

**Active Listening: The Cultural Politics of
Magnetic Recording Technologies in
North America, 1945-1993**

by

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Dedicated to JBK, who sent me down this path,
and to Mary, who got me to the end.

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Abstract

From the late 1940s to the mid 1990s, the use of magnetic tape recorders provoked aesthetic, social, and political debates about the decentralization of sonic production. At the very moment that postwar mass culture seemed most ascendant and critics began to identify it as a coherent object of study and scorn, reel-to-reel tape recorders allowed users to reproduce and manipulate mass-produced sounds emanating from radio and recording studios, as well as the sounds of their households, their communities, and the larger world outside their homes. Many non-professional tape users, non-commercial sonic researchers, and hobbyist audio networkers would come to believe that they could be more than passive recipients of culture industry products and the dominant ideologies that they transmitted; through an active engagement with tape, they hoped to teach listeners to become producers themselves. Listening to their works produced via tape, reading their voluminous writings, and combing their archival collections for evidence of wider connections to their practices, I argue that such tape enthusiasts developed a set of media theories through a self-reflexive recording practice I call active listening.

This dissertation follows hobbyists and professional recordists ranging from New York City folklorist and advertiser Tony Schwartz, composer and educator R. Murray Schafer and his World Soundscape Project in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the Iowa City-based audio collective the Tape-beatles, who all proposed multiple forms of engagement with, against, and about mass culture. They made structural critiques of commercial culture industries for separating producers from consumers in the name of profits, perceptual arguments about the capacity for sound to activate new political imaginaries, and aesthetic moves that aimed to

reintegrate presumably alienated listening subjects. Not only did the ubiquity of mass culture throughout North America give listeners a shared vocabulary, but the act of appropriating and manipulating sounds on tape fostered a self-consciousness about how mass culture worked and how it might be made to work differently. Such forms of engagement both attempted to eliminate boundaries between the production and consumption of mass culture and bolstered an ideological investment in the idea of mass culture as a passive and alienating force.

Introduction

Listeners More Participant: Towards a Theory of Active Listening

During a January 1965 broadcast of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *Sunday Night* program, a series of voices began to speak above a recording of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony. "Canned goods and canned music," said one man, remarking on the ubiquity of pre-recorded sound in public places, "meet in a wonderful new wedding." "A new interest in music has been brought to bear, brought to life," asserted the next speaker, "by virtue of its mechanical reproduction." "There's a kind of dehumanizing quality," dissented the next, "with the perfection of reproduction [...] that I think is terribly frightening, and I think that when its moment comes, humanity will be ready for the floods again, will be ready for self-destruction."¹ Though they were never in the same room, nor did they speak with the opening movement to Beethoven's Eighth in their mind's ear, these voices, "candidly miked and callously edited" by the Canadian pianist, essayist, and broadcaster Glenn Gould, served to introduce "Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording." For an hour and a half, this radio piece staged a wide-ranging debate about the meaning of recording technologies within the world of classical music and recorded sound at large. Having recorded several interviews with music executives, composers, conductors, critics, musicologists, and the ever-present communications scholar Marshall McLuhan onto reels of

¹ They were the voices, respectively, of Marshall McLuhan, then director of the University of Toronto's Institute of Culture and Technology, Robert Offergeld, then a music editor for the hobbyist magazine *HiFi/Stereo Review*, and pianist Leon Fleisher. Glenn Gould, "Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording," *CBC Sunday Night*, CBC-AM, January 10, 1965. To my knowledge, this recording has never received an official release on LP or CD. A version for online streaming can be heard, however, at <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2099409392> (accessed August 28, 2013).

magnetic audiotape, Gould and his producer Irving Glick cut and spliced their responses to questions about new recording technologies so that they were often in direct conflict with one another. The conversation touched on many subjects, but a common thread throughout had to do with the ways in which recorded music and might have disrupted relationships among creators, works, and listeners.

For Gould, who had retired from live performance in 1964 to devote himself to the art of recording, these were not simply aesthetic debates relevant to a highbrow audience of professional musicians, engineers, or classical music fans. “The most significant thing that recordings have done,” he argued during the last third of the program, “does not concern the performers or the composers who are involved with them. It concerns the listeners who make use of them.” For a generation or two prior to this radio program, many North American critics had worried about the role of mass culture in producing a passive citizenry, particularly when faced with recording and dissemination technologies that severed producers from consumers of media. Magnetic tape recorders and high fidelity sound systems, Gould believed, allowed consumers to reverse that relationship. Whether listeners used tape machines to make their own recordings, to reproduce radio broadcasts for future listening, to splice together favorite sounds in new and unexpected combinations, or simply changed the settings on their listening devices to hear recordings as they wished, “a quite extraordinary variety of controls are available” to “afford them a responsible role in the recreative process.”² Gould amplified his position by presenting the words of Marshall McLuhan next, who stated “In any electric circuit audience becomes more

² Gould, “Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording.” In an earlier essay for *Saturday Review*, Gould wrote, “electronic transmission has already inspired a new concept of multiple-authorship responsibility in which the specific functions of the composer, the performer, and, indeed, the consumer overlap.” See Glenn Gould, “Strauss and the Electronic Future,” *Saturday Review*, May 30, 1964, 58.

and more creative, more and more part of the making process.”³ Perhaps surprisingly for a musician renowned for his efforts to be in control of his output during the recording process, Gould continued to argue that the listener was a salutary “threat, a potential usurper of power, an uninvited guest at the banquet of the arts, one whose presence threatens the familiar hierarchical setting of the musical establishment.”⁴ At the core of Gould’s ideas, then, was a collapsing of distinctions between producers and consumers. Art could be a less rarified experience if consumers took it upon themselves to use electronic technologies to their fullest potential.

Gould doubled down on his assertion about the collapsing distinction between producers and consumers of electronic media when he adapted his radio program to print for *High Fidelity* the following year. “At the center of the technological debate” about recording, he wrote, “is a new kind of listener – a listener more participant in the musical experience.”⁵ Whether Gould correctly foresaw the future of media was beside the point. His radio program and article distilled prominent strains of thought about active listening emerging from cultural critics and theorists, composers and performers, and hobbyist communities busy recording the sounds around them onto reels of magnetic tape over the previous fifteen or twenty years, and for a generation after his program.

I begin with this episode in media history not only because Gould’s essay brings many of this project’s central concerns to the fore, nor because it has been a long-standing and oft-reproduced touchstone for discussions about the meaning of recording technologies, but because the original form of the radio and print essays themselves also attempted to enact his propositions. More than an attempt to limn the possible futures of listening, Gould modeled one

³ Marshall McLuhan, in Glenn Gould, “Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording.”

⁴ Glenn Gould, “The Prospects of Recording,” *High Fidelity*, April 1966, 59

⁵ Ibid.

version of it on the air and in print. Historians, musicologists, and media scholars have remained stubbornly resistant to give Gould's voice and editorial choices as much attention as his written words.⁶ In multiple reproductions of the essay for critical collections, "The Prospects of Recording" has been abridged, with the other voices typically edited out.⁷ In short, they transformed his imagined dialogue into a monologue.

By contrast, the presence of multiple, conflicting voices within the radio documentary encouraged listeners to take an active role in interpreting the debates they heard.⁸ When Gould argued over the airwaves in 1965, then, "that the old distinctions about the various classes of the musical hierarchy, the distinctions that separated the composer and the performer, and both of them from the listener, will to a large extent become outmoded," he hoped to empower audiences to make their own choices about the media they encountered, including his own works.⁹ In a visual analog to this technique, Gould placed these voices along the margins of his own text in the printed version of the piece for *High Fidelity*. Gould certainly guided readers along towards his position, but in the process, allowed his interlocutors to have their say. Though Gould had the significant resources of a national broadcasting network's studio at his disposal, his decision to

⁶ For a brief sampling of references to Gould's essay, see Paul Théberge, "Counterpoint: Glenn Gould & Marshall McLuhan," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* X (1986): 109-127; Nicolas Collins, "Ubiquitous Electronics: Technology and Live Performance 1966-1996," *Leonardo Music Journal* 8 (1998): 27-32; Colin Symes, *Setting the Record Straight: A Material History of Classical Recording* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); Tim Hecker, "Glenn Gould, the Vanishing Performer and the Ambivalence of the Studio," *Leonardo Music Journal* 18 (2008): 77-83.

⁷ Edited reproductions appear, for example, in Glenn Gould, "The Prospects of Recording," in *Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (New York: Knopf, 1984); and Glenn Gould, "The Prospects of Recording," *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004). With the exception of Symes' discussion of Gould, the essays in the previous footnote cite these reproductions rather than either the radio program or the original *High Fidelity* article.

⁸ This was not unique to this particular documentary, either. In "The Idea of North" (1967), Gould staged an extended conversation among several Canadians that had spent time in the North. Throughout the piece, different voices overlapped with one another, either forcing listeners to make choices about which voices to follow, or hoping that they could absorb the essence of several comments at once. See Glenn Gould, "The Idea of North," *Glenn Gould's Solitude Trilogy*, CBC Records, PSCD 2003-3, 1992, 3 compact discs.

⁹ Gould, "Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording."

mount his “dialogue on the prospects of recording” by splicing together his favorite recording of Beethoven’s Eighth with the voices of prominent figures in the world of media modeled a mode of production drawn from the creative listening practices of the hobbyists he invoked at the end of his program. Indeed, what has remained underappreciated until now is the degree to which the thinking that underpinned his arguments and approach emerged from the world of hobbyist tapers.

*** Overview ***

From the late 1940s, when the first magnetic recording devices hit the consumer market in North America, to the mid 1990s, when digital media began to supplant cassette tapes as the easiest way to reproduce recorded sounds, the use of magnetic tape provoked aesthetic, social, and political debates over the value of recorded sounds. At the very moment that postwar mass culture seemed most ascendant and critics began to identify it as a coherent object of study and scorn, reel-to-reel tape recorders allowed users to not only record the sounds of the radio or other pre-recorded music, but also, through attached microphones and power sources, the sounds of their households and the world outside their doors. Unlike other earlier forms of home recording like cylinders or consumer grade gramophone recorders, the resulting tape could be easily cut into pieces with razors or scissors; reconstituted in new arrangements through adhesive splicing tape; sped up, slowed down, and played backwards through the controls on the machine. Although less malleable than reel-to-reel, the rise of cassette tapes in the 1970s allowed for the mass reproduction of culture industry products in a form at once smaller, cheaper, and easier to distribute than reels of tape. Not only did more and more technology users record the sounds coming through their stereos without regard to the copyright owners, but hobbyists could

produce small runs of tapes they made themselves to send to one another through distribution networks outside of the commercial recording industry. The lines separating professionals like Gould from casual users, avid hobbyists, non-commercial artists, and those who might have made money from their hobby without relying on it for their primary livelihood were both porous and productive. Hobbyist tape users imagined they could be more than passive recipients of culture industry products and the dominant ideologies that they transmitted; through an active engagement with the medium, they might in the end tilt the balance of power in the entertainment industry from producers to consumers.

