to salvage the remnants of the past but also as a way of overcoming the chaos of the present. On this point see Simon Reynolds' "Lost in Music: Obsessive Record Collecting" (2004b, 294), where he speaks of the collector teetering on the cusp between control and consumerism, between partial mastery of commodity capitalism and total immersion in it.

¹⁹¹ There is also a direct line back to Poe: "As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which *disentangles* ... he is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural" ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue" [1982, 141]) [my italics].

numbering in 19th century Paris and the appearance of photography (which Benjamin calls the “most decisive of all conquests of a person’s incognito [48]).¹⁹²

But, most importantly, the image of the detective brings a heightened sense of self-direction to the figure who is the overarching “hero of modernity” (Tester 1994, 6) – the flâneur. The fundamental characteristics of marginality, elusiveness and inquisitiveness, present to various extents in the rag-picker, collector and detective, are brought together in the detached, solitary flâneur. The latter has, since Baudelaire, been engaged in

a restless *doing*; a struggle for satisfaction through the rooting out and destruction of dissatisfaction (dissatisfaction being due to the banality of coming across the familiar or across passing friends; dissatisfaction being the sense of finding a world rather than making a world). (Tester 1994, 5) [original italics]

Satisfaction in *making* a world – this precise characteristic of the flâneur might be better accounted for by comparing *Nausea*’s Roquentin with his humanist nemesis, the Autodidact. In the story, Roquentin comes to recognise that the latter is systematically working his way through the collection of the local library in alphabetical order:

He has passed abruptly from the study of coleopterae to that of quantum theory, from a work on Tamerlane to a Catholic pamphlet against Darwinism: not for a moment has he been put off his stride. He has read everything; he has stored away in his head half of what is known about parthenogenesis, half of the arguments against vivisection. Behind him, before him, there is a universe. And the day approaches, when, closing the last book on the last shelf on the left, he will say to himself: And now what? (Sartre 1965, 49)

The activities of the Autodidact appear naïve in comparison to Roquentin’s; nor do they so closely reflect Benjamin’s recourse to the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris during his *Arcades* research. Though an intrinsic thirst for knowledge and apparent distaste for the

¹⁹² Such controls and methods of investigation have universally multiplied in postmodern society: DNA technology, satellite imaging, electronic surveillance, electoral rolls, and so forth. While each of these is unambiguously related to criminology and the practice of detection, they are at the same time suggestive of the alternate role of the flâneur-type as an individual who maintains a level of distance and anonymity in such a highly-regulated society.

ever-increasing crowds are traits of the Autodidact that might usefully be appropriated for the present-day flâneur, it can be seen that Roquentin and Benjamin are struggling for something more. They are restlessly and self-consciously trying to figure out, to construct a world, whereas with the Autodidact there is a sense he is happy merely to be immersed in one.

The flâneur's ongoing struggle is, if anything, heightened in 21st century society, where there is more to absorb and comprehend but arguably less opportunity to do so independently of the conventions and banalities of a dominant capitalist order. In his "Benjamin's *Flâneur* and the Problem of Realism" (1989), John Rignall elucidates the intricate associations between this ambiguous, multi-faceted character and the pending decline of realism, prefigured in the flâneur's own fleeting existence as a creation of the original poet of modernity (Baudelaire) operating in the twilight of the realist period. Yet he goes on to emphasise how the flâneur of *The Arcades Project* simultaneously indicates the way forward to the "crisis of representation" underpinning the modernist project of Benjamin's own historical period, as well as the experiments in postmodernism that were to follow (112). Rignall confirms the link between the "transition of realism into naturalism" and beyond, as well as the decline of the Parisian arcades in the face of an advanced post-industrial society epitomised by those great monuments to consumerism that are the department stores (120).¹⁹³ As such, the flâneur is a figure inextricably associated with modernity's perpetual state of renewal and demise.

¹⁹³ Looking forward from the demise of Benjamin's Parisian arcades, the American author Don DeLillo (in his 1985 novel *White Noise*) most brilliantly captures the very different types of dilemmas confronting the individual when he or she ventures into a contemporary browsing and shopping paradise: "We went our separate ways into the store's deep interior. A great echoing din, as of the extinction of a species of a beast, filled the vast space. People bought 22-foot ladders, six kinds of sandpaper, power saws that could fell trees ... my family gloried in the event. I was one of them, shopping at last. They gave me advice, badgered clerks on my behalf. I kept seeing myself in some reflecting surface. We moved from store to store, rejecting not only certain items in certain departments, not only entire departments but whole stores, mammoth corporations that did not strike our fancy for one reason or another. There was always another store, three floors, eight floors, basement full of cheese graters and paring knives. I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped for immediate needs and distant contingencies ... a band played live muzak. Voices rose ten stories from the gardens and promenades, a roar that echoed and swirled through the vast gallery, mixing with the noises from the tiers, with shuffling feet and chiming bells, the hum of the escalators, the sound of people eating, the human buzz of some vivid and happy transaction" (82-84).

I have herein suggested that the characteristics of ambiguity and autonomy in the flâneur can potentially illuminate the concept of the individual in the now postmodern age. In order, however, to bring these together to depict a modern-day interpretation of flânerie, it is necessary to first address a problem that has haunted critical studies of popular culture since World War II. The problem is one of reconciling Benjamin's optimistic Marxian vision for a culture of the majority with the conundrum of what, for Adorno, is little more than a deceptive consumerism that "outdoes, in its veiled autocracy, all the excesses of autonomous art" (1951, 200) and instead signals the death of the individual. In what follows, I argue that by complementing the Benjamin of the Arcades period with Adorno's critical correspondences and later *Negative Dialectics*, it is possible to conceptualise an effective rendering of flânerie in the 21st century, one which successfully disrupts a hitherto restrictive and inescapable high-popular dichotomy.

III

Benjamin never stopped imagining a messianic moment wherein the ruins of the past become a path to new illuminations. Modernist fragments can glow with significance, an incandescent hope. Adorno, in sharp contrast, pursued a ruthless negation of the cultural events of his world. For him, the popular arts were a new order of enslavement, the means by which the enslaved learn to love their captivity. (Zelnick 1985, 409)

Written toward the end of Benjamin's life, when *The Arcades Project* was coming closer to fruition, the final correspondences with his friend and critic Theodor Adorno say much about their complex intellectual relationship, with both moving in essentially the same direction but on quite distinct paths. In a letter to Adorno dated 4 October 1938, appended to a portion of what he at that time refers to as "the Baudelaire," the impact of escalating political tensions in Europe – the reprehensible Munich agreement, handing a large part of Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany, was signed only days earlier – upon Benjamin's scholarly inquiries can be easily detected:

Yesterday, I prepared the several hundred books I have here for shipment to Paris. Now, however, I am increasingly coming to feel that this destination will have to become a transfer

point for them as well as for me: I do not know how long it will continue to be physically possible to breathe European air; after the events of the past weeks, it is spiritually impossible even now. This observation is not easy for me to make; but it simply cannot be avoided any longer. (575)¹⁹⁴

Adorno responded from New York, having departed Europe for the United States some months earlier. Today, the reader obtains a clear sense of how crossing the Atlantic placed Adorno well and truly at the centre of what was, for him, a contemporaneously unfolding cultural crisis. Certainly his reply to Benjamin shows Adorno to be fully focused upon the matter at hand, namely criticism of the former's work on Baudelaire and in particular his methodological approach:

The basic reason for [my] disappointment is that ... the work represents not so much a model for the *Arcades* as a prelude to that project. Motifs are assembled but not developed. In your cover letter to Max [Horkheimer], you presented this as your express intention and there is no mistaking the ascetic discipline you allowed to rule, making it possible for you to abstain from conclusive theoretical answers to questions throughout the text and probably even making it possible for you to allow the questions themselves to become apparent only to initiates. But I ask myself whether this kind of asceticism can be sustained in the face of this subject and in a context that places such powerful internal demands on you. (580)

Adorno's reaction at Benjamin's seeming refusal to buttress his project with direct theoretical objectives gets to the heart of the primary difference between the philosophical positions of the two, as outlined by Zelnick. In particular, it speaks of Adorno's teleological attitude to modernism, which stands in quite stark contrast to the patchwork, non-linear appreciation inherent in Benjamin. Alongside this, the latter's outsider status (already heightened by his remaining in Europe and difficulties in establishing a formal association with the academy)¹⁹⁵ is further confirmed through the decision of Adorno and the Institute for Social Research (operating in exile out of Columbia University) not to make public, and thus place open to discussion, the texts Benjamin forwarded to them (*Aesthetics and Politics*

¹⁹⁴ This excerpt and the following (taken from Adorno's letter of reply dated 10 November) appear in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940* (Scholem, G. & Adorno, T).

¹⁹⁵ Coetzee (2001, 28): "Benjamin was drawn to universities, remarked his friend Theodor Adorno, as Franz Kafka was drawn to insurance companies."

["Presentation III"] 2007, 104-105).¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, these important divergences do not erase the fact that Adorno and Benjamin were in many ways heading in the same direction. To my mind, combining the best aspects of their respective oeuvres leads one to a better understanding of the ongoing process of modernity (or postmodernity) and of the various uses and interpretations of contemporary culture apparent over the intervening years. Furthermore, such an approach can lead to alternative ways of engaging with the problem of aesthetic value.

As far as Adorno is concerned, his criticism of the paper on Baudelaire forwarded to him by Benjamin – much of which concerned the notion of *flânerie* – derives most notably from his own refined take on aesthetic modernism. That is, Adorno remains unflinching in his insistence upon certain “principles of structuration” that form the basis of the (formalist) trajectory of modernism (Witkin 2000, 148), a trajectory he at that time saw as most obviously represented in the twelve-tone compositions of Arnold Schoenberg. While for Benjamin *flânerie* is an activity through which new opportunities emerging at the interface of modernism and mass culture can be explored, Adorno condemns this kind of politically-correct engagement with everyday life as futile behaviourism; instead, he sought from Benjamin an interpretation that would “do justice to Marxism” (Scholem & Adorno 1994, 583).¹⁹⁷ In other words, Adorno feels that Benjamin’s fragmented, dream-like interpretation of 19th century Paris should reflect more explicitly the (to his mind) destructive nature of the historical bifurcation of modernity toward the diametrically opposed poles of modernism and mass culture.¹⁹⁸ On the face of things, then, his philosophy is underpinned by the

¹⁹⁶ *Aesthetics and Politics* (Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht & Lukács 2007) contains four unattributed presentations prepared by Livingston, R., Anderson, P. and/or Mulhern, F. All further citations will refer only to the title and number of presentation when appropriate.

¹⁹⁷ Elsewhere in the same correspondence, Adorno’s exemplary sense of humour softens objections to Benjamin’s methodology and clarifies his admiration for what the latter is attempting to achieve: “Do not fear that I am making use of this opportunity to mount my hobbyhorse. I will content myself with handing it a lump of sugar en passant and for the rest will try to indicate to you the theoretical basis of my aversion to this particular type of concreteness and its behaviouristic features” (581).

¹⁹⁸ In his letter to Benjamin dated 10 November 1938, Adorno says: “Panorama and ‘trace,’ *flâneur* and arcades, modernism and the immutable *without* theoretical interpretation – is this ‘material’ that can patiently wait for interpretation without being consumed by its own aura?” (Scholem & Adorno 1994, 580) [original italics]. Benjamin’s reply (9 December [585-592]) in part shows him eager to point out that in the following chapter (not yet viewed by Adorno) he intends to provide the theoretical illumination absent from his writings thus far; nonetheless, Benjamin would never

inevitability of radical modernism's grand narrative – a utopian impulse leading inexorably toward a redemptive negative aesthetics. But this is only part of the story.

In his superb essay on Adorno, modernism and mass culture, Andreas Huyssen (2002) describes how resilient this well-honed dichotomy – between avant-garde and culture industry – has proved over the ensuing decades.¹⁹⁹ Yet he goes on to emphasise not only how it represents an over-simplification of a complex debate, one in which the supposedly unconquerable divide between those two historical outcomes of modernity can no longer be sustained. Huyssen also shows that charges of elitism against Adorno – predicated upon his consistent critiques of the culture industry – conveniently ignore the numerous footholds for a positive, emancipatory cultural criticism present in much of his writing (51-52). For example, this standard dualism makes no attempt to differentiate, as Adorno did, between a constructive popular culture created by the people and a homogenised mass culture that arises out of the machinations of the culture industry (Kellner 2002, 104).

Adorno's position is underpinned by his theory of negative dialectics, which updates the Hegelian notion of dialectical thought as a way of progressing beyond oppositional relationships in order to arrive at a more advanced, more rational level of understanding. At that heart of negative dialectics are the notions of immanent critique and identity/non-identity. Adorno is stridently opposed to versions of transcendental criticism embodying preordained philosophical "givens" that appear somehow to be beyond criticism – simply the way things are. He refers to such transcendent philosophy as "the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" (1973, xx) – a falsely attained state of enlightened reason that is premised upon suspect foundations, not to mention essentially blind to the realities of totalitarian oppression (the culture industry being his preferred example of the latter phenomenon). An immanent critique contrasts this by "[remaining] within what it criticises" (Jarvis 1998, 6), encouraging interpretations which are truly dialectical, predicated upon "truth-content" (6) and historically valid in that they emerge out of, rather than claim independence from,

become as astringent as Adorno in his evaluation of mass culture, something his subsequent "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" makes palpable.

¹⁹⁹ A point Jameson corroborates (in the afterword to Adorno et al. 2007 [207]) when he speaks of "the full force and constriction of that stark alternative between a mass audience or media culture, and a minority 'elite' modernism, in which our thinking about aesthetics today is inevitably locked."

philosophical tradition (151). At the same time, dialectical thinking must focus wholly upon the object itself, discarding extraneous associations that discourage independent understanding and lead toward assumptions of totality (identity thinking) for the corrective course of non-identification: “criticising what an *inevitable* formalisation has made of the *potential*” (Adorno 1973, 151) [my italics]. Non-identification in negative dialectics hence privileges the ongoing process of analysis over the standard Hegelian concept of an outcome in which an evolution toward a more comprehensive and rational understanding is presupposed. For in Hegel’s dialectics, Adorno believes, the outcome obtained when one equates two negatives (the dialectical problem) with a positive (the dialectical outcome) is not truthful to the process – rather, it is a mere illusion consistent with the logic of identity thinking (158). In the final analysis Adorno’s negative dialectics is posited not as a tangible solution to a problem but rather as a way of “[making] *visible*, as contradiction, the real antagonisms which are masked by philosophy’s striving for logical identity” (Jarvis 1998, 170) [original italics]. For Adorno, synthesis and equilibrium are replaced by perpetual and meticulous critique, a permanent revolution.

