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Popular Music and/as Event: Subjectivity, Love and Fidelity in the Aftermath of Rock 'n' Roll

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This article concerns the usefulness of attaching a philosophy of the event to popular music studies. I am attempting to think about the ways that rock 'n' roll functions as a musical revolution that becomes subjected to a narrative of loss accompanying the belief that the revolution has floundered, or even disappeared completely. In order to think about what this narrative of loss might entail I have found myself going back to the emergence of rock 'n' roll, to what we might term its 'event', and then working towards the present to take stock of the current situation. The article is divided into three parts. Part One attempts to think of the emergence of rock 'n' roll and its attendant discourse alongside Alain Badiou's notion of event, looking at ways in which listening subjects are formed. Part Two continues the discussion of listening subjectivity while shifting the focus to objects associated with phonography. Part Three attends to a number of difficulties encountered in the Badiouian project and asks to what extent rock music might be thought of as a lost cause.¹ All three parts deal with notions of subjectivity, love and fidelity. 1

Part One: Revolution, Event, Fidelity

The translation of Alain Badiou's *L'être et événement* into English in 2005 reflects both a widening interest in the work of the French philosopher in recent years and a realisation that 'event' has become something of a keyword of the new millennium.² The focus on event can be seen as part of a more general interest in memory, loss, nostalgia and history around this same period. For many in the West, there is a sense that, following the fall of communism and the seeming victory of capitalism, society has entered a period of 'being' in which the possibility of an 'event' that might proffer something different has become nonexistent, visible only in the rear-view mirror as a receding trace of a future promise. For Badiou, however, whose philosophical project relies upon historical change for its exegesis, the anxious backward glance cast by those for whom the current situation proves unsatisfactory has provided an ideal perspective from which to articulate the emergence of the new. 2

Badiou's notion of event is connected to unpredictability. For Badiou, 3

an event is something that can – but will not necessarily – occur at an evental site and that occurs as a complete break with the continuum of being. For Badiou the fields of human interaction where such events can emerge are those of science, art, politics and love. An event is a creative, assertive act that breaks with what has gone before and sets in motion a new truth that in turn creates subjects who show fidelity to it. Examples used by Badiou include the French Revolution, Galilean physics, Schoenberg's twelve-note serialism and the event of any amorous encounter that entails a change for the subjects constituted by that encounter. The event itself cannot be verified, but fidelity to its truth can be maintained after it has been recognised. For Badiou, fidelity to the event is a process that exceeds the event itself, a truth process by which subjects are created. In the case of the Cuban Revolution, for example, we can talk about the *event* of the Revolution – commonly identified as the victory of 1959 – to reflect the singular nature of this irruption into the established order of a completely new situation. And we can talk about *fidelity* to this event as being the ongoing project of the Cuban Revolution.

But can we, by a deft leap, take a contemporaneous musical example, the emergence of rock 'n' roll, and speak of the *event* of this 'Revolution' – commonly identified as the 'victory' of 1955 – and of a singular irruption into the established order of a completely new situation? And can we talk about *fidelity* to this event as being the ongoing project of the rock 'n' roll 'Revolution'?³ The Native American poet and activist John Trudell suggests we can in his piece 'Baby Boom Ché' (Example 1), a description of Elvis Presley as freedom fighter surrounded by commandants – Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Bo Diddley – in what Trudell calls 'another Civil War all over again'.⁴

'Baby Boom Ché'

[Guitar intro – 'I Want You I Need You I Love You' intro;
segues into: organ 'Love Me Tender' background]

You wanna know what happened to Elvis?
I'll tell ya what happened.
I oughta know, man, I was one of his army.
I mean, man, I was on his side,
He made us feel all right.

We were the first wave in the post war baby boom.
The generation before had just come out of the great
depression
and World War Two,
You know, heavy vibes for people to wear,
So much heaviness
Like some kind of voiding of the emotions.

Their music,
You know, the songs life always carries.
You know, every culture has songs?
Well, anyway, their music was restrained emotion,
You know, like you didn't wanna dance
If you didn't know how,
Which says something strange.

Well, anyway, Elvis came along about ten years after the nuke
When the only generals America had and the only army she
had
Were Ike and Mac
And stupor hung over the land,
A plague where everyone tried to materially free themselves,
Still too shell-shocked to understand
To feel what was happening.

[...]

[instrumental break – organ: 'Love me Tender'; lead guitar:
'I Want You I Need You I Love You' variation]

The first wave rebelled,
I mean, we danced even if we didn't know how,
I mean Elvis made us move.
Instead of standing mute he raised our voice
And when we heard ourselves something was changing,
You know, like for the first time we made a collective decision
About choices.

America hurriedly made Pat Boone a general
In the army they wanted us to join
But most of us held fast to Elvis and the commandants around
him
Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly,
Little Richard, Bo Diddley, Gene Vincent,
You know, like a different Civil War all over again

I mean, you take 'Don't Be Cruel', 'I Want You I Need You I
Love You'
And 'Jailhouse Rock',
Or you take Pat and his white bucks singing love letters in the
sand,
Hell, man, what's real here?
I mean, Pat at the beach in his white bucks,
His ears getting sunburned,
Told us something about old wave delusion.

[...]

Then before long Elvis got assassinated in all the fame,
Taking a long time to die.
Others seized control while Elvis rode the needle out
Never understanding what he done.

It's like we were the baby boom because life needed a fresher
start,
I mean, two world wars in a row is really crazy man
And Elvis, even though he didn't know he said it,
He showed it to us anyway
And even though we didn't know we heard it,
We heard it anyway

Man, like he woke us up
And now they're trying to put us back to sleep.
So we'll see how it goes,
Anyway, look at the record, man,
Rock 'n' roll is based on revolutions
Going way past 33 $\frac{1}{3}$
You gotta understand, man,
He was America's baby Boom Ché.
I oughta know man,
I was in his army.

[guitar outro: 'I Want I Need You I Love You' variation]

[Example 1: John Trudell's 'Baby Boom Ché'. Words by John Trudell,
music by Jesse Ed Davis. Permission to reprint lyrics requested.](#)

Trudell's warriors are fighting the drabness of post-war America, the threat of nuclear destruction, straight line dancing and the music of Pat Boone. Trudell provides an exposition of an eventual site, an account of the nature and consequences of an event that exceeds this site, and a highly charged metaphor (Che Guevara) to suggest fidelity to the possibilities allowed by the Elvis event, possibilities that extend beyond musical materials. As Trudell says, 'Rock 'n' roll is based on revolutions going way past 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ '.⁵

Trudell's stance is echoed in a strand of popular music history that, since the late 1960s, has been a major force in creating and maintaining a set of myths about popular music. I will cite just one exemplary party, Nik Cohn, and specifically his 1969 book *Awopbopalooop Alopbamboom: Pop from the Beginning*.⁶ Cohn's book makes no claim for accuracy, as he makes clear in a preface written in 2004 for the book's republication:

My purpose was simple: to catch the feel, the *pulse* of rock, as I had lived through it. Nobody, to my knowledge, had ever written a serious book on the subject, so I had no exemplars to

inhibit me. Nor did I have any reference books or research to hand. I simply wrote off the top of my head, whatever and however the spirit moved me. Accuracy didn't seem of prime importance (and the book, as a result, is rife with factual errors). What I was after was guts, and flash, and energy, and speed. Those were the things I'd treasured in the rock I'd loved.⁷

It is worth taking note of the use of 'love' here and the reference to the 'flash', reminding us perhaps of Walter Benjamin's account of history as a 'seiz[ing] hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger'.⁸ The flash represents the attempt to fix, as in flash photography, as well as the moment where something freezes long enough for us to glimpse some kind of 'truth' – the moment often referred to as an 'epiphany' (from the Greek *epiphainō*, reveal). The 'moment of danger', meanwhile, reminds us of the subversive potential of rock 'n' roll.⁹

For Cohn, then, the very evental nature of the pop revolution calls for act rather than accuracy. Not surprisingly, accounts such as this have found a number of detractors eager to wield the strict baton of historical accuracy in defence of 'the facts'. Again, I will select just one classic example, Richard Peterson's article 'Why 1955?' Peterson's 'production of culture' perspective allows him to emphasise various important factors leading to the 'advent of rock 'n' roll': law, technology, industry structure, organisation structure, occupational career, market. Although Peterson is keen not to lose sight of the notion of the event of Elvis and his contemporaries, he needs to downplay its importance in order to present his argument:

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It is easy to characterise eras in terms of the leaders of the time. The 'Napoleonic' era is an obvious case in point. It is no less tempting to identify an aesthetic revolution with its most celebrated exponents – Vivaldi, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Picasso. In this vein, it is possible to point to specific individuals like Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis and say that rock emerged in the late 1950s because [...] they began their creative efforts at this specific moment. In bringing into question this 'supply side' explanation, I do not, for a moment belittle their accomplishments [sic]. Rather, I suggest that in any era there is a much larger number of creative individuals than ever reach notoriety, and if some specific periods of time see the emergence of more notables, it is because these are times when the usual routinising inhibitions to innovation do not operate as systematically, allowing opportunities for innovators to emerge.¹⁰

In Peterson's article we find the evental site elaborated in all its detail but missing Cohn's 'pulse' or 'flash': missing, in other words, the

crucial magic of the event. An event, as Badiou would have it, always depends on something that is not accounted for in the complexity of the situation. In Peterson, we read the infinite complexity of the situation but the excess (be it named 'Elvis' or 'Chuck Berry' or 'rock 'n' roll'), that which transcends this infinite complexity, is lost.¹¹ Another way of thinking about this is via the conflict between history and fiction, a conflict traced out carefully in Paul Ricoeur's work. As Ricoeur suggests in his account of the attack launched by Fernand Braudel on the event in historiography, to which Peterson's work could be usefully compared, we are dealing with something more polemical than merely differing accounts seen from different perspectives:

[I]t is in political, military, diplomatic, ecclesiastical history that individuals – heads of state, generals, ministers, prelates – are supposed to make history. There too reigns the event that can be assimilated to an explosion. The denunciation of the history of battles and the history of events thus constitutes the polemical underside of a plea for a history of the total human phenomenon, with however a strong accent on economic and social conditions. It was within this critical context that was born the concept of the long time span opposed to that of the event [...]¹²

Given the connections sketched out in this article between rock music and military or religious affiliations, it is interesting to note Ricoeur's emphasis on such affiliations. His presentation of event-oriented history resonates with a Trudellian or Cohnian account of the rock event.

The kind of approach taken by Peterson is, of course, in keeping with much academic work, which in Badiou's schema is the work – or rather the result of what he terms 'enquiries' – associated with 'constructivist thought'. It is through such thought that we are able to acquire an archive of knowledge and to account for our situation. While Badiou is clearly excited about the possibilities of what lies outside this situation – what, in other words, may become an event – he is keen to note the necessity of constructivist thought to human endeavour:

Rather than being a distinct and aggressive agenda, constructivist thought is the latent philosophy of all human sedimentation; the cumulative strata into which the forgetting of being is poured to the profit of language and the consensus of recognition it supports.

Knowledge calms the passion of being: measure taken of excess, it tames the state, and unfolds the infinity of the situation within the horizon of a constructive procedure shored up on the already-known.

No-one would wish this adventure to be permanent in which improbable names emerge from the void. Besides, it is on the basis of the exercise of knowledge that the surprise and the subjective motivation of their improbability emerges.

Even for those who wander on the borders of evental sites, staking their lives upon the occurrence and the swiftness of intervention, it is, after all, appropriate to be knowledgeable.¹³

Peterson's argument resides in what Badiou would call the 'veridical': governed by the ideology of encyclopaedic knowledge, it 'tames the state'. Cohn's book is more of an act of 'excessive' truth – the truth it contains is not veridical, it is truth formed in the process of fidelity to a truth event. It is what Slavoj Žižek will call 'belief before belief', an always already *engrained* voice, the voice of one of the faithful.¹⁴ As Badiou writes in *Being and Event*, 'Amongst the Christians, the Church – the first institution in human history to pretend to universality – organizes fidelity to the Christ-event, and explicitly designates those who support it in this task as "the faithful".'¹⁵ To which we might add: Amongst the rock fans, the Rock Media – one of the more recent institutions in human history to pretend to universality – organises fidelity to the Elvis-event, and explicitly designates those who support it in this task as 'the faithful'. Or, as the quasi-religious rhetoric of Don McLean's 'American Pie' has it: 'Do you believe in rock 'n' roll/Can music save your mortal soul?'¹⁶ But how to account for these faithful subjects as subjects? Is a subject called into being by music also a subject lost to music, or, as we more frequently think of this, lost *in* music? And how are we to account for those academics who count themselves part of the faithful? I will return to this question below in my discussion of listening; for now, I must stay with the 'danger' of revolution.

Revolution, Memory, Fidelity, Nostalgia

At a basic level we can understand revolution to mean a break with the present, one that relegates the present to the past and connects it with loss. For the revolutionary, this loss is a necessary factor in order to make room for the 'gain' of the revolutionary project. For the non-revolutionary, the threat of this loss is traumatic and may even lead to counter-revolution. In another sense we can say that revolution is itself built on an awareness of loss. Badiou's early work, for example, deals with the role of the revolutionary party as the catalyst by which the subjective potential of the proletariat can be realised, a potential that is otherwise subject to loss and dissipation. Peter Hallward summarises Badiou's position thus: 'Through the party, pure subjective catalyst, the all-powerful but ephemeral power of the masses becomes conscious of itself, becomes the actual rather than simply the effective subject of history. The masses make history, but as vanishing or ephemeral; the party makes this very

vanishing *consist* and endure.’ The October Revolution brings a consistency to the ‘the ephemeral “cause” that was the Paris Commune’.¹⁷ Revolution, we could say, shifting into a psychoanalytic register not so far from Badiou’s political theorisation, is constituted around a lack – constituted too, of course, around desire.

