RE-VIEWING ROCK WRITING
The Origins of Popular Music Criticism

Steve Jones

Interviewer: What makes your opinion any better than that of a cabby out there on Sixth Avenue?
Lester Bangs: Nothing. Let him do it!
—From an interview in Throat Culture

POPULAR MUSIC CRITICISM has been canonized, organized around standard phrases and prosaic writing. As Mark Fenster claims,

[R]ock criticism, at this point in its history and in the history of rock, is almost self-generating, as though there were a big CD-ROM somewhere in the vaults of Rolling Stone’s offices that can simply spit out various catch phrases and judgements, even for rock critics who miss a show . . . [R]ock criticism is now more or less an exercise in pasting certain tried and true catch phrases and analogies to record reviews and artist profiles.1

One reason for the current state of popular music criticism, as described by Fenster, is simply that there is little left to write about, for aesthetic standards have changed little. Another reason is that many writers have left popular music criticism to write social criticism. The two had been intertwined in popular music criticism’s heyday in the sixties and seventies, but had begun to unwind as, seemingly, youth itself sought to leave the political out of popular music.

This essay is in part inspired by John Pauly’s notion that the New Journalism has become a “literary canon,” removed from its origins.2 Like the New Journalism, popular music criticism is

2. John Pauly, “The Politics of the New Journalism,” in Literary Journalism in

Steve Jones is an associate professor of communication at the University of Tulsa. He is the author of Rock Formation (Sage, 1982) and editor of CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community (Sage, 1994).
disconnected from its evolution and history, a history that ironically is intertwined with that of the New Journalism. As Faulty points out, the New Journalism "affirmed a generational identity" as well as "articulated a cultural identity." Popular music critics were writing about both generational and cultural identity well before the term New Journalism came into popular use, and popular music itself is precisely about such affirmation, as the music's frequent use in advertising constantly attests.

Little exists in the way of systematic study of popular music criticism as it evolved in the press, as little understanding of its history exists among many popular music critics. An increasing number of academic studies of popular music are published each year, and there are several scholarly journals that serve as forums for popular music scholars. Yet little has been published about popular music criticism in popular music scholarship, journalism and mass communication scholarship, or the works of critics themselves.

Journalism historians even seem to have overlooked the publications popular music critics wrote for, like Crawdaddy, Creem, Musician, and Trouser Press (to name the well-known ones), save for a handful of research articles on Rolling Stone magazine. But although histories of Rolling Stone, a leading publisher of music criticism, offer glimpses into the publishing industry and the counterculture, musicologists and sociologists alike appear to have ignored popular music criticism as a site for academic study. Only Abe Peck's Uncovering the Sixties, a history of the underground press in the 1960s, situates the rise of magazines catering to a rock audience within the framework of cultural and political debate. Indeed, the editorial raison d'être of many underground periodicals (then and now) is to provide an audience with published music criticism. Underground periodicals have been particularly tied to popular music criticism because such periodicals have served as a "farm league" for many journalists who subsequently found careers in the mainstream or underground press.

of these themes within the space of single articles, in a paragraph, occasionally even within one heavily weighted sentence.

Race, Records and Writing

Explaining why his writing shifted from music toward politics and cultural criticism, Nat Hentoff said, "You see the discrimination and injustice in the music industry and you naturally gravitate toward [social criticism]. Unless you're a totally aesthetic critic and that's a whole 'nother thing." If nothing else, popular music forced critics to confront social issues and go beyond aesthetics, to explore the ways in which meaning is made from popular music. Popular music critics, as Patricia Bizzell has noted, wrote about "that part of human life which is constructed through shared language use, the life-in-language that connects us to various pasts, puts us in concert or conflict with contemporaries, and provides us with visions of collective futures." That such collective envisioning should surface in popular music criticism is not surprising, since the music itself often seemed to have a similar purpose. Popular music was considered to have a meaning beyond the aesthetic, and consideration of that meaning—its construction, constitution, and communication—occupied many critics.

Popular music critics' examination of the urban music scene led them to write about racism and urban and moral decay. Since most music is recorded within and distributed from large cities, and since most "scenes" are labeled by the city in which they originated (the San Francisco Scene, the Liverpool-based Mersey Beat, the Minneapolis Sound, the Athens Underground), this connection seems natural. Even though many musical forms incorporated into popular music are born outside the city, many are inextricably linked to the inner city (in particular disco and rap music), and the city provides a context within which popular music incorporates elements of urban life (and vice versa). At first critics addressed these issues within the context of popular songs' lyrics. Later, they would address those issues without prompting from lyrics.

One of the first popular music critics to address race in his criticism was Ralph J. Gleason (1917–1975). Though he was sometimes excitable, even giddy, his writing was usually stately, and slightly ponderous. His extreme faith in the revolutionary promises held within rock and roll, gleaned perhaps from his association with San Francisco's psychedelic avatars, the Jefferson Airplane, during the late 1960s, is legendary. To Gleason, at least late in his life, rock and roll was the revolution. Gleason passed that way of thinking on to his disciple, Jann Wenner, and to a generation by way of their joint project (later Wenner's alone) Rolling


Stone. To this day the magazine still features Gleason's name at the bottom of its masthead in tribute to his contribution to the lingering philosophy of the magazine.

In 1960, Gleason began to look beyond the aesthetic criticism of jazz, for which he was known. Racism provided the spark Gleason needed to reinvent himself. In a "Perspectives" column in Downbeat magazine, Gleason related his anger and frustration at the scaling down of the live San Francisco jazz scene by city authorities who feared rioting (there had been fighting in the crowds of several jazz and rhythm and blues shows).

"What's behind this," Gleason wrote, "whether the people who make the decisions in such matters know it or not, is a fully functioning Jim Crow stereotype. … The fact that you can have a fight at a Guy Lombardo dance, the Harvest Moon Dance, or a football game between 22 Caucasians has nothing to do with it apparently. Some people can't think past their first impressions."

He goes on to blame schools and the education system partially, saying they do not encourage thinking and have made language "fuzzy" enough to allow words to mean many different things, apparently even that racism is okay, or that it is not even racism.

"We are in the midst of a gigantic social upheaval in which the Newport Jazz Festival riot, the southern lunch-counter sit-ins, Elijah Muhammad, and countless other things are part of the whole," Gleason wrote in that column. "Patience, tolerance and, above all, compassion are needed everywhere. The protest inherent in jazz has always been a protest for good, against evil. Let us not allow it to curdle into hate." 12

Later that year as the Civil Rights movement began to catch fire, many youth (as well as jazz musicians) saw themselves as in a position to redirect the hatred of blacks. Gleason was beginning to adopt a more socially aware standpoint. Music was the tonic, he seemed to be saying. "The 1960 Monterey Jazz Festival proved many things," he wrote, again for Downbeat in an article that seems a turning point for Gleason's approach to criticism. "That a jazz festival devoted to music does not incite a riot; that American audiences can and will be patient, attentive, and sympathetic to the most exploratory of musical experiences; that, as in the words of Jon Hendricks sung by Lambert-Hendricks-Ross, 'everything started in the house of the Lord.'" 13

In this article, Gleason seems to realize that there is a cultural significance to the music of which he writes—the slave songs, African music, "sexually symbolic" blues; but he still concentrates on the performances, on music, focusing on the quality of the sounds and power of their presence. "Communication was the key to both afternoon programs," Gleason wrote. "It might be said that

these two programs not only represented both sides of our society today but that they communicated directly to the audience with the same intensity with which the two sides of society burn. . . . But just as some can see the world of technology, of the Bomb, and of the giant shedding of skin of discrimination by black peoples of the world, with fascination and excitement and a kind of joy mixed with fear, so did this music communicate. 14

A critic who quickly realized the social significance of popular music and often wrote about the connections between jazz and race is Nat Hentoff (1925—), today a prominent political journalist and columnist for the Village Voice. Less prone to out-on-a-limb blanket statements and more thoroughly logical than Gleason, the two were originators of popular music criticism.