Negative dialectics may be seen as an ongoing process of denial – denial of the possibility of revealing absolute truth or some other form of positive dialectical reconciliation (both, for Adorno, absurd goals in the wake of World War II and the Jewish holocaust).²⁰⁰ As Jarvis says, “[Negativity] cannot provide a blueprint for what the good life would be like, but only examines what our ‘damaged’ life *is* like” (1998, 9) [my italics].²⁰¹ And any semblance of redemption in this irrevocably damaged life of 20th century commodity capitalism is to be located, according to Adorno, amidst the radically alternative aesthetics of high modernism – in the abstract painting of Wassily Kandinsky, the prose of Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett and, most tellingly of all, the atonal music of Arnold Schoenberg and his associates

²⁰⁰ “After Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims’ fate” (Adorno 1973, 361). Undoubtedly exacerbating this negativity in Adorno’s mind post-war were the rapid expansion of the culture industry (most obviously in the US, from where Adorno did not finally depart until 1953) and the Cold War political climate in which Stalinism (more or less an extension of Nazism under a Marxist rubric) prospered. The absolute critical obligation at the heart of negative dialectics must therefore be one of a constant self-reflection, lest thought be “from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims” (365).

²⁰¹ *Minima Moralia* (Adorno 1974), a collection of essays written between 1944 and 1947, is subtitled *Reflections from Damaged Life*.

of the so-called second Viennese school of composers (in particular Alban Berg). Adorno locates a non-dialectical, repetitive structural organisation, characterised by identity thinking, in products of mass culture such as jazz music – products he views as agents of totalitarianism. Conversely, truly modernist works of art shimmer with individual expression through their negative (oppositional) relationship to the art, literature and music that preceded them. All of the classic traits of a high modernist aesthetic are emphasised in Adorno’s philosophical claims: a strictly linear progression toward even more representatively pure modern art forms; a focus upon the artist as genius, with an associated denial of the possibility of a democratic culture; an essentially antagonistic relationship with the contemporaneous avant-garde movement of the early 20th century (fully exposed in Bürger 1984).

The latter point is of particular importance when endeavouring to reveal the hidden complexities of Adorno’s position on modernism, and of his critical relationship with Benjamin. As Huyssen (2002) emphasises, there has been some discussion, most notably in Bürger (1984), on the innate differences between the modernist and avant-garde aesthetics of the early 20th century. Huyssen makes particular reference to the avant-garde doctrines of the dadaist and surrealist movements, which are characterised by “attempts to dissolve the boundaries between art and life” (2002, 42), through practices such as collage. Adorno’s arch-modernism rejects (and this is where his break with Benjamin is most apparent) any movement away from the autonomy of the art work. Such a conception of what is valid aesthetic practice ostensibly leads to an even more drastic divide between high and mass culture: “where high art itself is sucked into the maelstrom of commodification, modernism is born as a reaction and a defence” (Huyssen 2002, 49). At the same time, however, Huyssen further unravels the intricacies of Adorno’s vision by insisting that his unswerving disgust at the standardisation and pseudo-individualisation rife in commodity culture does *not* merely translate – here, his objections to certain aspects of the avant-garde are of paramount relevance²⁰² – to a “conservative defence of the high cultural canon” (50),

²⁰² The infallibility or otherwise of Adorno’s strict separation of modernism and the avant-garde, as discussed in Huyssen (2002), is arguably yet to be confirmed. Certainly in many cases the two terms continue to be used interchangeably, despite the intervention of Bürger. According to the latter, Benjamin’s focus upon the deterioration of art’s ritual value in the face of technological change goes to confirm the distance between avant-garde enterprises, which seek to somehow integrate art and life, and classical modernism (1984, 27-31). Yet in his 1989 essay “Politics of Modernism” (the

something Adorno's explicit advocacy of ugliness and dissonance in modern artworks confirms. Adorno is in the final analysis, then, a "critic of [both] 'high culture' and 'mass culture'" (Kellner 2002, 86) [my italics].

Yet so, despite their many disagreements, is Benjamin. Caught up in the midst of a post-industrial society evolving at an ever more rapid pace, the two stand together in "tense solidarity" as advocates for "a philosophy of history formed by experiences of modernity in aesthetics" (Wiggerhaus 1994, 196). As such, they present a united position in opposition to arguably more backward-looking Frankfurt School comrades such as Georg Lukács (who mostly sees in modernism evidence of the unfulfilled promise of realism) and Herbert Marcuse (whose work harks back to even more archaic notions of aesthetic beauty).²⁰³ In concert with Adorno, though at the same time adopting a quite distinct methodology, Benjamin seeks to both understand and criticise the progress of modernity in a contemporary setting of great social and cultural crisis. And like Adorno, his thought is crucially underpinned by Hegelian philosophy. However, while similarly concerned with the methodology of immanent critique – "the inner logic of the subject under investigation" (Wolin 1982, 163) – the Benjamin of *The Arcades Project* and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is otherwise indebted, much to Adorno's dismay, to that aspect of Hegelian logic that allows him to "scrupulously [eschew] explicit thematisation of the methodological premises underlying his work" (163).²⁰⁴ While Adorno always appears

editor's introduction to the Raymond Williams retrospective of the same name), Tony Pinkney contrasts Williams' early pillars of modernity (Blake, Wordsworth, Dickens) with those of Marshall Berman (Goethe, Marx, Baudelaire) [13]. As Pinkney goes on to note, the modernism that later enraptured Williams was a heady combination of surrealism, Ibsen, *Finnegans Wake*, jazz, T.S. Eliot and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*; Berman, meanwhile, lauds Gabriel García Márquez (literature), Werner Herzog (film), Philip Glass (music) and Twyla Tharp (dance) as evidence of "the brilliance and depth of living modernism" (1983, 24). Such inclusive, varied versions of the modernist project muddy the distinction between modernism and the avant-garde and are arguably linked in spirit to Benjamin. Adorno's modernism, on the other hand, is far more reductive – only Kafka, Klee, Schönberg and a few others fit in. It might also be noted that on many occasions art that seems patently modernist in Adorno and Bürger's terms, such as the free jazz of Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor and others, is commonly labelled avant-garde (see, for instance, Kart 2000). In the end, perhaps it can only be observed that both the modernist and avant-garde movements are much further removed from mass culture in general than they are from each other.

²⁰³ Sara Nadal-Melsió says that for Lukács, "realism is the accuser, modernism the accused" (2004, 82), while Lyotard suggests that Marcuse has confused "the Kantian sublime with Freudian sublimation [because] aesthetics has remained for him that of the beautiful" (1984a, 79).

²⁰⁴ The link between Benjamin and Hegel can be easily comprehended, as Wolin suggests, in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 1977), where one encounters such phrases as

to be obsessively moving forward toward the advent of a profound high modernism, Benjamin is torn, much like the flâneur, between a necessary (in Marxist terms) ideological condemnation of modernity and the joys and insights of burying oneself in the heart of that very environment (epitomised by the lights, the stores, the prostitutes of the metropolitan city). “He [Benjamin] can not resist one last look down the boulevard or under the arcade; he wants to be saved, but not yet” (Berman 1983, 146).

Where Benjamin parts most significantly from his colleague is in his belief that an omnipresent mass culture might provide the best access point for any attempt to mobilise the populace for political ends. “[He] recognised, with some urgency, the need to extend the role of the intellectual in order to engage with the people and to do this through transforming the existing mass media while simultaneously making use of its technological advances” (McRobbie 2005, 295). In other words, the democratic turn in *The Arcades Project* and the “Work of Art” essay signifies an attempt to tackle the very same philosophical problem as Adorno – namely, undertaking a dialectical investigation of the modern condition – from a radically different direction: from below rather than above. The kinds of cultural productions criticised by Adorno around the time of his final correspondences with Benjamin were many and varied: popular music as epitomised by the standards of Tin Pan Alley; European and American jazz; photography; Hollywood film. At the same time, many of these relatively new forms of artistic expression were being championed by Benjamin, most notably in his “Work of Art” essay (Benjamin 1969, 211-244). The primary thrust of this text is the examination of potential positive outcomes associated with the weakening of the customary aura surrounding works of art, a condition destined to reduce the typical separation – both physical and psychological – between art and the populace by “[enabling] the original to meet the beholder halfway” (220). Decisive to this loss of aura is the fact that in these newer forms of artistic expression there is never one original, but instead innumerable reproductions accessible to many people at the one time. To Benjamin’s mind, forms like photography and film accordingly lessen the distance between artist and audience, liberating both parties and enhancing art’s political possibilities. Although this “tremendous shattering of tradition” (221) is detrimental to the ritual nature of the aesthetic

“useless ideas and locutions about cognition as an instrument for getting hold of the absolute” and “[the] empty appearance of knowing” (48).

experience (travelling to attend the concert hall or art gallery; engaging “one on one” with the celebrated object), it does allow art to be accessed in more “natural” circumstances, such as the in the home (the phonographic record; the photographic reproduction) or in the immediate neighbourhood (the film house; the jazz club). Benjamin prophesies the future dominance of this kind of mass-consumption, along with the associated decline of the ritual value of the traditional artwork, in effect downplaying the concerns of Adorno and others of the Frankfurt School regarding the isolation of high art in the face of mass entertainment.

But, as Susan Buck-Morrs puts it,

Benjamin’s argument managed to tread on all ten of Adorno’s intellectual toes ... aping the official line of the Communist Party, Benjamin was claiming that the *art pour l’art* which Adorno had judged positively as an alternative to mass culture was the aesthetic parallel to fascism. [At the same time] Adorno was startled by Benjamin’s uncritical affirmation of film, the medium of mass culture which had taken the place of traditional, ‘autonomous’ art. (1977, 148-149)

Benjamin, as we have already seen, in many ways rejects Adorno’s largely unambiguous approach to the problem of mass culture. Echoing Simmel, he focuses upon the metropolis as the key location for modernity; echoing Baudelaire, he sees this necessary transfer of attention – from the beauty of unspoilt nature and the communal simplicity of pre-modern lifestyles, involving narratives that are localised and followed through to conclusion, to labyrinthine, disjointed cities where life resembles “a short story, dreamlike, insubstantial and ambiguous” (Wilson 1992, 107-108) – as ripe with descriptive possibilities.²⁰⁵ And unlike Adorno, there is no possibility of a straightforward answer for a man who, as Angela McRobbie points out, “disputed the idea of progress, historically and philosophically” (2005, 304). Here, familiar, though often simplistic, associations between Benjamin,

²⁰⁵ The writer who most lucidly appropriates this stylistic method post-Benjamin is Jorge Luis Borges. In his story “The Garden of Forking Paths” the protagonist’s revelation evokes Benjamin’s methodology – potential routes to the future both seen and unseen, taken and bypassed: “Almost instantly, I understood: ‘the garden of forking paths’ was the chaotic novel; the phrase ‘the various futures (not to all)’ suggested to me the forking of time, not space ... in all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts’ui Pên, he chooses – simultaneously – all of them. *He creates*, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork” (1970, 51) [original italics].

postmodernism and the cultural studies project come into clearer focus. And it is certainly correct to say that for Benjamin, the traditional Marxist take on modernity and the prolongation of commodity capitalism leads ultimately to a dead end. He seeks a new way of thinking about mass culture that is sufficiently critical of the transformative processes of modernity *yet* neither inexorably deterministic nor ignorant of the possibility of genuine autonomy amongst the general population. As far as his methodology – most notably in research for *The Arcades Project* – is concerned, this departure from Adorno and others is indicated by a desire to somehow circumvent such perceived constraints as “conventional scholarship” and the “conferring [of] value” (McRobbie 2005, 301). The realisation of this strategy can be found in the “Work of Art” essay, but it is even more palpable in the “imagistically constructed ... cognitive principles of montage” associated with his arcades research (Buck-Morris 1989, 218-219). Benjamin’s expose on the flâneur, as well as the aspects of flânerie reflected in his own methodology, are in turn roundly criticised in Adorno’s letter of 10 November 1938. By sacrificing developed theory for the mere assemblage of images and “objective reflection for the sake of political correctness” (Buck-Morris 1989, 228), Benjamin, according to Adorno, strays too far from the strict theoretical beliefs upon which the Institute for Social Research was founded. Adorno tells Benjamin that this subjective approach has led him to “the crossroads of magic and positivism,” before warning him (with characteristic eloquence) that “[the spot] is bewitched” (Scholem & Adorno 1994, 582).

As *The Arcades Project* demonstrates, Benjamin’s ultimate goal is to

write the prehistory of the world crisis of the 1930s in such a way that its post-history, the language of an awakening from the nightmare culmination of commodity capitalism, would become a reality ... while operating within the central Marxist categories of history, materialism and dialectics, Benjamin sought to liberate those categories from their manifest complicity with determinism, tyranny, and political impotence. (Rolleston 1989, 13)

Ultimately, the unfolding political, humanitarian and cultural crises of the between-wars period underpin the critical concerns of both Adorno and Benjamin: it is their responses to the problem that differ so much in kind. Adorno associates himself squarely within a 20th century modernist narrative, wherein ever more rarefied and isolated artworks stand opposed

to both totalitarianism and a burgeoning mass culture. In his view, both history and future can be revealed immanently in the aesthetic material of the modernist composition, a circumstance more or less limited, in music and literature, to the serialist techniques of Schoenberg and Berg and the anti-novels of Kafka and Beckett respectively. Benjamin's approach to modernism, on the other hand, is largely grounded in the modernity of 19th century Paris and informed by figures – such as the flâneur and the collector – who explore, and sometimes embrace, mass culture, defying the kind of explicit theoretical characterisation demanded by his colleague. He appears equally fascinated by such disparate aesthetic achievements as the dense fictions of Proust, the kitsch lithographs and engravings of Grandville, the remarkable Parisian photographs of Atget, the transcendentalist art of Klee and the popular films of Chaplin.

Despite their differences, however, both men can be regarded as outsiders. Zelnick refers to them as not Marxists but “Marxians [who share] a modernist outlook and method, and champion artists who are modernists to the core – Benjamin, Baudelaire; Adorno, Schoenberg” (1985, 409). And both remained committed, after Marx, to salvaging hope in the face of fascism, armed conflict and dominant commodity capitalism. Douglas Kellner (2002) stresses how the two share a fundamentally Marxian goal within their radically opposed critical approaches:

While Adorno tended to criticise precisely the most mechanically mediated works of mass culture for their standardisation and loss of aesthetic quality – while celebrating those works that most steadfastly resisted commodification and mechanical reproduction – Benjamin saw progressive features in high art's loss of its auratic quality and its becoming more politicised. Such art, he claimed, assumed more of an “exhibition value” than a cultic or religious value, and thus demystified its reception ... for Adorno, however, only the most radically avant-garde works could provide genuine aesthetic experience [which] alone, he came to believe, provided the refuge for truth and a sphere of individual freedom and resistance. (89; 92-93)

Bringing this debate forward into the present epoch requires acceptance of something Kellner makes abundantly clear: that Benjamin holds out some hope for a culture industry upon which Adorno pours only scorn. However, it is unfortunate that, in concert with cultural studies and post-structuralism embracing Benjamin for dislodging the “halo” of

modern art (Huyssen 1984, 7), this basic truth has usually led to an unsophisticated cordoning-off of Adorno as both elitist and passé (Huyssen 2002, 51-54). Both Adorno and Benjamin would, one suspects, be thoroughly disheartened by the general absence of political commitment associated with the even more profit-driven, more alienating, and (crucially) more omnipresent culture industries of the present age. For Adorno, these events would be most obviously signified by the juxtaposition of an all-pervasive commodity culture with a marginalised, disorganised high art community, one clinging desperately to the last vestiges of relevance under postmodernism. Benjamin in turn would be dismayed by the general absence of revelatory interpretations emanating from a mass media that has come to entirely dominate (and thus hugely constrain) the landscape of culture and aesthetics.