Although often associated with inaugurating new projects, revolutions play an equally important role in providing closure for preceding projects, retrospectively ‘creating’ them both as regimes to be overturned and objects of a history it will only be possible to write after the revolutionary event, a history that ‘will have been’. Noting how nostalgia ‘is not necessarily opposed to modernity and individual responsibility’, but rather ‘coeval with modernity itself’, Svetlana Boym highlights this retroactively creative role of revolutions:

Outbreaks of nostalgia often follow revolutions; the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution and recent ‘velvet’ revolutions in Eastern Europe were accompanied by political and cultural manifestations of longing. In France it is not only the *ancien regime* that produced revolution, but in some respect the revolution produced the *ancien regime*, giving it a shape, a sense of closure and a gilded aura.¹⁸

A good example of this in popular music, and one that fits with the example given above of the Cuban Revolution, is the Buena Vista Social Club, whose self-titled 1997 album has, in terms of sales, been among the most popular ‘world music’ releases of the last decade in the United Kingdom. The music of the Club harks back to the pre-revolutionary period of the 1940s and 1950s and offers a nostalgic take on a defining moment in Cuban cultural history, a moment that is arguably defined precisely by its cessation as a result of the Revolution’s clampdown on night clubs and ‘hedonistic’ entertainment. That the music is so successful now has less to do with any supposed attachment to, or reaction against, the ongoing revolutionary project – indeed, the popularity of the island’s music has been of great benefit to Cuba as it has been forced to open its doors once again to tourism – than it has to do with its association with the ‘gilded aura’ of a ‘closed’ past.

We could summarise the above by positing two positions: on the one hand, a making-concrete of the hitherto ephemeral cause via the revolutionary act; on the other, a creation of the old regime via a memorial-cum-historical act of closure. These might be roughly equivalent to what Andreas Huyssen calls the ‘present futures’ of modernism and the ‘present pasts’ of the postmodern era, although this might equally provide these positions with historical referents that are too divisive.¹⁹ By allying Boym’s work on nostalgia with Badiou’s notion of fidelity, moreover, we should also remain alert for what could be termed ‘nostalgia for fidelity’; in other words, for the lost cause. Nostalgia, as Boym points out, is ‘not always for the *ancien*

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regime or fallen empire but also for the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that became obsolete'.²⁰

Here, it is worth outlining two possible ways of looking at this return to the past. One is that associated with the melancholic who is trapped in the past and unable to move forward. Julia Kristeva describes this figure: 11

Riveted to the past, regressing to the paradise or inferno of an unsurpassable experience, melancholy persons manifest a strange memory: everything has gone by, they seem to say, but I am faithful to those bygone days, I am nailed down to them, no revolution is possible, there is no future...²¹

These 'strange memories' are not ones that a revolutionary subject could act on as they seem to deny any sense of agency. If, as some critics have maintained, one of the problems with Badiou's notion of the subject is a suggestion of a lack of agency, then, following Kristeva, Badiou would seem to be theorising the creation of what we might term 'the melancholy subject'.²² Does being 'faithful to those bygone days' – being 'nailed down to them' – have to parallel the act of fidelity? Or is there, as Badiou's political theory seems to suggest, still a role for the active(ist) subject? Žižek is interested in this second, activist (non-melancholic) return to the past and he uses it to suggest the possibilities for the Left to (re)find its place:

Today more than ever, in the midst of the scoundrel time we live in, the duty of the Left is to keep alive the memory of all lost causes, of all shattered and perverted dreams and hopes attached to leftist projects. The ethics which we have in mind here, apropos of this duty, is the ethics of Causes qua Thing, the ethics of the Real which, as Lacan puts it, 'always returns to its place'.²³

Žižek is insistent that this position does not involve the kind of infatuation that seems to define the subject described by Kristeva. Although, through a psychoanalysing of 'the Left', he evokes a history of trauma, he is keen to stress that this 'subject' must simultaneously not give in to nor forget the trauma:

This, then, is the point where the Left must not 'give way': it must preserve the traces of all historical traumas, dreams and catastrophes which the ruling ideology of the 'End of History' would prefer to obliterate – it must become itself their living monument, so that as long as the Left is here, these traumas will remain marked. Such an attitude, far from confining the Left within a nostalgic infatuation with the past, is the only possibility for attaining a distance on the present, a distance which will enable us to discern signs of the New.²⁴

In an article for *The Wire* on music and ‘hauntology’ – a concept he takes from Jacques Derrida – Simon Reynolds discusses the British record label Ghost Box, which specialises in a series of audio-visual projects using elements of the recent past that have not been deemed important enough to be retained in the collective memory but that have not been entirely forgotten either. Examples of these uncanny objects residing in the hinterlands of memory include old public service announcements, obsolete educational programmes and library recordings. Contrasting these projects with what he sees as an obsession with the past in pop culture that has led to ‘the black hole of retro without end’, Reynolds writes, in a passage that bears some similarities to Žižek and Boym:

Ghost Box and their allies merge two opposed yet connected responses to this predicament. One is a ‘nostalgia for looking forwards’ (as [Ghost Box co-founder Julian] House puts it), for that bright, clear-eyed spirit of post-World War Two modernism. The other strategy involves a reinvention, or rewriting, of history. When the Future goes AWOL, those with radical instincts are forced to investigate the past. Renegade archivists, they seek to uncover alternative pasts secreted inside the official narrative.²⁵

As Reynolds makes clear, this project takes its place amongst a number of other instances of ‘haunted audio’, including the dubstep phenomenon which updates the uncanny sonic explorations of 1970s dub (such as Burning Spear’s *Garvey’s Ghost* – a dub of their *Marcus Garvey* album by Jack Ruby – and Joe Gibb’s ‘Ghost Capturer’) into a contemporary ‘post-jungle’ imaginary, and the proliferation of band names and song titles employing terms relating to ghosts, haunting and absence. The presence of ghosts should not surprise us here given the prominence of the spectral in many revolutionary texts. Marx and Engels, of course, opened the *Communist Manifesto* with the declaration, ‘A spectre is haunting Europe’. Derrida later utilised this image in his *Specters of Marx* (Reynolds’s main philosophical reference), while Žižek has returned on numerous occasions to the ‘spectre of ideology’. Haunting is an evocative concept in that, like remembering and imagining, it refers to both time and space and requires witnesses in order to be effective.

Hail, Hail Rock ‘n’ Roll: Interpellation, Identification and Ideological Transference in Popular Music

Rock Schooling

I wish to move on now to listening and the losses associated with it, not least the concept of being lost in/to music and the connections between listening and agency. This consideration touches upon a number of issues, including musical affect, loyalty to a group of

musicians or a musical style (fandom) and the use of popular music for specific memory work. When Julia Kristeva speaks of the melancholic being faithful to bygone days, how might we connect this fidelity to that discussed earlier in relation to the 'rock faithful'? Is the person lost in music always a melancholy subject? To attempt to answer these questions is to bring together a number of aspects: popular music as revolutionary event; fidelity; and a negotiation of the 'noise' of ideology – what we might think of, after Billy Bragg, as 'the sound of ideologies clashing' – via the development of listening strategies.²⁶ I will begin by returning to a question left on hold earlier when I asked what role academics might play as part of 'the rock faithful'.

Robert Fink, in his article 'Elvis Everywhere', jokes about academics 'doing Elvis' and makes an analogy between such academics and Elvis impersonators.²⁷ Two points arise from this. Firstly, to even acknowledge the joke, funny as it is, is to take part in legitimising a persistent discourse about the usefulness (or lack thereof) of mixing academia with popular culture. Similarly, Bruce Tucker, in an article on postmodernism and the emergence of rock 'n' roll, worries about 'risking the absurdity of bringing all this critical apparatus to bear' on the music.²⁸ This is a point to which I will return; for now I will merely note it as a defensive strategy erected at the start of Fink's and Tucker's texts. The second point I want to make with regard to Fink's joke is that it is not enough to talk only of 'doing Elvis'; one has also to speak of *being done* by Elvis too.²⁹ Taking a cue from Louis Althusser we should remember that we are subjects both in the grammatical active sense – agents who do – and in the passive sense – individuals who are subjected. In the UK, of course, we must speak of being subjects of the Crown,³⁰ and in this light it is worth remembering the regal and/or religious sobriquets bestowed upon popular musicians – Elvis the King of Rock n Roll, Bessie Smith the Empress of the Blues, Nina Simone the High Priestess of Soul, James Brown its Godfather. To what extent are we, as listeners, their subjects? Chuck Berry's 'School Days' provides a further example of this as rock 'n' roll itself is hailed in the way we might hail a monarch. 'Long live rock n roll', sings Berry: long to reign over us, we might add.³¹ Rock 'n' roll is something we can hail but, crucially, it is also something that hails us. We should perhaps turn, then, to Chuck Berry and Louis Althusser. In doing so – turning, that is – we are connecting ourselves to an operation highlighted by both 'School Days' and 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. Let us begin with the former, the lyrics of which can be found as Example 2.³²

'School Days'

Up in the mornin' and out to school
The teacher is teachin' the golden rule
American history and practical math
You studyin' hard and hopin' to pass

Workin' your fingers right down to the bone
And the guy behind you won't leave you alone

Ring, ring goes the bell
The cook in the lunch rooms ready to sell
You're lucky if you can find a seat
You're fortunate if you have time to eat
Back in the classroom, open your books
Keep up the teacher don't know how mean she looks

Soon as three o'clock rolls around
You finally lay your burden down
Close up your books, get out of your seat
Down the halls and into the street
Up to the corner and round the bend
Right to the juke joint, you go in

Drop the coin right into the slot
You're gotta hear somethin' that's really hot
With the one you love, you're makin romance
All day long you been wantin' to dance,
Feeling the music from head to toe
Round and round and round you go

Hail, hail rock and roll
Deliver me from the days of old
Long live rock and roll
The beat of the drums, loud and bold
Rock, rock, rock and roll
The feelin' is there, body and soul.

[Example 2: Chuck Berry's 'School Days'. Words and music by Chuck Berry. Permission to reprint lyrics requested.](#)

As Berry is aware, and Althusser makes clear, the 'golden rule' applies to more than just the correct way to learn 'history and practical math', for the school exists as one of what Althusser calls the 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISAs). ISAs provide the sites for individuals to learn 'know-how', in other words how to do the jobs necessary for production to continue, how to treat and/or manage others and how to submit to one's place in the ruling ideology. The ISAs operate by ideology predominantly, Althusser says, and by repression and violence secondarily, while the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) functions by (the threat of) violence and repression predominantly and ideology secondarily. The RSA is a singular entity made up of a number of branches, usually unified, while the ISAs are plural in nature. The RSA consists of the government and its administrative bodies, the army, the police, the courts and prisons. The ISAs include educational and religious establishments, the family, political systems and parties, legal bodies, cultural

organisations and the media. Binding everything together is the Law, which operates as both RSA and ISA.

To a certain extent, of course, when listening to rock music we do not need Althusser to tell us all this: rock seems to *know* this already. One only has to consider the number of 'rock' songs relating the persuasive/repressive powers of the ISAs/ RSA, a selective list of which is given as Example 3. 15

Family	Eddie Cochran, 'Summertime Blues' Beastie Boys, 'Fight For Your Right' Lucinda Williams, 'Sweet Side'
School	Alice Cooper, 'School's Out' Pink Floyd, 'Another Brick In The Wall' Peter Tosh, 'You Can't Blame The Youth'
Religion	Jethro Tull, 'My God' Patti Smith, 'Gloria' XTC, 'Dear God'
Media	Rolling Stones, 'Satisfaction' John Fogerty, 'I Saw It On TV' Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, 'Television, Drug Of A Nation'
Army	Phil Ochs, 'I Ain't Marching Anymore' Neil Young, 'Ohio' The Clash, 'The Call-Up'
Police	Junior Murvin, 'Police and Thieves' Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Sonny's Lettah' Sinead O'Connor, 'Black Boys On Mopeds'
Government	Sex Pistols, 'Anarchy in the UK' The The, 'The Beat(en) Generation' Asian Dub Foundation, 'Fortress Europe'
Law/court/prison	Johnny Cash, 'Folsom Prison Blues' Nina Simone, 'Mississippi Goddam' Billy Bragg, 'Rotting on Remand'
Multiple	John Lennon, 'Working Class Hero' Rage Against The Machine, 'Killing In The Name Of'

Example 3: Sample of popular music tracks offering representations of ISAs and the RSA.