For all of tape's profound consequences for the ability to transform recorded sound within professional studios, it also created the possibility for non-professionals to respond to the sounds coming over their record players and radios, as Gould argued in his radio piece. Although there had been antecedents in vernacular forms of self-expression through technologies of media reproduction, such as amateur photography, one of the striking things about hobbyist uses of magnetic tape was the extent to which the ability to reproduce and manipulate the products of mass culture industries fostered a critical approach towards them. For the first time since Edison's early phonograph, a consumer audio recording technology combined playback and recording functions, and thus challenged what historian David Suisman calls the "structural and social division between making a recording and listening to it."¹⁰ To those who believed that such a division alienated production processes from listening capabilities, particularly non-professional hobbyist male enthusiasts, tape seemed capable of restoring agency to listeners by shifting their consumption practices into new forms of production.

¹⁰ David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

While many hobbyist tapers criticized the passivity of mass listening as a way to enrich their individual leisure activities, others who straddled the boundary between hobbyist and professional recordists saw tape as a crucial means to influence listening practices for more pointed and often radical political purposes. The tapers explored in this project saw the medium as a strategic vehicle to combat a wide array of social ills. They not only used tape to amplify silenced or forgotten sounds, but also to educate listeners how to pay attention to the sounds around them. In different hands tape could, for example, give a platform for those silenced by early Cold War anti-communist blacklists or highlight the marginalization of voices in streets just outside the center of U.S. culture industries during the 1950s, as in the case of New York advertiser and tape hobbyist Tony Schwartz, who later befriended Marshall McLuhan and began producing his own works of media theory. Alternatively, it could help those concerned with noise pollution to document the threat of a looming sonic environmental catastrophe in the 1960s and 1970s, as with R. Murray Schafer and his research team at the World Soundscape Project in Vancouver. To their ears, recordings were necessary to dramatize the possible deafness and social alienation brought forth by the vulgarizing sound of jet engines, “schizophonic” Muzak, and the imperialistic spread of U.S. popular culture spreading across the 49th parallel, and to preserve the sounds of the silenced natural “soundscape” instead. It allowed artists connected to one another through transnational postal networks in the 1980s, such as the Iowa City-based audio collective the Tape-beatles, to record and reconstitute the ever-present sounds of mass media organizations in such a way to highlight the absurdity of copyright monopolies in an age of accessible reproduction and distribution technologies. Whatever else they hoped magnetic tape could do, all agreed they could use the medium to direct listeners’ attention to sounds otherwise ignored by the popular recording industry, to make strange what commercial media

rendered “normal,” and to produce audio themselves. Through their material engagement with tape, their audio output, and their written critiques, they were theorists in their own right as practitioners of a self-reflexive vernacular media practice I call active listening.

*** The Ends of Mass Culture ***

Tape hobbyists proposed multiple forms of engagement with, against, and through mass culture. They made structural critiques of commercial culture industries for separating producers from consumers in the name of profits, perceptual arguments about the capacity for sound to activate new political imaginaries, and aesthetic moves that aimed to reintegrate presumably alienated listening subjects. From our contemporary standpoint, the notion that a group of consumers constructed political subjectivities for themselves through the products of mass culture industries is not exactly new. As we will see below, several generations of scholars have questioned the notion that the consumption of mass culture is inherently incommensurate with political self-fashioning. What was new to the practice of tape hobbyists, however, was a self-consciously oppositional approach towards mass culture made possible by a deep familiarity with its sonic conventions. By looking at mass culture debates from the perspective of technology users who not only used the products of mass culture but developed their own media theories as on-the-ground practitioners, we can begin to refocus the emergence of active listening theories through the specific historical conjuncture of post-World War II hobbyism, rather than through more abstract discourses about mass culture and consumerism. In order to understand such practices, however, it is useful to understand the intertwined histories and historiographies of mass culture and its discontents through the twentieth century before turning to the politics of perception and aesthetic strategies to combat alienation.

Pinning down the essential characteristics of “mass culture” is difficult, and the decision to name it as such, rather than say, “popular culture,” is a loaded one with political consequences for how we conceive of the relation between producers and consumers of culture. While recognizing the slipperiness of the constitutive elements of such a definition, I follow Richard Ohmann’s description of mass culture as a set of “voluntary experiences, produced by a relatively small number of specialists, for millions across the nation to share, in similar or identical form, either simultaneously or nearly so; with dependable frequency; [which] shapes habitual audiences, around common needs or interests, and [...] is made for profit.”¹¹ The organization of nationally-scaled, professionally-administered, for-profit amusements began to take root in North America during the early decades of the nineteenth century. From the 1830s onwards, audiences could take in professionally organized theatrical productions and minstrel shows, go to museums catering to popular classes, purchase tickets to spectacular events like rare performances by leading operatic singers, attend professional sporting events or nationally-touring circuses, buy inexpensive urban newspapers, and read paperback novels and even-cheaper mass produced dime novels. Turning cultural consumption into a profitable enterprise required both large audiences and specialized labor, which meant that numerous consumers would inherently be at some remove from an increasingly professionalized class of producers who nevertheless attempted to market experiences and commodities that could be appealing to all. Such developments led many critics to worry about the ability for producers and unscrupulous salespeople to trick audiences, to inculcate frivolity among young urban working-

¹¹ Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 14.

class consumers, or shape the consciousness of recent immigrants, but they did not yet begin to speak of a coherent thing that might be labeled “mass culture.”¹²

One of the most significant transformations that made such a label possible was the rise of advertiser-subsidized general interest magazines at the turn of the twentieth century, since national distribution made possible the simultaneous consumption of the same publications and the same advertisements across the United States. Because advertisers paid the majority of production costs for magazines, who could then sell magazines for less than it cost to produce them, they reoriented the publishing industry away from producing content to sell directly to culture consumers towards selling the attention of readers to advertisers. In turn, advertisers hoped that the readers would become consumers of their goods. For Ohmann, this step marked the true watershed moment in the rise of a national mass culture, since it linked the consumption of entertainment products to increasingly salient facts of industrial life in the United States, such as the horizontal and vertical integration of leading industrial corporations, the rationalization of markets, the nationalization of brands, and the professionalization of advertising and marketing. The need to deliver habitual audiences to advertisers led content producers to rely upon formulaic strategies that could attract and maintain the attention of readers. Individual outlets should provide new content every week or month, but that new content should reflect the brand identity of the publisher; in short, different, but not too different.¹³

¹² See, for example, James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Robert Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

¹³ Ohmann, *Selling Culture*.

If magazine publishing at the turn of the twentieth century marked an emblematic inflection point in this story, other increasingly powerful culture industries consolidated many of its nationally-oriented industrial strategies throughout the first half of the century. From sheet music publishing to record sales to film production to radio broadcasting, culture industries shifted from multiple locally-based productions catering to nearby urban audiences towards centralized Hollywood studios, record labels, and radio networks aiming for the largest number of listeners and viewers possible, either to recoup increasingly skyrocketing production costs or to attract the support of advertisers. The ability for nationwide audiences to watch the same movies or listen to the same radio programs simultaneously might both link culture consumers together through their shared access to the same materials *and* contribute to an alienation of listeners and viewers from the products they consumed, since these were increasingly made by specialized and centralized outlets.¹⁴

From the 1930s, intellectuals and activists from a variety of political orientations grappled with the ways in which culture produced by those centralized media industries informed political and social formations in North America and Western Europe. As Michael Denning has persuasively argued, within the middle-third of the twentieth century, cultural producers within the broad political left developed a complex approach towards popular culture as fluid and open to radical transformation from within. The Popular Front—a capacious coalition of communists, socialists, and the left wing of the New Deal Democratic Party that

¹⁴ Suismann, *Selling Sounds*; Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975); Steven Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Thomas Streeter, *Selling The Air: A Critique of the Policy of Commercial Broadcasting in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Timothy Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

came together as a result of official Communist Party doctrine in the mid-thirties in order to present a united front against fascism—sought to bolster the cultural resonance of progressivism in the U.S. by organizing culture workers under the ideological banners of industrial unionism, anti-fascism, racial and ethnic pluralism, and social democracy, and thus bringing the concerns of labor and progressive politics to the fore of cultural production. The very growth of profit-driven culture industries from newspapers and radio to film and eventually television meant that more and more people from a variety of class backgrounds would come to work within these industries. While the profit-driven nature of these industries seemed to constrict opportunities for radical challenges to the status quo through the products of mass culture, participants in the Popular Front hoped that increasing the ranks of people conceiving of themselves as culture workers might open up possibilities for radical messages to make their way into cultural commodities.¹⁵

After World War II, many others on the political left animated by anti-Stalinist and anti-fascist impulses recoiled from the cultural strategies of the Popular Front, which often employed populist rhetoric, sentimentalism, and turned away from avant garde aesthetic strategies hitherto associated with radical cultural production. An influential mid-century generation of intellectuals writing about mass culture castigated culture industries in North America and Europe for producing endless varieties of sameness in the name of corporate profits or political control. According to critics like Dwight Macdonald, Harold Rosenberg, and Theodor Adorno, the critical acumen of culture consumers atrophied in the face of lowest common denominator programming, and the task of the intellectual should be to nourish readers with the insights

¹⁵ While the official “Popular Front” policy put forward by the Communist Party of the USA ran from 1935 to 1939, I follow Denning in using the phrase here to refer to the unofficial social movement that bound this broad coalition together until at least the second red scare of the late 1940s. See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

needed to accurately see the entertainment industry as it was.¹⁶ To speak of populism in a capitalist marketplace was to cede the ground of political analysis to the imperatives of capital, and thus to reinforce existing social structures that eroded independent thought, democracy, and the potential for radical change.¹⁷ Implicit in this critique was the sense that audiences were unable, on their own, to do the work of interpretation; or worse, that the endless consumption of the same products and ad-driven media messages could pave the way for totalitarianism in the United States, as we will see in Tony Schwartz's early works.¹⁸ In short, the threat of "false consciousness" loomed behind mass culture critiques dependent on an idea of passive audiences.

From a different standpoint than the Popular Front, several intellectuals in the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s also challenged the mid-century New York Intellectuals' view of mass culture. Collapsing distinctions between authors and audiences, or producers and consumers, as intellectual historian Daniel Horowitz has argued, writers from Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco to the later McLuhan, Susan Sontag, Herbert Gans, and Stuart Hall sought in various ways to understand how consumers of popular culture were more than passive recipients of messages emanating from on high, and instead actively participated in construing the world they encountered in the media. Since it became harder and harder to find forms of cultural production

¹⁶ The key publication bringing such thinkers together was Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957).