Though younger than Gleason, Hentoff took a similar career path. Starting out as a music reviewer for such publications as Downbeat and the Jazz Review, he later contributed to Playboy, the New Yorker, Commonweal, the Saturday Review, and the Reporter, becoming in the process (like Gleason) as much a social as a music critic. He currently writes little about popular music, preferring political analysis for the Washington Post and frequent contributions to such publications as the Village Voice, New Republic, and Progressive.

Hentoff's early writing demonstrated his social concerns. He picked up early on the idea that jazz had much more to it than notes, charts, and scales, more than simple musical exploration. To Hentoff, much jazz was about rebellion, but he always seemed to bring the discussion back to the context of the music itself. Social concerns for Hentoff are a part of popular music, and his main concern is its authenticity.

As Gleason had in 1960, Hentoff began to write about racism in jazz. However, he was quicker to turn to popular music as a vehicle for social commentary than Gleason (and quicker to abandon it, too). In an article for Commonweal the connection to his earlier writing on jazz and racism becomes clear. He wrote that "being oneself, or trying to be, may mean being totally alone, and that prospect is for the most part unbearable. The overall context is somewhat similar to that in Southern cities where 'liberal' whites have become increasingly silent." 15

Hentoff did not abandon writing about jazz at this early stage of his career, as Gleason did. However, his interest in the social issues surrounding jazz brought him more frequently to folk music and rock and roll. His attention, then as now, focused on protest, regardless of the medium within which he found it. In 1965, for instance, he wrote of Miles Davis and John Coltrane: "Neither makes speeches on prejudice in their music, but their jazz speaks from a sense of strength in their self-images as creators who do not have to—and will not—grin for the white man." 16 Since jazz is the full expression of the man playing, Hentoff writes, it is clear that modern jazz is more grounded in protest than it ever has been.

The folk movement of the 1960s provided Hentoff with a fertile site for examining American protest. In a 1967 essay Hentoff predicts the demise of several forms within the folk revival in what amounts to a quite impressive feat of extrapolation. Importantly, Hentoff's writing is again informed by his thoughts on race. For instance, Hentoff wrote that urban white boys trying, with admitted good intentions, to reproduce the rural black blues sound to which they have no cultural connection are going to fail. There is no way for Paul Butterfield to sing and play real Delta blues as though he were born black and on the land a half-century ago. It is impossible to recreate someone else's history, Hentoff says, so if they are to survive artists must face the future more as themselves, and create more of their own material. His focus is still on the music, however, and the expression of race via music. 17

By the late 1960s Hentoff left popular music criticism, but not before writing an article for Parents magazine that encapsulates his, perhaps essentialist, view of why popular music is important. Rock music, Hentoff tells the nation's parents, is a dialogue between young people. "It provides the quality of identification, what comes from knowing that your most urgent concerns and anxieties are understood by others who share them." 18 A central facet of the importance of rock music, the reason it seems to provide existential truths, Hentoff says, is because it is diversified culturally. "In a society increasingly divided by color and class, teenagers are able, at least through their music, to transcend those barriers." They can dig Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles with equal aplomb.

Returning to a theme from his jazz criticism, Hentoff writes that such diversity had not always been present. There were clearer geographic and ethnic lines only fifteen years earlier. There was hillbilly music for Southern whites, blues and jazz for blacks and some white aficionados, Broadway and show tunes for most of the white youth. Elvis Presley and Bob Dylan helped change that, primarily because both were equally indebted to white and black artists. By 1969, Hentoff suggests, the music was tearing down racial barriers.

Such faith was also exhibited by Lester Bangs (1946—1982), who since the 1970s has inspired many critics for the underground press. Like Gleason and Hentoff, Bangs was a fan of popular music. Unlike them, he began writing about rock, and stuck with it, though showing a taste for jazz and blues from time to time. Bangs's articles, particularly those written during his tumultuous

years as writer and editor at Creem magazine in the 1970s, were always an up-front challenge to his readers, to his editors, to his culture. At times he wrote to anger people and usually succeeded (certainly he succeeded in enraging Jann Wenner, who fired Bangs from the staff of Rolling Stone in 1971 for being disrespectful to musicians).

In his very first published piece, a review for Rolling Stone on the MCS's debut album Kick Out the Jams, Bangs sounded somewhat like Gleason or Hentoff, and his later writing harkened back to the blues as an indicator of a "true" roots heritage. In every case, though, as with Hentoff, it was the music that most counted: but revolution counted too, and the MCS were judged by their political stance as well as their music. Bangs found them lacking on both counts. There were hints of the coming bombast, the style that first took form in Bangs's review of the Count Five's Carburetor Dung:

I suppose the best way to characterize the album would be to call it murky. Some of the lyrics were intelligible, such as these, from "The Hermit's Prayer": "Suck funk / dunk Dog God the goosie Gladstone prod old maids de / back seat sprung Louisiana sundown junk an' / bunk an' sunken treasures / But oh mah drunken hogbogs / I think Ismella a skunk." Lyrics such as these don't come every day, and even if their instrumental backup sounded vaguely like a car stuck in the mud and spinning its wheels, it cannot be denied that the song had a certain value as a prototype slab of guilty-bottom rock 'n' roll.20

Like Gleason, Bangs was sometimes excitable and giddy. And, like Gleason, Bangs had an extreme faith in the revolutionary promise of popular music as personal fulfillment and transcendence rather than as social revolution. Bangs was not troubled so much by racism as by the sheer nihilism of the rock generation he had grown up with, a nihilism that expressed itself in punk rock. In a 1979 Village Voice article titled "The White Noise Supremacists," Bangs scolded the New York punk scene for its racism:

You don't have to try at all to be a racist. It's a little coiled clot of venom lurking there in all of us, white and black, goy and jew, ready to strike out when we feel embattled, belittled, brutalized. . . . But there's a difference between hate and a little . . . gob at authority: swastikas in punk are basically another way for kids to get a rise out of their parents and maybe the press, both of whom deserve the irritation. . . . Maybe. Except that after this while casual, even ironic embrace of the totems of bigotry crosses over into the real poison.21

Unlike other popular music critics, Bangs was extremely self-reflexive, and this is what sets him squarely in the ranks of the New Journalists. For example, in the same 1979 Voice article he wrote that "In Detroit I thought absolutely nothing of going to parties with people like David Ruffin and Bobby Womack: where I'd get drunk, maul the women, and improvise blues songs along the lines of 'Sho' wish awuz a nigger . . .,' and of course they all laughed. It took years before I realized what an asshole I'd been."22

But Bangs is less interested in the details than in larger cultural patterns:

All I knew was that when you added all this sort of stuff up you realized a line had been crossed by certain people we thought we knew, even believed in, while we weren't looking. Either that or they were always just that line and we never bothered to look until we tripped over it. And sometimes you even find that you yourself have drifted across that line. . . . Most people think the whole subject of racism is boring, and anybody looking for somebody to stomp is gonna find them irrespective of magazine articles. Because nothing could make the rage of the underclass greater than it is already, and nothing short of hydrogen bomb on their own heads or a sudden brutal bigoted slap in the face makes almost anybody think about anybody else's problems but their own. And that's where you cross over the line.23

Bangs's ire was induced less by individual acts of racism and nihilism and more by the big social picture he perceived, at the center of which was popular music: "[S]ince rock 'n' roll is bound to stay in your life you would hope to see it reach some point where it might not add to the cruelty and exploitation already in the world."24 His writing often included sweeping, bittersweet speculations about the baby-boom generation, such as this one written just after Elvis Presley's death: "If love is truly going out of fashion forever, which I do not believe, then along with our nurtured indifference to each other will be an even more contemptuous indifference to each other's objects of reverence."25

What is conspicuously absent from Bangs's writing is the inherent sense of optimism that suffused popular music criticism. Gleason and Hentoff, for instance, did not so much champion popular music as divulge their faith in it as a force for positive social change. They were not convinced that popular music would end racism, but did seem to believe that popular music would bring it to a swifter conclusion among youth. In Bangs's writing such faith is present, but it is far from certain. It occurs as a marker of

22. Bangs, Carburetor Dung, 276.
change in popular music and the popular music audience, a
change playing itself out still in the critical discourse concerning
rap music, racism, and violence. The current broken, mass-mediat-
ed conversations between generations that find more disagree-
ment than harmony in the popular music to which they cling
represent Bangs’s conviction: Popular music can bring people
together... but it is just too late.