I wish to stay with songs relating to education for now because they constitute a body of work that has been consistent through rock's history. Indeed, one way to define 'rock' music might be to point to the countless songs that evoke the promise of freedom once school

is out, enact resistance to education, or suggest the idea of rock 'n' roll as a kind of alternative education.³³

I do not mean to suggest that rock 'n' roll is somehow immune from ideology. In fact the contrary is true, as any updating of Adorno's famous observations of the popular music of his day will show. Going surfing, dancing, driving or rocking out is not going to do away with either the RSA or its support via the ISAs. In such a reading, rock is just another ISA, a pleasurable way of ignoring the real problems at large in society.³⁴ However, I think it is worth paying attention to the ways in which rock music operates as one of the sites in which ideological transference is made possible. A good example of this can be found in Richard Linklater's film *School of Rock* (2003), in which ideological transference and the learning of lore both play major roles. The film relates the story of failed rock guitarist Dewey Finn (played by Jack Black), who masquerades as a supply teacher at an expensive private elementary school. Finn finds that the class he is supposed to be tutoring includes a number of highly talented musicians. The only problem, for Finn, is that the children's knowledge of music – in both listening and playing – is focussed on art music and they have next to no knowledge of popular music, especially rock. Finn devises a plan to 'educate' the children by putting together a 'project' which involves creating a rock band and entering a 'battle of the bands' competition. The majority of the film consists of Finn 'teaching' rock history, attitude and style to the children and interpellating them (successfully as it turns out) into the world of popular music. Finn himself, who is shown to be a hopeless member of society at the outset of the film due to his childish obsession with rock and his refusal to grow up and take responsibility for his own life, is redeemed at the conclusion by having found his vocation; the closing credits play over footage of his newly established 'School of Rock', where youngsters are seen getting to grips with AC/DC's 'It's A Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock 'n' Roll)'. There are numerous references throughout the film to the Symbolic Order, here referred to as 'the Man', and to the need to rebel against it ('sticking it to the Man'), while the song the band play in the competition is about having their heads turned from 'making straight As' and 'memorising your lies' to learning how to rock. Among the more obvious of the various 'knowing' references throughout the film (known, that is, to graduates of the rock school) is Jack Black's appropriation of the schoolboy uniform which has been used by guitarist Angus Young of AC/DC since the beginning of the band's career.³⁵

An Adornian account might well see in Linklater's film a narrative whereby the 'false consciousness' of the over-identifying rock fan is shown to be incompatible with the society in which he lives, only to be reinstated at the conclusion via a 'Hollywood' happy ending. But such an 'objective' account would downplay the importance of fantasy and faith. In doing so, it would operate in a similar manner to

'objectivist' scientific denunciations of faith such as Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*. While Dawkins is able to 'prove' the instability of the foundations upon which various religions rely, he cannot account for the need in people to seek out solutions to problems that life brings upon them (this is not to say that Dawkins is unaware of these problems or of people's responses to them, rather that science cannot show from where in the human the need arises). Slavoj Žižek has discussed in an analogous manner the problem that cognitive science has with the question of consciousness. For Žižek, although cognitive science is a useful tool for proving the role of judgement in perception amongst other things, it cannot explain awareness. Žižek suggests that, if we are to think of consciousness in evolutionary terms, we should think of it as a kind of 'mistake' in which 'consciousness developed as an unintended by-product that acquired a kind of second-degree survivalist function' and that it 'originates with something going terribly wrong'. We experience consciousness as a result of trauma.³⁶ If we were to filter the 'problem' of *School of Rock* through the psychoanalysts who have influenced Žižek, we might read the film, with Freud, as a tale of a subject who is caught in the cyclical trap of repetition and, with Lacan, as an account of a subject who, following a period of analysis, has happily learnt to live with and enjoy his symptom.³⁷

'Hail, hail'

Now that this question of belief has arisen, it is time to 'turn' to the other influential concept from Althusser's ISAs essay: interpellation, or 'hailing'. Althusser uses the example of a man being hailed in the street by a police officer. 'The hailed individual will turn round', writes Althusser. 'By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really him* who was hailed."³⁸ Many commentators on this text, among them John Mowitt and Mladen Dolar, have emphasised the use of sound in Althusser's example.³⁹ In thinking about this sound, it is also worth looking at a comparable situation described by singer Bruce Dickinson of the heavy metal group Iron Maiden. In an interview for the documentary *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, Dickinson (who, early in his singing career, earned the nickname 'Air Raid Siren') provides a perfect example of the hail in rock:

My intention as a frontman is to try and find the guy who's right at the back of the 30,000 [capacity] festival and sort of go, 'Yeah, you...Yeah, you. You!' And the guy goes, 'Me? Me!' Like that. And you can do that, you can actually do that [...] You're warming up the crowd and on a good night, when it works, it shrinks whatever arena you're in and it should [...] feel like you've shrunk the place to the size of your thumb where you can go, 'Yep. All together'.⁴⁰

This togetherness suggests desire. Judith Butler and Mladen Dolar both make much of the turning in Althusser's example of the hail. What is the desire in this turning? Do we perhaps want to turn, want to be recognised, in the hope that it is us, after all, from the multitude of addressers and addressees who are being spoken (to)?⁴¹

Yet it is not just the listener we should pay attention to here. Dickinson's example highlights the extent to which the hailer is also aware of the power of the hail. This is an important aspect to note because most interpretations of Althusser's text – my own included – place the emphasis on the listening/hearing subject: it is *this* subject who is seen in most accounts to be subjectivised. But we must also recognise a process of subjectivisation happening in the hailer too. After all, the police officer of Althusser's example is, as we might note by thinking of the 'off duty' police officer, 'only' a normal person, an ordinary embodiment of an extraordinary force. 'The police', in this sense, is (and I use the singular deliberately) as distinct from 'the police officer' as 'business' is from any particular business one might wish to name. The hailer, then, as individual subject, is also being hailed and subjectivised, by his/her own action, becoming a channel through which the hail of the big Other passes in a kind of ideological ventriloquism. Thus, when thrash metal band Anthrax perform their song 'I Am The Law', they are indeed the law while on stage, yet simultaneously agents of a power beyond their control. 19

This is not to rob the hailer of agency – Dickinson, after all, is perfectly aware of the power of his hail – but to note that (s)he is the agent for a process larger than him/herself. Dickinson, though aware, is both a little surprised and awestruck by the power that he gains when backed up by the rock machine. Were the machine not to function properly, it would become impossible for him to enact his role. We only have to imagine what would happen if the enormous backup necessary for an effective stadium rock concert were to break down. This is nicely illustrated on numerous occasions in the film *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) about the fictional band of the same name. At the start of their live performance of the song 'Rock 'n' Roll Creation', the band members are supposed to emerge from onstage 'pods', into which they return at the song's end. However, the bassist, Derek Smalls, finds that his pod is malfunctioning and he spends the entire song trapped there, only to stagger out just as the other band members are returning to their pods. In another scene a breakdown in communication leads to a life-size replica of a set of standing stones being built in miniature so that, when they are lowered onto stage during the song 'Stonehenge', the effect is farcical rather than dramatic. In the scene that is perhaps closest to the concept of a failed hailing, the band is seen wandering around the labyrinthine backstage area of the venue they are supposed to be playing. As they approach what they think is the door leading to the stage, Derek Smalls shouts 'Hello Cleveland! Hello Cleveland!', only for the band to find they have circled back to their starting point and are still lost. 20

Meanwhile the audience keep calling 'Tap! Tap! Tap!' In a classic moment of communication breakdown, the crowd presumably see the band as 'teasing them', deliberately delaying their entrance to make it more climactic; in reality, the band are not in this position of power but prey to their own incompetence and impotence.⁴²

'...round and round and round...'

Chuck Berry reminds us, in 'School Days', of the liberation enjoyed by the dancing subject. But, with Althusser in mind, I want to think also of the self-consciousness that sometimes accompanies dancing, of how dancing sets up a dialectic between mastery (over body) and submission (to music/body). The 'automatic' act of dancing is also crucially tied up with the 'automatism' of listening. Round and round and round goes the record in the jukebox to which Berry refers and so does the record on which he relates this tale to us. Round and round and round go the rhythms and the riffs of Berry's music and we are lost in and to this persistent circling. Richard Middleton raises similar points in his discussion of 'groove', noting that:

The contemporary deployment of the term [... summons] up a host of images, not only, perhaps, of dancing bodies but also of circling discs and even the never-ending routines typical of both everyday life and popular culture under modernity. Here, where the stylus and with it the listener faithfully follow the spiral groove cut in the disc, is His Master's Groove, drawing the listening subject inexorably towards that central disappearing-point [...] in a movement that irresistibly suggests both an auditory equivalent to the invisible but all-seeing gaze of Foucault's panopticism, and a Lacanian mirror function.⁴³

The following of the groove, or the beat, leads us to wonder again about agency and choice, which are not here synonymous. We might say that there is agency but no choice. The 'choice' here might be that described by Lacan in his use of the phrase 'Your money or your life': no choice, in other words, for life is nothing without money and money nothing without life, making a mockery of the 'or'. Lacan also links the phrase, via Hegel, to a choice between life and freedom for the slave, for whom life without freedom is not life and freedom without life is, similarly, death.⁴⁴ Can we rephrase Lacan's example with the dancing subject in mind and demand of her: 'Your mastery or your enjoyment'? What is mastery without enjoyment? And enjoyment without mastery must be some form of slavery, the point at which we become, as the song has it, 'Slave to the Rhythm'.⁴⁵

'Deliver me from the days of old': From Law to Lore

Similarly, we must reflect on the non-dancing subject, the individual who maintains control while seated at a rock concert, at home or on the bus but who is still slave to the voice. Mladen Dolar's work on the

authority of the voice is useful here. Dolar suggests that ‘there is something in the very nature of the voice that endows it with master-like authority’ and that ‘listening is “always-already” incipient obedience’.⁴⁶ We attempt to master our own voices even as we submit to the mastery of others’ voices. The voice is always a site for potential loss of control or for discovering a power in ourselves we did not know we possessed. As the Argentinian singer Mercedes Sosa puts it in her rendition of Milton Nascimento & Fernando Brant’s ‘Canciones y momentos’:

Hay canciones y momentos	There are songs and moments
yo no sé como explicar	I don’t know how to explain
que mi voz es instrumento	That my voice is an instrument
que no puedo controlar	That I can’t control ⁴⁷

Sosa herself is a fine example of the power of the voice, having been a ‘voice of conscience’ and spokesperson for Latin American issues over the course of nearly five decades. Hers has also been a voice that, crucially, others have not been able to control either, suggesting the possibilities of what a voice can do.

We also need to attend to the ways in which voices and languages take control of each other. Songs can contain what we might call, after Benjamin, ‘moments of danger’, when the voice moves away from linguistic sense to other less definable qualities. As Mladen Dolar says in regard to this indefinability, ‘It is not that our vocabulary is scanty and its deficiency should be remedied: faced with the voice, words structurally fail.’⁴⁸ Dolar relates the history of distrust in philosophy and theology over the voice moving away from sense-making activity: ‘Up to a point, music is sublime and elevates the spirit; beyond a certain limit, however, it brings about decay, the decline of all spiritual faculties, their disintegration in enjoyment.’⁴⁹ And as with the mostly religious and classical music that Dolar discusses, so too with popular music, where issues to do with the power of voices serve as crucial ways in which subjects are always already implicated in what Richard Middleton calls the ‘voicing’ of the popular. The self-restraint of the speaking-listening subject could be read as a sign of subjectivised civilisation. To really let oneself be lost in music is to let oneself become disruptive, a bad subject (in both legal and psychoanalytic registers), to ‘lose it’, go mad to the music, etc.⁵⁰ And mastery and submission are also crucial aspects of the anxiety inherent in the narratives we weave around music. The differing accounts of 1955 described above, for example, present different registers of certainty. The fear of the loss of certainty is profound, whether manifested in the anxiety over the loss of academic rigour (Peterson) or in the recognition of the loss of the real, the radical (Cohn). These fears circle one another, constituting the riven subjects of popular music.

Whether considering Badiou’s faithful subject, Althusser’s subjected 24

subject or the split subject of psychoanalysis, music seems to work, in the examples I have been using, as a channel through which agency passes. I want to think, then, of a dialectic of agency moving between the musical subject and the listening subject, of times when, lost in music, the subject gives himself up to music's guiding force; of other times when, driven by her own agency, that same subject assumes the guiding role, relegating the musical object to its 'mere' use value; of other times, perhaps the most numerous for the 'committed' listener, when the shifting boundaries between the subject's agency and that of the music cannot even be recognised, let alone rationalised. Here the listener's agency lies in the very act of wishing to transfer agency to the musical object. Perhaps, then, to mix Peter Sloterdijk with Louis Althusser, the listening subject is that subject who knows very well what they are doing, giving themselves up willingly to a hailing that will render them subject to music's ideology.⁵¹

If one is choosing to lose oneself in music, one is, we could say, choosing to enact a transference of ideology from the school to (the school of) rock. There are still rules and ideologies in the School of Rock but they can (be seen to) be oppositional to the dominant order. There is, of course, an argument that this transference merely involves moving from one ISA to another, that rock music is merely providing a safe place to work out and come to terms with one's place in the ideological order. Against this we can place the idealism of rock's narratives of liberation, rock as the freedom and the promise that will 'deliver me from the days of old'. Music hails us away from the hail of the law with the promise of its lore, the guarantee of a freedom that exists outside of the situation governed by constructivist thought. As Paul Ricoeur notes in his discussion of ideology and manipulated memory, memorised lore (myth in his account) enables the effectiveness of ideology.⁵²

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Part Two: There Is a Light

If Badiou can encompass in his theory both political revolution and the amorous relationship (for both are world-changing), can we, in an analogous move, attempt to encompass both the Elvis event and the acts of love involved in listening to and being fans of music (for both, again, are world-changing)? In popular music listening and lore there is a seemingly ubiquitous sense in which individuals have been waiting to be interpellated. Here we enter an arena of popular music discourse that overlaps with religious lore, not least in the notion of the epiphany. Some random but seemingly typical examples:

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- Daniel Goldmark writes of the jazz bagpiper Rufus Harley's moment of conversion: 'Harley had an epiphany – this was the sound that he'd been hearing but unable to realize on his saxophone.'⁵³

- Composer-arranger Paul Buckmaster says of Miles Davis's move to electric music: 'It was everything I had imagined some kind of future music to be. Everything that I hoped to hear was revealed in *Bitches Brew*'.⁵⁴
- Lester Bangs, in an article on The Clash, writes: 'don't ask me why I obsessively look to rock 'n' roll bands for some kind of model for a better society...I guess it's just that I glimpsed something beautiful in a flashbulb moment once, and perhaps mistaking it for a prophecy have been seeking its fulfilment ever since.'⁵⁵
- Roger Nupie, president of the International Dr Nina Simone Fan Club, says that 'when [Nina Simone's] music came into my life [...] I felt like I had already heard it, as if I recognised and knew it in some way or another.'⁵⁶
- Billy Bragg writes of his youth: 'I knew little about [Simon and Garfunkel] apart from the fact that that their music was a route to some kind of ecstasy, a catalyst for emotions more intense than I had ever known before. I felt as if I had stumbled onto a different reality, in which the sound of a certain song could transport me to another place.'⁵⁷ Bragg's next step is to lie in wait for the song to appear on the radio so that he can record it.
- Merle Haggard, as ever, gets straight to the heart of the matter in 'Someone Told My Story' (1967):

I played a brand new record on the jukebox
 I scarcely could believe the song I heard
 It told of how you left me for another
 It was almost like I'd written every word

And Moe Bandy makes an analogous observation in 'Hank Williams You Wrote My Life' (1976).⁵⁸

- Scott Walker includes a quote from Albert Camus on the sleeve of his album *Scott 4*, which reads: 'A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to discover, through the detours of his art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened.'⁵⁹

Judith Butler, *not* writing about popular music epiphanies, nevertheless summarises the issues at stake in the moment: 'Something takes hold of you: where does it come from? What sense does it make? What claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized?'⁶⁰ Butler is here writing about loss and it is worth considering how the moment of epiphany is both a moment of gain (we find something new in that paradoxical moment of learning what we already seemed to know) and a moment of loss (we feel we will never confront that sudden flash of insight again, although we will go on searching for what it seemed to illuminate). It is possible, then, to connect being seized by a truth event (such as the rock event) and

being seized by a loss. As Butler observes: 'Perhaps [...] one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the result of which one cannot know in advance.'⁶¹ Or, as the folk singer and bard Robin Williamson puts it in 'There Is a Music', we allow ourselves to become 'lost in the pursuit of that which has already snared us'.⁶² Epiphanies compel us to continue searching for greater epiphanies – this is the shape fidelity to the listening event takes.