I stand convinced that neither Benjamin nor Adorno can survive being thrust into our present cultural epoch alone; Wolin (1982, 210) is correct to contend that each requires the tempering influence of the other. Keeping the pared down, finely honed methodology of a perpetually suspicious Adorno side by side with the indistinctly articulated, sometimes equivocal approach of a tentatively hopeful Benjamin can lead to entirely new insights into what commonly is perceived as an unimpeachable intellectual division. Such an approach can also lead to a more structurally flexible theory of culture and aesthetics, one capable of subverting stereotypical and oversimplified critical views of Adorno as stern elitist and Benjamin as tolerant radical respectively (Hansen 1993, 27-28). To further investigate this possibility, it is necessary to look more closely at how alternatives to such critical views have been articulated.

IV

There has been no shortage of discussion on the weaknesses and limitations of Adorno's supposedly elitist approach to music in particular. Arguments are typically structured around one or more of the following concerns: that Adorno privileges contemplative engagements with music over other potential uses such as pleasure or distraction; that his requirement for true art to be esoteric excludes all but a small few of the population from the

possibility of being transformed through its emancipative qualities; that his examples of worthwhile music are wholly Eurocentric and therefore highly restrictive; that he is blind to analogous modernist-style progressions occurring beyond the world of traditional art music; that he steadfastly accuses the popular art forms of the 20th century, such as pop and rock music and film, of capitulating to the forces of capitalism, when in truth these are often sites of subversion and discernment.²⁰⁶ And to these one might add the suggestion that over the course of a long career of writing on culture and aesthetics generally, inconsistencies sometimes surface in ways that compromise his ostensibly unyielding position on mass-produced art. For example, one can contrast Adorno's positive reference to "the incomparable cinematic farces of the Marx Brothers" in "The Relationship of Philosophy and Music" (2002, 136) with the following statement from *Minima Moralia*: "Every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse" (1974, 25).

Many of the above-mentioned supposed failings in Adorno are evidenced by his controversial relationship with jazz music. In an infamous essay outlining why jazz fails as an aesthetic construct ("On Jazz"), Adorno concludes with the finding that the genre is close to "beyond redemption" (2002, 492). Inasmuch as his criticism here is limited to the jazz music of the period (mid-30s), this has come to be proven at least partially correct – arguably jazz as a distinct entity is, much like rock and classical, a largely nostalgic construct in the 21st century, a term used by most to evoke a musical form as it was, rather than what it has become.²⁰⁷ Nonetheless, the evolution of 20th century jazz in Adorno's

²⁰⁶ Amongst the most even-handed and convincing criticisms of Adorno are those in Middleton (1990, 57-63), Gracyk (1992), Witkin (2000), Shusterman (2000, 177-200), Huyssen (2002) and Paddison (2004, 81-105).

²⁰⁷ This is the case for *both* the conservative and experimental spheres of the genre. While Adorno assigns jazz in general to the category of non-affirmative art, others discriminate between "modern jazz" and "jazz modernism." The former refers to the genre's pre-World War II (popular) incarnation and the latter to the period that commenced with be-bop and culminated (in Adorno's lifetime) in the avant-gardism of the 1960s. As indicated by the title of his 1963 essay "The End of Jazz," Philip Larkin despairs at the introduction of what he believes to be a hermetic, unlistenable jazz modernism. For instance, he says that with John Coltrane "jazz started to be *ugly on purpose*: his nasty tone would become more and more exacerbated until he was fairly screeching at you like a pair of demonically-possessed bagpipes. After Coltrane, of course, all was chaos, hatred and absurdity, and one was almost relieved that severance with jazz had become so complete and obvious" (1983, 291) [original italics]. Larkin and other conservatives took further umbrage at the subsequent fusion music of Miles Davis, John McLaughlin, Weather Report and others; this later aspect of jazz's evolution is dismissed in a matter of minutes in Ken Burns' 12-hour documentary *Jazz* (Kahn 2001, 2; Ford 2002, 190). Alternatively, those immersed in the jazz avant-garde, such as

lifetime (until 1969) certainly belies his claim to its wholesale commercialisation and ultimate insignificance.²⁰⁸ Gracyk (1992, 532-533) wholeheartedly disputes this alleged standardisation inherent in the music, giving examples of experimental compositions beginning with Louis Armstrong in the 1920s and carrying on right through to the avant-garde and/or improvisational jazz of the 1960s. In the latter development, one that closely resembles those of atonality and serialism in art music, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Sun Ra, Evan Parker and others unleashed an arguably modernist, often dissonant and esoteric sound far removed from that which was the focus of Adorno's ire three decades earlier. Yet these advances would probably have remained incidental for Adorno even if he had become aware of them. As Robert Witkin intelligently recognises, the position taken by Adorno on jazz is more importantly related to his philosophical "principles of structuration" (that is, his determined adherence to a negative dialectics) than to any musical evaluation. The philosophical ideals at the heart of Adorno's opposition to non-progressive music are always rigidly adhered to: even Schoenberg was not immune to criticism from Adorno when he began to stray from the path of rigid negation (Witkin 2000, 151). For Adorno, jazz is unable to transcend its intrinsic association with popular culture, despite apparently irrefutable evidence to the contrary.

The modernist pathway to a revelatory aesthetics is laid out in a statement by the Cubist painter Braque:

The whole Renaissance tradition is antipathetic to me. The hard-and-fast rules of perspective which it succeeded in imposing on art were a ghastly mistake which it has taken four centuries to redress. (in Moszynska 1990, 12)

For Braque, Adorno and many others, the failure of the traditional order (and thus the need to promote a new one) is recognized in the twin conditions of an art world restrained by convention and a society beset by war, oppression and class inequality. The spirit of the aesthetic rupture initiated by the modernists is beautifully captured in *The Cow*, a 1910 composition by Russian expressionist painter Wassily Kandinsky. This early example of

Davis himself, see that music as a kind-of post-jazz – music that has somehow evolved beyond jazz whilst still rooted in the jazz tradition.

²⁰⁸ As Witkin observes, Adorno published nothing on jazz after 1953 (2000, 146).

non-figurative art gives one a clear sense of the direction modern aesthetics is about to take. The cow that is the ostensible subject here has all but merged into a background of fields, hills and houses, a background that is itself a barely discernible melding of one colour into another. Positioned on the cusp of Kandinsky's own passage from representation to abstraction,²⁰⁹ *The Cow* can be seen as embodying the last glimmer of a long-standing tradition about to be subsumed by an unprecedented future; a point in time where it seems possible to either hold on to the final remnants of natural life and perspective, or plunge headlong into the new world that the modernists bid us enter.²¹⁰ In truth, the artists and philosophers of modernism often differ in how far they are prepared to step into this future. Braque, for example, loitered on the cusp between representation and abstraction (Moszynska 1990, 13), while Schoenberg himself never totally abandoned the tonal tradition out of which his daring new music arose (Griffiths 1978, 35-36). Yet Adorno's own vision is one that demands consistent and complete submission to an ever more impenetrable, ever more isolated formalist aesthetic.²¹¹

It is this determination to pursue a linear high modernist narrative that invites the various criticisms leveled against Adorno. Such criticisms are particularly difficult to deny with regard to an aesthetics of reception: for Hans Robert Jauss (1982b, 16-17), arguing against what he eventually perceived to be the dead end of esotericism, the categories of affirmative and negative are not permanent but are capable of being transcended over the history of an artwork's cultural reception; for Rose Rosegard Subotnick (1996, 170), the kind of structural

²⁰⁹ This passage, from the artist's more traditional *Der Blaue Reiter* (1903) through to abstract masterpieces such as *Yellow Red Blue* (1925), is made plain by the chronological presentation of examples in *Kandinsky* (1993). (A reproduction of *The Cow* appears on page 26.)

²¹⁰ Analogous sensations are palpable in a musical composition such as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1912), in which broken shards of harmony remain to be extracted by the listener, or in a (later) modernist novel like Beckett's *Watt* (1953), where an at first traditional narrative begins to fall to pieces before the reader's very eyes and the language becomes, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, that of a "willed poverty" (1986, 19).

²¹¹ Curiously, to the best of my knowledge Adorno's published writing shows barely any engagement, apart from two references in *Aesthetic Theory*, with the painter whose aesthetic philosophy seems to most closely reflect his own – Piet Mondrian. Like Kandinsky, Mondrian moved into abstraction – via Cubism – around the time of World War I, titles like *Composition No. 10 (Pier and Ocean)* [1915] indicative of the final vestiges of representation clinging to palpably abstract art. But Mondrian's vision leads him toward a more pure form of abstraction, structured around a concept of negation comparable to that contemporaneously pursued by Adorno. Yet interestingly, a similar aesthetic outlook did not stop Mondrian embracing jazz in the years leading up to his death in 1944.

listening required in the case of a Schoenberg composition, for instance, in the end proves to be “socially divisive.” Nonetheless, it should be remembered that Adorno’s sometimes blind determination is always underpinned by a search for ways to undermine totality and bypass commodification (Huyssen 2002, 42), something even ostensibly modern artists such as Stravinsky, Picasso and Brecht are, as far as he is concerned, unable to satisfactorily achieve. A not dissimilar search is prominent in the work of his compatriot Benjamin, who nonetheless undertakes his in light of what he perceives to be the imminent shattering of that same linear narrative. He explores a very different route in pursuit of social redemption, although this pathway has in many ways proven to be as fraught with danger as that taken by his colleague.

Unlike Adorno, Benjamin’s vision cannot easily be pared down to an orderly list of criticisms. His belief in both the fading of art’s traditional aura and the unlikelihood of progress, as associated with the enterprise of modernism, opens the door to all manner of untapped possibilities; rather than hindering analysis, Benjamin’s own inconsistencies often neatly reflect the greater ambiguity of his life’s work. Benjamin conceived of *The Arcades Project* not as a top-down assessment of modernity, but instead as one involving “those minutiae of everyday collective practices and experiences that – in spite of their overall fetishistic nature – contain a spark of radical energies” (Markus 2006, 87). As such, he pursues a utopian vision which, contrasting that of Adorno, translates not just to a select few intellectuals in society. Though the revolutionary potential of many of the objects of Benjamin’s admiration may be elusive and concealed beneath a commodity wrapping, at the same time they are more easily accessible than Beckett, Kafka, Kandinsky and Schoenberg could ever be.

In significant contrast to the latter-day reception of Adorno, Benjamin’s integration into postmodern thought has predominantly been a smooth one; most critics now consider his philosophical approach the more productive of the two (McRobbie 2005, 303; Markus 2006, 68). But if in retrospect it can be argued that Adorno was overly optimistic as to the revolutionary potential of high modernism, might Benjamin have crossed too far over to the other side in his disavowal of the ritual value of high art? As Benjamin’s vision simultaneously becomes both more palatable to modern-day scholars *and* more prophetic of

global capitalism and commodity fetishism, it is hardly surprising that it is Adorno himself who gains in stature as Benjamin's most important critic:

The condemnation of aura easily becomes the dismissal of qualitatively modern art that distances itself from the logic of familiar things; the critique of aura thereby cloaks the products of mass culture in which profit is hidden and whose trace they bear ... the failure of Benjamin's grandly conceived theory of reproduction remains that its bipolar categories make it impossible to distinguish between a conception of art that is free of ideology to its core and the misuse of aesthetic rationality for mass exploitation and mass domination, a possibility he hardly touches upon. (Adorno 1997, 56)

It is, then, at that final way station on the road to a pure non-representational aesthetic, around the moment when Kandinsky's cow begins to merge into its surroundings and lose all recognisable form, where Benjamin is fated to linger. He is willing to admire the achievements of high modernism, but only from that precise position where his view of its alternative in modernity – mass culture – can also be apprehended and absorbed. Benjamin cannot quite bring himself to turn away from the spectacle of the culture of the majority, convinced that from amongst the detritus of modernity positive elements will emerge (McRobbie 2005, 312).

However, because he is not concerned with linear reasoning, it might also be suggested that for Benjamin modernism does not come down to simply a movement from representation to abstraction, tonality to atonality, and so forth. More likely, Benjamin sees in modernism the same volatile combination of sophistication, disintegration and crisis as do Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (1976, 26). But this does not mean that Benjamin stands in direct opposition to Adorno. Believing that absolute hope lies in neither a rarefied modernism nor a troubled mass culture, Benjamin marshals his thoughts while moving comfortably, flâneur-like, from Proust to Grandville, Atget to Klee. Yet, as has already been noted, he is never uncritical of the general direction in which mass culture is leading, even in his lifetime. Benjamin, for whom any hope is always mitigated by "intellectual sadness [and] his despair at the outcome of events around him" (McRobbie 2005, 297), less expects than *allows for the possibility of* revolutionary praxis in the culture and art of the mainstream. For this reason, it can be argued that many have too-easily linked Benjamin

with the critical evolution whereby popular texts are considered “the privileged sites of ideology” (McRobbie 2005, 297) and an “old hierarchy [is] simply reversed” (Huysen 2002, 52).

Moreover, the progression of global capitalism since 1940 (characterised by what Adorno prophetically observed to be an increasingly dominant culture of conformity and regression) itself stands as evidence that a major aspect of Benjamin’s philosophy remains unrealised – that is, the revolutionary potential of popular art has failed to materialise in the face of an overbearing, propagandistic electronic media. Staying with the example of jazz music, in this case the modern-day juxtaposition of an inescapably marginalised experimental/improvisational slipstream with a populist, mostly nostalgic mainstream (combining the endless repackaging of greats like Louis Armstrong with widely popular contemporary artists in the “classical” mode) suggests the triumph of a facile populism over Benjamin’s hoped-for politicisation of aesthetics (1969, 242).²¹² In other words, the kind of dichotomy defined in Adorno (but for the most part eluded by Benjamin) continues to overshadow debate in jazz as it does debate in music and culture generally.

In the end, the seemingly diametrical positions of Benjamin and Adorno vis-à-vis art and culture serve to explain why they should be brought forward into the 21st century in a dialectical fashion:

Benjamin, by emphasising the importance of mechanically reproduced art as a vehicle of mass political communication, forfeits the measure of distance art needs vis-à-vis society in order to fulfil its inalienable critical function. His position thereby risks heralding the *false* overcoming of autonomous art ... Adorno, on the other hand, staunchly preserves the moment of negativity embodied in the works of the 20th century avant-garde ... the more pervasive the grip of the totally administered world becomes, the more the artistic avant-garde is forced, for the sake of its own self-preservation, to distance itself from that world. (Wolin 1982, 207-208) [original italics]

²¹² As we have previously seen, this is a situation to all intents and purposes analogous to that of classical or art music (as with jazz, the designation remains problematic), now split between a barely-heard experimental zone and a far more popular, stridently tonal, traditional core dominated by the perpetual repackaging of the pre-moderns.