¹⁷ See Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). While this was a matter of contemporary debate, the historiographical fallout from these alternate positions continued to be felt for generations. For the clearest distillation of the differences between conceiving of mass culture audiences as participants in the making of culture and the view that the tilted power relations of mass culture made real dissent fundamentally impossible, see the well-known exchange between Levine and Lears, Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1369-1399; and T. J. Jackson Lears, "Making Fun of Popular Culture," *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1417-1426.

¹⁸ See also Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism From World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013) on intellectuals and artists responding to the threat of fascism through more participatory forms of media.

outside of mass culture, they understood the New York Intellectuals' views as overly totalizing and wanted to understand how people on the ground actually engaged with consumer products.¹⁹

One important theoretical contribution to these debates emerged from scholars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, who attempted to outline a rigorous but non-reductionist Marxist theory of cultural practice beginning in the 1970s. Drawing upon the work of New Left academics such as Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, as well as the writings of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, the Birmingham School sought to broaden conceptions of culture beyond “a set of texts and artifacts” with universal meanings floating above a material base of objective fact, towards a historically situated and pluralist view of cultural *practices* embedded in complex sets of social relations.²⁰ Stuart Hall and others elaborated Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and tried to understand how historical blocs battle for dominance over “the structures of civil and political life, culture and ideologies.”²¹ Hegemony, Hall wrote, “is always the (temporary) master of a particular theatre of struggle” at a particular historical moment. In a complex social structure (and superstructure) where neat separations between state, civil society, and popular culture are difficult to discern, culture itself becomes a crucial “battlefield” between historical blocs attempting to revise “the whole social formation.”²² To speak of hegemony, then, is to speak of the “cultural dialectic” through which “relations of dominance and subordination are articulated” in the process of continuous cultural struggle.²³ In a context where British conservatives had seemed more successful in claiming the mantle of “the popular” on a national level, often through the denigration of post-colonial

¹⁹ Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures*.

²⁰ See Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems,” 27 in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, eds. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²² Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Popular,’” 447, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey, 2nd ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1998); *ibid.*, 36.

²³ Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Popular,’” 449.

populations in the metropole, accounting for how politicians and cultural producers figured “the people” became a matter of political necessity. For Hall, any perspective that assumed relations of domination as imposed from above, with passive cultural consumers as victims of “false consciousness” was not only historically false, but politically ineffective.

Historical scholarship in this vein has compellingly demonstrated that alienated passivity has not been the entire lot of popular media consumers. Even while recognizing the capitalist logics embedded within the production and circulation of various cultural commodities, such works powerfully argue that people make meaning out of commercial available products beyond the fact of their commodity status.²⁴ Crucially, many of these critiques emerged from a variety of subaltern perspectives that questioned whether it was possible to speak in singular terms about the effects of consumer culture and politics at large, especially when the deleterious effects of consumerism in the eyes of critics often seemed to fall along fault lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Whether consumers directly challenge the social relations that create distance between themselves and the products of the culture industries or not, the process by which nineteenth century working men reading dime novels, turn of the century female textile workers going to the cinema, New Deal-era listeners gathering around the radio, postwar families watching television, or diasporic African communities relating to one another through the transatlantic circulation of popular musical forms, makes it clear that meaning making is embedded in social worlds, rather than inherent in products and acts of consumption themselves. While the search for large audiences often limits many forms of cultural expression to the

²⁴ For useful statements about the simultaneous importance of studying capitalist commodities in their specific contexts and in allowing for multiple interpretations of situated subjects, see Michael Denning, “The End of Mass Culture,” 97-120 in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (New York: Verso, 2004); and James W. Cook, “The Return of the Culture Industry,” 291-318 in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future*, eds. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O’Malley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

commercially viable, the circulation of goods through mass markets nevertheless allows for those willing to negotiate the complex power dynamics of the culture industries to find audiences far beyond their immediate surroundings. When one looks and listens closely, one finds battlegrounds over popular culture where earlier generations of leftist intellectuals saw settled ideological scores.²⁵

Despite often using the products of popular culture for their own purposes, the active tapers of this project had a conflicted relationship to cultural commodities pitched at a mass audience, which led them to develop a series of media critiques through their cultural practices. While the political valences of the media critiques explored here ranged widely, what united these actors and distinguished their practices of political self-fashioning from those just

²⁵ Over the last thirty years or so, a wide range of works bridging social and cultural history have located interactive processes of meaning-making within various commodity cultures and media histories, including Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*; Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Denning, *Mechanic Accents*; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1369-1399; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Denning, *The Cultural Front*; Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*; Cook, *The Arts of Deception*; Derek W. Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Music in Chicago, 1873-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Suisman, *Selling Sounds*; Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2015).

For media theorists and media historians, the influence of Hall's framework helped pave the way for the development of a robust literature from the late 1980s and early 1990s about "active audiences" who participated in the process of making meaning out of mass media products, especially in television and literary studies. While such studies in the U.S. context had a mixed record in terms of attending to the radical political imperatives of Hall's project, for our purposes, such insights are useful in understanding how the transmission of sounds through records or tapes purchased in a store might just as well generate unexpected social solidarities across vast distances as they might generate alienated unease. This work begins with Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 128-137 in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, eds. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), and continues, for instance, with works such as John Fiske, *Television Culture*, (New York: Methuen, 1987); David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Lynn Spiegel, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences For a Postmodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Kathy Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935-1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Elena Razlogova, *The Listener's Voice: Early Radio and the American Public* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

described is that the ideas they developed through and around their use of mass culture products were essentially *about media themselves*. Since many early tape users were part of the first generation to come of age while going to films produced by Hollywood studios or listening to national radio networks, the familiarity of twenty- to forty-somethings with the audiovisual conventions of U.S. mass media productions gave them access to a common language of media literacy as well as new tools with which to engage them. For subsequent generations of tapers with even more exposure to the conventions of mass media, that familiarity would deepen and extend beyond the urban centers of the U.S. culture industries. Not only did the ubiquity of mass culture throughout North America give listeners a shared vocabulary, but the very act of appropriating and manipulating sounds on tape fostered a self-consciousness about how mass culture worked and how it might be made to work differently. And when tapers learned that the meanings attached to those sounds could be transformed through their own reappropriations, they then took on the role of teachers who could educate others how to do the same through their own use of tape.

Because this is not a story rooted in subaltern communities, it may seem perverse to turn the tools of cultural studies to middle-class white male subjects whose existence outside of power structures came via their own self-marginalizing tastes. There is a moment, for instance, where Hall cautions against considering “Pigeon-fancying and stamp collecting, flying ducks on the wall and garden gnomes” as crucial to the history of popular culture.²⁶ But while tape hobbyists might not always have been so different from stamp collectors, their self-conscious approach towards media makes them worthy of study as historically-situated producers and theorists in their own right. The theories they developed, however, cannot be seen as the only

²⁶ Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” 448.

way that tapers engaged popular culture through practice. This is especially important to acknowledge since the technologies these men used could just as easily be understood as technologies of domination and subordination rather than those of subversion and resistance.²⁷ In addition, there are many other important countervailing uses of recording technologies by more politically disenfranchised social groups than those that are the focus of this study, especially towards the end of the story as tape became more accessible. For example, the history of African American forms of vernacular technological creativity, most notably with the rise of hip hop, is a crucial part of the larger story about the unexpected repurposing of mass media products for often critical ends.²⁸ To tell that story, however, would be to require a different approach than the one developed here, which focuses on practices that not only used mass media products, but used them to develop theories about the media. It is only by taking those ideas seriously on their own terms that we can see both the political possibilities and inherent limits to active listening as a cultural strategy.

On the one hand, by actively responding to the products of commercial media through their use of tape, hobbyist tapers participated in the collapsing of boundaries between production and consumption at the heart of postwar intellectuals' reassessment of popular culture. On the other hand, their very use of tape *as* a critical medium bolstered an ideological investment in the idea of mass culture as a passive and alienating force. Rather than an unexplainable contradiction, this conflict is constitutive for the development of active listening as a multivalent cultural strategy over the last half of the twentieth century. In short, if tapers believed that mass

²⁷ Jennifer Stoeber-Ackerman, "Reproducing US Citizenship in *Blackboard Jungle*: Race, Cold War Liberalism, and the Tape Recorder," *American Quarterly* 63 (2011): 781-806.

²⁸ See, for example, Tricia Rose, *Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994); Rayvon Fouché, "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud: African Americans, American Artifactual Culture, and Black Vernacular Technological Creativity," *American Quarterly* 58 (2006): 639-661.

culture was an inherently alienating force due to its commercial status and its separating of sound from larger social contexts, it was their job to propose alternative modes of listening that might combat the disintegrative forces of modernity. Whether responding to the repeated claims of news media, bringing tape recorders out of the studio, or recombining the recognizable sounds of popular culture in sonic montages as a challenge to the commodity status of art, this project's active tapers all attempted to model critical listening practices for others through their own engagement with magnetic tape.

*** Perceptual Politics of Active Listening ***

For tape hobbyists, Tony Schwartz, R. Murray Schafer, and the Tape-beatles, active listening had many often conflicting meanings. Regardless of their specific interventions, however, the subjects of this dissertation often relied upon a series of juxtapositions that held up seeing and hearing as fundamentally different from one another and sought to teach people how to listen through their use of tape. As some of these actors were fond of saying, humans are not equipped with earlids, with the implication that we cannot choose to hear or unhear sounds on the basis of our preference, when say, in public places. This notion that the perceptual qualities of listening contributed to the alienation inherent in mass culture was thus central to the practices and theoretical interventions of this project. If, in their minds, hearing was preferable to seeing, listening more involved than reading, the ear more integrated than the eye, why did so many assert the need for active listening? In a curious move that both asserted the salutary difference between vision and audition, and also seemed to try to make listening more like seeing, the

desire for more active listening practices had to do with a fear that most listening was not directed, not attentive enough. They hoped it could become so with practice.²⁹

For many, listening became both more difficult and more alienated with the separation of sounds from the sonic events that produced them, as in the case of recordings. To take one prominent example that will be further explored in chapter four, consider R. Murray Schafer's conception of all recorded music as "schizophonic." At once ontological and structural, his argument held that if recording technologies separated sounds from their originary instantiations as sonic events, listeners were automatically at a remove from recorded sound in moments of audition.³⁰ While recording potentially allowed more directed and active listening to the characteristics of any given sound by creating the opportunity to return to the same fixed sound repeatedly, it also, in Schafer's view, took sound out of its spatial and temporal context. "Vocal sound, for instance, is no longer tied to a hole in the head but is free to issue from anywhere in the landscape. In the same instance it may issue from millions of holes in millions of public and private places around the world" through the recording and dissemination technologies.³¹ Nothing in this argument implied that listening must be a passive act, but it did assert that there is a fundamental difference between making a sound and perceiving it after it has been recorded, and that it is harder to locate the source of a sound when its source cannot be seen.³² And for the

²⁹ For a sustained and nuanced argument about the assumption of passivity in hearing, see Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013).