In being promised a truth outside of constructivist thought, we become enamoured of a possibility that such a situation-evading possibility can be repeated. To capture it we start to repeat the actions that gave rise to that first calling, as suggested in Scott Walker's use of Camus's words. In doing so we slowly join the situation via our own constructivist thought, laying behind us a sedimentation of encyclopaedic knowledge (just as Nik Cohn left such a trail in archiving his passion to escape the archive). We become subject to a radical loss as we come to realise the pastness of the event and the impossibility of its repetition. This process is one recognised by the Marxian concept of commodity fetishism and it is with this in mind that I turn from music's subjects to a consideration of some of its objects. 27

Music's Things

As Judith Butler makes clear, there is a process of 'claiming' and 'taking-hold' that we become subject to in the epiphanic moment. The English language permits us to immediately make connections between the subjects and the objects of popular music via the notion of *possession*. Evan Eisenberg puts it nicely via recourse to funk music: 28

With tempting dialectic, funk suggests the following: music, having started out as ritual, having then become a thing, now becomes a *thang*. The difference is profound. A thing is what you possess, a *thang* is what possesses you. A thing occupies space, a *thang* occupies time and preoccupies people. A thing, above all, is private, a *thang* can be shared. As *thang*, music is again communal and celebratory.⁶³

I am not as sure as Eisenberg that music-as-thing always or necessarily precedes music-as-thang. I think it just as likely that, as in the attempt to repeat the subjectivising epiphanic moment, we return to music's things after having discovered the potential of its *thang*. Whichever it is, however, a discussion of the music's subjectivising processes should not neglect music's myriad objects. I do not have space to go into the many implications for music brought about by sound recording, the sonic archive, phonography and collecting,

issues that have been examined in depth by others.⁶⁴ Instead I want to focus on the issues of fetishisation, anxiety and fidelity. What is it that makes us want to associate music with objects? What is the anxiety that accompanies the loss of these objects? In what ways do we demand that these objects be true to our sonic fantasies?

The relationship between loss, memory and technologies can be traced back to classical times, as Paul Ricoeur shows in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.⁶⁵ Plato, for example, has Socrates railing against the evils of writing, which, while easing the task of recollection and recitation, will render the art of memory redundant. Plato's *pharmakon* – both cure and poison – will also prove a touchstone for Jacques Derrida in the latter's discussion of speech and writing.⁶⁶ But for others, the development of technologies of recording is an extension of human ability. Sigmund Freud, for example, writes:

With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning [...] In the photographic camera he has created an instrument which retains the fleeting visual impressions, just as the gramophone disc retains the equally fleeting auditory ones; both are at bottom materializations of the power he possesses of recollection, his memory.⁶⁷

For Freud, then, man is fully aware of the power of recollection and not anxious that the transference of it onto a mechanised device will rob him of his power, for that power is still necessary to make use of the results of the recording devices. Allied to the anxiety over the substitutive role that technology plays is a concern over the extent to which the technology shows fidelity to the original. Numerous theorists of photography, from Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Vilém Flusser, have discussed the extent to which the camera may or may not lie.⁶⁸ Equally, theorists of recorded sound, such as Jonathan Sterne, Evan Eisenberg and Theodore Gracyk have examined the differences between what seems to be captured in recording and what we seem to hear when playing back recorded sounds. Many, like Eisenberg and Gracyk, find photography and film useful comparisons to recordings and both media certainly harbour similar deceptions. As Richard Middleton observes, 'like the photograph, the recording cannot lie – which means that it lies more convincingly; like the photograph, it is both lifelike and already dead and gone.'⁶⁹ As this suggests, nowadays the recording and the photograph can very easily lie; indeed, in the era of digital manipulation it is easier than ever for them to do so.

In developing a potential 'aesthetics of rock', Theodore Gracyk is keen to point out that: 'Within popular music, rock is significantly dependent on a shift in ontological category, in *what* counts as a unit of significance or an object of critical attention.'⁷⁰ This 'what', or object, has profound implications for the relationship between

musician and fan. As Evan Eisenberg notes: 'Music is now fully a commodity, exchangeable for the universal commodity, money [...]. The listener need never see the working musician behind the vinyl. Each is, in a modified Marxist sense, a fetishist.'⁷¹ The very objectness, as any record-lover is aware, is a crucial semblance of fixity for both artist and listener. For Geoffrey O'Brien: 'Records are perfect and self-contained. The events they memorialize are messy, unfinished, often not events at all but slivers of possibility salvaged from everyday chaos.'⁷² And, as O'Brien goes on to note, replaying a record now does not necessarily evoke the memory of the time the record was bought but the memory of the work the song it 'fixes' was *already doing* (quite possibly, even at the time, memory work).

The effect records have on listening processes is an area that seems to invite disagreement. John Mowitt, for example, writes: '[T]he contemporary structure of listening, with its dependency on memory, is given its social significance by the reproductive technologies that organize it.'⁷³ But, for Jonathan Sterne: 'all the *technologies* of listening that I discuss emerge out of *techniques* of listening.'⁷⁴ I would only intervene here to suggest, in response to Sterne, that techniques of listening – and, especially, *rituals* of listening – emerge from technologies too. There is either a cyclic or dialectic process at work here as there is with any practice located along the speaking/listening/writing/reading axes, which also accounts for why I can organise my account of listening subjects and objects in an order different from that of, say, Evan Eisenberg, who deals with the obsession of collecting and the process of music becoming a thing before discussing listening strategies. 31

The politics of listening and the fantasy of total control

Collecting and archiving are the processes that help connect the notions of 'recording loss' and 'lost recordings', both of which hinge upon the sense of anxiety brought about by loss. Eisenberg provides a 'tentative list' of five reasons for collecting: 'The need to make beauty and pleasure permanent [...] The need to comprehend beauty [...] The need to distinguish oneself as a consumer [...] The need to belong [...and] The need to impress others, or oneself.'⁷⁵ More recently, other writers have focussed on the identification of record collecting and masculinity, no doubt inspired by the kind of 'common sense' connection between men and record collecting chronicled so successfully in Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity* (1995).⁷⁶ 32

Simon Reynolds deals with masculinity, collecting and the anxiety of loss in his essay 'Lost in Music', suggesting: 'If there's a distinctively masculine "sickness" [in record collecting,] it's perhaps related to the impulse to control, contain, master what actually masters, ravishes, disorganizes you: to erect bulwarks against the loss of self that is music's greatest gift.' But he quickly adds, 'Or is it the other way around: collecting as a perverse consumerism, a literally consuming 33

passion that eats up your life?’ Reynolds speaks also of collecting as a parallel life, not an alternative self-contained life: ‘On the one side, the life of loves lost and kept, family tribulations, “civilian” friendships; on the other, the world of music.’⁷⁷ Eisenberg, meanwhile, speaks of ‘heroes of consumption’ such as his friend Clarence, a truly obsessive record collector: ‘The true hero of consumption is a rebel of consumption. By taking acquisition to an ascetic extreme he repudiates it, and so transplants himself to an older and nobler world.’⁷⁸ This world is one that, for many, is sealed into the very grooves of the discs. There is a fragility here that always threatens to fragment the memory, a realisation that the musical vehicle – be it record, CD or hard drive – might be little more permanent than the air upon which sound drifts away. For Geoffrey O’Brien, writing about 78s, the fragility of the object is connected to the fleetingness of the lost moment:

The disks themselves – at once heavy and fragile with an extra layer of surface noise – suggest a past surviving against heavy odds. It must be given special attention because its traces – carved into those thick grooves and extracted from them with a thick obsolete needle as crude as a barnyard nail – are so easily smashed. The past is retrieved, but just barely, and it is forever in danger of being smashed beyond recapturing: I learned that the day ‘The Viper’s Drag’ slipped from between my fingers.⁷⁹

These vessels, then, must be treated with the utmost respect. This includes the manner in which the collection is organised, as Walter Benjamin makes clear in ‘Unpacking My Library’ and Georges Perec in ‘Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One’s Books’. This process sheds further light on the project of collecting inasmuch as the latter is an impossible quest for some kind of totalisation of knowledge. Perec writes:

Like the librarians of Babel in Borges’s story, who are looking for the book that will provide them with the key to all the others, we oscillate between the illusion of perfection and the vertigo of the unattainable. In the name of completeness, we would like to believe that a unique order exists that would enable us to accede to knowledge all in one go; in the name of the unattainable, we would like to think that order and disorder are in fact the same word, denoting pure chance.⁸⁰

It is not only recordings that promote anxiety even as they bring comfort. Accompanying the move to sound recording is the loss of sight of musical instruments⁸¹ and the shrinking of recording and playback devices. Most recently, the iPod has generated a notable level of distrust due to its lack of objects (no discs or cassettes), a distrust partly addressed by the attachment of numerous accessories

to the player itself, such as cases, speakers, 'skins', etc. With the development of telephony and phonography came an uncanniness brought about by not seeing the source of the sound, a feeling highlighted by Proust in his description of the sound of the telephonic voice in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. With the current methods of accessing music, where the only object involved might be a computer or an iPod, this process has intensified, as Julian Dibbell discusses in 'Unpacking Our Hard Drives', an update of Benjamin's essay on libraries. Dibbell asks: 'Can the erotics of pop consumption [...] survive when records live unseen and untouched on our hard drives, and if so, how? Where is the love in the age of the download?'⁸² It is worth noting here the appeal to sight and touch, reminding us that there is more to 'listening' than listening. Dibbell quotes Benjamin on mourning the collector but suggests that the 'eros' – better understood as a kind of obsession – has not gone away but has transmuted into different but comparable practices related to downloading and sharing music, such as the 'zero day' scene (involving the downloading of music before it has been officially released) which thrives on the obsession to have the music before anyone else and on the thrill of illegality. Though many have cautioned against the utopian narratives of consumer control that the internet suggested,⁸³ Dibbell is correct to focus on the thrill of the process. What remains constant is the obsession based around the extra Thing, the part of music which is not music itself but which represents desire: the record, the MP3, the autograph.

If something scares us in the prospect of losing ourselves in music, then it may well be that this anxiety is only increased by the 'disappearance' of the music itself into the electronic labyrinths of computer hard drives. This could be one reason for the persistence of the listening ritual, a process often held dear by those most vociferously opposed to new media such as iPods. What is for these critics an 'agency of listening', a refusal of random elements, can be seen as a result of an anxiety around sound's authority and around one's 'incipient obedience'. Listening becomes an act of mastery, often gendered as a masculine reclamation of feminine space, connecting it to the male mastery of 'feminine' consumption that some see record collecting as being. Agency here means imposing order on a seemingly chaotic world (a world of computer-generated and -maintained favourites and wishlists, of shuffle functions on iPods or random modes on CD players). The existential question relating to this agency becomes 'To shuffle or not to shuffle?' The implicit suggestion in many such responses is that other people do not listen properly. This is connected to authenticating accounts of popular music taste and cultural capital, as Anahid Kassabian points out in her work on ubiquitous music.⁸⁴ Yet while the criticisms of new media are often essentially a performance of anxiety over the loss of 'serious listening', the counterpoised notion of the listening ritual does recognise that there is importance in the music and wants to show respect (fidelity), wants to make of each listening experience an

event.

Utopia, Festival, Concert

The Real (in the Lacanian use of the word) may not be that amongst which we live for the most part but it underpins our 'regular' Symbolic life. And, as Geoffrey O'Brien reminds us in discussing 'the imagined life' of pop consumption, it is an Imaginary as much as a Symbolic or Real life.⁸⁵ As Reynolds points out, collectors are not necessarily the arrested developers of *High Fidelity*: 'most of the avid collectors I know are married or involved, hardly running scared from intimacy or commitment. If their collector selves represent a form of arrested adolescence, this is a protected zone of retardation [...] that runs in parallel with their "real," relatively emotionally mature lives', a living with their symptom we might say.⁸⁶ Something similar can no doubt be claimed for the rock festival, which represents an exemplary utopian site, a promised event, or event-to-come to use messianic terminology. 36

Julien Temple's 2006 film *Glastonbury* nicely illustrates the idea of people escaping their symbolic lives to try to achieve, via the possibilities of utopian communitarianism and rock music, some blast of the Real. In connection to the foregoing account of being lost in listening, it is worth thinking about a kind of mass losing. Remembering the 'collective decision' referred to by John Trudell, we can perhaps speak here of a collective decision to get lost together.⁸⁷ Temple's *Glastonbury* also serves as a reminder that the festival is increasingly a capitalist exercise, the dream always mediated by the ever-strengthening fence. How to keep what is out there separate from what is in here?⁸⁸ One interviewee in Temple's *Glastonbury* describes the festival as a bridge between worlds. Others describe attendance as an attempt to glimpse a vision of a possible alternative, others still as a chance to show their 'real selves'. This brings to light a paradox: the real self can only be attempted or realised at extraordinary events. Or, rather, the real self is different from the ordinary self, suggesting the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real. The Real, it turns out, is not that amongst which we live for the most part; in a similar way to Lacan's topology, the Real is not reality. 37

I Was There (the rock witness)

If the festival or concert is an important site of utopian possibility, it is also a stadium of memory, where remembered events are given their full retrospective power. An example of this can be found in the book *I Was There*, which charts a number of concerts deemed as major, 'world-changing' events within the Anglophone rock imaginary, including the Moondog Coronation Ball (1952), the Charlie Parker Quintet at Toronto's Massey Hall (1953), the Monterey (1967), Woodstock (1969) and Live Aid (1985) festivals, the Manic Street 38