Criticism, Mass Culture, and Commercialization

Mass media and mass culture remain prevalent topics in pop-
ular music criticism. Critics comment on pop culture itself, the
aspirations and self-projecting fantasies of those within that culture,
the dissolution of that culture, and in some cases “blueprints” for the
improvement and preservation of that culture. Such comments
make up a vast amount of Robert Christgau’s work, as it did
Bangs’s and Gleason’s.26 Christgau (1942—) is one of the few
contemporary rock critics who can boast of a career traversing
popular music since the mid-1960s—and who can boast of a career
as a rock critic without using Rolling Stone as a springboard.

Christgau’s main concern has been the aesthetics of rock. After
Christgau appeared on the scene as a columnist for Esquire in 1967,
the face of the entire genre began to take on the features he gave his
writing. He has called himself “the dean of rock critics,” and while
writers like Greil Marcus, R. Serge Denisoff, and Wilfred Mellers
have displayed a more classically academic tone, Christgau is the
professor of the popular critics. He may be the first to invent a
theory about the job of the pop music critic in society, and his vision
certainly has helped define the mainstream approach to popular
music criticism as it now exists. Rock is art, Christgau says,
nothing less, nothing more. And it is a powerful social force,
magnified by its place in mass media.

In Christgau’s writing, one finds a remarkable unity in his
vision of popular music and popular music criticism, even if one
can also discern a tendency to repeat things that have already been
said. His intentions seem to have remained the same today in his
“Consumer Guide” columns for the Village Voice as they were in
his earliest “Secular Music” columns for Esquire.

In one of Christgau’s earliest columns for Esquire, a review of
folk singer Phil Ochs, one can find elements that still survive in his
writing. There is a demanding sense of what makes music musical
(a standard missing among some critics, notably Lester Bangs), a
sense of political certainty, a sense of where pop music should be
and what it should be saying to the culture or subculture it
addresses. Unlike Jann Wenner, Gleason, and others who gath-

26. Though not included in this study, Marcus’s writing is particularly relevant
in comparison to Christgau’s. Both critics achieve many of the same ends,
though they begin in different places. Christgau’s emphasis remains rooted
in music, Marcus’s in sociology. For a representative sample of Marcus’s
writing, see his Lipstick Traces (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
ered under Rolling Stone’s masthead, one rarely found Christgau
reeled with giddiness over the revolutionary promises of rock
music. “Good intentions” he wrote, “are never good enough,” and
revolutionary promise had little influence on his musical taste.27

After five years as a rock critic, Christgau collected his writing
in a book, Any Old Way You Choose It, in which he outlined his
theory of criticism. He talks of formulating these theories as a
college student, first impressed with the idea of rock as an “art
form” (or “anti-art” as he also terms it) after seeing a painting of
a nude woman into which a radio had been installed. The radio was
tuned to a pop music station. He declared an early penchant for
jazz and literature, amplified by Motown and Phil Spector recordings
(which inspired him to compile charts, precursors to his
“Consumer Guide,” a regular feature in the Voice). Later, when the
Beatles rolled around, he says, he began to view the music through
the “secular theology of new-crucial literary analysis” he was
studying: “I certainly didn’t reject all art, and I didn’t exactly
decide that what is called high art is bullshit—I still don’t believe
that. But I did come to understand that popular art is not inferior
to high art, and achieved a vitality of both integrity and outreach
that high art had unfortunately abandoned.”28

He dismisses much of his period with Esquire, saying that his
attitude could be condensed to a phrase—“Hooray Little Richard,
boo Jefferson Airplane,” a phrase quite contrary to that asserted by
West Coast critics (especially Gleason). But Christgau softened
and learned to like the hippies: “Most important, they like mass
culture: What was then called rock—popular music created by the
counterculture—embodied my own personal contradictions.”29

His impulses were part pop-culture theorist and part bohemian,
and these fused in his politics, he said. Both approaches were
pragmatic, suggesting complementary modes of self-preservation.
“Pop is really a system for beating the system, both perceptual-
ly, by aesthetic reinterpretation, and physically, by selective
consumption. And bohemianism has always sought to shed
the system’s outworn, wasteful usages and uncover the true self.”30

Both, he wrote, are too insular on their own, and Christgau forged
them into a course of critical action. He rejected the elitism of each
approach, the pop and the bohemian, and claimed to have melded
the two into a sensibility:

I always resisted the term “criticism” to describe secular
music—I preferred “amateur sociology” or “journalism” or just “writing,” because the idea of criticism
had been deracinated for me in college. As practiced by
academics, it leached life from works that had to sur-

bottle but in the commerce of the world, and it separated the critic—or, anyway, the critic's student—from the pleasure that has always been the secret of art. . . . My understanding was that criticism should invoke total aesthetic response. . . . The richest and most useful kind of criticism respected the work as it was actually perceived, by people in general. . . . Any critic who wrote about the music as if he/she were no longer a fan—or who was no longer a fan—was shirking all the fun. Christgau here addresses not only issues of the mass culture debate, but also the critical discourse regarding those issues, a remarkable thing for a genre that was less than ten years old.

Toward the end of the sixties, Christgau took to keeping one eye on the records' being released and another on the record companies releasing them, and in time his writing showed a savvy understanding of the music industry. Like Gleason, Christgau bemoaned the industrialization of rock and roll. It had, he believed, spread widely as a commercial force but thinly as an art form, and though he blamed the music industry he mostly blamed the popular music audience for its unwillingness to make aesthetic choices for itself. This is an interesting and somewhat ironic perspective for the author of the "Consumer Guide," which it could be argued, itself has led to the industrialization of popular music—or at least to the industrialization of popular music criticism, as many publications have adopted Christgau's one-paragraph review style and grading system.

Hentoff, too, turned an eye to the music industry. In an article in Commonweal he writes of being able to overcome some of his distaste as a jazz fan for the simplicity of teen-aged rock and roll music, saying that there are adult reasons for the mediocrity of most rock and roll. Although he quotes a claim by ASCAP (the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) that music's decline is due to the infestation of the young with rock and roll, he maintains that ASCAP's concern is less aesthetically based and more financially based, since its upstart competitor, BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.), has signed the most rock acts, at considerable profit. Payola seemed to fill out the equation. Rock and roll was being selected and distributed on the basis of publishers' greed.

Gleason turned fifty at the height of the summer of love. He was too old to be accepted into the "now" generation but young enough to feel part of it anyway, and had begun to ponder the impact of rock music on American mass culture. He had seen it give voice to the frustrations of urban blacks through jazz; he was now aware of rock music giving voice to the frustrations of a much larger audience, American youth. With many other critics, Gleason at first saw the whole "Beatles-Sgt. Pepper-Airplane-Dead-hippy"

movement as an unbelievable utopia-in-creation. A generation was in motion, and rock music had propelled it.