³⁰ Schafer's identification of schizophonic sound as split from its source echoed Walter Benjamin's argument about the loss of artistic aura in conditions of technological reproduction. But where Benjamin saw the decline of aura as a potential opportunity for the democratization of artistic production and reception, Schafer found this separation deeply distressing and unnatural. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 19-55 in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

³¹ R. Murray Schafer, *Music of the Environment* (Vancouver, BC: Universal Editions, 1974), 15.

³² As we'll see below, Schafer's position also differed markedly from the similarly named French composer Pierre Schaeffer, who argued in favor of splitting sound from its source as a means to attend to the purely sonic characteristics of recorded sound.

most part, Schafer and others noted that the centralization of power within the recording industry meant that few listeners had a direct structural relation to the sounds they heard coming over loudspeakers or headphones on a daily basis. So if listening was to be active and involved, the enthusiastic tapers of this project believed that listeners needed to be guided towards such a practice by seizing the means of technological reproduction to assert a productive role for consumers.

By contrast to such sensory generalizations about the nature of recorded sound, scholars like Alain Corbin, Jonathan Sterne, Emily Thompson, and Kate Lacey have compellingly argued that modes of listening are learned and not inherent in the perceptual qualities of hearing.³³ Indeed, this assertion that hearing and listening are historically and culturally contingent phenomena irreducible to grand generalizations about the difference between various senses is a central intervention of recent scholarship in the interdisciplinary field of sound studies. Sterne, for instance, suggests that all arguments deriving from Marshall McLuhan's "audiovisual litany" (which equated vision with linear thinking and singular points of view and audition with immersive experience) or Schafer's "schizophonia" are fundamentally ideological rather than a description of differences between visuality and aurality or the impact of recording technologies on listening. Claiming that listening practices emerged from the splitting of sound from its source through phonograph technology, to elaborate one example, recapitulates the process through which recording companies themselves attempted to convince consumers that records represented a tangible link to the artists that produced them. So instead of Schafer's insistence on

³³ Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 [1994]); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Lacey, *Listening Publics*. For overviews of the field as a whole, see Michele Hilmes, "Is There a Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does It Matter?" *American Quarterly* 57 (2005): 249-259; Jonathan Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," 1-17 in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012).

the phonograph's centrality to individuated listening practices in the twentieth century, Sterne argues that the specialized nineteenth century "audile techniques" of science and technology played a large role in determining how recording companies decided to sell their own sounds as commodities.³⁴ Rather than speak of definitive differences between seeing and listening, works like Sterne's suggest it is more fruitful to examine how particular discourses about listening come to be.

For all the value of understanding sonic perception as historically contingent, sound studies scholarship falters when it presents theoretical interventions about the senses as merely theoretical, rather than historically situated. Or when it unwittingly argues for the hegemonic power of the visual and assigns itself the task of attending to sonic registers of analysis. Even while recognizing the limits of arguments reliant on grand sensory generalizations, one must nevertheless account for their emergence and continued relevance for many, including tape hobbyists and theorists like Schafer. In this case, then, the purpose of listening to tape hobbyists is not just to pay attention to the aural dimensions of history, but to understand how their ideas about the benefits of active listening emerged from their historically-situated practices. So what was at stake for all those making distinctions between hearing and listening, sight and sound, point of view and acoustic space, rationality and partiality, public and private, mass and individual, or active and passive?

More than a specific argument about audition, the presence of this set of powerful and familiar binary distinctions suggests that every argument about the importance of attentive

³⁴ While recorded sound allowed listeners to return repeatedly to an isolated piece of music or speech produced at vast spatial and temporal remove, it was not only the phonograph and gramophone that rewired human capacity for audition. Instead, Sterne argues that expert listeners like doctors using stethoscopes or telegraph operators deciphering Morse code developed forms of specialized attentive listening earlier in the 19th century that could be applied to recorded music. Sterne, *Audible Past*, 88-136.

listening was as much a cultural debate about the nature of attention in contemporary life.³⁵ Indeed, as Jonathan Crary and others have argued, the apparent problem of “attention” has been a recurring staple of psychological, philosophical, scientific, industrial, artistic, and cultural practice and theory since at least the last half of the 19th century. “Capitalist modernity has generated a constant-recreation of the conditions of sensory experience,” Crary writes, “in what could be called a revolutionizing of the means of perception.”³⁶ The point is not that transformations stemming from the rise of industrial production processes or changing communications technologies have inexorably led towards the domination of the senses by capital, but that these deeply felt changes led to the continued development of new theoretical apparatuses to apprehend the relation of perceptual capacities to relations of power. Whether in the guise of German cultural theorists from Simmel to Adorno claiming overstimulation, distraction, and the decay of attention as constitutive sensorial features of modernity, French Situationist philosophers lamenting the “empire of passivity” setting upon audiences in the “society of the spectacle,” or the Toronto School of communications’ fear that spatially-oriented media eroded continuity by shifting from the ear to the eye, the notion that the distraction, passivity, and alienation wrought by mass media needed to be addressed head on was at the core of much cultural theory throughout the 20th century.³⁷

³⁵ On the recursive binaries of listening and hearing, see also Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 3-4.

³⁶ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 13.

³⁷ Although Adorno later held out the possibility that the gramophone (and later the long-playing record) and the radio might allow for the progressive development of listening practices, his early writings emphasized “Deconcentration [as] the perceptual activity which prepares the way for the forgetting and sudden recognition of mass music,” which did “not permit concentrated listening.” “Regressive listening,” in his analysis, was fundamentally tied to the commodity status of popular music. See Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” 288 in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1985). For a more nuanced view of Adorno’s openness to the use of LPs and radio, especially in terms of the possibility for sonic montage, see Thomas Y. Levin, “For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” *October* 55 (1990): 23-47. On Situationist philosophers’ views of the spectacle as domination over the senses, see Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983); Jonathan Crary, “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory,” *October* 50 (1989): 96-107.

Let us consider the development of the Toronto School of communications' sensory theory, which included the works of Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and Glenn Gould as well, because it attempted to work through a structural analysis of power through the perceptual dynamics of sight and sound. McLuhan in particular returns often throughout this project as someone who both picked up on and served as inspiration for active listening practices through electronic technologies like tape. McLuhan drew on and simplified the insights of economic historian and fellow University of Toronto professor Harold Innis, who suggested in the late 1940s and early 1950s that communications technologies from cuneiform tablets and papyri to newspapers and radio had either spatial or temporal biases that influenced how regimes of power extended their monopolies over the dissemination of knowledge.³⁸ At times, Innis spoke of technologies as oriented towards the eye or the ear as shorthand for their spatial or temporal orientations. But in an idiosyncratic variation on contemporary mass culture theory, Innis concerned himself less with the innate characteristics of technologies than with the processes by which various regimes of power drew peripheries into their spheres of influence through the spatial expansion of communications, often at the expense of temporal continuity. The commercialism of contemporary media in the U.S. concerned Innis in particular because advertisers drove the search for a large readership, listenership, or viewership in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.³⁹ Whatever producers actually provided for their audience, their

³⁸ For overviews of Innis' contribution, see Daniel J. Czitrom, "Metahistory, Mythology, and the Media: The American Thought of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan," in *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); James Carey, "Space, Time, and Communications: A Tribute to Harold Innis," in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Judith Stamps, *Unthinking Modernity: Innis, McLuhan, and the Frankfurt School* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Alexander John Watson, *Marginal Man: The Dark Vision of Harold Innis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); and Jody Berland, "Space at the Margins: Colonial Spatiality and Critical Theory After Innis," 65-97 in *North of Empire: Essays on the Cultural Technologies of Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

³⁹ For more statements of the constitutive centrality of advertising to the mass media establishment in the U.S., see Ohmann, *Selling Culture*; and for radio in particular, Smulyan, *Selling Radio*; Streeter, *Selling the Air*; and Taylor,

funding mechanisms mattered more to the ultimate meaning of their communication infrastructure than the content itself. No matter how much audiences might enjoy what they consumed, their alienation from the means of production and circulation put them at a structural remove from the mechanisms of mass culture. This separation of production from consumption meant that “those on the receiving end of material from a mechanized central system are precluded from participation in healthy, vigorous, and vital discussion,” which thus eroded democratic participation in the political system even as it drew more people into relations with media organizations.⁴⁰ For Innis then, communications held the key not only to the economic history of the twentieth century, but to its political culture throughout North America as well.

McLuhan elaborated Innis’ typology of spatially and temporally based media in a comprehensive if often frustrating attempt to understand the sensory nature of modernity itself. During the 1960s, in works like *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) he posited that the shift from medieval manuscripts, read aloud and passed down from generation to generation, to the far flung world of the printing press, read in silence by individuals at great distances from one another, not only heralded the rise of mechanization, but the rewiring of human consciousness towards an overly visual orientation.⁴¹ In one particularly bold public statement about the far-reaching consequences of the Gutenberg Galaxy, he argued:

The Sounds of Capitalism. Innis also feared that the dominance of U.S. culture industries worldwide drew his native country into a colonial relationship with its southern neighbor after a brief period of cultural independence from Britain. In his terms, Canada had “moved from colony to nation to colony.” See especially Harold Innis, “Great Britain, The United States, and Canada,” and “The Strategy of Culture,” in *Changing Concepts of Time* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004 [1952]).

⁴⁰ Harold Innis, “The Press, a Neglected Factor in the Economic History of the Twentieth Century,” in *Changing Concepts of Time* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004 [1952]), 89.

⁴¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (New York: Signet, 1962). In addition to many of the secondary works on Innis that treat McLuhan as well, I’ve been guided through McLuhan’s output through Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*; Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989); Stamps, *Unthinking Modernity*; Glenn Willmott, *McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Janine Marchessault, *Marshall McLuhan: Cosmic Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005).