Preachers in Havana (2001) and Paul McCartney in Red Square (2003). Although erroneously claiming to '[lift] the lid on a century's worth of classic performances' (the first, by Robert Johnson, dates from 1938) and seemingly uninterested in any acts from outside the easy audibility of the Anglo-American pop world, the book displays a keen interest in remembering these moments even as it pays attention to various aspects of 'obliteration' which are 'often a significant part of the concert experience': 'Lost in the crowd. Lost in music, preferably at ear-crunching volume. In liquor or some other mind-changing substance. Lost in moments that have since become cornerstones of popular music history.'⁸⁹ The author, it turns out, was not actually there at the events described, relying on the accounts of other witnesses (mainly music journalists) and immediately calling into question whether these events are 'cornerstones' because of what actually happened or, as seems likely, because they fit easily into a coffee-table-book 'historical' account that essentially retells the familiar story of the rock canon. It is easy to critique a book such as this but *I Was There* finds its echoes in countless other examples of music journalism which rely on the ongoing belief in the eventness of events such as those listed here. In 2007, for example, *The Wire* magazine ran a cover story entitled 'Seismic Performances' about '60 concerts that shook the world', while such features have long been a staple feature of monthly rock magazines such as *Q*, *Mojo* and *Uncut*.⁹⁰

It is worth remembering that 'I was there', the witness's classic statement, refers to both space and time: I was at that place at that time. Although this is often shortened to suggest 'I was at that place', it should equally be shortened to 'I was at that time (in my life)'. Music, after all, does not just pass time (is not just a pastime), but is often (always?) consciously associated with past time, whether it be the time of the adolescent who may or may not now have graduated from the School of Rock or the time associated with public and personal events. There is always the awareness of the impossibility of returning to that time save by the sonic fantasy of listening-as-remembering. 'The Way We Were', despite what Barbara Streisand might have us believe, is never really the way we were, just as history never really tells it 'like it really was', as Walter Benjamin makes clear.⁹¹ But we believe and, when belief falters, we experience what I earlier called nostalgia for fidelity, meaning the sense that one has lost one's fidelity (one's unconditional love of music) just as one might lose another person. Nostalgia for fidelity relates to the notion of the lost cause, bringing about a dilemma over whether loss always takes the shape of an unavoidable betrayal.

Part Three: Fidelity's End?

It is hard to imagine Alain Badiou condoning the application of *Being and Event* to rock's history, for while he often uses music as an

example of the event in art his examples are invariably not 'popular': he mentions Haydn, Schoenberg, Cage, Berg and Webern and is generally rude about the popular love song. In this his views are not so far from those of Adorno: Adorno's standardisation finds a corollary in Badiou's implication that much of popular music represents a continuation of being without event. In 'Considerations of the Current State of Cinema', Badiou writes:

The twentieth century [...] essentially witnessed three types of music. First, there was post-romantic music which maintained the artifices of the finishing tonality, such as found in Mahler or Tchaikovsky's symphonic melancholy, and which continues, via Strauss and Rachmaninov, right through to the current day, and singularly in cinema. Second, the great creation of American blacks, jazz, which has its major artists from Armstrong to Monk, but to which we must also attach, in mass, everything which falls under the term 'youth music', from rock to techno. Finally, there was the continuation through rupture of veritable musical creation, which, from Schoenberg to Brian Ferneyhough, liquidated tonality and constructed a universe of musical singularities, serial and post-serial.⁹²

It is not hard to discern which of these three 'types' attracts Badiou's admiration; which qualifies, in other words, as an event. One way to start challenging the location of 'veritable musical creation', then, would be to posit the irruption into the musical situation of the whole of African-American music – from ragtime through jazz and rock to rap – as an event rather than a 'type'. But I would want to go still further by allowing rock 'n' roll an eventness that its relegation to 'a type of music derived from jazz' does not allow.

Before posing some questions specific to popular music that arise from the consequences of making this decision (from 'intervening', to use a Badiouian term), it is necessary to raise some other questions about event and decision. The first of these is: Who gets to decide what an event is? The short answer would seem to be: those who find themselves brought into being as subjects (subjectivised) by their constitution as subjects via the truth claim; what Badiou refers to as 'intervention' and, in his attempt to connect the process to set theory, 'forcing'. But there are problems with this, not least the fact that Badiou himself seems to insist on emphasising his own examples of events. This is a point made by Terry Eagleton in his critique of Badiou: 'Commonplace social life [...] is for Badiou, as much as for Sartre, a zone of inauthenticity. Common knowledge is just idle opinion, and there is as sharp a gap for him between doxa and truth as there is for Plato.' Eagleton goes on to ask: 'Are there really no contradictions in this quotidian realm? Is there no selflessness, compassion, extraordinary endurance? Or do we need to resort for such virtues to the numinous sphere of our fidelity to non-normative, exceptionalist truth events?'⁹³ I feel some sympathy with this critique,

often wondering as I read *Being and Event* how any new creation could rival the seemingly indisputable 'eventness' of Badiou's examples. And it is certainly true that we are surrounded by events that seem far more mundane than those Badiou relates. It might even be possible to think of 'ubiquitous events' in a manner that allows us to connect such a concept with what Anahid Kassabian calls 'ubiquitous music' and 'ubiquitous listening', except for the fact that such ubiquity would only seem to equate with *being*, not *event*, in Badiou's world.⁹⁴ In such a reading it would only be the desire to make a moment 'momentous' that would lift anything, including listening experiences, out of the ordinary and into the evental.

I would not, however, want to sacrifice what might be termed the 'rare evental' in order to focus on the 'evental everyday'. Just because people experience (consciously or not) countless 'mundane' events each day of their lives does not mean that they do not mark their lives via larger, rarer evental moments. I would prefer to think of the more fluid interaction of the major and minor, the personal and the collective, suggested in the work of Joe Brainard whose list of past events in his book *I Remember* can move directly from 'I remember the first time I saw television' to 'I remember the day John Kennedy was shot'.⁹⁵ Georges Perec, who produced a French version of Brainard's text entitled *Je me souviens*, made the following claim in an interview:

The idea would be that everyone would write a *Je me souviens*, but that no one else could write the 455 'je me souviens' that are in the book [...] It's like in set theory, I share memories with X that I don't share with Y, and everyone could choose for themselves a unique configuration from out of the complete set of our memories. It's the description of a conjunctive tissue of a kind, in which a whole generation might recognize itself.⁹⁶

Events are represented according to both teleological and historical aspects: they promise utopia in the future and serve as memory of the past. Here we witness a double aspect of 'event' that is evident when something that has not yet happened is *forecast* as an event and when something that has happened is *remembered* as one. In the case of the former, which is really based on a promise, there is always the possibility of disappointment; where this happens, we witness the non-event. Neither the event nor the non-event can be predicted, leading to the phenomenon of marketing failures, where a logic operates via a formula of treating everything as an event in the hope that some things may just fulfil their promise of eventness. The media's role in shaping eventness relies on an eventness tied as much to expectation (to the *a priori* event) as to selective remembering (the *a posteriori* event). The non-event, in other words, is an eventness that cannot deliver an event, a 'de-evented' or 'virtual' event.

We must not neglect the notion of event in the present either. This may entail the rather vague notion of 'current events' or it may be the ability, via 24-hour news media, to be a witness to 'events unfolding'. This notion of unfolding provides a staple for modern television entertainment, such as in the popularity of reality TV programmes or in the US series *24* where the main selling point of the programme is that 'events occur in real time'. We might want to ask how this connects with the time experience of listening and what effect cutting and editing has on such events. It would seem that such editing is necessary due to the fact that 24-hour witnessing is impossible, at least if we resort to a notion of witnessing as a dual process of 'seeing' and 'saying'. We can imagine a 24-hour seeing, perhaps, as we relegate recording to electronic media which do not require sleep, only infinite storage capacity where items can be tagged, logged and held in an archive which never needs to be deleted but which, perversely, may never be accessed. Here is where the 'saying' comes in, the active part of witnessing, what the witness does with the knowledge s/he bears (witness to). Because this form of saying can still only reside in the human, 24-hour vigilance is not possible (despite what the makers of *24* might have us believe). Selection and partiality are therefore essential. This impossibility is reflected in the 'happy' process of forgetting.⁹⁷ What remains is a series of 'markers' or 'quilting points', which lead us in turn back to events.

A priori and *a posteriori* events are often reported together in the news as 'event markers' of the present, meaning that the present has a vital role to play – as it does in the study of memory and trauma – as the point that marks the event. This is illustrated in the following news story from 2007 concerning the fortieth anniversary of the release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*:

Oasis, The Killers and Razorlight are to cover songs from The Beatles' Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band to mark the album's 40th anniversary.

James Morrison, The Fratellis, Travis and the Kaiser Chiefs are among the other acts taking part in the special recording sessions for BBC Radio 2.

The engineer in charge of the original 1967 sessions will use the same equipment to record the new versions.

The results will be aired on Radio 2 on 2 June, a day after the anniversary.

The original album was released on 1 June 1967 and went on to be regarded as one of the best and most influential releases in rock history.

Last year, it came top of a Radio 2 poll to find the best number one album of all time.

‘Unique event’

The modern rock bands will be recorded by audio engineer Geoff Emerick, using the one-inch four-track equipment he captured the original on 40 years ago.

Radio 2 is also celebrating its 40th birthday this year, and the programme will form part of the station's '60s Season.

Radio 2 controller Lesley Douglas said: ‘This will be not only a unique radio event, but a very special musical moment.

‘The range and quality of artists involved ensure that this will be a fitting tribute to one of the great albums of all time.’⁹⁸

Here we find an *a priori* event (‘this will be [...] a unique radio event’) about an *a posteriori* event (the original album, which also has a canonised eternality about it due to its position at the top of the poll cited) reported in the present and using names of the present to lead the story (Oasis, The Killers, Razorlight, etc.). And this is to say nothing of the nostalgia present in the original work itself or of the similar event in 1987 where those memorialising the album were at least able to play on the line ‘it was twenty years ago today’ from the title track. It is just such tangles of history, memory and (anxiety over) forgetting that contribute to the continual enlarging of the archive. And it is just such tangles, relying as they do on the role of genealogies in constructing evental histories, that mark another challenge to Badiou’s theory.

I want to briefly explore how some of the problems raised by the clash of Badiou and popular music play out and will do so by asking a simple question: what has become of the event of rock ‘n’ roll? The following examples touch down on different moments in the ‘rock’ story but what I want to stress is not so much the leading of one of these moments to the next (although to a certain extent this is unavoidable) but the importance they have for the present. I will begin with a verse from John Trudell’s ‘Baby Boom Ché’. Having established the eventness of Elvis in the first part of the track, Trudell admits to the passing of the moment: 45

Anyway, man, for a while we had a breather of fresh energy
To keep us from falling into the big sleep
Then before long Elvis got assassinated in all the fame
Taking a long time to die
Others seized control while Elvis rode the needle out
Never understanding what he done⁹⁹

For many observers and listeners, rock 'n' roll began to lose its eventness as early as the end of the 1950s. This might be thought of as the moment that Elvis joined the real army, rather than the countercultural army Trudell has him leading, or the slow decline of the late Elvis who 'got assassinated in all the fame'; it could be 'the day the music died' evoked by Don McLean in his response to the loss of Buddy Holly and his fellow artists in a plane crash; or it could be the self-professed 'downbeat' story told by Bruce Tucker of the recuperation of rock 'n' roll by the dominant culture and the fates of four of rock's 'seminal' performers. As Tucker notes, 'in 1957, Little Richard simply retired from rock 'n' roll, confused apparently about religion, secular music, and his sexual orientation', while Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis suffered 'an exorcism of the cultural implications of [their] work'. Presley was not exorcised 'but trivialized, the central figure in the shifting of the discourse from cultural miscegenation to generational conflict', and, when he was drafted, 'his recuperation by the dominant culture was complete'.¹⁰⁰

Of course, the 1960s were still to come and many others were able, as Trudell says, to 'seize control while Elvis rode the needle out'. 46 It might even be claimed, from a current perspective on popular music, that this was the decade where the templates for contemporary styles were truly fashioned and where the modern pop sound was fixed, though few could deny that such templates were themselves built on earlier models. Yet, by the end of the 1960s, downbeat stories were once again being sounded. Loss here involved an updating of the recuperation story, famously described in the title of George Melly's *Revolt into Style* (1970), but also the disappointment of a range of failed projects, from the hippy counterculture's demise to the fallout of the civil rights movement. This was also the moment that the canonisation of rock began, a process arguably connected to the death of rock as unfolding event and its birth as a retroactively-positing event. Magazines such as *Creem* and *Rolling Stone* in the USA and *NME* and *Melody Maker* in the UK provided both the history and the reasons for writing the history, assigning the music an ever greater value. Book length studies emerged to fill in the gaps left by the space restraints of the magazines, from the 'flash' histories of writers such as Nik Cohn to carefully researched accounts of the industry such as Charlie Gillett's *The Sound of the City* (1970) and interpretative cultural histories like Greil Marcus's *Mystery Train* (1975).