It has been contended that the two theorists' overestimations of the possibilities inherent in mass culture and modernism respectively lead to "signs of imminent conservatism" – suggested in Benjamin by his nostalgia for silent film and in Adorno by his inability to embrace the latent modernism in certain non-classical forms of music (*Aesthetics and Politics* ["Presentation III"] 2007, 107). At any rate, while it is necessary to acknowledge that neither could have foreseen the "extremely complex and variegated set of dialectical relationships between 'high' and 'low,' 'avant-garde' and 'popular'" (108) in the media and arts of the present era, it is nonetheless the case that both tended to downplay specific historical attributes in aesthetics (Adorno, use value; Benjamin, eternal value) that might more usefully be brought together than maintained in opposition.

Thus the contrasting positions of Adorno and Benjamin make the most sense when they are juxtaposed as complementary, not competing, philosophies on art and culture. In the case of Adorno, his modernist logic is vital primarily because it tempers the stultifying omnipresence of commodity culture with the (too often neglected) radical possibilities of experimentation, dissonance and negation. He serves as a reminder – in the face of both a chaotic postmodernism and an unimaginative antimodernism – of art's ability to question and transcend the widespread banality of the mass media.²¹³ Adorno also reminds us of the need to ensure that debates concerning 21st century culture do not stall in the cul-de-sac of populism (Goodall 1995, 172-174; Gitlin 1997, 30-32), bypassing altogether esoteric or challenging aesthetic practices. To these ends, considered today Adorno is a means of preserving a little judicious distance between criticism and mass culture. Adorno's thinking (and this can hold true despite his theoretical blindness to non-affirmative forms of art) may function to moderate a situation where the salience of mass culture leads to strategies that overemphasise its emancipatory promise.

²¹³ According to the antimodernists, most of whom have no time for popular culture either, the kind of modernism championed by Adorno has no residual value whatsoever. In music, the critics yearning for a return to pre-modern values include Harry Pleasants, who early on identified modern music as the sound of "deluded spectators picking through the slagpile" (1955, 3), and Terry Teachout, who – in commenting on Arnold Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire: Opus 21* of 1912 – makes the ridiculous claim that "atonality makes sense only when intended to serve as a musical representation of nonsense – that is, psychosis or some other dire mental disturbance" (1999a, 49). Paradoxically, the arguments of Pleasants and Teachout turn out to be more elitist than Adorno ever was, denying as they go on to do any potential reconciliation of art and the everyday that might be seen as one of the positive outcomes of the postmodern condition.

Benjamin, on the other hand, offers mitigation in the face of consistent efforts to distance high art from the everyday. He is available to soften the antinomy whereby, in Adorno's terms, it is thought that in the face of a materialist and deceptive popular culture modern art can only survive through recourse to its traditional values of ritual, impenetrability and authenticity (Arato 1982, 218-219). As such, through Benjamin it is possible to break away from the high-popular dichotomy without submitting to a culture industry rooted in distraction and self-indulgence; rather, his intrinsic ambiguity offers both a link to and path away from Adornoesque negativity by way of exploring those aesthetic and cultural practices that take place in the margins of contemporary culture. Benjamin – when viewed as problematising the high-low divide, not perpetuating it – restores the notion of historical development otherwise denied to that vast array of cultural endeavours not strictly aligned with the aesthetic values of modernism.

In music, the importance of the early modernists (the Debussy of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un Faune*, the Schoenberg of *Erwartung* and the Stravinsky of *The Rite of Spring*) is exemplified by the part they played in ushering in a monumental break with hundreds of years of tradition. Adorno, I would contend, plays his part as the most important voice in a philosophy of modernism that in effect oversees the entire movement. But if it is in engineering the rupture (one that gave art a renewed aesthetic and political relevance in the 20th century) that the significance of Adorno, Debussy, Schoenberg, Stravinsky and so many more lies, then plotting future paths beyond this rupture proves impossible without addressing the reality of positions which do not hold steadfastly to the linear progression of high modernism.²¹⁴ And this is where Benjamin becomes Adorno's most important philosophical companion. Rather than leading toward (as Adorno alone unavoidably does) an ever-widening chasm between pure art and the culture industry, Benjamin's primary influence is to foster consideration of the alternative paths forward which might exist between and around such a limiting dichotomy. In this way, so many events in 20th century

²¹⁴ Again, Adorno is unique in that he demands total commitment to a negative modernist aesthetic, supporting only those artists, writers and musicians who reflect this and abandoning them as soon as they stray from it. By contrast, Debussy remained radical yet explored various stylistic methods with an almost postmodern zeal, Stravinsky eventually reverted (much to Adorno's chagrin) to a neo-classicism, and even Schönberg was criticised by Adorno for the direction his latter-day music had taken.

music can clearly be seen to have forged pathways antithetical to both a rarefied high modernist aesthetic (though arguably most of these have taken inspiration from the experimental urge underpinning modernism) and the typical culture industry event (though each has had at least a troubled affiliation of some kind with the mass media).²¹⁵

Witkin, Gracyk and others claim there is a need for a reconsideration of a jazz music that (post-Adorno) does not fall neatly in line with either a modernist or a mass culture aesthetic. For Witkin there is a version of jazz evidently antagonistic to the culture industries – since the 1960s mostly bound up in explorations evolving out of US free jazz and European improvisational music (Cox & Warner 2004, 251-252) – that can give rise to the notion of a “sensuous and charged affectivity, lived and celebrated on the margins of rational-technical modernity, configured in relation to it and always rubbing up against its grain” (Witkin 2000, 164). In the postmodern period these margins or between-spaces (where in music categories like jazz rub up against, and eventually dissolve into, a plethora of other genres and sub-genres) are where the inescapable commodity character of art shorn of its ritual status (Benjamin) and the innovation and truth-value of a modernist aesthetic (Adorno) finally cross paths.

In my estimation, however, it is less helpful now to think of certain enlightened individuals (artists and/or audience members) as occupying such between-spaces. Instead, it is more important to think of how people can and often do bypass, or even defeat, an ever-present high-popular dichotomy by moving in their own lives around and amongst the vast world of cultural material that surrounds them, operating, in the spirit of *flânerie*, against the grain of a fully entrenched consumer culture.

²¹⁵ As it turns out, Max Paddison identifies isolated threads in Adorno’s work to actually implicate him as a proto-postmodernist aware of the possibility that certain music might ultimately avoid the standard modernist-mass culture dialectic (2004, 97-102). Paddison takes part of his evidence from a work of Adorno’s yet to be translated into English (“Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der Musik”), going on to suggest a number of examples of “radical popular music” that in his view accord with this strand in Adorno’s thinking: Frank Zappa, Henry Cow, the Velvet Underground, plus certain post-punk and avant-garde rock and jazz bands (101-102).

This chapter has set out to use the critical theory of Frankfurt School scholars Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno as a lens through which to view the individual audience member in the 21st century. The thinking of Adorno and Benjamin, along with subsequent criticisms of their work, comes together to create a kind of moving dialectic – a continual process of reconceptualising the opposition between modernism and mass culture, an opposition essential to the discourse between the two men as well as so much that has followed. Through this dialectical process arrives a sense of the firmly inscribed dualism of a ritualised high art and a globalised entertainment industry breaking down into a single vast, intricate global landscape of cultural artefacts and fragments old and new, simple and complex, cherished and discarded. Though all of this material lies within the potential ambit of the culture industries, there is much that lingers (and nowhere is this more obvious than in music) on the fringes, averting, for the time being at least, the steady gaze of commercial interests.

Central to the discussion has been Walter Benjamin's conception, following Baudelaire, of the figure known as the *flâneur*. Benjamin and Baudelaire were both contrary figures, peculiar (certainly more so than Adorno) as regards what they found worthy of appreciation in an increasingly modernised, urbanised and (for Benjamin especially) technological society. A latter-day version of this urban wanderer, it has been contended, involves bringing certain characteristics of *flânerie* forward into a setting of advanced multinational capitalism far beyond anything either Baudelaire or Benjamin could have imagined. In such a setting, it is possible to conceive of *flânerie* as embodying an indefinable, ambiguous relationship between individual and society, a relationship with at least the potential to develop into a full-scale critique of the cultural landscape upon which each of us is fated to act out our lives.

Certain traits I have proposed in connection with modern-day *flânerie* – ambiguity; wandering freely amongst a wide range of cultural alternatives; constructing a life out of the mounting debris of commodity culture; the determination to find “in a time without dignity

... a trace of genuine dignity” (Wiggerhaus 1994, 209) – are identifiable in the activities of countless present-day musicians, some of whom have already been cited in this dissertation. London composer Robin Rimbaud (Scanner) bases his music around miscellaneous radio signals, predominantly mobile telephone conversations, surreptitiously obtained through the use of scanning devices. Jason Lytle’s recently-defunct band Granddaddy (out of Modesto, California) deliver songs like “Broken Household Appliance National Forest” and “Saddest Vacant Lot in All the World” that musically and lyrically evoke urban wastelands strewn with the detritus of the electronic age. In his own Californian studio, Loren Nerell carefully applies treatments to field recordings of Balinese and Javanese gamelan from half a world away; meanwhile, numerous Indonesian pop musicians might be cited as evidence of like appropriations and influences travelling in the *other* direction (that is, from America outwards). For Nurse with Wound’s recent *Shipwreck Radio* series (involving residency in a fishing village in Norway’s Lofoten archipelago), Steve Stapelton and Colin Potter prepared radio broadcasts using whatever material (instruments and found sounds) available in their isolated location. Rap artists like the British-Sri Lankan MIA, Canada’s Buck 65 and Australia’s Morganics survey the globe engaging in a form of scavenger aesthetic that connects hitherto disconnected worlds. Ashley Wales and John Coxon (Spring Heel Jack) confound genre distinctions when combining their laptop and drum and bass music with avant-garde jazz and free improvisation on recordings such as *Masses* (2001). Japanese sound artist and university lecturer Yuko Nexus6 uses her laptop to process and mix, as *Signal to Noise* journal’s Susanna Bolle puts it, “a hodgepodge of sounds and samples from TV and radio, chattering voices, familiar and half familiar songs, and myriad field recordings to create her uniquely eccentric compositions” (2007, 8). More generally, the activities of myriad artists working in or around genres such as sampling, found sounds, DJ cultures and turntablism in particular (activities especially conducive to music making in less public, or even private, circumstances) have proven important so far as concerns confounding the purported distinction between artist and audience member or, in terms of the original notion of the flâneur, between the watcher and the watched.

Although many would describe the combination of styles and interventions of the various musicians mentioned here as postmodern – particularly in terms of the concept of bricolage as discussed in Bennett (2001, 90) – it is doubtful now whether apparent “outsider” music

can be so easily associated with a specific meta-category. Susan McClary, for instance, in proposing her own examples of (80s) music that is “com-posed – literally, put together” (she includes John Zorn, Philip Glass, Public Enemy, Prince and KD Lang) evokes postmodernism, though laudably she seeks to concentrate on the more important point that “the practices that have emerged over the last two decades are as vital and varied as those of any other moment in cultural history” (2000, 141). David Cunningham’s concept of “nuance,” meanwhile, though concerned with autonomous music that somehow escapes the trajectory of Adornian modernism (he refers to, amongst others, Luciano Berio, Morton Feldman, Ornette Coleman, Harry Partch and Thomas Köner) is nonetheless couched as a continuation of “the ongoing critical work of a musical modernism” (2004, 26).

Yet my overriding intention is not to revert to the idea of the flâneur as a special case amongst the crowd, such as is conjured by reference to particular musicians. Rather, I am interested in evoking a contemporary version of flânerie that can be considered part of each and every individual’s *potential repertoire of operating* in today’s society.²¹⁶ Even when one accepts (as I believe one must) the by now all-pervading nature of commodity culture, it is impossible to sustain an argument as to the compliance or rebelliousness of the individual without considering the full range of their cultural engagements *and on a continuing basis*. Moreover, it can, after all, be allowed that even in the most heavily commodified and compromised spaces of the present-day, people to some extent exercise discrimination worthy of the name (recall, for instance, the “Starburst” incident referred to earlier in this chapter [Huber 2004]). And, as Keith Negus argues, in music the activities of the individual audience member are typically to some extent antithetical to the existing theoretical paradigms and marketing categories: “look in your own music collection, no matter how large or small, and see if you agree” (1996, 32). In the end, it is perhaps feasible to allow that there is a little bit of the flâneur in everybody.

²¹⁶ On this note, when interviewed musicians like Buck 65, M.I.A., Steve Stapleton and Jason Lytle have made it clear that discovering and interpreting other music (that is, acting as audience members) takes up much of their time *and* has a major influence on how they go about their own work. All professional music makers are also audience members, but only a relative few audience members are professional music makers.

To stray too far in this direction, though, would be to imply that individuals outwit, as it were, the dominant consumer culture merely through their (distinctive) habits of consumption. In the foreword to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau dedicates his work to “a common hero, a ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets” (1984). The modern-day notion of flânerie I wish to evoke here does embrace the concepts of “making do” and (especially) “being in-between” as described in Certeau. Taken on its own, however, Certeau’s common hero eventually leads to a universal version of the flâneur who appears in Benjamin, one whose behaviour is intimately related to patterns of consumption. (Certeau refers at one point to “the enigma of the consumer-sphinx” [31].) This is significant, as much of the work in cultural studies following on from Certeau shows that there is a fine line between negotiating a path through the minefield that is consumer culture and submitting, even if sometimes unintentionally, to what is effectively an endorsement of it.

Ultimately, my adaptation of flânerie is underwritten by the constant interchange between hope and hopelessness that arises from a union of Benjamin and Adorno.²¹⁷ The struggle of the individual in contemporary society is now played out, as Witkin (2000, 163) reiterates, wholly within a cultural environment where everything is up for sale. No doubt the sheer dominance of the system dulls the search for many: the easy option is to follow the trails the mass media lays out for us. So maybe it must be granted that interpretive autonomy is likely to be greater amongst those relatively few aware individuals who are neither (following Adorno and Reisman) blindly accepting of the products of the culture industry nor (following Benjamin and Certeau) eternally limited to the specificities of so-called elite culture. But while the margins of contemporary aesthetics are vital to my conceptualisation of modern-day flânerie, it would be a mistake to assert that it is wholly reliant upon them. This would simply be to create another all-encompassing distinction, a third resting place for the cultural and aesthetic consciousness that opposes the traditional high and popular positions without doing anything to problematise or dismantle them. What is envisioned, rather, is life observed on the cusp of optimism and suspicion – an unspecified zone, always in the middle of things, where individuals might loiter or else come and go in any direction.

²¹⁷ The final sentence in Beckett’s *The Unnamable* comes to mind here: “I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (1979, 382).

It is at this precise location where Simmel's battle "to preserve autonomy and individuality ... in the face of overwhelming social forces" (1997, 174-175) seems destined to carry on unabated.