The new medium of linear, uniform, repeatable type reproduced information in unlimited quantities and at hitherto-impossible speeds, thus assuring the eye a position of total predominance in man's sensorium. As a drastic extension of man, it shaped and transformed his entire environment, psychic and social, and was directly responsible for the rise of such disparate phenomena as nationalism, the Reformation, the assembly line and its offspring, the Industrial Revolution, the whole concept of causality, Cartesian and Newtonian concepts of the universe, perspective in art, narrative chronology in literature and a psychological mode of introspection or inner direction that greatly intensified the tendencies toward individualism and specialization engendered 2000 years before by phonetic literacy.⁴²

McLuhan's theologically motivated "audiovisual litany," in Jonathan Sterne's term, imagined an integrated prelapsarian subject attuned to cyclical rhythms and polyphonic perspectives whose ears atrophied with the rise of mechanization and print which brought linear time, rationality, and singular points of view passed on from those in power.⁴³ Because readers could not speak back, its fundamental mechanisms "bred passive consumers" far removed from the integrated and embodied processes of meaning-making based in orality and aurality.⁴⁴

Hope, however, lay in forms and technologies that turned back the tide and restored a sense of involvement among the audience, as he argued in *Understanding Media* (1964). While Innis heard radio's appeal as an expansion of commercialism to the realm of the ear, since broadcasters sold time to advertisers across wide swaths of space, McLuhan held out the

⁴² "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," *Playboy*, March 1969. The relevant portion of the interview appears online at http://www.mcluhanmedia.com/m_mcl_inter_pb_02.html (accessed February 16, 2016).

⁴³ Other contemporary iterations of McLuhan's argument include the classicist Eric Havelock and the Jesuit scholar Walter Ong's studies of the differences between orality and literacy Ong. See Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963); Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word, Some Prolegomena For Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967); and Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982). In the latter, Ong recapitulates the argument that "sight isolates, sound incorporates" (72) as central to his sensorial cosmology. Martin Jay, however, suggests that the identification of "Renaissance notions of perspective in the visual arts and Cartesian ideas of subjective rationality in philosophy" as a hegemonic "scopic regime" has missed the fact that possible meanings behind these modes of seeing were always one among many. The "beholder" could just as well be fragmented, involved, irregular, and open to different meanings and not simply a unified subject apprehending the world at large from above. See Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," 3-23 in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988). Quote from 4.

⁴⁴ Stamps, *Unthinking Modernity*, 131.

possibility that aural media could reintegrate audiences into the production process. Instead of Innis' tendency to criticize mass media from a moral perspective, McLuhan sought to understand the ways in which "artistic creation is the playback of ordinary experience" for most listeners and viewers.⁴⁵ Rather than simply transmitting content to passive consumers, he felt that technologies like tape and transistor radios allowed listeners to carve out acoustic spaces for themselves and involve themselves in processes of creating meaning out of the products of mass media.⁴⁶ His well-known aphorism, "the medium is the message" spoke to this downplaying of production in favor of reception. No matter what the audience said (or heard, for that matter), its ability to speak back reversed hundreds of years of Western history and could bring forth a "global village" of communal feeling among the technologically integrated.

Read charitably, McLuhan's trajectory from culture industry critic to celebratory media guru tapped into the larger shift from condemnation to celebration in intellectuals' interpretations of popular culture documented by Daniel Horowitz as described above. Though his politics ran much more conservative than the likes of Stuart Hall, since McLuhan was more interested in returning to a mythical pre-industrial state through new technologies, his theories were influenced by and influential to the hobbyists and researchers described in this project, many of whom were less sanguine about the potential for mass media to be participatory. More relevant for what comes next, he developed much of his theoretical framework through an engagement with a variety of artistic and literary texts. For McLuhan, as for Tony Schwartz, as for Glenn

⁴⁵ "Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan."

⁴⁶ Recapitulating his grand metahistorical argument with reference to recorded sound, for instance, McLuhan argued, "The brief and compressed history of the phonograph includes all phases of the written, printed, and the mechanized word. It was the advent of the electric tape recorder that only a few years ago released the phonograph from its temporary involvement in mechanical culture," in part because of its "acceptance of multiple facets and planes in a single experience," through multitrack recording and stereo separation, rather than the "fixed point of view" of the gramophone. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964) 243, 247.

Gould, as for R. Murray Schafer, and as for the Tape-beatles, the politics of sight and sound could only be revealed through an engagement with aesthetic practices.

*** Aesthetics of Active Listening ***

The notion that aesthetic practices could alter the perceptual dynamics of listening, and with them, the structural relation between producing and consuming culture, was not unique to the hobbyist tapers and sonic researchers of this project. For Tony Schwartz and the recordists of the World Soundscape Project, magnetic tape afforded the possibility to take recorders out of studios and into urban and rural settings to closely listen to oft-ignored sounds of everyday life, while the Tape-beatles believed it necessary to attend to the sonic characteristics of mass media through their recording practice. The idea of using “real world” sounds, whether through the incorporation of non-traditional sounds in composition, through tape recorders brought outside of studios, or through the use of popular songs created its own set of aesthetic and philosophical opportunities with regards to the politics of active listening. These artistic strategies might serve to heighten one’s attention to already existing sounds that were not typically in the purview of the recording industry, while at other times, they might serve to make the common sounds of that industry unfamiliar through manipulation. “The whole conflict between (and the whole shuffling of) the notions of event and representation and of work and fruition,” argues musicologist Sérgio Freire, “indicate a new aesthetic experience for the ear, one in which listeners are called upon to participate more actively in the definition of their object of contemplation.”⁴⁷ What was common throughout such aesthetic practices was the notion that the work of art should serve as invitation for those on the receiving end to participate in the construction of meaning.

⁴⁷ Sérgio Freire, “Early Musical Impressions from Both Sides of the Loudspeaker,” trans. Carlos Palombini, *Leonardo Music Journal* 13 (2003): 70.

Before outlining the specific sonic approaches of this dissertation's main actors, it is useful to briefly elaborate some of the main aesthetic and philosophical debates among artists over the potential for magnetic tape to reorient listening after World War II, especially among the followers of Pierre Schaeffer and John Cage, because people like R. Murray Schafer and the Tape-beatles often referred to such strategies in their practice. Musical composers, performers, visual artists, and media theorists embraced the technical possibilities opened up by the tape recorder and other electronic technologies in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in their ability to disturb the familiar through the use of recorded sound in compositions.

In part, the treatment of recorded sound as material for new compositions echoed earlier debates about the capacity for collage strategies to involve viewers in the process of interpreting art. Cutting and pasting material from one source to another ran throughout twentieth century visual art from Cubism to Futurism to Dada to Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art to Fluxus to Post-Modernist Appropriation Art and beyond. Though the meaning of the practice shifted from one context to the next, the technique itself, wrote Harold Rosenberg in an influential essay, “brings to an end the age-old separation between the realm of art and the realm of things.” In the age of art's mechanical reproducibility, wherein technological processes of reproduction allowed for the dissemination of artistic products beyond their original contexts, and in the process, according to Walter Benjamin, discarded the sacred “aura” of the original, what was to distinguish the mass reproduced work of art from the ephemeral detritus of everyday consumer life, from newspapers or wallpaper to subway tickets or photographs?⁴⁸ For Rosenberg, this condition created the impetus for collage, since “art no longer copies nature or

⁴⁸ Benjamin was especially interested in film montage as explored in the next paragraph, but he also argued that Dadaists achieved ‘a ruthless annihilation of the aura in every object they produced, which they rebranded as a reproduction through the very means of its production.’ See Benjamin, “The Work of Art: Second Version,” 39.

seeks equivalents to it; an expression of the advanced industrial age, it appropriates the external world on the basis that it is already partly changed into art.”⁴⁹ Incorporating multiple disjunctive materials onto the same canvas, however, was not only about using the materials at hand to reevaluate the relationship between art and everyday life. It also asked viewers to make meaning out of disparate material and to consider the relation between elements whose provenance spanned the boundaries of time and place, and in the process, sought to transform the relation between artists and viewers.⁵⁰

Although in theory collage allowed a viewer to apprehend all the disparate elements on the canvas or sculpture at the same time, practitioners argued that sonic art’s unfolding in time created different challenges and opportunities. As a result, the aesthetic manipulation of recognizable materials from everyday life on tape drew on techniques from film montage as much as visual collage. As two time-based media, both film and tape allowed for meaning to accrue from the juxtaposition of materials one after another, which, like other forms of visual collage, raised questions about who exactly did the interpretive work of putting the pieces together. For Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s and 1930s like Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, montage provided a democratizing technique in which producers and consumers collaborated on the construction of meaning out of the combination of images in sequence, making the whole more than the sum of its individual parts. The result, according to Eisenstein, was that:

Each spectator creates an image along the representational guidance suggested by the author, leading him unswervingly towards knowing and experiencing the theme in accordance with his own personality, in his own individual way, proceeding from his own experience, from his own imagination, from the texture of his associations, from the features of his own character, temper, and social

⁴⁹ Harold Rosenberg, “Collage: Philosophy of Put-Togethers,” 61 in *Collage: Critical Views*, ed. Katherine Hoffman (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1989). Essay originally published in 1975.

⁵⁰ See also Monica Kjellman-Chapin, “Traces, Layers, and Palimpsests: The Dialogics of Collage and Pastiche,” *Konsthistorisk tidskrif / Journal of Art History* 75:2 (2006): 86-99.

status. The image is at one and the same time the creation of the author and the spectator.⁵¹

Already in 1925, before the technology existed that reliably allowed him to do so on film, Vertov foresaw a future in which montage techniques could be applied to sound. Through the recording of “every rustle, every whisper, the sound of a waterfall, a public speaker’s address,” in short, the “audible facts” of daily life, he argued, “man will be able to broadcast to the entire world the visual and auditory phenomena recorded by the radio-movie camera. We must prepare to turn these inventions of the capitalist world to its own destruction,” as he believed film montage had begun to allow.⁵² Whether listeners to subsequent sonic montages recognized the original materials as part of their daily lives or not, the process of trying to identify them, keeping them in mind as one sound gave way to another, and working to assemble meaning through the juxtapositions involved listeners in the meaning-making process.⁵³

While earlier composers from Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo, French composer Carol-Bérard, and American composer Henry Cowell all advocated for the use of noise and recorded music among composers from the 1910s to the 1930s, magnetic tape expanded the practice dramatically after World War II.⁵⁴ The French composer Pierre Schaeffer’s lifelong attempt to articulate a theory of “concrete music” combined an emphasis on recording, manipulating, and listening to sound removed from its originary context. Rather than seeing the separation of sound

⁵¹ Sergei Eisenstein quoted in Katharine Norman, “Real-World Music as Composed Listening,” 2 in *Poetry of Reality: Composing With Recorded Sound*, ed. Katharine Norman, (Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 9.

⁵² Vertov quoted in Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 141. Another example of early sonic montage was the German director Walter Ruttmann’s “movie without images,” *Weekend* from 1930. Freire, “Early Musical Impressions from Both Sides of the Loudspeaker,” 69.

⁵³ For an extended discussion of listening strategies as they relate to sonic montage, see for example, Norman, “Real-World Music as Composed Listening,” 11-18.