The gaze, then, had become a backwards one and with this came a certain amount of despair. In 1970, one of the young guns of the new music journalism, Lester Bangs, felt able to write the following: 47

Personally I believe that rock 'n' roll may be on the way out, just like adolescence as a relatively transitional period is on the way out. What we will have instead is a small island of new free music surrounded by some good reworkings of past

idioms and a vast sargasso sea of absolute garbage.¹⁰¹

Bangs would be proved correct in his prediction of 'reworkings' as the 1970s ushered in such record industry practices as the search for 'new Dylans', incorporating all manner of male singer-songwriters from John Prine to Loudon Wainwright (who would later satirise the practice in his 'Talking New Bob Dylan') and Bruce Springsteen. While the latter's first two albums certainly seem to fall into the 'new Dylan' style, his third, *Born to Run* (1975), is perhaps the album that truly captures the Janus-faced nature of rock music at this stage, the point where the music's future may well lie in its past. Springsteen, famously touted at the time of *Born to Run* as 'the future of rock 'n' roll', was attempting a fusion of styles that were steeped in the music's history. While writing and recording the album he was aware of a continuation of a tradition rather than an attempt at something new, saying 'lyrically, I was entrenched in classic rock and roll images, and I wanted to find a way to use those images without their feeling anachronistic.'¹⁰² As June Skinner Sawyers writes, Springsteen 'considers himself a traditionalist – a synthesist – more a throwback to rock and roll glory than a harbinger of rock and roll future.'¹⁰³ What becomes explicit on *Born to Run* is the arrival of the era of fan-as-artist, evident in 'citational' lines such as that found in the first verse of 'Thunder Road': 'Roy Orbison singing for the lonely/Hey that's me and I want you only'.¹⁰⁴

A similar process was evident in the contemporaneous pub rock scene in the UK, which sought a back-to-basics approach that challenged the increasingly mammoth proportions of rock. Yet it would not be long before this movement itself would be challenged with the arrival of punk rock, many of whose performers had also been involved in the pub rock scene. Given the context in which it emerged and the responses it drew, it does not seem unreasonable to posit punk as an event in much the same way that I dealt with rock 'n' roll earlier. This is certainly how the movement is presented in the popular music press and, if I do not veer too far from the standard history of punk here, it is partly to emphasise the media's role in establishing this history. Punk, then, can be seen as an attempt to *re-event* as much as reinvent rock; indeed the felt necessity for such a re-eventing could be said to have required a reinventing of musical style, star persona and fan identification. While one of its anthems might have been 'God Save the Queen', one of its effects was to 'save' the King, notable in the 'primitive' rock 'n' roll styles of many punk bands or the homage to Elvis's first album in the cover design of The Clash's *London Calling*. That punk was all about 'surface' excess (in sound, language, style, etc.) few would deny; yet it was also, to use the Badiouian take on the term, about an attempt to find the excess of the situation.

One of the pub-rockers who was 'hailed' into a new existence was Joe Strummer, who later traced his conversion to a Sex Pistols gig

which convinced him to leave his revivalist band the 101'ers and join Mick Jones and Paul Simonon in The Clash. To use Badiouian language, The Clash initially proclaimed a fidelity to punk and the death of rock, thus creating itself as a subject (a punk band) and as subject to truth (the truth of punk's declaration). In Althusserian terms, they were interpellated as punk subjects, having recognised a call to arms. As Pat Gilbert makes clear in his biography of the group, there was substantial indecision concerning whether Strummer should leave the 101'ers at the time but the retrospective positing of the Sex Pistols event was crucial to the politics of the situation. As Strummer himself put it, The Clash felt the need to take an 'almost Stalinist' approach, annihilating anything in their past that might contradict their current aims.¹⁰⁵ On '1977', the B-side to their first single 'White Riot', the group sang of 'no Elvis, Beatles or the Rolling Stones/In 1977', while their first self-titled album, also released in 1977, contained the famous 'I'm So Bored with the U.S.A.' and, along with its songs about life in London, suggested an alternative musical influence via a cover of Junior Murvin's reggae number 'Police and Thieves'. Like a number of punk bands, The Clash were fascinated by reggae and found in it both an exoticism nurtured by its otherness and a 'local' language born of Jamaican immigrants' accounts of life in the UK. The group would continue to cover reggae numbers and to write their own material based on reggae styles (including dub), a practice enriched by their association with DJ and filmmaker Don Letts and their collaboration with reggae artist Mikey Dread.

By the time of their third album, *London Calling* (1979), the 'Stalinist' 50 anti-American, anti-rock 'n' roll stance was exposed for the act it had always been as the band covered rockabilly numbers such as 'Brand New Cadillac' and plastered the record cover with American images, from the pastiche of Elvis's first album via the use of black and white photography and green and pink typography to the use of three photographs of the band performing at venues in the USA, prominently labelled on the rear sleeve. The fact that it was a double album seemed to further remove them from the 'get-it-down-quick' ethos of early punk and the album exuded a well-worked-on rock feel. It might be said that the recognition of the call to arms of 1977 had become by this time a misrecognition as the band shifted their allegiance to both the originary event of 1955 and to a larger fidelity that was both international *and* local. This changing fidelity is one that Joe Strummer would continue into his solo career, especially with his last group The Mescaleros, where he performed a mixture of rock, folk and what by then had become known as 'world music'. In a sense, Strummer's quest does not uncover some new development in rock so much as the (re)discovery that, prior to and during the Elvis event, the reliance on the other, on the marginal, was crucial.¹⁰⁶

It is also worth highlighting the way that The Clash and the punk 51 scene more generally have become part of a campaign by the rock media to emphasise the eventness of what happened at this point in

rock's history. The extent of this fascination was furthered by Joe Strummer's premature death in 2002, which took many rock fans by surprise. In addition to Gilbert's book and Letts's film, recent years have also brought the luxurious repackaging of *London Calling* as a double CD and DVD to mark its twenty-fifth anniversary (2004), lengthy features in the rock monthlies to mark the event, and Julien Temple's film about Strummer, *The Future is Unwritten* (2007), again accompanied by features in the rock media (even the notoriously presentist *NME* put the Clash on their cover in May of that year with a tagline reading 'How they changed all our lives...').¹⁰⁷ More generally, *Mojo* ran a feature on 1976 as event ('Inside the '76 Revolution!') for its thirtieth anniversary, while most of the monthlies also featured 1977 as a year to be commemorated on *its* thirtieth.¹⁰⁸

For others, punk was never able to deliver the musical revolution it promised, leaving this job to those who were inspired by punk but keen to try something different. The scene that became known as 'post-punk' has had its history eloquently written by Simon Reynolds in *Rip It Up and Start Again* (2005). For Reynolds, post-punk was the realisation of the revolution punk had promised. Tracing punk's 'degeneration' to 1977, Reynolds identifies a fracture that produced two groups of musicians, 'the populist "real punks" [...] who believed that the music needed to stay accessible and unpretentious, the angry voice of the streets', and 'the vanguard [...] who saw 1977 not as a return to raw rock 'n' roll but the chance to make a break with tradition, and who defined punk as an imperative to constant change'.¹⁰⁹ For the latter group, styles based on 1950s rock 'n' roll, 1960s garage punk or mod, which had provided the engine for much of 'popular' punk, became as undesirable as the progressive rock stylings punk had sought to overthrow. Post-punk did look to the past, not only in its adoption of 1970s black music innovations but in its admiration for the more arty end of pre-punk music; 'not', Reynolds is keen to stress, 'prog's attempt to merge amplified electric guitars with nineteenth-century classical instrumentation and extended compositions, but the minimal-is-maximal lineage that runs from The Velvet Underground to Krautrock and the more intellectual end of glam'.¹¹⁰ As becomes increasingly clear from Reynolds's distinction between the vanguard and the traditional, what is at stake in (this account of) post-punk is a particular attitude that in turn forges a particular style. The hostility found in some parts of the contemporary discourse towards new groups, such as Franz Ferdinand, who have started to use elements of this style stems from a disappointment that yet another revolt has turned into a style.

If musical tradition emerges at the point at which musical style is fixed, then the moments of revolt-into-style here can be seen as moments in the creation of a tradition, or set of traditions. It is the recognition of such a process that fuels some of the most hostile criticisms of popular music. If it has become something of a cliché to bemoan the loss of tradition in 'traditional' musics – often as a direct

result of the impact of post-rock 'n' roll popular music – it has also become something of a commonplace to deny the latter any kind of longevity that would rely on traditional style. An example of this can be found in John Strausbaugh's *Rock 'Til You Drop*, an extended attack on what the author calls 'colostomy rock'. For Strausbaugh, acts such as the Rolling Stones, although they remain immensely popular and attract new generations of fans, are betraying the rock music they helped fashion by treating the music as an exercise in nostalgia rather than as a challenge to the status quo: 'Colostomy rock is not rebellion, it's the antithesis of rebellion: it's nostalgia [...] And nostalgia is the death of rock. We were supposed to die before we got old.'¹¹¹ Strausbaugh also turns his sights on younger bands like Rage Against The Machine, accusing them of mere 'revolutionary signifying'.¹¹² The question emerges, however, of whether one can be nostalgic for something one has not experienced (this would be true for both Rage Against The Machine and their audience). If nostalgia is a longing for home, where is 'home' here? A critical nostalgia could suggest that the tactics of rock bands, young and old, are attempts at keeping hold of a (potentially lost) cause. But neither a critical nostalgia nor a desire to show fidelity to a (lost) cause need necessarily deny change. Here we find ourselves in the realm of the Derridean 'living fidelity'.¹¹³ What Strausbaugh seems to fear among his ageing rockers is the existence of a zombified fidelity; would a living (changing) fidelity to rock overcome this? If not, do we have to consider rock music an isolated moment whose time has passed? If a changing fidelity *is* possible, however, in whose hands can it flourish? One answer would seem to lie in those (youthful) hands that Strausbaugh finds no time for, in groups such as Rage Against the Machine, or their contemporary equivalents.¹¹⁴

Younger bands are crucial here in that they highlight the difficulty of establishing an 'original' statement in the contemporary pop scene. The process that Bangs described in 1970 has increasingly become the norm, with reworkings of past idioms passing for the 'new'. In the BBC's series of reports on the Best New Acts of 2007, for example, all the groups featured were described in terms of what aspects of the past they used. More surprising was just how recent the sources were and the extent to which the sources chosen were themselves reworkings of past acts. The feature on The Twang, for example, established the group's rock credentials by noting that 'the band are already getting a reputation for rowdiness' before going on to claim that 'they are also ambitious, fiercely committed and not short of charisma or talent – a combination that brings back memories of Oasis and the Happy Mondays.'¹¹⁵ Meanwhile The Klaxons, who would go on to win the 2007 Mercury Music Prize, were noted for their invention of a style known as 'new rave'. In an interview, singer and bassist Jamie Reynolds was quite honest about their motivations:

Everything's got rehashed over the last five years [...] And for

us, it seemed like the early '90s was the only thing that hadn't yet been rehashed. And as soon as we did that – rehashing the only thing there was left – it put a stop to that and we wanted to make a fresh start. Now we're left with the fact that we have to create something completely new and fresh.¹¹⁶

In addition to bands taking this attitude, such comparisons have become normal in the description of new music in the media. In doing so they mix these references with their main project, which is to reinforce the canonisation of rock. One of the most visible ways in which they do this is through the seemingly endless production of lists. List-making has become a ubiquitous practice for the media generally, with a growing amount focussed on historical products of popular culture: the hundred greatest films of all time, the nation's favourite books, the top ten gardening programmes and so on. Often seen as examples of pop culture's increasing tendency to feed on itself, these lists grow ever more ironic and knowingly self-reflexive, with lists of lists already available on the internet. In thinking about lists and their relation to canon, a number of issues emerge, among them the relationship between the temporal and the eternal, qualitative versus quantitative judgements, who creates the lists and how, the roles played in the creation and maintenance of the canon by those involved professionally in the topic and those who are not, compilers' or voters' awareness of current canons and their roles in justifying or challenging them and what is being said not only by the lists but by the desire to compile them.

A lot of the issues highlight the interdependent notions of value and history in popular culture, interdependent because value can most easily be attributed to popular culture through an examination of its history and its history can only be written on the assumption of its value. Part of the agenda of cultural studies has long been to problematise Matthew Arnold's idea of culture ('the best that has been thought and said'), yet Arnold's formula, stressing as it does both value and history, is what popular culture lists are all about. In popular music, this has tended to be reflected in the sacralisation of certain musical texts into esteemed 'works'. This has led to a particular focus on albums, generally those dating from the mid-to-late 1960s or early 1970s, considered a golden age of rock music and the point where it stopped being temporal and became eternal, when pop claimed a value previously denied it and nominally became 'rock', and when albums became more important than singles in forging the canon. As mentioned earlier, this period also witnessed the turn towards historicising rock in magazines and books and there developed a change from popularity-based lists to lists of historically important 'works'. The emergence of writers' lists (such as that in the *NME* in 1974) seemed to suggest a distinction between those 'qualified' to take an objective position in valorising rock's past and those not. This has proven to be a constant in rock lists, where there is still a distinction between critics' and readers' polls. The readers'

polls have come to be the place where the temporal overlaps with the eternal and they force us to question the relationship between popularity and worth. While all lists are based on popularity and worth, it remains the case that in 'long view' lists worth is attributed first and popularity gauged second and in 'short view' lists the reverse tends to be the case.