It was exactly as Plato had predicted, Gleason would note. "Music, if Plato was right, might save us yet. Certainly no hippie, no folk singer, no long-haired guitar-playing rock musician is going to fry us all with napalm or blow us up with the bomb. This would be a better country with Zally [Yanovski, a member of the Lovin' Spoonful] as president, to say nothing of the thousands of others."23 For Gleason it was the community that rock fostered that mattered, a community tenuously tied together by a variety of constructs: folk music, art, politics. As Frith claims, "Music is no longer commenting on a community but creating it, offering a sense of inclusion not just to the musicians, bohemian style, but also to the audiences, to all those people who are the product of the necessary commitment to the music, to assert that it matters."24 Gleason asserted just that. "I don't think music has lit up the world, so to speak," he wrote for Rolling Stone in April 1968. "But I do think the new music has established a kind of 'stranger in a strange land' head community, vibes in concert, thoughts and ideas and concepts changing together."25 He predicts that 1968 might be the time during which the counterculture will find whether deviants within society might be accepted or squashed.

By December 1968, there were many clues about which direction the counterculture would travel. Assassinations, the party conventions, the election of Richard Nixon, escalation in Vietnam to five hundred thousand troops, drug busts of the Rolling Stones and Lovin' Spoonful, and a dissipation of spirit in the underground community were among the hints. Gleason was still committed to the idea of a youth rebellion, but now complained it was being sapped by Madison Avenue ads that could take the words "world revolution" and make them a pun on the revolving door of a Sheraton Hotel, sell Nehru shirts with the slogan "Meditate '68," and make radio commercials that sounded like a drug pusher peddling the finest in Acapulco gold. It was then, also, that Columbia Records began an advertising campaign whose slogan was "The Man Can't Bust Our Music." Gleason was not pleased. "Neither Columbia Records nor any other entrenched privilege group is going to nurture any power which will obviously destroy it. The key word is obviously. As long as any point of view or doctrine is not considered a threat, it will be expressed and even encouraged because it proves the deification of the system was worthwhile."26

Having left jazz, Gleason now saw the co-opting of the counter-

culture occurring before his eyes, and predicted the total blurring of the line between rock music and commercialism, a line that he had helped draw earlier in the 1960s while writing about the San Francisco music scene. The greatest danger to the counterculture, and to youth rebellion, he said, is the ability of the established society to co-opt the leading elements and ideas. That it had not happened yet is no protection against that danger, he added. “They haven’t figured out yet how to utilize all this power that’s floating around, but you can believe that somewhere somebody is working on it. In fact, you’d better believe it.”

By March 1969 Gleason had constructed a theory of exactly how music works on its audience, and how music might be used as a cultural tool. He quotes Herbert Marcuse, to claim that public opinion is made by the media of mass communications. “If you cannot buy equal and adequate time,” he quotes Marcuse, “how are you supposed to change public opinion in the monopolist way?” By then he had moved almost completely away from the traditional music criticism he had written, based on reviews of performances and criticism, to a form of social and cultural criticism.

Much of his writing in this period begins to echo that of media critics. He wrote about understanding what makes news and how to get the news available to the media. He takes on issues of epistemology and the social construction of reality in popular culture. “When you accept ‘Desolation Row’ and ‘Tom Thumb’s Blues’ along with ‘Mr. Tambourine Man’ and ‘Rolling Stone’ and the rest, you are accepting a definition of the world around you.” Despite the wildness of some of his theories (at times one wonders about his sanity, as he makes claims about Dylan and the Beatles having started “programs” to indoctrinate youth, which will begin when the time is right), he did make a particularly lucid prediction in the context of late 1980s/early 1990s political changes: “Gilbert and Sullivan may have made a government tremble, but I am convinced that rock’n’roll, in its total manifestations, will cause one to fall eventually.” In the light of changes in the political systems of eastern Europe, Russia, Germany, and the Tianamen Square riot, his words are prescient.

For these and other critics the co-optation of popular music was to be guarded against, yet none wrote about the connections between commercialization and the popular music and underground presses. While seeking to preserve popular music’s posi-

tivespirit, as with their writing about racism, popular music critics wrote for a mass medium, and the music articulated itself in a bundle of media texts: records, films, radio, books, magazines. Popular music fans, musicians, and producers have forever sought to retain (or create) that positive spirit in the name of authenticity or credibility. Only Christgau managed to extricate himself from the morass of glib pronouncements concerning rock’s demise by noting in an essay on the Rolling Stones that:

Only popular culture could have rendered art accessible—in the excitement and inspiration and self-congratulation of its perception and the self-realization (or fantasy) of its creation—not just to well-raised well-offs but to the broad range of less statusy war babies who in fact made the hippie movement the relatively cross-class phenomenon it was. And for all these kids, popular culture meant rock and roll, the art form created by and for their hedonistic consumption.

License and Essence: Criticism and Authenticity

Authenticity is probably the most simultaneously invisible and opaque of the ideas that occupy popular music critics, yet it is referred to or implied in almost all popular music criticism. It is also the most frequently debated topic, and one that brings popular music’s inherent elitism to the fore. Since the job of the music critic is, fundamentally, to convince readers that particular music is good or bad, and since standards are difficult to come by in popular music, critics often refer to authenticity as a measure of aesthetic soundness to bolster their opinions. In numerous ways critics claim music is either “authentic” or “inauthentic.” Some of these claims are contradictory, and the examples given here probably represent only the most obvious of these approaches.

Sanjek defines authenticity as central to the ideology of rock music, writing that it is “the degree to which a musician is able to articulate the thoughts and desires of an audience and not pander to the ‘mainstream’ by diluting their sound or their message.” Music critics seem to use a similar definition. Frith argues that the importance of the music press is “not commercial . . . but ideological. Fanzines, fanzine writers (and the important critics in the mass music papers share the fanzine stance) are the source of the arguments about what rock means, arguments not only about art and commerce, but also about art and audience.” Consequently, discussions of authenticity went beyond the aesthetic discourse of earlier criticism and included elements apart from the music itself.
Thus popular music criticism can be understood as meaning-making, away of continuing the discourse of popular music on a non-musical plane.

As most critics who are also fans do, Nat Hentoff started out his career as a critic with a sense that he had to try to protect the authenticity and validity of the music he reviewed. In an article published in the *Saturday Review* in 1956, Hentoff scolds the jazz audience for not being more responsive to jazz history, for allowing older jazz musicians such as Coleman Hawkins, Jack Teagarden, and Cootie Williams to become dispossessed as their styles fell out of favor. Many were having trouble even securing club dates. "If jazz is indeed an 'art form,' a fair majority of its practitioners and supporters ought by now to be expected to possess—and listen according to—an informed sense of the history of this young musical language." 44 As things stood, Hentoff wrote, there was little room for any jazz player who had reached forty or forty-five years of age.

The best of the modern jazzmen—Miles Davis, John Lewis, Tony Scott, Charlie Mingus—have a good sense of what has come before, Hentoff writes, "but there have been other modernists fully aware of from whence they swung, it's possible that the quality of some of the present-day experimental jazz might have been of higher quality with longer likelihood of fruitful durability." 45 Like many popular music critics Hentoff claims that a "return to the roots" signifies authenticity. History, in other words, provides a context without which one cannot claim to be authentic.