⁵⁴ For documents related to this earlier history, see *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History of Early Phonograph, Cinema, and Radio*, eds. Timothy D. Taylor, Mark Katz, and Tony Grajeda (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

from its source as a problem, Schaeffer believed it could heighten perceptual capacities of listeners as long as composers actively worked to sever the referentiality of what he called the sound object. Working as a radio engineer at public broadcaster Radiodiffusion Française's studios in the 1940s, Schaeffer had access to multiple turntables, mixers, microphones, and most importantly prior to the use of tape, disc lathes to record sounds of everyday objects in real time. The purpose was not to elevate everyday sounds to the status of art, but instead to begin the compositional process on the basis of concrete materials. Where most art music began from an abstracted written score that served as a blueprint for performers, Schaeffer wanted to begin with sound itself. Once composers recorded sounds, they could begin to manipulate them as they wished in order to create something new, and tape facilitated that process. For instance, if one struck a bell, but edited out the moment of impact, the resulting sound would be an ethereal and sustained drone that could be difficult to place for listeners, and that sound could itself be looped or sped up or slowed down or played in reverse. In short, it could become the substance for future imaginative works on the part of the composer.⁵⁵

While Schaeffer's concrete music sought to transform the production process for musical composition, his ultimate goal was to shift modes of listening away from an emphasis on referentiality. If one listened without *seeing* the source of a sound, one could attend to its sonic characteristics without being concerned with placing its origins in time and space. Drawing on a myth about the followers of Pythagoras, who were said to listen to his teachings while he spoke behind a veil or curtain, Schaeffer began to speak of "acousmatic" sound as a purer form of sonic

⁵⁵ To formalize his process, he established the *Groupe de Recherche de Musique Concrète* in 1951, which became the *Groupe de Recherche Musicales* (GRM) in 1958. Artists associated with the BBC Radiophonic Workshop (established in 1956) such as Daphne Oram and Delia Derbyshire produced many similar kinds of experiments with tape. For more on Schaeffer, see Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 109-114; Joanna Demers, *Listening Through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

experience. Positing a transhistorical link between the Pythagorean veil and the variety of new recording and transmission technologies available during the postwar period, Schaeffer wrote in 1966: “In ancient times, the apparatus was a curtain; today, it is radio and the methods of reproduction, with the whole set of electro-acoustic transformations, that place us, modern listeners to an invisible voice, under similar circumstances.”⁵⁶ There was nothing about the acousmatic situation that necessarily directed listeners towards the quality of sound itself. In everyday listening to records, radio, or television, for instance, curiosity might lead listeners to imagine musicians playing instruments in a recording studio on the other end, or think of political figures quoted in news stories, or otherwise try to place the sounds they heard. But when composers worked to remove the referents through their manipulation of tape, they forced the acousmatic listener into a condition of “reduced listening.” This condition, drawn from Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological theory of bracketing, did not reduce listeners’ capacity to apprehend the sonic qualities of any given sound, but instead liberated the listener from attempts to locate the origins of the sound by denying any possibility of referentiality. Even if concrete materials could never be entirely estranged from their sources, followers contended that the very attempt to make the source unrecognizable made listeners direct their perceptual capacities to placing the original sound, and thus made them active participants in the construction of meaning from the estranged material. “The more mysterious the material,” argues composer and musicologist Katherine Norman, “the more ambitious our perceptual reconstruction and the more varied the relationships we are willing to entertain.”⁵⁷ So for Schaeffer and his followers, then, recorded music was most powerful in expanding sonic vocabularies for artists and in creating the

⁵⁶ Quoted in Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 24. Originally in Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 91.

⁵⁷ Norman, “Real-World Music as Composed Listening,” 9.

possibility for directed listening to composed electroacoustic works, and not necessarily for transforming listeners' relationship to all sound in their daily lives.

No fan of recorded music, John Cage nevertheless explored the possibilities for the incorporation of recorded music into his compositions at an early point in his artistic development as a means to direct listeners to attend to the world outside the concert hall. In part, his objection to recorded music had to do with the difference between the forced attention of listeners who knew they might hear something once versus the possibility of distraction when listeners heard the same pieces of music repeatedly. It was harder, he believed, for sound to become mere background music when heard only once.⁵⁸ At times his work approached Schaeffer's concrete music, but his greatest concern was with the abolition of boundaries between music and sound, art and life, composition and performance, production and consumption. Cage's goal was not to give composers complete control over their artistic processes, nor to embrace the sounds of mass media, but to open listeners' ears to the possibility of turning all sound into music.⁵⁹

The purpose here was not merely to listen to recorded sound differently, but instead to reconceptualize what could be considered noise, sound, music, or silence. At the same time as Cage was furiously at work assembling his ambitious tape collage *Williams Mix* (1952), pianist David Tutor premiered Cage's most famous (and infamous) piece *4'33"* in Woodstock, New

⁵⁸ In this, Cage disagreed vehemently with the Gouldian position outlined in "The Prospects of Recording." Gould held out hope that the use of experimental compositional modes in popular music as in the use of atonalism in horror films or electronic music in science fiction films allowed its methods to become cliché, and in the process, part of the common language of consumers. "Because it can infiltrate our lives from so many different angles," Gould wrote, "the cliché residue of all the idioms employed in background becomes an intuitive part of our musical vocabulary." See Gould, "The Prospects of Recording," 60-62. On Cage's differences with Gould over background music and much else, see David Grubbs, *Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, the Sixties, and Sound Recording* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 73-81.

⁵⁹ Both the five-part *Imaginary Landscapes* series (1939 to 1952) and the tape collage *Williams Mix* (1952) were crucial examples of this strategy.

York. Tutor performed each of the three movements by sitting at the piano, lifting its cover at the beginning of a movement, closing it at the end, and starting again without playing a note the entire time. Rather than producing silence, the piece put the unintentional ambient sounds of the concert hall front and center, including sounds generated by the audience. If silence as such was impossible, then all sound could be attended to as music, as long as listeners focused their attention on them, often at the expense of mass media productions.⁶⁰

Cage was not always concerned with Schaeffer's denial of referentiality through reduced listening, but his conceptually oriented practice allowed for the incorporation of all sound into the realm of music. This aesthetic and philosophical move paved the way for a wide variety of works that used recognizable material on tape as an alternative method of active listening for subsequent experimental musicians in the 1960s and 1970s. The works of ONCE Festival founders Robert Ashley and Gordon Mumma in Ann Arbor, artists associated with the San Francisco Tape Music Center like Steve Reich, Terry Riley, or Pauline Oliveros, or works like James Tenney's *Blue Suede (Collage #1)* (1961), Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting In a Room* (1969), or ex-GRM member Luc Ferrari's *Presque rien n°1 ou le lever du jour au bord de la mer* (1970), all presented and represented taped sounds of recognizable materials as a means to explore the sonic possibilities of the medium.⁶¹ Whether experimenting with techniques like tape looping

⁶⁰ Douglas Kahn argues that Cage's "emblematic silence was founded on a silencing of communications technologies, that he diminished and eradicated the sociality of the sounds of the auditive mass media throughout the 1950s and 1960s [...] or that a shift toward listening occurred as listening became more of a consumerist imperative." Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 199.

⁶¹ On the ONCE Festival, see Leta E. Miller, "ONCE and Again: The Evolution of a Legendary Festival," liner notes to *Music From the ONCE Festival 1961-1966*, New World Records, 80567-2, 5XCD, 2003; Ralf Dietrich, "ONCE and the Sixties," 169-186 in *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kyle Gann, *Robert Ashley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Gordon Mumma, *Cybersonic Arts: Adventures in American New Music*, ed. Michelle Fillion (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015); for the history of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, see *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde*, ed. David W. Bernstein (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); and on Ferrari, see Eric Drott, "The Politics of *Presque Rien*," 145-166 in *Sound Commitments*. See also Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*; Demers, *Listening Through the Noise*.

and phasing, with live tape feedback experiments, or using popular music or relatively unmediated field recordings as source material for compositions, such composers drew on the Cagean ethos to listen broadly, to interrogate the boundaries among composers, performers, and audience, or between art and everyday life.

For both Tony Schwartz and the World Soundscape Project, attending to the entirety of the “soundscape” by bringing tape recorders outdoors and recording the sounds of either ignored urban communities or the “natural” environment offered a sonic alternative to the offerings of culture industries, and allowed listeners to contemplate sounds from other realms of human existence in a more active way. Though Schwartz’s initial motivations came from the progressive politics of his New York upbringing, and Schafer’s from a melding of Cagean artistic practice and the burgeoning West Coast environmental movement in Canada, both imagined tape as an inducement for listeners to pay closer attention to the sounds of their daily lives. While they certainly manipulated their recorded material in important ways documented in the chapters below, their intention was to produce relatively unmediated documentary recordings of the world as it was.

As opposed to the relatively transparent recording practices of Schwartz and the World Soundscape Project, the techniques of “sound on sound” and multitrack recording onto tape allowed producers to layer sounds both atop one another and in sequence, creating further chains of signification for listeners to untangle akin to visual collage.⁶² Though artists could record their own materials to manipulate, this ability to reproduce and layer different sounds opened the

⁶² In a tape context, “sound on sound” refers to a process for adding sonic layers to a tape without the use of multiple tracks on the tape itself. In short, one records a sound on tape, plays it again into another recorder, and adds sounds to the new recording in a process that can be repeated over and over. Multitrack recording, meanwhile, allows for the separation of different elements onto different tracks of the same tape. Rather than having to repeat the playback and recording functions, multitrack recording allows for the introduction of multiple elements at the same time, provided they are patched into different inputs on the recorder or mixing board.

possibility of repurposing the products of the recording industry into new contexts. If popular music had become as much an unavoidable part of everyday life by the 1970s and 1980s as the newspapers and subway tickets used by Dada collagists fifty years earlier, whether one decided to seek it out or not, artists like John Oswald and Negativland believed they had the right to use and manipulate the sources of the culture industries. The artistic appropriation of such materials, both in “art music” and popular contexts like hip hop, raised questions about authorship, the distributed agency involved in the creative process, and the legality of using copyrighted works for the basis of new compositions.⁶³

As we will see, however, such questions also revolved around the continued efforts of cultural producers to use technologies of magnetic reproduction to produce active listening situations for those on the receiving end of their works. While the language of active participation ran throughout the long history of aesthetic production in the twentieth century, the recurrence of such strategies also raised difficult questions for those trying not to recapitulate narratives of false consciousness among mass culture consumers, even as artists might try to activate audiences *through* mass culture. Invoking aesthetic theorist Jacques Rancière, art historian Claire Bishop suggests that “the binary of active/passive always ends up in a deadlock: either a disparagement of the spectator because he does nothing, while the performers on stage do something – or the converse claim that those who act are inferior to those who are able to

⁶³ Many works address the history of artistic appropriation in relation to copyright law, such as Jane Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Siva Vaidyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How it Threatens Creativity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Joanna Demers, *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Affects Musical Creativity* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Lewis Hyde, *Common as Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010); Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli, “I Collage, Therefore I Am: An Introduction to *Cutting Across Media*,” 1-23 in *Cutting Across Media: Appropriation Art, Interventionist Collage, and Copyright Law*, eds. Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

look, contemplate ideas, and have critical distance on the world.”⁶⁴ These tensions were not merely hashed out in the context of performances in galleries or concert halls, but also in the homes of hobbyists and tape enthusiasts who hoped to use those technologies to create active listening situations for their own purposes, and had been doing so since the late 1940s. It is with their story that this project begins.