To return to the 'problem' of new bands, then, it is notable that the monthly magazines most prone to list-making, such as *Uncut*, *Mojo* and *Q* in the UK, induct new artists into the canon by connecting them stylistically (and often attitudinally) to the established and constantly re-sacralised canonical acts. New music is almost by default described in terms of precursors, thus keeping both in their place. It is this situation which has led a number of pop and rock critics to suggest that the music has run out of future. In a feature in *The Guardian* entitled 'Meet the future of pop music', Jon Savage and Paul Morley bemoan the 'retro' nature of so many new acts, with Savage claiming that his test for new music is whether or not it could only have been made in the current year: if not, it is 'boring'.¹¹⁷ It is clear what Savage means and yet his attitude does not allow for the fact that 'retro' music could possibly still only have been produced in the current year too (in other words, it is a symptomatic style). Simon Reynolds seems more aware of this when he writes:

I do think the uncanny persistence of indie-rock, the fact that it has outlasted all the obituaries written for it, is something to reckon with. Explaining it by positing an inherent lameness or laziness to its audience seems... inadequate. Perhaps it's a format that does a certain thing particularly well, and the mystery is not the survival of the format, but the survival of the need for it (society's to blame?).¹¹⁸

In an internet debate between Reynolds and Mark Fisher about one of the biggest of the new British acts, the Arctic Monkeys, Fisher raises the issue of context while reinforcing Savage's aesthetic view. Claiming that, now, 'Pop really is trad.', Fisher states his position thus:

My quarrel [...] was less with the Arctic Monkeys per se [...] than with the critical climate that has elevated them into the stratosphere. If the AM album were re-classified as a guilty pleasure, akin to enjoying a good quality Abba tribute band or something, I would have few problems with it. But not to challenge the NME rating – fifth best British album EVER – not to be alarmed by the audience's fervour for it, is catastrophic for two reasons. First, because it colludes in the pretence that Pop is healthy and thriving ('this is as good as it ever was!') Second, because it actively contributes to a lowering of expectations ('it won't get any better than this'). It is, exactly, a matter of principle, of refusing to give up on desire, because to

accept either of these positions is to betray (Pop's) desire, to lapse in fidelity to those convulsive Events which made Pop matter, made it more than something pleasant to listen to. It is a betrayal worse than an actual renunciation of those events, since it is a forgetting that anything happened in the first place. For Pop no longer to make demands on the world but to accommodate [sic] itself to the world's 'it'll have to do' *realism* constitutes the very flatlining into undeath of which I wrote [in a previous post].¹¹⁹

Reading accounts such as Fisher's and Reynolds's, one becomes aware of the extent to which this is essentially a debate about rock or pop music as art. For those who oppose tradition, pop is an avant-garde art that has no time for looking back unless it is a productive looking-back, a reclaiming of lost futurism. As witnessed earlier, Reynolds has championed the latter type of nostalgia in his work on 'haunted audio', arguing that the kind of looking-back practised by groups such as those on the Ghost Box label entails a retrieval of a particular British post-war modernism. This is in marked contrast to his attitude to nostalgia in a piece predating 'Haunted Audio' by nearly a decade. Writing on his blog in 1998, Reynolds listed, as he does each year, his 'unfave' records of the year, those which he considers most over-rated or to which he finds himself in political opposition. In 1998 his major target was 'Americana', the term he uses to describe 'the middle aged/middle class/middlebrow consensus behind Lucinda Williams, that 32 year old Bob Dylan record [*Live 1966*], Elliot Smith [sic], Billy Bragg and Wilco, Vic Chestnutt, and the rest of the retro roots minstrels'. Reynolds accuses fans of these artists of being scared of the future, of having an active phobia of electronic music and of buying into an 'isolationist' Americanism that denies non-US influences on popular music. He continues:

There's lots of reasons for all this nostalgia, nativism and necrophilia: inability to get a grip on electronic music in all its protean and mutational forms (and unwillingness to experience it in its 'real' and most engaging context – the ravefloor); not knowing where to go next after grunge made a mainstreamed mockery of indie-rock idioms; a perhaps understandable squeamishness about what real white American kids are into (Korn style funk-metal, ska, swing); a perhaps forgivable confusion in the face of hip hop and R'n'B's encrypted resonances and commodity-fetishing [sic] playa ethos. So where else to go for nourishment and 'renewal,' then, but to the past?¹²⁰

Reynolds also singles out Greil Marcus's book *Invisible Republic* and suggests that its focus on what Marcus terms 'the old weird America' (as documented by Harry Smith on his *Anthology of American Folk*

Music) legitimised this looking-back. Alluding to Raymond Williams's formulation of emergent, dominant and residual elements of culture, Reynolds writes, 'I guess ultimately I'm an "emergent" rather than "residual" kind of guy – more interested in the weirdshit [sic] lodged in crevices of contemporary culture, the stuff that some future Harry Smith will archive.'¹²¹

It would not be difficult to highlight a paradox between the seemingly absolute refusal of looking back posited here and the justification for Ghost Box's doing so in the 'Haunted Audio' article – to point out, for example, the necessity for Ghost Box to bring the 'residual' into play against the 'dominant' *and* possibly the 'emergent' – but that is not my intention any more than it is to provide an 'answer' to the debate between vanguardists and traditionalists (not surprisingly, I do not have one). Rather, I wish to draw attention to the ways in which the issues regarding loss, memory and nostalgia have come to be incorporated into both popular music and the discourse surrounding it. My focus on the media, from where I have drawn a number of my quotations, is aimed at highlighting the ways in which both musicians and critics have taken on the roles of intervening in debates related to these topics. To take one example, we can consider the debates surrounding universalism, relativism and the politics of difference and identity that tend to be juxtaposed or deployed against each other depending upon the stance one is taking on issues ranging from modernism and postmodernism to globalisation, aesthetics and much else besides. The position ascribed to Mark Fisher and the 'vanguardists' above is one we could fairly easily connect to an account of universalist modernist aesthetics; it is a position which does not see the necessity of looking outside the perimeters of Anglophone popular music even as it searches the stylistic perimeters of that 'set' for the promise of something new. It is as antagonistic to a politics of difference in this sense as is the philosophy of Alain Badiou, who not only declares identity politics to be a distraction from political action (claiming that what is needed is a 'politics of sameness' that would restore the original promise of democracy) but who also chooses as the primary examples of his aesthetic politics an array of prototypically 'evental' modernist artworks. Against such a position we can position Bruce Tucker's claim that otherness, as part of a postmodernism opposed to the universality of modernism, is one of the crucial elements in rock 'n' roll's eventness. Tucker states:

Modernism has often included an ideology of modernization coupled with an internationalism that plays out in the political sphere as domination of other cultures, subcultures, and social classes. It is just such domination that the emergence of otherness and marginality in politics and in art challenges. Placed in this historical context, culturally resistant postmodernism is seen to be more than merely a matter of style or of the latest avant-garde, but, as in the case of early

rock 'n' roll, the locus of a full-blown crisis of cultural authority.¹²²

Here we might claim that, even as they draw on the influences of the recuperation of difference established by colonialist practices, those works of modernist art so dear to Badiou express a universalism that would deny that any such recuperation was necessary in the first place. Another point that Tucker makes, as we saw earlier, is that the relegation of rock 'n' roll's identity politics to a politics of generational difference was another universalising modernist move. We could then reverse such a procedure and suggest that the tendency for rock and pop to 'eat itself' could find its escape route in a turn outwards, learning to face the world for which it speaks and against which it defines itself via a universalising of sonic diversity.

It seems apparent that rock and other popular musics that have responded to its call can be said to undergo a transition from 'events' to examples of 'being'. As examples of encyclopaedic knowledge, they become arenas for the exercise of accuracy over act as their histories are perfected, contested and revised. For many this brings about various processes of loss, not least the fear of a loss of vitality (described by Fisher as 'undeath'), where rock endangers itself in a manner analogous to the ways many have suggested it endangers other musics. This may well be, to cite Poe, a 'premature burial' where 'the boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague'.¹²³ What becomes important, then, is the policing of those boundaries, as recognised by Fisher in his professed vigilance for messianic moments in Pop, or Žižek in his call for a defence of lost causes. It is perhaps too early still to say for sure whether rock or pop, in their mid-to-late twentieth century incarnations, are lost causes but it is clear that they continue to play crucial roles in reflecting and refracting notions of loss, memory and nostalgia both within the arena of popular music and in our cultural lives more generally. 59

As for the question posed at the beginning of this article regarding the usefulness of applying Badiou's notion of the event to popular music studies, I wish to make two points. Firstly, Badiou provides a vocabulary which fits quite neatly with the discourse surrounding the emergence of rock 'n' roll, the faithful subjects it brings into being and subsequent crises of faith, thus providing another way of narrating the rock 'n' roll project. Secondly, the shift of emphasis from producers to consumers that is one of the strengths of popular music studies attests to a shortcoming in Badiou's theory regarding *who* gets to decide upon and shape events. Where the French Revolutionaries, Galileo and Schoenberg stand in for the events of politics, science and art in Badiou's work, he is curiously circumspect when it comes to providing specific examples of his fourth area of evental activity, love. Love, as Dolar suggests, may well be what lies 'beyond interpellation'; it also provides an area of evental experience 60

in which everyone can claim an involvement and one in which popular music has invested heavily. In doing so, the music and its attendant discourse continue to provide useful ways to reflect upon and problematise one of the crucial philosophical debates of our era, the (im)possibility of the emergence of the new.

Notes

¹ I am using 'rock' here as a general term for the wide variety of Anglo-American pop and rock that has dominated popular music internationally since at least the rock 'n' roll 'event'. Later I will be talking about rock music with reference to electric guitar-based musics such as 'indie', heavy metal and punk. I trust the meaning will be clear within its context.

² Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, tr. Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2005 [1988]).

³ To a certain extent, we do not need to make such a leap. As Bernardo Palombo has pointed out with regard to the emergence of *nueva trova* (a Cuban 'new song' movement that emerged in the 1960s and whose figureheads were Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés), 'The reasons for the Revolution of '59 were the reasons for the birth of *Nueva Trova*.' In other words there was as much need for a musical revolution as for a political one. Here, as elsewhere, the revolutionary moment sought to identify itself with a lost past moment: in *nueva trova*'s case the *trova* practice that existed before the domination of what Palombo calls 'the post-Hollywood dreck from Batista's Cuba'. Bernardo Palombo, liner notes to Silvio Rodríguez, *Cuba Classics 1: Silvio Rodríguez Greatest Hits* (Luaka Bop, VVR1030032, 1991).

⁴ John Trudell, 'Baby Boom Ché', *AKA Grafitti Man* (CD, Rykodisc, RCD 10223, 1992). The imagery here is especially resonant given the centrality of race to both historical moments. In addition, 'Love Me Tender', the music of which provides the backdrop to Trudell's recitation, is an adaptation of a Civil War song, 'Aura Lee', although I do not know if Trudell was aware of this. My thanks to Richard Middleton for bringing these connections to my attention.

⁵ We should note, however, the way that the music accompanying Trudell's spoken narration seems, to a certain extent, to undermine the Elvis event. How effective is a comparison of Presley and Boone, we might ask, when placed over a musical text comprising 'I Want You I Need You I Love You' and 'Love Me Tender', hardly the most explicit examples of Presley's 'eventness'? As Richard Middleton's comparison of the two singers has it, 'there is no clear division between the two performers. Presley's singing, for example, carries meanings as well as "grain", and this is in fact why in some performances it could move across into a position close to that occupied by Boone'. See Middleton's discussion of the two singers in *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 262-3.

⁶ Nik Cohn, *Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom: Pop from the Beginning* (London: Pimlico, 2004 [1969]).

⁷ Cohn, 'Preface to the Pimlico Edition', *Awopbopaloobop*, xiii.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 245-55: 247. Richard Middleton has made productive use of this image in *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 88-9.

⁹ The 'danger' of rock 'n' roll is another thing that is supposedly lost in the commercialisation of the music, leading to various attempts, such as Punk's, to reclaim the danger, or to 'endanger' rock (which may or may not be the same thing). Similar debates go on elsewhere too: we could trace them in debates surrounding Portuguese fado, cleaned up from a dirty and dangerous music to the acceptable – even desired – face of authoritarian projections of the family and religion (a recognition of its interpellative powers and a re-transference of them to other Ideological State Apparatuses, of which more below); also in debates around

country music such as Barbara Ching's book on hard country, a paean to danger if ever there was one: Barbara Ching, *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Richard A. Peterson, 'Why 1955? Explaining the Advent of Rock Music', *Popular Music* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan., 1990), 97-116: 97.

¹¹ For a useful summary of Badiou's notion of differing infinities, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 133-134.

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, tr. Kathleen Blamey & David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 240.

¹³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 294.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 36-43.

¹⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 214.

¹⁶ Don McLean, 'American Pie', *American Pie* (LP, United Artists, UAS 29285, 1971). McLean's song should be heard alongside Trudell's 'Baby Boom Ché' as a lyrical intervention into the historicisation of rock.

¹⁷ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 36.

¹⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvi.

¹⁹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11.

²⁰ Boym, *Future*, xvi.

²¹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 60.

²² I should point out that Badiou has continued to develop his theory of the subjectivising potential of the event and to worry at this question of agency. The Badiouian position I am representing here is mostly based on his work up to and including *Being and Event* (1988), while *Ethics* (1993) presents a subject seized by a truth (at its mercy) that allows for an ongoing – and possibly changing – fidelity and hence suggests at least a partial agency for the subject.

²³ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 271.

²⁴ Žižek, *For They Know Not*, 273.

²⁵ Simon Reynolds, 'Society of the Spectral', *The Wire* No. 273 (November, 2006), 26-33: 33.

²⁶ Billy Bragg, 'Ideology', *Talking With the Taxman About Poetry* (LP, Go! Discs, AGOLP 6, 1986).

²⁷ Robert Fink, 'Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon', *American Music* Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), 135-79.

²⁸ Bruce Tucker, "'Tell Tchaikovsky the News": Postmodernism, Popular Culture, and the Emergence of Rock 'N' Roll', *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 9, No. 2, Papers of the 1989 National Conference on Black Music Research (Autumn, 1989), 271-95: 272.

²⁹ There is some evidence towards the end of the piece in the section that Fink paradoxically calls 'Doing Elvis'.

³⁰ We could take this further. As subjects of the Crown and of the State, we are subject to a Law that stipulates (via the Crown Court and other ideological/repressive state apparatuses) its ownership over our lives. In this sense we are always in a situation where it is possible for the State to take our lives from us, to 'kill' us. In the UK this 'killing' may no longer be a literal one. It is the 'soft killing' of life imprisonment that awaits us. In popular music, it is the song, as Roberta Flack reminds us, that kills us softly. See (hear) Roberta Flack, 'Killing Me Softly With His Song', *Killing Me Softly* (CD, Atlantic 87793-2, 1995 [1973]). We mustn't overlook the connection to the Sirens' song here either or the fact that songs not only 'kill' us, they also save our lives. See Richard Middleton, "'Last Night a DJ Saved My Life": Avians, Cyborgs and Siren Bodies in the Era of Phonographic Technology', *Radical Musicology* Vol. 1 (2006), <http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk> (accessed 17 May 2007), 31 pars.

³¹ Thomas Pepper plays on this double meaning in an article on Althusser, hailing Althusser himself. Thomas Pepper, 'Kneel and You Will Believe', *Yale French Studies* No. 88, Depositions: Althusser, Balibar, Machery, and the Labor of Reading (1995), 27-41: 41.

³² Chuck Berry, 'School Days', *The Chess Box* (6LP, Chess, 80001, 1988). Originally released as a 78 rpm and 45 rpm single (7", Chess, 1653, 1957).

³³ There is an accompanying history of popular music which has not sought to distance itself from 'traditional' education, from the Beach Boys' 'Be True To Your School' through an array of pop musicians who have come to music via art college to those genres known as 'college rock' and 'math rock'. Yet, the Beach Boys were hardly removed from the alternative culture preached by rock and both their hymning of the 'alternative education' of the surfing life and the dedication shown by Brian Wilson to taking pop music to new sonic frontiers suggested ambitions at odds with the continuation of state ideology. We might even read 'Be True To Your School' as being not about the college life its lyrics endorse but about fidelity to the countercultural school of rock.