If the usual distinctions that apply could be set to one side, a 21st century dictionary of music and musicians might include under the letter P (to take a random example) such disparate musical phenomenon as the Czech avant-rock band Plastic People of the Universe (later Pulnoc), Argentinean tangoist Astor Piazzolla, plainsong, Italian jazz pianist Enrico Pieranunzi, Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, the music of Pakistan, jazz improvisers Polwechsel, alt-rock band Pavement, Jamaican producer Augustus Pablo, Pussy Galore, Public Enemy, Liz Phair, Dolly Parton, Charlie Parker, Harry Partch and the Pet Shop Boys. Such scattershot combinations once again bring to mind the Borgesian theme of the infinite finite. But evoked also is the arbitrariness of interests (musical and otherwise) held by the eponymous subject of Borges' essay "John Wilkins' Analytical Language": "[Wilkins] was interested in several different topics: theology, cryptography, music, the building of transparent beehives, the orbit of an invisible planet, the possibility of a trip to the moon, the possibility and principles of a universal language" (Borges 1999, 229).²¹⁸

I concur with David Scobey when he says that the logic of modern-day *flânerie* is that of "an act of consciousness – the drama of a solitary, peripatetic analyst moving through the cityscape and making sense of it (1995, 337-338). When one considers the nature of the enlarged cityscape today (all that is out there to be found) in concert with all of the options available to the individual (each personal journey toward "making sense of it" all), tempered all the while by a heightened sense of isolation and of doubt in the face of entrenched global capitalism, then the enhanced possibilities of such a logic become apparent.

My conception of *flânerie* is based upon a perhaps utopian hope as to the individual's predisposition toward knowing – in the manner of John Wilkins – about as many things as possible. This is a predisposition that I believe it is important to both recognise despite its

²¹⁸ The story goes on to stress the "ambiguities, redundancies and deficiencies" of too-explicit genre systems, referring to a Chinese encyclopaedia that divides animals into categories as arbitrary as "belonging to the Emperor," "fabulous," "drawn with a very fine camel hair brush" and "that from a long way off look like flies" (231).

relative marginality (though in music there is evidence of it becoming more prevalent) and to focus upon and encourage wherever possible (which would hopefully include a more sustained critical highlighting of plurality and difference in music and music audiences).

As such, I will leave the final word on all of this to Neil Young, who, in the liner notes to the compilation album *Decade* (1977), says of his 1972 hit single “Heart of Gold”:

This song put me in the middle of the road. Travelling there soon became a bore so I headed for the ditch. A rougher ride, but I saw more interesting people there.

Conclusion

[The] process of coming to see other human beings as ‘one of us’ rather than as ‘them’ is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like. (Richard Rorty 1989, xvi)

I have never wanted to make a conclusive statement. I have always posed various problems and left them open to consideration. (Pier Paolo Pasolini 1971)²¹⁹

This dissertation has been about how people perceive music, the language they use to discuss it and the categories they rely upon to systematise it. By people I mean the music audience, and by the music audience I mean *everyone* who listens to and takes an interest in music. Often it seems that in discourses about music, audiences are somehow partitioned off as a discrete (amateur) segment of the musical world. It is conveniently forgotten that the supposed professionals who make music (both the star performers and the unknowns), those who criticise or otherwise conduct research into music (both scholars and journalists), and the sundry other “industry” people who make a living from music are each and every one of them first and foremost part of the music audience.

Over recent decades, the dominant narratives concerning music (especially what is known as popular music) have always been those focused upon the centre of the mainstream – upon the predilections of the mass media, upon the multi-national recording industry, upon the consumptive patterns of the general public. In an Australian context, such attitudes are epitomised by the dialogue surrounding what Tony Mitchell terms “Oz Rock: Australian music’s dead centre” (1996, 204-209), where the perpetuation of an “established mainstream musical lineage” (205) leads to a skewed vision of an otherwise divergent conglomeration of musical cultures. As far as scholarly inquiries into music are concerned, attention has likewise been for the most part concentrated around those (highly visible) activities central to the musical mainstream. This dissertation does not assert that researchers have

²¹⁹ In *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Film-Maker’s Life* (directed by Carlo Hayman-Chaffey 1971).

necessarily been at fault in conducting such inquiries – though it casts doubt upon the veracity of the findings in a few specific cases – but rather shows that the sustained and unidirectional (and, in terms of actual music, often times epiphenomenal) nature of this focus has left much unsaid regarding contemporary music and its audiences. Throughout, I have sought to consider alternative ways of thinking about music and music audiences.

Nonetheless, the dissertation denies the presence of an elite higher culture somehow situated outside of the machinations of the culture industries (as Adorno conceived of certain examples of modernism), arguing that today any attempt to challenge or rethink the universality of commodity capitalism must take place within it. Thus it is assumed that in music, a dominant, easily visible mainstream co-exists with a marginalised, largely hidden slipstream. Whether specific texts or styles of music might be allocated to one or other of these regions at any specific time is a matter for ongoing observation, though it seems likely certain music is destined to evade the clutches of the culture industries. But it is not the case that audience members themselves are well served by being identified as occupying a conformist or alternative position on account of their personal or collective taste preferences.

The tactic here has instead been to explore pathways between and around the traditional monuments of contemporary music, to operate in largely uninspected between-spaces, and to question the use-value of conventional categories and genres. But while the intention has been to try to move away from the idea that one category or genre is more worthy of inspection than any other, this should not be seen as a move toward cultural relativism. Quality judgements are central to the way we all engage with music, whether certain scholars choose to admit so or not. I can only return here to Robert Brustein's assertion that critics are valued for their arguments, not their judgements. It is, as intimated in Chapter 3, necessary that arguments about music are made in the context of accepting the *impossibility* of knowing what is going on in every corner of an incredibly diversified, globalised art form. To accept this is to accept that there is potentially good and indifferent music in all identified genres and styles, and to move away from totalising claims as to the intrinsic value of any one category or meta-category of music against another.

When it comes to thinking about audiences for music, our understanding has been coloured by two prevailing research methodologies. The first looks at audiences by way of examining musical texts. This may result in findings as to how audiences have interacted with and come to understand certain specific examples of music, although in truth often textual approaches are only tentatively concerned with audiences and their responses. The second – particularly favourable to sociology and cultural studies – groups audience members together on the basis of their (apparent) shared attraction to certain music or music-related phenomenon. In such cases, individuals are normally discussed as being part of a larger community or subculture.²²⁰

Instead of seeing individual audience members through texts or organising them into groups, this dissertation has argued that it would be more fruitful to seek to *group tastes within individuals*: to develop an understanding of how audience members engage with and interpret music by inquiring (theoretically and/or empirically) into the entire range of their cultural interactions, musical and otherwise. In a time of entrenched capitalism, where each individual is valued only as a potential consumer, it is nonetheless surely the case that a person's cultural interactions are too complicated and variable to support the kinds of individual and group labels scholars have been apt to apply to them. Although on many occasions the complexity and unpredictability of these interactions obviously does not amount to a sustained critique of, or distancing of the individual from, mainstream consumer culture, the prospect at least of such developments remains constant.

In this context, I believe it is important to acknowledge that many people do engage with music and culture beyond their station, so to speak, and, equally, that it is worthwhile to aspire toward a cultural environment in which more and more individuals are encouraged to do so. I agree wholeheartedly with Henry Gates when, in his 1992 book *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*, he states that “cultural tolerance comes to nothing without cultural understanding” (1992, 176). In striving toward a cultural milieu in which both commonalities and differences are valued, Gates references Edward Said in his claim that “our model for academic freedom should therefore be the migrant or traveller” (xv). This is

²²⁰ Or, in the words of Simon Frith, “the academic study of popular music has been limited by the assumption that the sounds somehow reflect or represent ‘a people’” (1996, 269).

a theme, one applicable not only to formal criticism, which has remained close at hand throughout the dissertation. Cultural understanding and tolerance seem to me inexorably linked to Said's concept of the nomadic disposition, and this in turn suggests the need for a greater interest in the unpredictability of individual interpretations and improvisations.

The concept of *flânerie* – as first significantly developed by Walter Benjamin – was used to cultivate the theme of an unpredictable and potentially ambiguous relationship between individual and society. Rather than attempt, as others have done, to bring Benjamin's *flâneur* forward into the 21st century, I have tried to specify characteristics of *flânerie* that might be applied in any circumstance where interactions and interpretations go genuinely against the grain of commodity capitalism. The potential for unexpected outcomes in music seems twofold. First, one can envisage texts and specific interpretations of texts that in some way trouble or confound mainstream expectations. Second, and even more central to this dissertation, one can envisage a range of interactions with texts on the part of the individual that trouble or confound convention (so, for instance, it need no longer seem incongruous to mention Cyndi Lauper and Delia Derbyshire and Oum Kalsoum and Joan La Barbara in the one breath). To remain aware of those individual interactions and interpretations at the interface between the extraordinary and the everyday is particularly important, I argue, in terms of moving beyond simplistic oppositions such as highbrow versus popular and art versus entertainment.

Ultimately, the spirit of *flânerie* is that of the individual drifting – much in the fashion of the swallow in Calvino's *Esmeralda* – through an endless global landscape of cultural artefacts and detritus, able to find loopholes and to survive at least in part outside of conventional narratives. But the utopian character of this notion can be kept in check by constantly juxtaposing Benjamin with Adorno. In doing so, one encounters what I term a moving dialectic – a constant interplay between the inevitable and the unexpected in modern life. Adorno envisages music as fundamentally utopian (Leppert in Adorno 2002, 85-86), yet unlike Benjamin he sees no reason to be positive about the deterioration of music's (of all art's) ritual status and the unchecked growth of commodity culture. The consciousness of latter-day *flânerie* thus balances somewhere on the cusp of hope and hopelessness – with the optimism that alternative routes do exist perpetually tempered by suspicion as to the iron

grip of consumerism and the inexorable nature of multi-national capitalism. Such a consciousness is reflective of many aspects of the unique critical dialogue that took place between Benjamin and Adorno in the between-wars period.

My adaptation of the concept of *flânerie* could lead to an accusation of being overly concerned with what might be termed an ideal listener, along the lines of the so-called ideal reader developed in Iser (1978). However, the overriding concern here is not with individual listening circumstances – the concern is with the full range of possible “listenings” for each and every individual. A person might encounter music through the playing of a CD, attending a concert or dance party, listening to a car radio, watching a film with a soundtrack, overhearing a personal stereo on a train, and so forth. The control the individual has over his or her interactions with music depends on the circumstances in each case. But to focus on aesthetic judgements is predominantly to focus upon people’s choices in situations where they are able to exercise choice. It is certainly the case that the circumstances whereby individuals make personal aesthetic discriminations about music have been very much underplayed in a literature more often concerned with music as social interaction. And nor should it be doubted that such discriminations often remain active even in communal situations. If listening experiences such as the muzak encountered in elevators and shopping malls have been downplayed in this dissertation, then I would argue only that to date these have been prominent in the minds of researchers to a more than sufficient extent, both in popular music studies and elsewhere.²²¹

The introduction to this dissertation alluded to a potential relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical in studies of contemporary music and contemporary music audiences. From that point onward, it has moved toward the idea that there is something important and valuable about aesthetic diversity and an awareness of “other” musics and cultures; this idea has its genesis in what David Reisman over fifty years ago described as the more active listener (1950). However, I have not yet made concrete this association between the aesthetic and the ethical. To do so, I want lastly to turn to the work of Richard Rorty and the individual he terms an “ironist.”

²²¹ For instance, see Negus (1996, 34) on how marketing research focuses on the manipulative qualities of “functional music” in public settings where consumption is encouraged.

The nature of Rorty's ironist comes down to a combination of three conditions pertaining to language – what he refers to as a person's final vocabulary (1989, 73). Firstly, the ironist, realising that there are many competing vocabularies out there, maintains lingering doubts as to whether his or her own vocabulary is the best one available. Secondly, the ironist knows that such doubts cannot be quelled simply by recourse to that personal vocabulary. And thirdly, the ironist accepts that his or her vocabulary is not necessarily any more transcendent, any "closer to reality," than the various vocabularies others might be using. The ironist, then, can be seen as a person riddled with doubts – someone who approaches culture not as something to be understood and conquered but as a field of play upon which each individual is faced with a range of alternatives. The testing of these alternatives results in the ironist continually recasting himself or herself in a process Rorty terms "redescription" (80). Redescription is, in Rorty's estimation, the basis of tolerance and understanding, of avoiding the kind-of us-versus-them attitude likely to accompany overinvestment in a single description central to one's own beliefs. "The liberal ironist just wants our *chances of being kind*, of avoiding the humiliation of others, to be expanded by redescription" (91) [original italics].

In assessing the pros and cons of Rorty's ironist in relation to a pragmatist aesthetics, Richard Shusterman decides that the former goes too far in exhorting a life of "unending curiosity" (2000, 247). In Shusterman's estimation, Rorty dispenses with the integrated self to such an extent that coherence is sacrificed. Ongoing redescription is thus seen as resulting in a fickle quasi-self whose only constancy is "the constancy of change, of novel alternative self-descriptions and narrations, the constancy of inconstancy" (249). For Rorty, redescription leads to a fuller, richer understanding; for Shusterman, it leads to inconsistency and a lack of conviction, both being fatal to the possibility of a unified self.

Yet I am not so convinced that redescription inevitably results in the kind of incoherent self Shusterman fears. Shusterman goes on to provide a conception of somaesthetics in place of Rorty's own pragmatism, however neither am I concerned here to work out a conclusion to the debate between Shusterman and Rorty. Rather, it can be argued that the debate itself – between continual redescription and final coherence – is one that can fruitfully *continue in*

perpetuity for each and every individual. It may well be that for Rorty's ironist a coherent self is of itself a desirable outcome: it is, however, an outcome that the individual will never be able to reach. There are, in the end, too many possible vocabularies out there for one person to ever become familiar with all of them. It is interesting, however, that Shusterman (2000, 248-250) returns to a poem by Philip Larkin (first discussed by Rorty [1989, 23-26]) in order to reiterate the alleged need for a conclusive self-centring. For if Larkin's bitter and outright dismissal of certain key strains of post-war jazz music is emblematic of the kind of coherent position Shusterman advocates, then Rorty is surely correct to steer away from the notions of common sense and a definitive, doubt-free vocabulary that Larkin's dubious self-assurance implies.²²²

To live with a broad aesthetic palette is to be acquainted with a multitude of cultures and attitudes. The attitude this dissertation identifies in connection with modern-day *flânerie* – one of ambiguity, of unpredictability, of making a life – appears conducive to the kind of cultural understanding that promotes general understanding and tolerance of others. This is partly what Rorty means when he defines the ironist as one who has doubts about his or her final vocabulary and is engaged in a continual process of redescription. The approach to contemporary music and its audiences taken here aligns closely with Rorty's twin processes of description of others and redescription of self as outcomes of more eclectic, more discerning engagements with music on the part of individual audience members. In this way, each listener can be seen as potentially in the process of constructing his or her own "beautiful mosaic" (Rorty 1989, 81), able to "expand [existing] narratives into longer ones, incorporating additional figures" and to "pick out useful strands from each [in order to] weave a new, improved narrative" (Rorty in Saatkamp 1995, 68).

²²² Larkin's stance on post-war jazz is set out in Chapter 5 (note 37). Relevant to the present discussion concerning the ethical dimension of music and aesthetics is Ben Ratiff's point, made in his recent excellent book-length study of John Coltrane, that Larkin's tirades against Coltrane at times exhibited obvious racist undertones (Ratiff 2007, 178-179).