*** Listening to Active Listeners ***

As a work of history rather than musicology, this project integrates formal aesthetic analysis of recordings produced via tape with deeply contextual readings of the circumstances in which they arose. Deciding on both the appropriate listening practices and the appropriate historical frame has not always been self-evident from the material, and many of my arguments unfold from these contextual decisions. Like other historical documents, audio recordings both index events that happened in specific times and places and are subject to forms of revision and transformation that make them unreliable as transparent reflections of the past. They also have the added difficulty of requiring the translation of sounds to the written word, which often relies on assumptions regarding cause and effect that cannot always be neatly resolved. Hypothetically speaking, if the sound of footsteps on a recording seems to increase in volume, is this because the footsteps moved closer to the microphone when they were recorded, or because the recordist chose to increase the volume of the footsteps in the editing process? How confident can we be, moreover, that these are even the sound of footsteps, rather than say, the rhythmic tapping of wood on concrete meant to mimic footsteps? Even when transcribing spoken words, the qualities of the speech, the character of the environment in which they were recorded, or the sequential

⁶⁴ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), 37-38.

editing choices might be just as important to the meaning conveyed as the words themselves, but choosing which of these sonic characteristics to emphasize in the descriptive text presents many of the same challenges.⁶⁵

While recognizing such difficulties, trying to keep both process and final result in mind while listening, transcribing, and describing the recorded material here has offered one way to disentangle the thorny issue of truth claims with reference to these sounds. Regardless of my underlying skepticism towards the politics of active listening propounded by the advocates of tape technologies, particularly with regards to the assumption of passivity that undergirded their aesthetic and political approaches, my own strategy here has in fact been to listen closely and listen repeatedly to the sounds I discuss. Taking cues from art historian Jennifer Roberts' invitation to decelerate thinking by immersing oneself in artistic material in order to grasp and make sense of easily missed aesthetic details, listening repeatedly while transcribing words, describing sonic sequences, and tracking down references often opened interpretive possibilities unavailable to me at first listen.⁶⁶

The fact that tape allows artists to record and manipulate sounds from outside sources has led me to try to pursue as referential a mode of listening as possible throughout this project. At the risk of replicating Schafer's schema of "schizophonic" sound and upholding the fundamental distinction between ordinary sonic events and fixed recorded sounds, I've felt it important in this context to try to identify the original source materials in my descriptions of hobbyist and artistic recordings, as I did with the radio program that opens this introduction. In part, such a

⁶⁵ For a helpful discussion of the difficult relation between sonic causation and fixation from a post-Schaefferian perspective, see Michel Chion, *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*, trans. James A. Steintrager (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016 [2010]), especially 121-127.

⁶⁶ Jennifer L. Roberts, "The Power of Patience: Teaching Students the Value of Deceleration and Immersive Attention," *Harvard Magazine*, November-December 2013, 40-43. Reproduced online at <http://harvardmag.com/pdf/2013/11-pdfs/1113-40.pdf>

choice is justified by the fact that the three main subjects, Tony Schwartz, the World Soundscape Project, and the Tape-beatles all used tape as a representational medium to varying extents. These were, with noted exceptions, non-Schaefferian recordings. Their producers wanted their listeners to know that the sounds they recorded had “real world” referents, whether they originally produced the recordings themselves, or whether they recorded sounds coming over their radios. Even when they intentionally kept the source material a mystery to potential listeners, trying to track down the referents has helped me to reconstruct both their contextual milieus and production processes, which were often key to their listening philosophies. To the extent possible, then, I try to refer back to the nature or source of the original sounds. When I use normative language to describe recorded sounds, it is typically in an attempt to make analytical arguments about the perspective of the recordists, rather than an elucidation of my own sonic preferences.

Beyond any sense of responsibility to the aesthetic choices of the artists involved, trying to track down the original sounds has also contributed to my ability to situate recordists in their appropriate historical contexts. Figuring out the source for these original materials has not been easy for various reasons, some of which have to do with the specific historical conjuncture that made these productions possible in the first place. The sheer ubiquity and anonymity of mass cultural production that made actors want to respond with their own audio pieces makes it increasingly difficult to identify the original sources and referents for listeners today. Moreover, few of the recordings of media provided citations of any kind for their sources. In the case of political speeches or commercials, I could try to find the originals by transcribing and searching for specific quotes transcribed elsewhere, but otherwise, I’ve relied on the available context to describe the material in this text. Occasionally, when artists used and manipulated popular songs

beyond recognition for their pieces, I was able to use open-source sound editing software like Audacity to try to reconstruct the originals for descriptive purposes. For example, if a piece sounded sped up, slowed down, or played backwards, Audacity allowed me to reverse the process. When songs were recognizable but still unknown to me, I tried isolating clips for the Shazam music recognition application to help with the identification. For the purposes of transparency, I've tried to be clear in the footnotes when I used these various techniques to identify the materials.

In cases where Schwartz or the researchers at the World Soundscape Project recorded their own materials onto tape, I've tried to be as specific as possible about the context for the sounds they recorded. On Schwartz's recordings for Folkways, the liner notes often spoke in general terms about the locations, people, or machines that could be heard, but cross-referencing Schwartz's own descriptions with other materials from his archive or published sources has at times allowed me to be more precise about his process. Meanwhile, though most of my sonic analysis of the WSP is based on their LPs and radio programs, the group's online database includes the original digitized source tapes with annotated remarks about their provenance. Since they often presented their final recordings as transparent demonstrations of their methodological concepts, turning to the source tapes occasionally provided insight into the assumptions undergirding their presentation in finished releases.

*** Chapter Outline ***

The first chapter begins by exploring the early history of magnetic recording to explain the emergence of hobbyism as a response to mass culture debates of the post-World War II era. Using marketing materials and hobbyist magazines rather than recordings themselves, it explores

the early history of tape from the perspective of those struggling to make the machines commercially successful in the home consumer market and those who took up the hobby enthusiastically. Although marketers fought against the perception that tape technology was difficult to use, this very perception led intellectuals and hobbyist enthusiasts alike to see tape as a salutary means for discerning listeners to assert their difference from mass culture audiences. As early adopters of a technology that struggled to break through into a mass consumer market, white middle-class male hobbyists—and the tape manufacturers that sought their disposable income—played a critical role in disseminating the idea that new magnetic recording technologies required the active participation of users to combat the alienating features of other popular media. Relying on gendered language that associated listening to the radio, purchasing records, or watching television with undesirable feminine qualities, members of the hobbyist tape subculture tapped into discourses animating concurrent “high fidelity” and “do-it-yourself” cultures in the 1950s to emphasize the ideological benefits of independence, creativity, discernment, and above all, a rejection of passivity in favor of active listening. Even when the cost of magnetic recording technologies dropped in subsequent decades with the introduction of the cassette tape, and the medium grew in accessibility and popularity, the elitist high fidelity framework of active listening through a discerning engagement with tape continued to play an outsized role in setting the assumptions for home tapers in the following decades.

Although the actors in subsequent chapters overlapped to varying degrees with the hobbyist profile outlined in chapter one, they also sought to use magnetic recording devices to enact political goals out of step with the aspirations of those hobbyists. The second and third chapters shift from this wide overview of hobbyism to explore the life and early recordings (both archival and commercially released) of Tony Schwartz, a tape hobbyist, audio documentary

producer for New York radio stations and Folkways Records, advertiser, and lay media theorist. To the extent that Schwartz is well-known today, it is typically as a result of his recordings of New York City streets in the 1950s and the media theories that were influential within advertising circles after he became friends with Marshall McLuhan in the late 1960s. Prior to such works, however, Schwartz was deeply connected to the wide social world of the city's progressive cultural producers, explored in chapter two. After growing up in the leftist hotbed of Mohegan Colony near Peekskill, NY in the 1930s, Schwartz moved to Midtown Manhattan to establish his livelihood in print advertising. At the same time, he developed a magnetic recording hobby with discernable connections to the Popular Front of New York City in the late 1940s, particularly in terms of its folk music wing. Influenced by the anti-fascist position central to this political formation, Schwartz worried about the media's ability to shape public opinion in the United States by repeating anti-communist messages over and over again to passive listeners. With the use of his wire and tape recorders, he subverted anti-communism in the news media by recording and repeating its messages alongside the sounds of Nazi Germany and what he heard as latent fascism closer to home in the case of the 1949 Peekskill riots. Repeating the messages of anti-communists with a critical ear, he also sought to amplify the voices of those silenced through blacklists by recording and transmitting the voices of Popular Front favorites like Paul Robeson and Henry Wallace.

When those same anti-communist blacklists made such overt demonstrations of political solidarity with the U.S. left more precarious for people like Schwartz, he continued to bring the populist politics of the Popular Front to bear through a series of 1950s sonic documentaries for Folkways Records, the subject of chapter three. In part because of his relative independence as a hobbyist producer who did not need to rely on sales or state support to express himself, Schwartz

imagined magnetic tape as a means to overcome the power of dominant culture industries to decide what merited recording. Taking his tape recorder out of the studio and into the streets, nightclubs, or apartments of his New York neighborhood, he not only wanted to challenge nearby recording studios' silencing of unintended noise, but also to give voice to those excluded from them, especially on his 1954 album *New York 19*. Here, rather than highlight the ways in which recording technologies could manipulate listeners, Schwartz emphasized the capacity of the tape recorder to capture the entirety of the urban sonic environment. Hearing cars rumble past while hawkers pitched their wares or street musicians plied their craft in the streets was more important to Schwartz than bringing them into quieter surroundings. Bridging the gap between international hobbyist tapers and New York's leftist arts and folklore community, Schwartz continued to be critical of the culture industries' sonic choices even as he tried to transform them through his recording practices. Rather than an entirely anti-commercial stance, then, his recordings subtly evinced a hope that like-minded folklorists could work within the city's culture industries to transform them along more inclusive lines.