And yet in a 1967 essay on folk music Hentoff urged young musicians not to rely on history too much, to compose and perform more of their own material as a way to get in touch with their own history. "For the city young, in sum, 'ethnic authenticity'—as that term refers to someone else's past of whatever color or region—is the route to absurdity." 46 Hentoff claimed that the mass media had for the most part destroyed the possibility of "ethnic authenticity," even for rural youths, who would now hear Marvin Gaye on the radio and not Mance Lipscomb on their porches. "Influences will, of course, continue, but the quest for authenticity must be pursued from within," he wrote. 47 He extended this claim to encompass black youth as well, stating that as blacks adapt the roots of the music of their culturally native Africa, they will no longer be, technically speaking, culturally authentic. He pronounces that they will, however, be personally authentic. Hentoff's turn from historical authenticity, based largely on ethnicity and "roots," to personal authenticity and self-expression, is thus clearly documented and delineated in one essay. It is as if, in the folk music movement, Hentoff determined that the ease of cultural assimilation provided by the mass media renders historical authenticity impossible. 48 Given the frequency and intensity with which he had written about authenticity in the past, he was forced to reconcile authenticity as a form of self-expression.

What is particularly interesting is that it is clear in his essay that Hentoff is still coming to terms with a new definition of authenticity. In some measure he contradicts himself by criticizing folk music for becoming less communal and more individualistic. And, still, his writing circles back to the music itself. "The message of the new folk can only be apprehended through the total medium—instrumental textures and ways of singing as well as the lyrics themselves. . . . To remain a markedly identifiable original—rising above the eddies of inevitable eclecticism—will require an order of imagination that may well make the survivors the true bars of the first international community." 49

He also returns to the theme of the 1960 *Commonweal* article on jazz and rock. Rock, he says, is fundamentally a release of feelings—expressing the poignant loneliness felt at times by all adolescents, and their fear of becoming as emotionally grey as their parents appear to be. Hentoff adds a final note that rock is also Big Business, and will lose some of its credibility as its market expands, and as it becomes politically co-opted, introducing a point that Gleason argued and that within two years would, in the hands of other critics (and fans), become a key issue in the debate on authenticity in popular music.

Christgau, too, showed a propensity toward using popular music's history to determine its contemporary authenticity. In 1969 Christgau wrote a feature for *Stereo Review* entitled "A Short and Happy History of Rock." Rock had become "canonized" by the mass media after the Sgt. Pepper album, he argued, "making it the hottest item since the Lindbergh kidnapping." 50 Christgau reveals a prejudice for the rock and roll of the 1950s, detailing the criteria the music must pass in order to pass the "Christgau test." But first he tries to explain how rock ever got big in the first place: "The success of rock and roll was as much a rejection of contemporary popular music as it was an affirmation of the blues and the country-and-western music in which rock is rooted. The vitality of rock and roll . . . was the vitality of an oppressed subculture—all right, not that of urban blacks or hillbillies, but of the young, particularly the white young." 51 Christgau echoes Hentoff's claims

47. Hentoff, "Folk Renaissance," 327.
48. One wonders what Hentoff would think of contemporary "world music." Its authenticity is dubious and its pervasiveness makes the historical authenticity Hentoff writes of difficult to preserve.
about rock music's ability to cross racial barriers, and refers to rock's "roots" in much the way Hentoff referred to authenticity. But, more importantly, he claims that rock's success is based on musical values and not political ones. Though he acknowledges the relation between social status, subculture, and rock's "vitality," he again keeps musical and political issues separate.

For Lester Bangs, authenticity was tied to fandom, and Bangs was, simply, a fan. As he once claimed, "My most memorable childhood fantasy was to have a mansion with catacombs underneath containing, alphabetized in endless winding dimly-lit musty rows, every album I'd ever released." What better evidence of fandom than the desire to be the ultimate collector?

For Lester Bangs, gritty, grungy, gully-bottom rock and roll was the core of all rock and roll, the brutally honest, vulgar and savage core of his culture, one of the last brilliantly gleaming torches that culture had bothered to keep lit in its ascent toward extremity. Unlike Jann Wenner, who seemed to believe the torch would burn out with an eternal flame fueled by "classic rock," Bangs struggled to discover new music that would keep the torch alight. As Christgau noted in Bangs's Village Voice obituary, Bangs kept "alive the dream of insurrectionary rock and roll as Rolling Stone turned to auteur theory and trade journalism," words that say as much about Christgau as Bangs, but sum up the direction that Bangs took upon leaving Rolling Stone.

That path often led him to write about punk rock (he is credited with coining the term). He kept a close ear on New York's punk scene in the 1970s, and even traveled to England to view British punk first-hand. Bangs espoused a punk aesthetic long before it came to be associated with safety pins, and that aesthetic more than any other informed his writing. Indeed, as the following passage demonstrates, his core concept of authenticity was that ined, grungy rock was the only true rock and roll:

"It wasn't until much later, drowning in the kitschvats of Elton John and James Taylor, that I finally came to realize that grossness was the true criterion for rock 'n' roll, the crudeness and grind that more fun and longer listened-to the album'd be. By that time I would just about've knocked out an incisor, shaved my head or made nearly any sacrifice to acquire even one more album of this type of in-clanging and hyena-sounding rubbish. By then it was too late."

Bangs was a critic whose main concern was always to keep the music aesthetically authentic, politics be damned, because, if the music became fake, there would be nothing left to grasp at to stem the tide of artificiality and hopelessness, of the existential nihilism.

---

52. Bangs, Carburetor Dung, xi.
the achieved what most critics seek, to understand "how this historical moment universalizes itself in the lives of interacting individuals." The themes examined in this essay—race, commercialism, and authenticity—were often the problems with which popular music critics were concerned. Popular music criticism has served as a tool for reflecting on the history of popular music, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which it has developed. These concerns have been reflected in the work of music critics, who have used their writing to explore the meaning of popular music in society.

Criticism and the Experience of Modernity

The emphasis on the essay—race, commercialism, and authenticity—was often the problems with which popular music critics were concerned. Popular music criticism has served as a tool for reflecting on the history of popular music, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which it has developed. These concerns have been reflected in the work of music critics, who have used their writing to explore the meaning of popular music in society.

1. Ibid., p. 192.

2. Ibid., p. 194.

3. Ibid., p. 195.

4. Ibid., p. 196.

5. Ibid., p. 197.

6. Ibid., p. 198.

7. Ibid., p. 199.

8. Ibid., p. 200.

9. Ibid., p. 201.


11. Ibid., p. 203.

12. Ibid., p. 204.

13. Ibid., p. 205.


15. Ibid., p. 207.

16. Ibid., p. 208.

17. Ibid., p. 209.


19. Ibid., p. 211.

20. Ibid., p. 212.

21. Ibid., p. 213.

22. Ibid., p. 214.

23. Ibid., p. 215.

24. Ibid., p. 216.

25. Ibid., p. 217.

26. Ibid., p. 218.

27. Ibid., p. 219.

28. Ibid., p. 220.

29. Ibid., p. 221.

30. Ibid., p. 222.

31. Ibid., p. 223.

32. Ibid., p. 224.

33. Ibid., p. 225.

34. Ibid., p. 226.

35. Ibid., p. 227.

36. Ibid., p. 228.

37. Ibid., p. 229.

38. Ibid., p. 230.

39. Ibid., p. 231.

40. Ibid., p. 232.

41. Ibid., p. 233.

42. Ibid., p. 234.

43. Ibid., p. 235.

44. Ibid., p. 236.

45. Ibid., p. 237.

46. Ibid., p. 238.

47. Ibid., p. 239.

48. Ibid., p. 240.

49. Ibid., p. 241.

50. Ibid., p. 242.

51. Ibid., p. 243.

52. Ibid., p. 244.

53. Ibid., p. 245.

54. Ibid., p. 246.

55. Ibid., p. 247.

56. Ibid., p. 248.

57. Ibid., p. 249.

58. Ibid., p. 250.

59. Ibid., p. 251.

60. Ibid., p. 252.

61. Ibid., p. 253.

62. Ibid., p. 254.

63. Ibid., p. 255.

64. Ibid., p. 256.

65. Ibid., p. 257.

66. Ibid., p. 258.
music practice as those that have been constituted commercially. But artistic exploitation, which is perhaps what sampling is at heart, is unacceptable to copyright holders. Such exploitation forces a wedge between the dual meanings of property/propriety (the dual interpretations of "work") to be discussed later in this essay and exposes the idea/expression duality. The contradictions between commerce and art, at the fore in popular music to begin with, are embodied in the establishment and exploitation of copyright and need to be examined critically as they are embodied within the technology used in service of copyright's exploitation.