Chapter 1 of this dissertation began by reproducing six statements reflecting what can be seen as commonplace attitudes toward contemporary music, based around a perceived need to protect certain categories or genres from infection by lesser categories or genres. As the discussion progressed, like attitudes were encountered time and again, even if often these appeared more subtly or covertly expressed. The prevalence of this type of thinking has led me to seek here to try to think around the dominant narratives in music today. The strategy has, to paraphrase Pasolini, been one of leaving various problems open to consideration – of looking for unfamiliar associations, of prospering in the isolation of between-spaces, of emphasising doubt over certainty, and of downplaying the obvious in favour of the possible.

This dissertation has not attempted to reach a final position on how contemporary music and its audiences should be theorised or compartmentalised; nor has it attempted to provide proof as to why certain musical texts or genres should be valued more than others. In the end, what has been articulated are ways of speaking of contemporary music and its audiences that include those previously excluded, encourage optimism where there was once only despair, and promote scepticism where there was before a premature rejoicing.

Works Cited

- Abbas, A. 2005. "Walter Benjamin's Collector: The Fate of Modern Experience." *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory Vol.3*. Edited by Osborne, P. New York: Routledge. 211-229.
- Adorno, T. 1973. *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by Ashton, E. New York: The Seabury Press.
- , 1974. *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life*. Translated by Jephcott, E. London: New Left.
- , 1997. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Hullot-Kentor, R. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- , 2000. *The Adorno Reader*. Edited by O'Connor, B. Oxford: Blackwell.
- , 2002. *Essays on Music*. With introduction, commentary and notes by Leppert, R. Berkeley: U of California P.
- Adorno, T., Benjamin, W., Bloch, E., Brecht, B. & Lukács, G. 2007. *Aesthetics and Politics*. With an afterword by Jameson, F. London: Verso.
- Allan, K. & Turner, J. 2000. "A Formalization of Postmodern Theory." *Sociological Perspectives*. 43/3: 363-385.
- "Albums of the Year." 1988. *Melody Maker* (24/31 December): 56-57.
- "The All Time Top 2000 Albums." 2005. *Acclaimed Music Website* (accessed 04/06/05). www.acclaimedmusic.net/1948-02a.htm
- Ang, I. 1991. *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London: Routledge.
- Arato, A. 1982. "Introduction to Part II: Esthetic Theory and Cultural Criticism." *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Edited by Arato, A. & Gebhardt, E. New York: Continuum. 185-219.
- Arnold, M. 1962. *Matthew Arnold: Lectures and Essays in Criticism*. Edited by Super, R. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P.
- "A to Z of Prog Rock: Part 2." 1995. *The Wire* (April): 32-35.
- Azerrad, M. 2001. *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes From the American Indie Underground 1981-1991*. New York: Little Brown.
- Bangs, L. 2003. *Mainlines, Blood Feasts and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*. Edited by Morthland, J. New York: Anchor.
- Barth, J. 1980. "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction." *The Atlantic*. 233/1: 65-71.
- Barthelme, D. 2005. *Forty Stories*. Introduction by Eggers, D. London: Penguin.
- Barthes, R. 1977. *Image, Music, Text*. New York: The Noonday Press.

- , 1987. *Criticism and Truth*. Edited and Translated by Keuneman, K. London: The Athlone Press.
- Baudelaire, C. 1930. "The Painter of the Modern Life." Translated by Konody, P. *The Painter of the Victorian Life: A Study of Constantin Guys*. Edited by Holme, G. London: The Studio Ltd. 25-172.
- , 2006. *The Flowers of Evil*. Translated by Waldrop, K. Middletown: Wesleyan UP.
- Baudrillard, J. 1998. "The Ecstasy of Communication." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Edited with an Introduction by Foster, H. New York: The New Press. 145-154.
- Baumann, M. 1999. "Listening to Nature, Noise and Music." *The World of Music*. 41/1: 97-111.
- Bayles, M. 1996. *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music*. New York: The Free Press.
- , 1998. "Body and Soul: The Musical Miseducation of the Youth." *Public Interest*. 131: 36-49.
- Beadle, J. 1993. *Will Pop Eat Itself? Pop Music in the Soundbite Era*. London: Faber & Faber.
- "Beatles 2000: International Cross-Disciplinary Conference, 15-18 June 2000, Jyvaskyla, Finland." 2001. *Popular Music*. 20/1: 117-119.
- Beckett, S. 1979. *The Beckett Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. London: Picador.
- Benjamin, W. 1969. *Illuminations*. Edited & with an Introduction by Arendt, H. New York: Schocken.
- , 1973. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Translated by Zohn, H. London: NLB.
- , 1999. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Eiland, H. & McLaughlin, K. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- Bennett, A. 1999. "Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste." *Sociology*. 33/3: 599-617.
- , 2001. *Cultures of Popular Music*. Berkshire: Open UP.
- , 2006. "Punk's Not Dead: The Continuing Significance of Punk Rock for an Older Generation of Fans." *Sociology*. 40/2: 219-235.
- Bennett, T. 1992. "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies." *Cultural Studies*. Edited by Grossberg, L., Nelson, C. & Treichler, P. London: Routledge. 23-37.
- Bennett, T., Emmison, M. & Frow, J. 1999. *Accounting For Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Berkmann, M. 2008. "Hip-Hop Hell." *The Spectator* (7 June): 50.
- Berman, M. 1983. *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso.

- Bloom, A. 1987. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Bloom, H. (ed.) 1988. *Modern Critical Views: William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Chelsea House.
- , 1994. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Bloomfield, T. 1993. "Resisting Songs: Negative Dialectics in Pop." *Popular Music*. 12/1: 13-31.
- Bogdanov, V., Woodstra, C. & Erlewine, S. (eds) 2002. *All Music Guide to Rock* (3rd Edition). San Francisco: Backbeat.
- Bolle, S. 2007. "Yuko Nexus6." *Signal to Noise: The Journal of Improvised and Experimental Music*. 44: 8.
- Borges, J. 1970. *Labyrinths*. London: Penguin.
- , 1999. *Selected Non-Fictions*. Edited by Weinburger, E. New York: Viking.
- Bork, R. 1997. *Slouching Towards Gamorrah: Modern Liberalism and the American Decline*. New York: Regan.
- Botstein, L. 2004. "Why Music Matters." *The Musical Quarterly*. 87/2: 177-187.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- , 1993a. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited and Introduced by Johnson, R. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- , 1993b. *Sociology in Question*. Translated by Nice, R. London: Sage.
- Boyne, R. & Rattansi, A. (eds) 1990. *Postmodernism and Society*. London: MacMillan Education.
- Brackett, D. 1997. "Putting Popular Music in Its Place / Concert Music, Rock and Jazz Since 1945" (Reviews). *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. 50/2-3: 507-519.
- , 2000. *Interpreting Popular Music*. Berkeley: U of California P.
- Brackett, N. & Hoard, C. 2004. *The New Rolling Stone Album Guide* (4th Edition). New York: Fireside.
- Bradbury, M. 1973. "Modernism." *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. Edited by Fowler, R. London: Routledge. 117-119.
- Bradbury, M. & McFarlane, J. (eds) 1976. *Modernism: 1890-1930*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Brophy, P. 2004. *One Hundred Modern Soundtracks*. London: British Film Industry.
- Buck-Morss, S. 1977. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute*. Sussex: Harvester Press.

- , 1989. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Bürger, P. 1984. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Shaw, M. Manchester: Manchester UP.
- Burns, L. 2005. "Meaning in a Popular Song: The Representation of Masochistic Desire in Sarah McLachlan's 'Ice'." *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis*. Edited by Stein, D. New York: Oxford UP. 136-148.
- Butler, C. 1980. *After the Wake: An Essay on the Contemporary Avant-Garde*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bywater, M. 1995. "Never Mind the Width, Feel the Lack of Quality." *The Spectator* (13 May): 44-45.
- Callick, R. 1995. "Ideology Guided the Hand That Signed the Book." *Australian Financial Review* (31 August): 19.
- Calvino, I. 1997. *Invisible Cities*. Translated by Weaver, W. London: Vintage.
- "Can We Get Rid of the 'Popular' in Popular Music? A Virtual Symposium With Contributions From the International Advisory Editors of *Popular Music*." 2005. *Popular Music*. 24/1: 133-145.
- Carter, D. 2004. "The Mystery of the Missing Middlebrow or The C(o)urse of Good Taste." *Imagining Australia: Literature and Culture in the New New World*. Edited by Ryan, J. & Wallace-Crabbe, C. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 173-201.
- Cascone, K. 2003. "The Laptop and Electronic Music: Shapeshifting Tool or Musical Instrument? (Introduction)." *Contemporary Music Review*. 22/4: 1-2.
- Certeau, M. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Rendell, S. Berkeley: U of California P.
- Chambers, R. 1997. "Recycling the Ragpicker: Le vin des Chiffonniers." *Understanding Les Fleurs du Mal: Critical Readings*. Edited by Thompson, W. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP. 176-191.
- Christgau, R. 1998. *Grown Up All Wrong; 75 Great Rock and Pop Artists From Vaudeville to Techno*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- , 2000. *Christgau's Consumer Guide: Albums of the 90s*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Clarke, D. 1995. *The Rise and Fall of Popular Music*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Clarke, E. 1999. "Subject-Position and the Specification of Invariants in Music by Frank Zappa and PJ Harvey." *Music Analysis*. 18/3: 347-374.
- Clover, J. 2004. "Good Pop, Bad Pop: Massiveness, Materiality and the Top 40." *This is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project*. Edited by Weisbard, E. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 245-256.
- Coetzee, J. 2001. "The Marvels of Walter Benjamin." *New York Review of Books*. 48/1: 28-33.

- Cohen, R. 1989. "Do Postmodern Genres Exist?" *Postmodern Genres*. Edited by Perloff, M. London: U of Oklahoma P. 11-27.
- Collings, M. 1999. *This is Modern Art*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Connor, S. 1997. *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (2nd Edition). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cooper, B. 1991. *Popular Music Perspectives: Ideas, Themes and Patterns in Contemporary Lyrics*. Ohio: Bowling Green State UP.
- . 1997. "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me: Reflections on the Evolution of Popular Music and Rock Scholarship." *Popular Music and Society*. 21/1: 101-109.
- . 2000. "The Classic Rock and Roll Reader" (Review). *Popular Music & Society*. 24/4: 124-125.
- Covach, J. 1997. "Progressive Rock, 'Close to the Edge,' and the Boundaries of Style." *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*. Edited by Covach, J. & Boone, G. New York: Oxford UP. 3-31.
- Covach, J. & Boone, G. (eds) 1997. *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Cowley, J. 1998. "An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture" (Review). *New Statesman* (27 November): 54-55.
- Cox, C. & Warner, D. (eds) 2004. *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. New York: Continuum.
- Crosman, R. 1980. "Do Readers Make Meaning?" *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*. Edited by Sulieman, S. & Crosman, I. Princeton: Princeton UP. 149-164.
- Cunningham, D. 2004. "Notes on Nuance: Rethinking a Philosophy of Modern Music." *Radical Philosophy*. 125: 17-28.
- Cutler, C. 1985. "What is Popular Music?" *Popular Music Perspectives 2: Papers From the Second International Conference on Popular Music Studies, Reggio Emilia, September 19-24, 1983*. Gothenburg: IASPM. 3-12.
- . 2004. "Plunderphonia." *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Edited by Cox, C. & Warner, D. New York: Continuum. 138-156.
- Dark, J. 1998. "Fair Maidens." *The Village Voice* (12 May). 118.
- Davis, R. 2001. "When Was Postmodernism?" *World Literature Today*. 75/2: 295-298.
- DeCurtis, A. (ed.) 1992. *Present Tense: Rock and Roll Culture*. Durham: Duke UP.
- . 1999. "Foreword: Dancing About Architecture." *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics*. Edited by Dettmar, K. & Richey, W. New York: Columbia UP. vii-x.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1986. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Translated by Polan, D.; Foreword by Bensmaïa, R. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.

- , 2004. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Massumi, B. London: Continuum.
- DeLillo, D. 1985. *White Noise*. New York: Viking.
- Dell'Antonio, A. 1999. "Florestan and Butthead: A Glimpse into Postmodern Music Criticism." *American Music*. 17/1: 65-86.
- de Man, P. 1983. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (2nd Edition). London: Methuen.
- Denzin, M. 1991. "Reading Postmodernism." *Contemporary Sociology*. 20/3: 447-449.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1992. *Acts of Literature*. Edited by Attridge, D. New York: Routledge.
- Dessaix, R. 1998. *And So Forth*. Sydney: MacMillan.
- Dettmar, K. 2006. *Is Rock Dead?* New York: Routledge.
- Docherty, B. 1994. "Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music" (Review). *Reason*. 26/7: 63-68.
- Donnelly, K. 2006. "It's all Depths and Deconstruction." *The Australian* (22 July): 26.
- Draper, R. 1990. *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History*. New York: Doubleday.
- Echard, W. 1999. "An Analysis of Neil Young's 'Powderfinger' based on Mark Johnson's Image Schemata." *Popular Music*. 18/1: 133-144.
- "Eclipse of the Highbrow." 1941. *The London Times*. 25 March: 5.
- Egan, V. 2008. "Rip it Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984" (Review). *Popular Music*. 27/1: 528-529.
- Evans, M. 1998. "'Quality' Criticism: Music Reviewing in Australian Rock Magazines." *Perfect Beat*. 3/4: 38-50.
- Everett, W. 1999. *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver Through the Anthology*. New York: Oxford UP.
- , (ed.) 2000. *Expressions in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*. New York: Garland.
- , 2001. *The Beatles as Musicians: The Quarry Men Through Rubber Soul*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Ferris, T. 1979. "Voyager's Music." *Murmurs of Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record*. Edited by Sagan, C. London: Hodder & Stoughton. 161-209.
- Fiedler, L. 1971. *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*. New York: Stein & Day.