³⁴ From within popular music itself, there is also a critique which points out a different 'lie' to the story told above, namely its racial and sexual politics. I do not have space to discuss that here – although I do have something to say about the canonisation process of rock later on – but it would be worthwhile adding to the list of songs about ISAs above titles such as Mos Def's 'Rock 'n' Roll' (from his *Black on Both Sides* album), which relates the 'real' history of rock and soul, replacing Elvis Presley with Chuck Berry, etc. The track also musically develops into a thrash/hardcore style, deliberately playing on assumptions as to what 'white' or 'black' musical styles 'are'.

³⁵ Young, as the permanent adolescent, is clearly the model for Black's character Dewey Finn.

³⁶ Slavoj Žižek & Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 54-59.

³⁷ 'Living with one's symptom', a concept explored throughout Žižek's work, might be how we should read the 'happy endings' of any number of Hollywood films and those rock songs which stress how their subjects just 'can't help it'. It might also be productive to work into such an enquiry Paul Ricoeur's discussion of 'happy memory' in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (494-496).

³⁸ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), 123-73: 163.

³⁹ John Mowitt, *Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 45-50. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2006), 122-123.

⁴⁰ Bruce Dickinson interviewed by Sam Dunn, *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, dir. Sam Dunn et al. (Canada, 2005).

⁴¹ Judith Butler, "'Conscience Doth make Subjects of Us All'", *Yale French Studies* No. 88, Depositions: Althusser, Balibar, Machery, and the Labor of Reading (1995), 6-26; Mladen Dolar, 'Beyond Interpellation', *Qui Parle* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring/Summer, 1993), 75-96.

⁴² This last scene is also notable for a hilarious exchange between the band and a backstage janitor who is offering them directions. The exchange plays on ideas of power that I explore here:

Janitor: ...go straight ahead, go straight ahead, turn right the next two corners, and the first door the sign "Authorized Personnel Only"...

David: Yeah.

Janitor: Open that door, that's the stage!

David: You think so?

Janitor: You're authorized. You're musicians aren't you?

David: We've got guitars yeah.

This is Spinal Tap, dir. Rob Reiner (DVD, MGM, 16146DVD, 2004 [1984]).

⁴³ Middleton, *Voicing*, 145-146.

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Norton, 1981 [1977]), 212.

⁴⁵ Analysing the role of the backbeat in Chuck Berry's music, John Mowitt refers to 'the object of a choice that then surrenders you to its powers.' Mowitt, *Percussion*, 31.

⁴⁶ Dolar, *A Voice*, 76.

⁴⁷ Mercedes Sosa, 'Canciones y momentos', *De mí* (Philips, 510 925-2, 1990).

⁴⁸ Dolar, *A Voice*, 13.

⁴⁹ Dolar, *A Voice*, 47.

⁵⁰ It is worth recalling here the reconfiguration of Manchester as "Madchester" during the rave scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s and the subsequent crackdown by the RSA represented by the police forces brought in to enforce changes in the law relating to such public events.

⁵¹ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (London: Verso, 1988 [1987]). Slavoj Žižek discusses and extends Sloterdijk's formulation – 'they know very well what they are doing, but still they are doing it' – in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 29-33.

⁵² Ricoeur, *Memory*, 84-86.

⁵³ Daniel Goldmark, liner notes to Rufus Harley, *Courage: The Atlantic Recordings* (CD, Atlantic/Rhino, RHM2 7725, 2006).

⁵⁴ Interview in *Miles Electric: A Different Kind of Blue* (DVD, Eagle Rock EREDV263, 2004).

⁵⁵ Lester Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburettor Dung*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 233-234.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Sylvia Hampton with David Nathan, *Nina Simone: Break Down & Let It All Out* (London: Sanctuary, 2004), 175.

⁵⁷ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot: A Search for Belonging* (London: Black Swan, 2007), 120-121.

⁵⁸ Merle Haggard, 'Someone Told My Story', *I'm a Lonesome Fugitive/Branded Man* (CD, Capitol/EMI, 7243 4 96854 2 0, 1998); Moe Bandy, 'Hank Williams, You Wrote My Life', *Hank Williams, You Wrote My Life/Cowboys Ain't Supposed to Cry* (CD, Audium Entertainment, 8181, 2003).

⁵⁹ Scott Walker, *Scott 4* (CD, Fontana 510 882-2, 1992 [LP, 1969]).

⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 21.

⁶¹ Butler, *Precarious*, 21, emphasis in original.

⁶² Robin Williamson, 'There Is a Music', *The Iron Stone* (ECM, 1969/9876441, 2006).

⁶³ Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* (London: Picador, 1988), 69.

⁶⁴ See in particular the work of Evan Eisenberg, Jonathan Sterne, Mladen Dolar, Theodore Gracyk, Richard Middleton and John Mowitt, all cited elsewhere in this article.

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, *Memory*, 7-21.

⁶⁶ See 'Plato's Pharmacy' in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, tr. Barbara Johnson (London and New York: Continuum, 2004 [1972]), 67-186.

⁶⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 21, tr. & ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 57-145: 90-91.

⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-44; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, tr. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000); Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979); Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, tr. Anthony Matthews (London: Reaktion Books, 2000 [1983]).

⁶⁹ Middleton, *Voicing*, 95.

⁷⁰ Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), x.

⁷¹ Eisenberg, *Recording*, 20.

⁷² Geoffrey O'Brien, *Sonata for Jukebox: Pop Music, Memory, and the Imagined Life* (New York: Counterpoint, 2004), 201.

⁷³ John Mowitt, 'The Sound of Music in the Era of its Electronic Reproducibility', in Richard Leppert & Susan McClary (eds.), *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 173-197: 183.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Duke University Press, 2003), 92.

⁷⁵ Eisenberg, *Recording*, 14-16.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Will Straw, 'Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture', in Sheila Whiteley (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 3-16.

⁷⁷ Simon Reynolds, 'Lost in Music: Obsessive Record Collecting', in Eric Weisbard (ed.), *This Is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 289-307: 294, 295.

⁷⁸ Eisenberg, *Recording*, 15.

⁷⁹ O'Brien, *Sonata*, 54-55.

⁸⁰ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, rev. edn., ed. & tr. John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1999), 155.

⁸¹ Although see Eisenberg's discussion of the phonograph as instrument in Chapter Ten of *The Recording Angel*.

⁸² Julian Dibbell, 'Unpacking Our Hard Drives: Discophilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction', in Eric Weisbard (ed.), *This Is Pop: In Search of the Elusive at Experience Music Project* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 279-88: 280.

⁸³ See, for example, Gustavo S. Azenha, 'The Internet and the Decentralisation of the Popular Music Industry: Critical Reflections on Technology, Concentration and Diversification', *Radical Musicology* Vol. 1 (2006), <http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk> (accessed 17 May 2007), 125 pars.

⁸⁴ Anahid Kassabian, 'Ubisub: Ubiquitous Listening and Networked Subjectivity', *Echo*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall 2001), <http://www.echo.ucla.edu>, 30 pars; Anahid Kassabian, 'Popular', in Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss (eds.), *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 113-123.

⁸⁵ Here, and elsewhere when I capitalise these words, I am referring to the Lacanian Orders of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. I am using 'Imaginary' to refer to those aspects of the subject's quest for a wholeness that is always unattainable but always desired, as in the 'Mirror Stage' of Lacanian theory. 'Symbolic' is mostly used to refer to the Order represented by society's attempts to impose logic, structure and consistency upon the inconstant nature of, exactly, nature, a process carried out first and foremost, as Lacan posited, through language. The 'Real' is that which cannot be symbolised and which exists beyond our attempts to explain inconstant nature. It is inconstant nature itself, which yet, paradoxically, always returns to the same place. The Real is that which irrupts into the Symbolic as trauma. Its connections with trauma, *jouissance* and death distinguish it from the more comforting Imaginary.

⁸⁶ Reynolds, 'Lost in Music', 294.

⁸⁷ Rave music – and, more pertinently, its use in the rave itself – would provide a useful comparison here. See also the work of Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison who, drawing on Victor Turner's concept of 'liminality', define the liminal aspects of music and social movements as 'states or periods of transition between ordered structures, in which actors "lose themselves" in ritualized performance' (Ron Eyerman & Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37).

⁸⁸ Here we might think too of M. Night Shyamalan's film *The Village* (2004), in which a group of city dwellers have left the city and formed a community in the woods, where they bring their children up in ignorance of the city's reality. Fleeing from time as much as space, they construct their reality via recourse to myths of

monsters and terror beyond the village limits. Inevitably, the outside can be kept at bay for only so long; eventually the need arises for something from Out/Over There and this need will threaten to bring down the Symbolic Order of the village.

⁸⁹ Mark Paytress, *I Was There* (London: Cassell Illustrated, 2005), 9.

⁹⁰ For the 'Seismic Performances', see *The Wire* No. 276 (February 2007), 22-35.

⁹¹ Benjamin, 'Theses', 247.

⁹² Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, ed. & tr. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 92. Badiou's 'Considérations sur l'état actuel du cinéma' appears in this edition as 'Philosophy and Cinema', 83-94.

⁹³ Terry Eagleton, 'Alain Badiou', in *Figures of Dissent: Reviewing Fish, Spivak, Žižek and Others* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 246-53: 250, 251. Originally published as 'Subjects and Truths', *New Left Review*, No. 9 (May/June 2001), 155-160.

⁹⁴ Kassabian, *Soundtracks*.

⁹⁵ Joe Brainard, *I Remember* (New York: Granary Books, 2001 [1975]), 9. However, in Badiouian terms there is nothing necessarily 'evental' about Kennedy's assassination just as there is nothing necessarily evental about September 11, 2001. Both are days people remember but nothing new was created from them.

⁹⁶ Percec, *Species*, 133.

⁹⁷ For 'happy forgetting', see the concluding chapters of Ricoeur, *Memory*.

⁹⁸ 'Rock stars to recreate Sgt Pepper', BBC News website (6 April, 2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/6530959.stm> (accessed 6 April 2007).

⁹⁹ Trudell, 'Baby Boom Ché'.

¹⁰⁰ Tucker, 'Tell Tchaikovsky', 292.

¹⁰¹ Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions*, 48.

¹⁰² Bruce Springsteen, *Songs* (New York: Avon, 1998), 44.

¹⁰³ June Skinner Sawyers, in Skinner Sawyers (ed.), *Racing in the Street: The Bruce Springsteen Reader* (London: Penguin, 2004), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce Springsteen, 'Thunder Road', *Born to Run* (LP, Columbia, PC 33795, 1975).

¹⁰⁵ Pat Gilbert, *Passion is a Fashion: The Real Story of The Clash* (London: Aurum, 2004), 86; Strummer quoted, 80.

¹⁰⁶ As Richard Middleton suggests, with Badiou in mind: 'Perhaps "black music" was the "void of the situation" from blackface minstrelsy onwards'. Private correspondence.

¹⁰⁷ The Clash, *London Calling*, Deluxe Edition (2CD/DVD, Columbia, 5179283, 2004); Adam Sweeting et al., 'Death or Glory', *Uncut* No. 89 (October, 2004), 52-70; *The Future is Unwritten*, dir. Julien Temple (Ireland/UK, 2007); Stephen Dalton, 'Strummer: Lust for Glory', *Uncut* No. 121 (June, 2007), 60-64; 'Why We Love The Clash', *NME* (19 May, 2007), 24-29.

¹⁰⁸ 'Mojo's Top Secret Punk Files', *Mojo* No. 151 (June, 2006), 54-88. Among its 'secret files', *Mojo* offers a deconstructed Joe Strummer. What emerges – as in *Uncut* 121 – is the familiar story of a man adopting a series of masks and slipping in and out of roles.

¹⁰⁹ Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-punk 1978-84* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), xvii.

¹¹⁰ Reynolds, *Rip It Up*, xxi.

¹¹¹ John Strausbaugh, *Rock 'Til You Drop: The Decline from Rebellion to Nostalgia* (London & New York: Verso, 2002), 10.

¹¹² Strausbaugh, *Rock*, 15.

¹¹³ 'In order to follow the "I do" today (before the priest), the "I do" of tomorrow should be the same and different.' Jacques Derrida, 'Following Theory: Jacques Derrida', interview in *Life After Theory*, ed. Michael Payne and John Schad (London & New York: Continuum, 2003), 11.

¹¹⁴ There is a much wider issue here, of course, regarding the extent to which all avant-gardes eventually nullify themselves through repetition and to which Badiou offers his theory of 'event' as a solution. Here, however, I want to stay focussed on the localised issue of youth and age in rock music.

¹¹⁵ Ian Youngs, 'Sound of 2007: The Twang', *BBC News* website (4 January 2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/6176049.stm> (accessed 4 January 2007).

¹¹⁶ Quoted in 'Sound of 2007: Klaxons', *BBC News* website (3 January 2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/6189307.stm> (accessed 3 January 2007).

¹¹⁷ Maddy Costa, 'Meet the future of pop music', *The Guardian* (20 April, 2007), available on the Guardian Unlimited website, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/filmandmusic/story/0,,2060807,00.html> (accessed 29 August 2007).

¹¹⁸ Simon Reynolds, *Blissblog* weblog (13 February 2006), http://blissout.blogspot.com/2006_02_01_blissout_archive.html (accessed 31 August 2007).

¹¹⁹ Mark Fisher, 'Night of the Living Indieheads', *K-Punk* weblog (8 Feb 2006), <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/007321.html> (accessed 31 August 2007), punctuation as in published text. The full debate can be viewed by following the links from this post to Fisher's earlier posts and to Reynolds's responses on his own *Blissblog* (see previous note).

¹²⁰ Simon Reynolds, 'Overrated of 1998', *Blissout* weblog (no date), <http://members.aol.com/blissout/over98.htm> (accessed 31 August 2007).

¹²¹ Reynolds, 'Overrated'.

¹²² Tucker, 'Tchaikovsky'. 270.

¹²³ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Premature Burial', in *The Collected Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2004), 252.

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