Popular music studies lack a framework for understanding popular music practice in such a way as to be able to account for authorship and authenticity as multifaceted constructs arising from the interstices between musicking, music-making, and music-bearing. A particular challenge to popular music studies is to perform the kind of "genealogy" that Foucault seeks of literary property in terms of popular music.4 To borrow from Bettig, the creative subject is constituted socially in popular music as regards popular music's consumption and constituted legally as regards popular music's production. As regards the study of popular music, the creative subject appears to be constituted according to theoretical boundaries of a study. The creative subject is situated differently depending on whether a study is musically or sociologically grounded, whether it is the study of text or context. It is rarely understood as a discursive practice. Consequently, popular music studies often assume the immutability of copyright and proceed to understand popular music practice as it is shaped by copyright law and concomitant restrictions, reinforcing Cugnet's claim that deconstruction may be "ultimately a conservative practice."" Analysis of censorship struggles has been less occupied with analysis of the law and more occupied with analysis of social and economic implications arising from censorship attempts.

Popular music is made to be reproducible, not merely technologically, but socially (via discourse, dance, and other means of interaction), and its mode of existence lies in reproducibility. And it is reproduction and playback, rather than recording, as is often claimed, that is problematic for copyright owners. Popular music scholars themselves seem to subscribe to a Romanic notion of authorship, if only because it is the legal consequences of infringement that are most visible and thus other conceptions of copyright (as censor, "structuring," structure, etc.) are less easy to see. Or, perhaps, they mythologize authorship by embedding it in performance. It is as if popular music studies implicitly and uncritically subscribe to the notion of authenticity, officially decreeing infringement because it tramples the rights of "authors," mapping genealogies of music that seek to resurrect its "true" origins, and omitting from consideration the social construction of the author in the context of popular music and in the very work of popular music scholars.

These issues have been addressed by critical legal scholars using literary criticism and literary theories on legal discourse in a fashion that begs popular music scholarship to follow suit. In particular, literary criticism has engaged questions of authorship and authenticity in recent years by historicizing the "author" and "authorship" and understanding the resultant ties to the structure of legal systems of copyright. Indeed, in literary studies authenticity (in particular the rise of a discourse of "origina	ility" and the "new" or "unique") is often problematized by way of authorship. For instance, Jazir has argued that "authorship" has been continually revised and redeployed, sometimes under very unusual circumstances, in debates about . . . copyright. Jazir claims that authorship is "a culturally, politically, economically, and socially constructed category rather than a real or natural one," an idea particularly appropriate to popular music studies since it can be claimed that authorship and authenticity are likewise constructed in popular music yet made to seem natural as part of the creative "work" of musicking.

Along with theoretical interventions into the concepts of "authorship" and the "author," critical legal studies (CLS) is often preoccupied with the history of publishing and the concomitant economic and legal environments of publishing. Such connections tell much about the way copyright has come to be thought of in the music industry and provide several avenues for CLS to engage popular music studies.

First, authorship is bound up with ownership. The roots of property law, and even the roots of the word "property" itself, are derived from the Latin proprius, meaning "one's own." Literary property is dependent on the idea of "real" property, which itself derives from proprius. Not coincidentally, the word "propriety" is derived from the same root. Ownership and use are conjoined, a point that is particularly important in the popular music industry. As Rosens claims, "the distinguishing characteristic of the modern author . . . is that he is a proprietor." To play further on language, it should be considered that there are (at least) two meanings to the term "work." In one instance it refers to that which is copyright, the author's "work." In another instance it refers to that which is "worked," processed, edited, exploited. These meanings confound popular music copyright, especially insofar as copyrights in the music industry are not perceived as protection for much as commodities to be bought, sold, and exploited by way of licensing agreements, publishing, airplay, and other royalty arrangements.

A strain is placed on literary definitions of property when they are applied to popular music, since such definitions are historically linked to "real" property. In popular music, it is difficult to define what the "real" property is, as each attempt to fix the definition brings contradictions. Written notation is not the same as performance; sound, though it can be recorded, is evanescent, and so on. Moreover, the property that is exploited takes the form of the "song" but can be exploited in many ways independent of the song's structure, sound, and written form.

Second, the development of copyright is inextricably bound to Jazir's "metamorphoses of authorship," a claim important to the study of popular music as it problematizes the notion of a "songwriter." Jazir argues that "it is not coincidental that . . . the articulation of many doctrinal structures that dominate copyright
today\textsuperscript{13} arose during the heyday of Romanticism, a time when authorship was used to signify "an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience," a claim mirrored in the discourse of authenticity in popular music. As Bloomfield puts it:

\textit{The illusion of the availability of the singer as artist is spelled out... as an ideology of authenticity. It is a discourse that takes over key elements of Romanticism in structure the listener's common sense into a (naive) realist, proto-theory of song production and consumption.}\textsuperscript{14}

Bloomfield historically situates the songwriter and identifies the Romantic era as the moment of formalization of modern ideas about the song as a way of prescriptive with self-consciousness and subjectivity.

Third, as Eisenberg argues in \textit{The Printing Press as an Agent of Change}, reproduction moves the work from the artist's studio to the printer or publisher.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, it is the publisher who gains a vested interest in the work. It is important not to elide what Bettig identifies as "the separate interests of authors and publishers.\textsuperscript{16}

This is a particularly fertile area for the study of legal structures and institutions in the music industry, because determination of Bettig's "creative subject" (upon whom are conferred the rights of ownership) is a political struggle—and an understudied area. In film studies and literary studies, Bettig notes, such work has been under way.\textsuperscript{17} The exploitation of novelists and screenwriters has been examined as it engages issues of copyright and control and is amenable to forms of literary criticism. Such work has only recently begun in popular music, but there is a long way to go.\textsuperscript{18}

Fourcault's work on authorship can form a basis for much theoretical work in popular music studies, especially his exploration of the "author function." The popular music industry clings obstinately to the author, as do fans and scholars.

\textbf{MUSIC, PROPERTY, COPYRIGHT, AND AUTHORSHIP}

Copyright in popular music has traditionally been discursively positioned as an author's legal protection against the copying and pirating of music. But in practice, copyright is the primary means for record companies and music publishers who usually own the copyrights to songs, to insure income during periods of low sales (since copyright is tied to a variety of royalty mechanisms that are not directly related to sales), and to control the manufacture and distribution of recordings. This is particularly important since the music industry has come to rely less on sales of recordings as a means of generating income for several reasons. First, the audience for popular music is an older audience and thus less prone to impulse buying. Second, it is an audience with less discretionary income.\textsuperscript{19} And third, synergistic arrangements within integrated media companies provide for easy exploitation of rights.\textsuperscript{20}

Shifting technologies have forced concurrent shifts in the ontological status of music and sound. Copyright law for sound recordings has not easily followed these shifts. Musical notation first externalized musical memory. However, written notation is not a medium of hearing but of sight. Writing can be considered a means of fixing sound by converting it to sight.\textsuperscript{21} But musical notes on a page represent music, not sound: that is, the sound will be variable according to the instrument, articulation, and the like, chosen by the person who makes heard what is written. Eisenberg writes:

\textit{Perfect preservation is a matter not simply of technology, but of ontology as well. A defect of preservation is a defect of realization, and this is the trouble with cliches and quavers. They aren't music; they just represent it. The music itself is sound.}\textsuperscript{22}