- Fink, R. 1998. "Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies." *American Music*. 16/2: 135-179.
- , 2005. "The Story of ORCH5, or, the Classical Ghost in the Hip-Hop Machine." *Popular Music*. 24/3: 339-356.
- Finnegan, R. 1989. *The Hidden Musicians: Music Making in an English Town*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Fiske, J. 1989. *Reading Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- "The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time." 2004. *Rolling Stone* (February): 32-76.
- Ford, A. 2002. *Undue Noise: Words About Music*. Sydney: ABC.
- , 2005. *In Defence of Classical Music*. Sydney: ABC.
- Foster, C. 1999. "An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture" (Review). *Contemporary Review* (May): 270-271.
- Foster, H. 1996. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Fowler, B. 1997. *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations*. London: Sage.
- Frank, T. 2001. "Alternative to What?" *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*. Edited by Harrington, C. & Bielby, D. Massachusetts: Blackwell. 94-105.
- Freeman, P. (ed.) 2007. *Marooned: The Next Generation of Desert Island Discs*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press.
- Friend, T. 1992. "The Case For Middlebrow: Why David Lynch is Bad for America." *New Republic*. 206/9: 24-27.
- Frisby, D. 1994. "The Flâneur in Social Theory." *The Flâneur*. Edited by Tester, K. London: Routledge. 81-110.
- Frith, S. 1992. "The Cultural Study of Popular Music." *Cultural Studies*. Edited by Grossberg, L., Nelson, C. & Treichler, P. London: Routledge. 174-186.
- , 1996. *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- , 2002. "Fragments of a Sociology of Rock Criticism." *Pop Music and the Press*. Edited by Jones, S. Philadelphia: Temple UP. 235-246.
- , 2004. "Reasons to Be Cheerful" (Essay Review). *Popular Music*. 23/3: 363-372.
- Frow, J. 1995. *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- , J. 1997. *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Frye, N. 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism*. London: Penguin.
- Gates, H. 1992. *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Giddins, G. 1990. "The Evolution of Jazz." *New Perspectives on Jazz*. Edited by Baker, D. Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press. 33-44.
- Gilbert, J. 1992. "Midcult, Middlebrow, Middle Class." *Reviews in American History*. 20/4: 543-548.
- Gingell, J. & Brandon, E. 2001. *In Defence of High Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gitlin, T. 1997. "The Anti-Political Populism of Cultural Studies." *Cultural Studies in Question*. Edited by Ferguson, M. & Golding, P. London: Sage. 25-38.
- Goldman, J. 2004. *Modernism 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Goodall, P. 1995. *High Culture, Popular Culture: The Long Debate*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Goodman, F. 2003. *The Mansion on the Hill: Dylan, Young, Geffen, Springsteen and the Head-on Collision of Rock and Commerce*. London: Pimlico.
- Goodwin, A. 1991. "Popular Music and Postmodern Theory." *Cultural Studies*. 5/2: 174-190.
- , 1992. *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- Gorak, J. 1991. *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*. London: Athlone.
- Gottlieb, R. & Kimball, R. (eds) 2000. *Reading Lyrics*. New York: Pantheon.
- Gracyk, T. 1992. "Adorno, Jazz and the Aesthetics of Popular Music." *Musical Quarterly*. 74/4: 526-542.
- , 1999. "Valuing and Evaluating Popular Music." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 57/2: 205-220.
- , 2001. *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity*. Philadelphia: Temple UP.
- Greenberg, C. 1961. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Griffiths, P. 1978. *Modern Music*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Gripsrud, J. 1989. "'High Culture' Revisited." *Cultural Studies*. 3/2: 194-207.
- Grossberg, L. 1987. "Rock and Roll in Search of an Audience." *Popular Music and Communication*. Edited by Lull, J. Newbury Park: Sage. 175-197.
- , 1992. *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- , 1997. *Dancing in Spite of Myself: Essays on Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke UP.

- Guillory, J. 1991. "Canon, Syllabus, List: A Note on the Pedagogic Imaginary." *Transition*. 52: 36-54.
- , 1995. "The Ordeal of Middlebrow Culture." *Transition*. 67: 82-92.
- Habermans, J. 1998. "Modernity – An Incomplete Project." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Edited by Foster, H. New York: The New Press. 1-15.
- Hall, S. 2001. "Encoding/Decoding." *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*. Edited by Bielby, D. & Harrington, C. Massachusetts: Blackwell. 123-132.
- Hamilton, A. 2007. *Aesthetics and Music*. London: Continuum.
- Hansen, M. 1993. "Of Mice and Ducks: Benjamin and Adorno on Disney." *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 92/1: 27-61.
- Hassan, I. 1993. "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism." *Postmodernism: A Reader*. Edited by Docherty, T. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf. 146-156.
- Hayman-Chaffey, C, dir. *Pier Paolo Pasolini: A Film-Maker's Life*. Eye International, 1971.
- Hayward, P. (ed.) 1998. *Sound Alliances: Indigenous Peoples, Cultural Politics and Popular Music*. London: Cassell.
- Hebdige, D. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen & Co.
- , 1988. *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*. London: Routledge.
- Hegel, G. 1977. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Miller, A., with analysis of the text and foreword by Findlay, J. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Herrnstein Smith, B. 1984. "Contingencies of Value." *Canons*. Edited by Von Hallberg, R. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 5-39.
- , 1988. *Contingencies of Value*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. 2002. "Popular Music Audiences and Everyday Life." *Popular Music Studies*. Edited by Hesmondhalgh, D. & Negus, K. London: Arnold.
- , 2006. "Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production." *Media, Culture & Society*. 28/2: 211-231.
- , 2007a. "Audiences and Everyday Aesthetics: Talking About Good and Bad Music." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 10/4: 507-527.
- , 2007b. *The Cultural Industries* (2nd Edition). London: Sage.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. & Negus, K. (eds) 2002. *Popular Music Studies*. London: Arnold.
- Hibbett, R. 2005. "What is Indie Rock?" *Popular Music and Society*. 28/1: 55-77.

- Hohendahl, P. 2005. "Aesthetic Violence: The Concept of the Ugly in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory." *Cultural Critique*. 60: 170-196.
- Holbrook, M., Weiss, M. & Habich, J. 2002. "Disentangling Effacement, Omnivore, and Distinction Effects on the Consumption of Cultural Activities: An Illustration." *Marketing Letters*. 13/4: 345-357.
- Holub, R. 1984. *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Methuen.
- Horkheimer, M. & Adorno, T. 1979. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Cumming, J. London: Verso.
- Hornby, N. 2000. "Beyond the Pale." *New Yorker* (October 30). 104-106.
- Hubble, A. 1994. "Booing For a Change." *Sydney Morning Herald* (03 May): 24.
- Huber, A. 2004. "How to Get Your Juices Going: The Starburst Incident and Mapping Top 40 Culture." *Perfect Beat*. 7/1: 3-16.
- Hughes, R. 1991. *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Hullot-Kentor, R. 1991. "The Impossibility of Music: Adorno, Popular and Other Musics." *Telos*. 87: 97-117.
- Hume, D. 1997. "Of the Standard of Taste." *Aesthetics*. Edited by Feagin, S. & Maynard, P. Oxford: Oxford UP. 350-363.
- Hung, E. 2005. "Hearing Emerson, Lake and Palmer Anew: Progressive Rock as 'Music of Attractions.'" *Current Musicology*. 79 & 80: 245-259.
- Hunter, I. 1992. "Aesthetics and Cultural Studies." *Cultural Studies*. Edited by Grossberg, L., Nelson, C. & Treichler, P. London: Routledge. 347-372.
- Huysen, A. 1984. "Mapping the Postmodern." *New German Critique*. 33: 5-52.
- . 2002. "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner." *Adorno: A Critical Reader*. Edited by Gibson, N. & Rubin, A. Oxford: Blackwell. 29-56.
- "In Search of the Best." 2006. *The New York Times Book Review* (21 May): 17-19.
- "Inside the RS 500." 2004. *Rolling Stone* (February): 8.
- Irvin, J. & McLearn, C. (eds) 2003. *The Mojo Collection: The Ultimate Music Companion*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
- Iseminger, G. 1999. "The Aesthetics of Music" (Review). *The Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*. 57/3: 374-375.
- Iser, W. 1978. *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Jameson, F. 1984. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*. 146: 53-92.

- , 1990. *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic*. London: Verso.
- , 1998. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Edited by Foster, H. New York: The New Press. 127-144.
- Jarvis, S. 1998. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jauss, H. 1982a. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Translated by Bahti, T.; Introduction by de Man, P. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- , 1982b. *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*. Translated by Shaw, M.; Introduction by Godzich, W. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- Jencks, C. 1996. *What is Post-Modernism?* London: Academy Editions.
- Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York UP.
- Jensen, J. & Pauly, J. 1997. "Imagining the Audience: Losses and Gains in Cultural Studies." *Cultural Studies in Question*. Edited by Ferguson, M. & Golding, P. London: Sage. 155-169.
- Johnson, J. 2002. *Who Needs Classical Music? Cultural Choice and Musical Value*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Johnson, P. 1964. "The Menace of Beatlism." *New Statesman* (28 February): 326-327.
- Johnson-Grau, B. 2002. "Sweet Nothings: Presentation of Women Musicians in Pop Journalism." *Pop Music and the Press*. Edited by Jones, S. Philadelphia: Temple UP: 202-218.
- Jones, S. (ed) 2002. *Pop Music and the Press*. Philadelphia: Temple UP.
- Jones, S. & Featherly, K. 2002. "Re-viewing Rock Writing: Narratives of Popular Music Criticism." *Pop Music and the Press*. Edited by Jones, S. Philadelphia: Temple UP. 19-40.
- Juddery, M. 2007. "Vintage Rock." *The Australian* (5 January): 9.
- Kahn, A. 2001. "Not Quite All That Jazz." *The Guardian*. (9 June): 2.
- Kandinsky, W. 1993. *Kandinsky*. Text by Reid, P. London: Park Lane.
- Kant, I. 1987. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated with an introduction by Pluhar, W. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Kart, L. 2000. "The Avant-Garde 1949-1967." *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*. Edited by Kirchner, B. Oxford: Oxford UP: 446-458.
- Kawamoto, A. 2005. "Can You Still Keep Your Balance?: Keith Emerson's Anxiety of Influence, Style Change and the Road to Prog Superstardom." *Popular Music*. 24/2: 223-244.
- Keightley, K. 2001. "Reconsidering Rock." *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Edited by Straw, W. & Frith, S. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 109-142.

- Kellner, D. 2002. "Adorno and the Dialectics of Mass Culture." *Adorno: A Critical Reader*. Edited by Gibson, N. & Rubin, A. Oxford: Blackwell. 86-109.
- Kermode, F. 1968. *Continuities*. London: Routledge.
- Koehne, J. 2004. "The Flight from Banality." *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*. New York: Routledge. 148-172.
- Koozin, T. 2000. "Fumbling Towards Ecstasy: Voice Leading, Tonal Structure, and the Theme of Self-Realisation in the Music of Sarah McLachlan." *Expressions in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*. Edited by Everett, W. New York: Garland. 247-266.
- Kramer, J. 2002. "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism." *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*. Edited by Lochhead, J. & Auner, J. New York: Routledge. 13-33.
- Kramer, L. 2007. *Why Classical Music Still Matters*. California: U of California P.
- Kruse, H. 2002. "Abandoning the Absolute: Transcendence and Gender in Popular Musical Discourse." *Pop Music and the Press*. Edited by Jones, S. & Featherly, K. Philadelphia: Temple UP. 134-155.
- Larkin, P. 1983. *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Lebrecht, N. 2007. *The Life and Death of Classical Music*. London: Anchor.
- Levine, L. 1996. *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture and History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Levy, J. ed. 2005. *Rolling Stone's 500 Greatest Albums of All Time*. New York: Wenner.
- Logan, S. 1999. "Our Lost Legacy." *The Spectator* (16 January): 31.
- Longhurst, B. & Savage, M. 1996. "Social Class, Consumption and the Influence of Bourdieu: Some Critical Issues." *Consumption Matters: The Production and Experience of Consumption*. Edited by Edell, S., Hetherington, K. & Warde, A. Oxford: Blackwell. 274-301.
- Lott, E. 1994. "The Aesthetic Ante: Pleasure, Pop Culture and the Middle Passage." *Callaloo*. 17/2: 545-555.
- Lull, J. (ed) 1987. *Popular Music and Communication*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Lyotard, J. 1984a. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Bennington, G. & Massumi, B.; Introduction by Jameson, F. Manchester: Manchester UP.
- , 1984b. "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde." *Artforum*. 22/8: 36-43.
- MacCabe, C. 1987. "The State of the Subject (I) English." *Criticism Quarterly*. 29: 5-8.
- McCaffery, L. (ed.) 1995. *After Yesterday's Crash: The Avant-Pop Anthology*. New York: Penguin.

- McClary, S. 1989. "Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-garde Music Composition." *Cultural Critique*. 12: 57-81.
- , 2000. *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form*. Berkeley: U of California P.
- McDonald, C. 2002. "Making Arrows Out of Pointed Words: Critical Reception, Taste Publics and Rush." *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*. 25/3-4: 249-260.
- MacDonald, D. 1957. "A Theory of Mass Culture." *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*. Edited by Rosenberg, B. & White, D. London: Free Press of Glencoe. 59-73.
- , 1960a. "Masscult and Midcult." *Partisan Review*. 27/2: 203-233.
- , 1960b. "Masscult and Midcult: II." *Partisan Review*. 27/4: 589-631.
- McLeod, K. 2001. "*/2: a Critique of Rock Criticism in North America." *Popular Music*. 20/1: 47-60.
- McRobbie, A. 2005. "The Passegen-Werk and the Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies: Benjamin, Cultural Studies, Marxist Theories of Art." *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*. Edited by Osborne, P. London: Routledge. 295-318.
- Marcus, G. (ed) 1996. *Stranded: Rock and Roll For a Desert Island*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- , 1997. *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*. New York: Picador.
- Marcuse, H. 1978. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. London: MacMillan.
- Marder, E. 2001. *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity: Baudelaire and Flaubert*. California: Stanford UP.
- Markus, G. 2006. "Adorno and Mass Culture: Autonomous Art Against the Culture Industry." *Thesis Eleven*. 86/1: 67-89.
- Marsh, D. & Swenson, J. (eds) 1983. *The New Rolling Stone Record Guide*. New York: Random House.
- Martin, B. 2002. *Avant Rock: Experimental Music From the Beatles to Bjork*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Mellers, W. 1973. *The Music of the Beatles: Twilight of the Gods*. New York: Schirmer.
- , 1998. "A Voice in the Wilderness" (Review). *The Musical Times*. 139/1863: 50-52.
- Melleuish, G. 2005. "A World Without the Humanities." *Quadrant*. 49/9: 18-21.
- Middleton, R. 1990. *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes: Open UP.
- , (ed.) 2000. *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Miller, J. 2000. *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll 1947-1977*. New York: Fireside.

- Mitchell, T. 1989. "Performance and the Postmodern in Pop Music." *Theatre Journal*. 41/3: 273-293.
- , 1996. *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania*. London: Leicester UP.
- Modleski, T. (ed.) 1986. *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Moore, A. 1993. *Rock, the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock*. Philadelphia: Open UP.
- , 1997. *The Beatles: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- , 2003. "Jethro Tull and the Case for Modernism in Mass Culture." *Analysing Popular Music*. Edited by Moore, A. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 158-172.
- , (ed.) 2003. *Analysing Popular Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Mordue, M. 2006. "Made of Songs." *Meanjin*. 65/3: 1.
- Morley, D. 1996. "Postmodernism: The Rough Guide." *Cultural Studies and Communications*. Edited by Curran, J., Morley, D. & Walkerdine, V. New York: Arnold. 50-64.
- , 1997. "Theoretical Orthodoxies: Textualism, Constructivism and the 'New Ethnography'." *Cultural Studies in Question*. Edited by Ferguson, M. & Golding, P. London: Sage. 121-137.
- Morris, M. 1979. "Days of Heaven" (Review). *Cinema Papers*. 23: 565-566.
- , 1988. *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*. London: Verso.
- , 1990. "Banality in Cultural Studies." *Logics of Television*. Edited by Mellencamp, P. Bloomington: Indian UP. 14-43.
- Moszynska, A. 1990. *Abstract Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Nadal-Melsió, S. 2004. "Georg Lukács: Magus Realismus?" *Diacritics*. 34/2: 62-84.
- Negus, K. 1996. *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Nelson, C. 2002. "The Outro." *Pop Music and the Press*. Edited by Jones, S. Philadelphia: Temple UP. 247-251.
- Norris, C. 1990. *What's Wrong With Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Nugent, S. 1985. "The Illustrated Rock Handbook / The Rolling Stone Record Guide / The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll / The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll / Who's Who of Rock / The Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits: 195 to Present / The Cash Box Singles Charts 1950-1981" (Reviews). *Popular Music*. 5: 235-244.
- Oakley, B. 1999. "This Living Century: The Writers" (Supplement). *The Australian* (10-11 July).

- “Obituary: Mrs. Virginia Woolf – Novelist, Essayist, Critic.” 1941. *The London Times*. April 3: 7.
- Olson, R. 2000. “An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture” (Review). *The Booklist*. 96/19: 1818.
- O’Meara, C. 2003. “The Raincoats: Breaking Down Punk Rock’s Masculinities.” *Popular Music*. 22/3: 299-313.
- Orwell, G. 1968. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Vol.3 – As I Please: 1943-1945*. Edited by Orwell, S. & Angus, I. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Paddison, M. 2004. *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music*. London: Kahn & Averill.
- Palmer, J. 2001. “Yes, ‘Awaken,’ and the Progressive Rock Style.” *Popular Music*. 20/2: 243-261.
- Parsons, D. 2003. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Patke, R. 2000. “Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* and the Postcolonial City.” *Diacritics*. 30/4: 3-14.
- Pattison, R. 1987. *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Pell, G. 2005. “The Dictatorship of Relativism” (Address to the National Press Club Canberra, 21 September 2005). *The Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney Website* (accessed 10/01/06) http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/Archbishop/Addresses/2005921_1181.shtml
- Peterson, R. 1992. “Understanding Audience Segmentation: From Elite and Mass to Omnivore and Univore.” *Poetics*. 21: 243-258.
- , 1997. “The Rise and Fall of Highbrow Snobbery as a Status Marker.” *Poetics*. 25: 75-92.
- Peterson, R. & Kern, R. 1996. “Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore.” *American Sociological Review*. 61: 900-907.
- Pichaske, D. 1997. “Poetry, Pedagogy, and Popular Music: Renegade Reflections.” *Popular Music and Society*. 23/4: 83-103.
- Pierson, D. 2000. “A Show About Nothing: *Seinfeld* and the Modern Comedy of Manners.” *Journal of Popular Culture*. 34/1: 49-64.
- Plasketes, G. 1997. “My Back Pages: Reflections on Rick(y), Rock Reunions and Writing Record Reviews.” *Popular Music and Society*. 21/1: 133-139.
- Pleasants, H. 1955. *The Agony of Modern Music*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Poe, E. 1982. *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. London: Penguin.
- Poirier, R. 1967. “Learning from the Beatles.” *Partisan Review*. 34/4: 526-546.
- Pollock, B. 1993. *Hipper Than Our Kids: A Rock and Roll Journal of the Baby Boom Generation*. New York: Schrimmer.

- Pope, A. 1951. "An Essay on Criticism." *The Great Critics: An Anthology of Literary Criticism* (3rd Edition). Edited by Smith, J. & Parks, E. New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 386-404.
- Potts, J. 1992. "Heritage Rock: Pop Music on Australian Radio." *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism: Popular Music and Australian Culture from the 1960s to the 1990s*. Edited by Hayward, P. Sydney: Allen & Unwin. 55-67.
- Powers, A. 1999. "In Rock's Canon, Anyone and Everyone." *The New York Times* [Arts and Leisure Section] (26 December): 1.
- , 2004. "Bread and Butter Songs: Unoriginality in Pop." *This is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project*. Edited by Weisbard, E. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 235-244.
- Radway, J. 1990. "The Scandal of the Middlebrow: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Class Fracture and Cultural Authority." *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 89/4: 703-736.
- Rapping, E. 1995. "The Seinfeld Syndrome." *The Progressive*. 59/9: 37-38.
- Ratiff, B. 2007. *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux.
- "The Readers' 100." 2002. *Rolling Stone* (October): 55-60.
- Reed, S. 2007. "Rip it Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984" (Review). *Popular Music & Society*. 30/2: 281-283.
- Regev, M. 2002. "The Pop-Rockization of Music." *Popular Music Studies*. Edited by Hesmondhalgh, D. & Negus, K. London: Arnold. 251-264.
- Reisling, R. (ed.) 2002. *Every Sound There Is: The Beatles' Revolver and the Transformation of Rock and Roll*. Burlington: Ashgate.
- "The Remaking of the Canon" (Panel Debate). 1991. *Partisan Review*. 58/2: 350-387.
- Reynolds, S. 1994. "Shaking the Rock Narcotic." *The Wire* (May): 28-32.
- , 2004a. "Post-Rock." *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Edited by Cox, C. & Warner, D. New York: Continuum. 358-361.
- , 2004b. "Lost in Music: Obsessive Record Collecting." *This is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project*. Edited by Weisbard, E. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 289-307.
- Richey, W. & Dettmar, K. 2002. "Rock and the Condition of Postmodernity." *Genre*. 34: 169-178.
- Riesman, D. 1954. *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays*. Illinois: The Free Press.
- Rignall, J. 1989. "Benjamin's *Flâneur* and the Problem of Realism." *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*. Edited by Benjamin, A. London: Routledge. 112-121.
- Robbins, I. (ed.) 1997. *The Trouser Press Guide to '90s Rock* (5th Edition). New York: Fireside.

- Robinson, L. 1993. "Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon." *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Edited by Warhol, R. & Herndl, D.. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP. 212-226.
- Roggeveen, S. 1999. "An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture" (Review). *Quadrant*. 43/9: 84.
- Rolleston, J. 1989. "The Politics of Quotation: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project." *PMLA*. 104/1: 13-27.
- 1996. "The Truth of Unemployment: Walter Benjamin Reads His Own Times." *South Atlantic Review*. 61/2: 27-49.
- Rorty, R. 1989. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Rose, P. 2005. "The Sound and the Fury: Uneasy Times for Hacks and Critics." *Australian Book Review*. 267: 29-34.
- Rubin, J. 1992. *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P.
- Ryan, S. 1997. "Dancing About Architecture: Postmodernism and Irish Popular Music." *Irish Communications Review*. 7.
- Saatkamp, H. (ed.) 1995. *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to his Critics*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP.
- Sagan, C. 1995. *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*. London: Headline.
- Said, E. 1975. *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- 1983. *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- Salusinszky, I. 1987. *Criticism in Society*. New York: Methuen.
- Sartre, J. 1965. *Nausea*. Translated by Baldick, R. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Schmutz, V. 2005. "Retrospective Cultural Consecration in Popular Music: Rolling Stone's Greatest Albums of All Time." *American Behavioural Scientist*. 48/11: 1510-1523.
- Scholem, G. & Adorno, T. (eds) 1994. *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*. Translated by Jacobson, M. & Jacobson, E. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- Schrøeder, K. 1992. "Cultural Quality: Search for a Phantom? A Reception Perspective on Judgements of Cultural Value." *Media Cultures: Reappraising Transnational Media*. Edited by Skovmand, M. & Schrøder, K. London: Routledge: 199-219.
- Scobey, D. 1995. "Commercial Culture, Urban Modernism, and the Intellectual Flâneur." *American Quarterly*. 47/2: 330-342.
- Scruton, R. 1997. *The Aesthetics of Music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1998. *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture*. London: Duckworth.

- , 1999. *On Hunting*. London: Yellow Jersey Press.
- Semmler, C. 1996. "From Carmichael Peak to Rap Morass." *Quadrant*. 40/9: 82-84.
- Shapiro, P. 1998. "The Primer: P-Funk." *The Wire* (June). 48-53.
- Shepherd, J. & Wicke, P. 1997. *Music and Cultural Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Showater, E. 1998. "Kneeling Before an Ever Clever Guide to Culture." *The London Times* (19 November): 44.
- Shuker, R. 2001. *Understanding Popular Music* (2nd Edition). London: Routledge.
- Shusterman, R. 2000. *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (2nd Edition). Maryland: Rowland & Littlefield.
- Silbury, E. 2006. "In Defence of Classical Music." (Review). *Music Forum*. 12/2: 77.
- Sim, S. (ed.) 2001. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Simmel, G. 1997. *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*. Edited by Frisby, D. & Featherstone, M. London: Sage.
- Sontag, S. 1982. *A Susan Sontag Reader*. Introduction by Hardwick, E. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Squeri, L. 2004. "When ET Calls: SETI is Ready." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 37/3: 478-496.
- Staines, J. & Buckley, J. (eds) 1998. *Classical Music: The Rough Guide*. London: Rough Guides.
- Stocken, F. 1992. "Call to Arms." *The Musical Times*. 133: 187-188.
- Stolnitz, J. 1950. "On Ugliness in Art." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 11/1: 1-24.
- , 1998. "The Aesthetic Attitude." *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*. Edited by Korsmeyer, C. Malden: Blackwell. 78-83.
- Straw, W. 1991. "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." *Cultural Studies*. 5/3: 368-388.
- , 2001. "Consumption." *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*. Edited by Frith, S., Straw, W. & Street, J. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 53-73.
- Studwell, W. 1994. *The Popular Song Reader: A Sampler of Well-Known 20th Century Songs*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Studwell, W. & Lonergan, D. 1999. *The Classic Rock and Roll Reader: Rock Music From its Beginnings to the mid-1970s*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Sturrock, J. 1977. *Paper Tigers: The Ideal Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- "Style Wars: The New Complexity and Australian Music." 1990. *Sounds Australian*. 28: 6-14.

- Subotnick, R. 1996. *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- Taruskin, R. 2007. "The Musical Mystique: Defending Classical Music Against its Devotees." *New Republic*. 237/8: 34-45.
- Taylor, T. 1997a. *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. New York: Routledge.
- , 1997b. "Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America / Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture / Dissonant Identities: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas" (Reviews). *TDR*. 41/2: 163-170.
- , 2002. "Music and Musical Practices in Postmodernity." *Postmodern Music/ Postmodern Thought*. Edited by Lochhead, J. & Auner, J. New York: Routledge. 93-117.
- Teachout, T. 1999a. "Masterpieces of the Century: A Critical Guide." *Commentary* (April): 46-50.
- , 1999b. "Masterpieces of the Century: Part 2." *Commentary* (May): 61-66.
- , 1999c. "Masterpieces of the Century: A Finale." *Commentary* (June): 55-59.
- Tester, K. (ed.) 1994. *The Flâneur*. London: Routledge.
- Toop, D. 1995. *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds*. London: Serpent's Tail.
- Toop, R. 1993. "On Complexity." *Perspectives of New Music*. 31/1: 42-57.
- Tsiolkas, C. 2006. "Mix-Tape: The Novelist's 'Desert Island Discs.'" *Meanjin*. 65/3: 233-239.
- Tucker, B. 2002. "Tell Tchaikovsky the News: Postmodernism, Popular Culture and the Emergence of Rock and Roll." *Black Music Research Journal*. 22: 23-47.
- Turner, G. 1993. "Who Killed the Radio Star? The Death of Teen Radio." *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*. Edited by Bennett, T., Frith, S., Grossberg, L., Shepherd, J. & Turner, G. London: Routledge. 142-155.
- Tyler, T. 1984. *I Hate Rock and Roll*. London: Vermillion.
- Valdez, S. 2002. "Revolver as a Pivotal Art Work: Structure, Harmony and Vocal Harmonisation." *Every Sound There Is: The Beatles' Revolver and the Transformation of Rock and Roll*. Edited by Reisling, R. Burlington: Ashgate. 89-108.
- van Eijck, K. 2001. "Social Differentiation in Musical Taste Patterns." *Social Forces*. 79/3: 1163-1184.
- Von Appen, R. & Doehring, A. 2006. "Nevermind the Beatles, here's Exile 61 and Nico: 'The Top 100 Records of All Time' – a Canon of Pop and Rock Albums From a Sociological and an Aesthetic Perspective." *Popular Music*. 25/1: 21-39.

- Walley, D. 2006. *Teenage Nervous Breakdown: Music and Politics in the Post-Elvis Age*. New York: Routledge.
- Walser, R. 1994. "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Voodoo Aesthetics." *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music, Youth Culture*. Edited by Ross, A. & Rose, T. New York: Routledge. 235-249.
- , 2000. "Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis" (Review). *Notes*. 57/2: 355-357.
- , 2003. "Popular Music Analysis: Ten Apothegms and Four Instances." *Analysing Popular Music*. Edited by Moore, A. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 16-38.
- Watson, B. 1999. "Decoding Society Versus the Popsicle Academy." *Living Through Pop*. Edited by Blake, A. London: Routledge. 79-97.
- Watson, J. 2003. *Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process* (2nd Edition). Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Weinstein, D. 2004. "Rock Critics Need Bad Music." *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*. Edited by Washburne, C. & Derno, M. New York: Routledge. 294-310.
- "What Happened to the Arts?" (Panel Debate). 2002. *Partisan Review*. 69/4: 606-635.
- Whiteley, S. 2000. "Progressive Rock and Psychedelic Coding in the Work of Jimi Hendrix." *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*. Edited by Middleton, R. Oxford: Oxford UP. 235-261.
- Wicks, S. 1998. "America's Popular Music Traditions as Cannon-Fodder." *Popular Music and Society*. 22/1: 55-82.
- Wiggerhaus, R. 1994. *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*. Translated by Robertson, M. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wilde, O. 1968. *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*. Edited by Ellmann, R. New York: Random House.
- Willhardt, M. & Stein, J. 1999. "Dr Funkenstein's Supergroovalisticprosifunkstication." *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics*. Edited by Dettmar, K. & Richey, W. New York: Columbia UP. 145-172.
- Williams, R. 1961. *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- , 1976. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana.
- , 1989. *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. Edited by Pinkney, T. London: Verso.
- , 1999. "Mass Communication and Minority Culture." *Media Studies: A Reader*. Edited by Marris, P. & Thornham, S. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP. 43-50.
- Wilson, E. 1992. "The Invisible Flâneur." *New Left Review*. 191: 90-110.
- Witkin, R. 2000. "Why did Adorno 'Hate' Jazz?" *Sociological Theory*. 18/1: 145-170.

- Wolff, J. 1989. "The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity." *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*. Edited by Benjamin, A. London: Routledge. 141-156.
- Wolfson, R. 2001. "Shock of the New." *ABC Radio 24 Hours* (April): 24-26.
- Wolin, R. 1982. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. New York: Columbia UP.
- Womack, K. & Davis, T. (eds) 2006. *Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism and the Fab Four*. Albany: State U of New York P.
- Woolf, V. 1943. *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Wordsworth, W. 1969. *Poetical Works*. Edited by Hutchinson, T. London: Oxford UP.
- Young, G. 2004. "So Slide Over Here: The Aesthetics of Masculinity in Late Twentieth-Century Australian Pop Music." *Popular Music*. 23/2: 173-193.
- Zelnick, S. 1985. "Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno by Lunn, E." (Review). *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 43/4: 408-409.
- Zion, L. 2006. "My Hot 100 Summer." *Meanjin*. 65/3: 147-154.