Audio recording presents a means of notating, of fixing, sound. Catuller writes:

[Recording] "remembered" actual performances; more importantly, it could equally well "remember" any sound that could be made, whatever its source. Thus, through the medium of recording, all sound became capable of musical organization and therefore the proper matter of music creation.\textsuperscript{23}

One can then determine some connections between authenticity and authorship within the framework of Romanticism. Popular music since the 1960s can be considered as carrying on Romantic ideals, placing emphasis on instinct and feelings, de-emphasizing the intellect, exalting individualism, naturalism and simplicity. If writing music divides the composer and performer, then, as Catuller argues, recording enables the (potential) "reunification of composer and performer." We may here locate the musician's desire to record, since one is able to perform one's own composition. Eisenberg put itself:

\textit{What are the causes of this impulse to create records?... Marks on paper can be misinterpreted... When the composer is the performer, what the recording records is nothing less than the composer's intentions...}\textsuperscript{24}

As a result, we have a connection to Romanticism by way of establishing that a recording is "one's own" work, and a connection to copyright as recording enables the commodification of what is "one's own." In this light, it is necessary to do for musical copyright what Jazzi, Rose, Woodhams and others have done for literary copyright: critically dissect its evolution.

The United States government has provided a means of copyrighting music since passage of the Copyright Act of 1909. In 1972, an amendment to the Copyright Act provided for copyrighting of "sound recordings." Four years later, the 1976 Copyright Act provided copyright protection for both published and unpublished sound recordings. The 1976 Copyright Act defines sound recordings as:

\textit{works that result from the fixation of a series of musical, spoken, or other sounds, not including the sounds accompanying a motion picture or other audiovisual work, regardless of the nature of the material objects,}
Consequently, it is not only music but sound that is copyrighted, a conjunction that points up the evolution of popular music's publication. It is necessary, especially in an age of sampling and digital reproduction, to protect and exploit not only the music but also the sound. The principal mediation (publication) of popular music is not by means of written notation but by means of reproduction of recordings, that is, publication of sound. Thus, traditional musical ideas that base the concept of authenticity on performance are misdirected in popular music. It isn't what one writes, it is how one sounds that is of most importance in popular music. Consequently, sound recording copyright is critical in popular music, as it lays claim to ownership not only of music but of sound. This point is crucial for understanding the controversies arising from digital audio sampling.

That point is also particularly important because it makes clear that copyright leads to income from sources other than just musical performance of copyright works. Indeed, the music industry derives income from several sources. In no particular order, these are: royalties from the sale of recordings, royalties from music used in recordings, royalties from the performance of recorded music, sampling of copyrighted recordings, and performance rights in recordings. Each form is based on the ownership of copyright in music and sound recordings.

In some ways, this arrangement is pernicious. The industry is moving away from royalties from the sale of recordings as a primary source of income toward exploitation of rights as a stable source of income. Thorough this process, the idea of the author or star is more strongly invoked; as a result, one sees artists like Madonna or Michael Jackson setting up microorganizations that mirror the royalty-exploitation structures in the industry but now have the artist's imprimatur. It becomes necessary to do so for marketing purposes, because Romanticism is most strongly evident in the mass media; when the audience is about style and looks, about feeling, soul, inspiration, and originality; it is an audience that seeks confirmation that individuals are expressing their own thoughts and feelings through their chosen medium.

Put another way, there needs to be a way of fixing a work's creative existence. As Martha Woodmansee put it, "as creative production becomes more corporate, collective, and collaborative, the law invokes the Romantic author all the more insistently." It is necessary to have an author to lend credibility and authenticity to a work, and that is why image creation and maintenance are of paramount importance in the entertainment industries. How does one market an "authorless" creation? The author is, of course, still necessary in economic terms, because without an author it is hard to lay claim to copyright.

This is particularly important to attend to, since artists with recording contracts are frequently viewed by the law as employees of the record company and/or music publisher with whom they are signed, and thus their creative output falls in the legal category of a "work-for-hire," essentially giving over rights in an employee's work to the record company and/or publisher that acts as employer. The creative subject, therefore, is not only constituted within the legal structures of the industry but becomes the "property" of the record company and/or music publisher. The owner of the rights in such cases has interest in establishing artists not as employees but as what Jazz terms the "Romantic author-genius" before the audience, to exploit his interest in rightnesshowness to the fullest. A similar situation occurred in the eighteenth century according to Mark Rose, who claims that London booksellers invented the "author" to boost sales.

Rose's analysis makes for a close link between the "author" and the star system, a link made even stronger by Richard Sennett in a discussion of the use of personality in the nineteenth century.

The . . . relationship between performer and text was embodied in Franz Liszt's famous remark, "The concert is—myself." The specific actions of the artist, the music or musical line beautifully shaped, were now thought of as the product of an artistic personality rather than a highly skilled worker.

The clearest cases illustrating the points made by Rose and Sennett are the intricate web of relations between authorship, copyright, and authenticity involve Vanilla Ice and Milli Vanilli. Vanilla Ice, a white rapper, achieved a number-one album and number-one single in 1990, overshadowing MC Hammer and other black rappers who had been in the charts. Ice's single, "Ice Ice Baby," copied from a collaboration between the group Queen and David Bowie (not James Brown, P-Funk or other artists black rappers often sample), caused many critics to denounce Vanilla Ice as a pretender, an imposter.

But what was more troubling to the audience was that Vanilla Ice's background as constructed by his record company didn't check out. SBR Records wrote in a press release, and Ice himself claimed in interviews, that he was from the same Miami neighborhood as 2 Live Crew's Luther Campbell. The intent was to provide some sort of "back-up" to a white rapper whose credibility was sure to be questioned. Journalists subsequently discovered Ice was a middle-class kid from Dallas. The industry was nevertheless strained, because, as Billboard reported,

The numbers generated by this latest "black music in a white wrapper" opened a wide window of opportunity for white artists and music industry entrepreneurs entertaining platinum aspirations.

The industry's reaction sensibly exposes the motivations for classic Marxist alienation: taking something as essentially human as one's biography and commodifying it for potential profit.

Similarly, Milli Vanilli, who were stripped of a Grammy Award when it became public knowledge that they were lip-syncing to
All persons in the United States who, prior to November 27, 1990, purchased... or received by gift, any of the following: any recordings by the entertainment group Milli Vanilli, any tickets to a Milli Vanilli concert, or any merchandise... bearing the words "Milli Vanilli."... 

Interestingly, Milli Vanilli are here defined as an "entertainment group," not as musicians, performers, or composers, to signify their inauthentic position (entertainment as opposed to art) within popular music. Even more interesting is the fact that the suit includes purchase of items other than recordings. This signifies a denunciation not only of the music but of the inauthentic author constituted as Milli Vanilli.

Moreover, all the defendants in the suit were not only the lip-synching duo of Pilatus and Morvan, but also managers, producers, and record companies. In the suit, it is stated that "BMG/Arista (Records), among others and other persons," were to blame for the misrepresentation of Milli Vanilli's concerts and recordings. BMG/Arista were the only ones to deny wrongdoing, but they are the ones holding copyright in the material commodities associated with Milli Vanilli (music, T-shirts, and so on). There is no mention of the creation of Milli Vanilli concerts and recordings, no mention of production decisions, staging, and so on. Therefore, it is the representation of authorship that is the crux of the issue, the claim (however implicitly made) that Pilatus and Morvan sang on recordings and at concerts, and not authorship itself.

To illustrate the connections to copyright and its practical use in the music industry, the clearest case is that of California-based musical group Negativland. In 1991 they released a recording titled "U2," essentially a parody of the group U2 that makes use of digital samples from Casey Kasem and a dub rendition of U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." The recording, on SST Records, an independent record company, sported a cover with the logo "U2" prominently displayed. Within weeks of the album's release, U2's record company, Island, brought suit against Negativland and SST and succeeded in having SST and Negativland remove the recording from circulation and pay $25,000 plus half the wholesale proceeds from copies of the recording that were sold and not returned.

The Negativland case is important for several reasons. First, it points up the degree to which control and copyright are intertwined in the service of constructing authorship. For Island, copyright translates directly to exploitation, as this excerpt from its suit against Negativland makes plain:

[Island has] the exclusive rights to publish and administer the copyrights in U2's musical compositions. Island is exclusively entitled to use the band's well-

This assertion is a clear illustration of Island's author-function as "not the convergence of meaning but the point of entitlement." This is true not only in the heretofore practical terms mentioned but also with regard to the audience's conception as to who has the "right" to interpret a work's meaning. The audience typically seeks interpretation from a designated author, someone "entitled" to make claims about a work's meaning and origin.

Second, the Negativland case does not primarily and directly involve claims of copyright infringement of a song. Instead, it involves the use of packaging intended to boost sales of Negativland's recording. Island's suit does claim that about a minute's worth of U2's version of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" is sampled within Negativland's recording. However, the problem for Island has less to do with infringement and more to do with Negativland's recording being "replete with expletives, curses and scatological language..." (result of which U2's image will be tarnished). Third, Island's lawsuit was instigated without U2's knowledge, an indication of the degree to which entitlement is taken. One of the members of U2, "ambushed" in an interview by members of Negativland, put U2's position thus:

[Island felt that... in a pure business sense, nothing about art... their attitude was "Well, look, OK, we're not going to look for damages but we're not about to swallow our own legal costs." I think we would have reacted in a different way, but the lawsuit was not our lawsuit. Although we do have some influence, we weren't in a position to tell Island what to do.]

The record company is protecting its rights, however and however those rights may be acquired (through direct purchase or through work-for-hire).

Fourth, the irony twist to the whole matter is that U2 themselves employed many of the same techniques as Negativland during their Zoo TV and Zooapalooza concert performances, sampling audio and video from broadcast satellites.

The above examples illustrate particular cases that highlight the tensions involved in music copyright issues and those issues' relation to authorship and authenticity. They are the only ones. But it is significant that even ones like these, publicized as they have been, are generally unexamined in most popular music scholarship. Perhaps this is because scholars have generally focused on production and consumption of popular music without accounting for the bounded, overdetermined assumptions about creativity and the music business. One reason for this focus is that in popular music prior to rock 'n' roll it was interpretation of songs and not songwriting (i.e., authorship) that engaged the attention of scholars and fans (though the industry's

**Conclusion**
yet something more is at stake for the study of popular music. Demand for authenticity in popular music is a particularly false request, because such a demand is made with the assumption that music exists in some pure form. Frith's suggestion is closer to the mark:

"The flaw . . . is the suggestion that music is the starting point of the industrial process—the raw material from which nothing flows—when it is, in fact, the final product. The "industrialization of music" can't be understood as something that happens to music but describes a process in which music itself is made—a process, that is, which fuses (and confuses) capital, technical, and musical arguments."

It is, I believe, primarily the technical that, by organizing sound, organizes our thinking about authenticity. The reproduction of sound incorporates signifying structures associated with the interpretation of authenticity. Put another way, popular recordings bear the stamp of their creators throughout the collaborative process. They bring an "immediacy," as Frith calls it. He writes that "what a performer could sell . . . was his or her unique approach to sound.[44] Frith locates the essence of the approach in the human voice, particularly after the advent of electronic recording in the early part of the twentieth century. Indeed, if we understand voice here to mean an expressive sound, we can apply Barthes' use of the term "signification," as a means of identification by way of sound. Consequently, Frith's use of the term "approach" can be supplanted with the word "sound." Recording allowed the degree of control over sound necessary to achieve such expression. More importantly, recording enabled these personal, expressive qualities to be mass mediated, and it thus enabled mediation of authorship.

For many rock fans, signification is translated as the idea of "feeling," and it is at the heart of experiencing rock music. Of course, the popular music industry has increasingly turned toward claims to control. Dick Hebdige makes this point clearly:

"When looking at Two Tone [Records], the point to remember is not that it was, as some rock and reggae purists have suggested, a "media-created hype" (less "authentic" than the original 1960s skiff movement) . . . what's important about Two Tone is that Jerry Dammers realized that when dealing with the popular music industry, the important issues for the artist have less to do with staying "honest" and "authentic" and refusing to "sell out" than with greasing and retaining control of the product at every stage and in all its forms."
Heldige is less concerned with what is and is not authentic than with who is responsible for the creative activity. Yet this is not a return to author theory, at least insofar as it demonstrates not artistic control but commercial control (perhaps a consequence of digital recording/reproduction rendering music as information, as something inherently controllable and commodifiable). As in the Negativist/12 case, analyses of copyright and its deployment in the popular music industry can tell much about control and the legal structures that establish boundaries enforcing relations between artists, record labels, recording studios, broadcast outlets, music publishers, and distributors.

Frith's elaboration of the pop aesthetic is a necessary step for popular music studies. He asks scholars to consider "how music works to construct a people, a culture, an aesthetic... (how) it creates our understanding of what popularity is." The goal then, should be to discover what sources outside music musicians, fans, critics, and so on, go to in searching of establishing authenticity and credibility. Though this may simply refer further removing us from the issue at hand, or substituting one constructed text for another, it is important to recognize the whole range of influences working within popular music generally, and the music industry specifically, that are organized for the creation and maintenance of credibility and authenticity. One example of this process may be a band's performance of "cover" versions of songs as close to the original as possible, or from an "accepted" canon of songs, to establish credibility before they themselves have any. Likewise, live performance and of and itself may be a means for a musical group to establish credibility as musicians and performers. It is particularly interesting to note instances, such as Vanilla Ice's recordings, of Public Enemy raps, of rock and roll, to make use of sampling as a means of importing authenticity. Such quoting establishes a connection that builds authenticity, a kind of ephorizing that identifies the author, if not of the text itself, as the one who creates it.

NOTES

5 Frith, "What Is an Author?" 177.
9 Jasi, "Metamorphoses" 459.
11 Jasi, "Metamorphoses" 459.
12 Jasi, "Metamorphoses" 456.
13 Jasi, "Metamorphoses" 455.
16 Betty "Critical Perspectives" 490.
21 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Methuen, 1982).
24 Eisenberg, *Recording Angel* 39.
25 All references to US copyright law are based on the 1976 Copyright Act, the United States Copyright Act. 17 USC 101 and subsequent Congressional revisions.
26 Particularly since such exploitation is reas of market forces and more in the control of vertically integrated media that can initiate cooperative activities to encourage such exploitation.
29 Rose, "The Author As Proprietor" 10.
32 Christopher Martin, "Blame it on Motown: Authorship, Authenticity, and Style in Postmodern Rock And Roll," 1992 (unpublished manuscript) 16. Martin not only provides an excellent analysis of the cultural debate surrounding Motown but also argues the debate historically in popular music.
34 Iland v. SST, et al., 90 CH 11499 (Cook County Illinois Press, 1991).
37 Iland v. SST, et al.
42 Frith, *Sound Effects* 53/54.
43 Thomas Streeter, "Broadcast Copyright and the Racialization of Property," *Cardinal Arts & Entertainment Law Journal* 10, 2 (1992) 5865. The ideology Streeter describes Brunel's such as the one by Les Blier (see Mann, "For Les Blier, Success is Measured More Than by the Bottom Line," *New Music World* (Summer 1995) and Wariner/Chappell Music, who believes that of helping set up a copyright system in emerging markets, he is "educating them about the concept of paying for music."
44 Frith, "Industrialization" 53/54.