Schwartz often downplayed his connections to professional folklorists and other artists in the city in an effort to argue that any and all hobbyists could employ tape recorders to capture the sounds of their own cities. The increasing availability of tape recorders, he hoped, might yet allow for non-professionals to break down the boundaries between the production and consumption of sound by actively documenting their own sonic environments, even as he himself became a professional in the field of sound recording during the 1960s. By the end of that decade, he combined his experience in sound design with his growing friendship with Marshall McLuhan to elucidate a theory of involved listening markedly different from his earliest recordings. Instead of believing that sheer repetition could convince otherwise skeptical

listeners of the merits of any political position, he came to argue that messages only stuck when they resonated with perspectives already held by listeners.

Like Schwartz, R. Murray Schafer too was influenced by McLuhan, as he believed that the sensory balance of North American society continued to favor the eye over the ear. A composer and educator by trade, Schafer did not begin his engagement with tape as a hobbyist like Schwartz, but instead as a post-Cagean artist worried that mechanized society risked making silence impossible to find. When he arrived at Simon Fraser University in suburban Vancouver in the mid-1960s, Schafer concerned himself with documenting the sonic environment of his new city with the hopes of improving its acoustic design, and established the World Soundscape Project to do so. Many of Schafer and the WSP's terms, from "soundscape" and "acoustic ecology" to "schizophonic" sound have entered the critical lexicon of musicology and sound studies, but little analysis has considered the group's sonic output, particularly *The Vancouver Soundscape* double LP record and the ten-part public radio series *Soundscape of Canada*. Despite the similarities between Pierre Schaeffer's "acousmatic condition" and Schafer's "schizophonic" sound, which both asserted that modern technologies fundamentally separated sound from their source, the WSP approached tape as a means to *enhance* the contextual integrity of recorded sound, rather than to impose an acousmatic situation on listeners. Like Schwartz, then, Schafer and his researchers believed that tape recorders should capture the entirety of the sonic environment by capturing and listening to all sounds, not simply those produced within professional recording studios.

While Schwartz's recordings can be understood as a precursor to the soundscape compositions of the WSP, attending to the radically different context for the emergence of the WSP's project reveals important discontinuities between these different means of recording the

sonic environment. Shifting from the populist politics of mid-century New York to the burgeoning environmental movement on Canada's west coast from the late 1960s, then, chapter four documents the WSP's use of tape to record the perceived threat of noise pollution and to amplify the silenced sounds of the natural environment. Expanding their scale of analysis from Schwartz's urban neighborhood to that of the nation at large, the WSP wanted to reorient Canadian society away from the eye towards the ear along McLuhanite lines. But where McLuhan was optimistic about the potential for new technologies to give voice to cultural consumers, Schafer believed that aural literacy needed to be taught as part of a larger effort to repel the imperializing influence of mass culture from the United States. Instead of proposing the use of tape as an empowering means for consumers to respond to the culture industries or the everyday sounds around them, the WSP used tape to educate listeners about *its* critical terms of analysis, which emphasized the holism of "natural" sound as opposed to the mechanized noise of contemporary North American society. Their use of professional-grade recording devices bolstered by the resources of a research university and funded through philanthropic organizations was thus of a piece with much of the environmental movement's elite orientation. Active listening for Schafer and the WSP was often less about hearing the world with open ears and empowering them to produce their own material, and more about learning how to pay attention to its sonic wonders and deficiencies through the ears of educated experts.

Although their writings had many disdainful words for the "vulgar" and "imperializing" sounds of popular culture, the WSP evinced little interest in working with and through those same sounds in their own recordings. Instead, they presented them as self-evident blights on the contemporary soundscape, even when they used recordings and their access to the national broadcaster in order to do so. For those similarly concerned about the impact of an increasingly

centralized mass media landscape on consumers, but who wanted to confront it head on, the totality of sounds coming over radios, record players, and television sets was not simply to be avoided. The media soundscape could instead provide the raw material for an active listening practice put together on reel-to-reel tapes and distributed through a transnational cassette trading network that attempted to stand resolutely outside the framework of mass media. By the 1980s and early 1990s, the diffusion of tape technology allowed home tapers and networking artists to connect with one another directly through the postal system. Gathering names and addresses from mailing lists, self-produced zines, and non-commercial college radio stations, they attempted to develop an autonomous production and distribution structure for decentralized cultural producers working outside of both mass media industries and the rarified gatekeeping structures of the art establishment. Operating in the cracks of culture industries, art galleries and magazines, and institutional settings like research universities, the Tape-beatles in Iowa City, the subjects of chapter five, used the tools at their disposal as a means to make and distribute their own works. Demographically speaking, many participants in this community of mail artists continued to be well-educated white men, but the declining price and increased availability of technologies like photocopiers and tape recorders allowed more and more people to create artworks at copy shops and within their homes. Since materials were more likely to be traded through the mail rather than purchased outright, one needed to produce in order to participate in the community. By privileging gift exchange over economic remuneration and amateurism over professionalism, they believed it was possible to create a supportive framework for the creation and distribution of art without relying on the economic incentive of copyright's temporary monopoly over the right to reproduce one's works.

Not only did one need to be an active participant in order to consume such content, but the use of reproducible media technology as the essential tool for cultural production led many networkers to rely on the consumption of popular culture as the basic raw material for their works. Concurrent to the rise of other sample-based popular music genres like hip hop, the Tape-beatles and their closest associates developed a theory of cultural work that they called Plagiarism®, in which they used other people's works as a starting point for their own. Recording and repurposing the sound of radio broadcasts, television shows, or second-hand records without permission from the copyright holders was a means of turning ubiquitous commercial culture against itself. Listening critically to the entirety of the media soundscape, from newscasts and production music to radio jingles and commercials, and reshaping it through tape collages was an effort to awaken listeners to the pervasiveness of consumer culture's domination of sensory experience in daily life. Instead of focusing on the aesthetic or phenomenological consequences of using recorded sound split from its source as the basis for compositions, as in Pierre Schaeffer's concrete music, they enunciated a political economic critique of intellectual property in sound recordings. More than a flippant denial of copyright, Plagiarism® combined aesthetic techniques from Dada, surrealism, concrete music, Fluxus, and "plunderphonics" with the distributional practice of mail art and the philosophical framework of Situationism to criticize the private property relation at the core of mass cultural production. When they denied listeners the easy referentiality of the material by refusing to provide sources for their sonic materials, the Tape-beatles relied on listeners' lifetime engagement with the media, whether intentional or not, to make sense of the recordings they produced. To create an active listening situation, then, was to ask listeners to engage critically with all the mediated sounds of daily life, even if it meant running afoul of copyright law. For proud plagiarists,

success could not be measured in units sold but in the inducement for other listeners to become active participants in their own right.

Chapter One

Creative Instruments: Hobbyists and the Tape Recorder

Announcing the benefits of magnetic tape recording in a 1947 brochure, Amplifier Corp. of America's chief engineer A.C. Shaney heralded "a whole new era in high fidelity sound recording and reproduction." Cheaper to produce than commercial discs, easier to edit and erase than amateur recording discs, less prone to snarls and tangles than wire recorders, and more quickly usable than sound-on-film techniques that required chemical processing, magnetic tape seemed to offer users higher quality at a lower price with greater flexibility than other existing recording methods. Given these many perceived advantages, engineers like Shaney confidently predicted that the technology's "popular acceptance and widespread use in all recording fields is a foregone conclusion."⁶⁷ All in all, manufacturers were sure that tape would revolutionize communication by providing recording companies, musicians, businesses, and individuals with the means to record all manner of sound. In their eyes, it would only be a matter of time before home consumers would see the benefits of the new technology.

Fast-forward to the early 1960s. Within most homes, those predictions failed to materialize. While magnetic tape quickly became the standard medium in recording studios, and while many offices used tape for dictation and other purposes, sales in the home consumer market stalled through the 1950s. But if tape recorders were less popular than manufacturers had hoped, a small band of tape enthusiasts at least found great satisfaction in turning the technology

⁶⁷ A.C. Shaney, *Elements of Magnetic Recording - And 999 Applications* (New York: Amplifier Corp. of America, 1947), 2, 6.

into a new hobby. Some 14 years after the appearance of the first tape recorders on the consumer market, the editors of *Tape Recording* magazine made the unusual choice to publish a letter from a hobbyist calling himself “The Crazy Tapeworm” on its editorial page instead of the letters column. Perhaps they thought it was worth highlighting the perspective of a reader who had previously taken out ads in the magazine asking others who “tape for fun” whether they were “interested in swapping nonsense.”⁶⁸ An accountant by trade, Dick Kenny developed an interest in unusual sounds, from the singing of oysters and Saharan sands to the thundering storms and trains near his Connecticut home. Like other members of the “Voicespondence Club” who traded reels of self-recorded tape through the mail, Kenny extolled the benefits of “tapesponding” while lamenting the industry’s seeming failure to capitalize on his hobby:

if the tape machine manufacturers and perhaps the tape manufacturers got together on a reasonable advertising campaign exploiting the potential FUN and USEFULNESS of a tape recorder they could increase their sales and help to promote the furthering of world peace and understanding between all nations via tapesponding. I am sure most tape machine owners have not the faintest knowledge that tapesponding clubs exist. These facts should be exploited...⁶⁹

The magazine’s editors agreed wholeheartedly, adding, “a phonograph is a passive instrument, a tape recorder is a creative one—more like a camera. The more the customer knows about what he can do with it, the better, but most recorders contain only the direction booklet on how to operate the machine.”⁷⁰ Panning the passivity of other playback media, the editors echoed the assessment of more prominent mass culture critics in the 1950s, such as Edward Shils, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Harold Rosenberg. Record players and radios might serve to provide easy access to pre-recorded music, but what could they offer to the creatively minded?

⁶⁸ Language from Dick Kenny tapesponding advertisement in *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, October 1954, 17.

⁶⁹ “Crosstalk,” *Tape Recording*, October 1961, 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

At one level, such critiques of the tape industry were curious. As recent studies of the early taping industry have shown, manufacturers were all too happy to link tape recording practices to more common hobbies like amateur photography, language learning, and letter-writing.⁷¹ Indeed, another printed profile on Kenny quoted a tape manufacturer lamenting the fact that “most people don’t use their recorders creatively. They will tape the kids, the wife, the cat, a couple of parties or TV shows and then put the machines into the closet forever. It’s bad for business.”⁷²

Yet the underlying ideas that prompted *Tape Recording*’s editors to give Kenny’s missive pride of place on their editorial page can tell us much about the sensibilities of tape enthusiasts in the early 1960s. It is not difficult to discern both a sense of dissatisfaction with tape’s lack of popularity and a growing sense among hobbyists that the medium was superior to phonographs and radio in its capacity to activate users’ creativity. This exchange points to at least three of the central issues that shaped the tape industry during its early decades: the simultaneous struggles of tape manufacturers to garner a mass audience for their wares, the wider cultural critique of “passive amusement” in the United States, and the emergence of a distinct hobbyist tape sensibility.

In what follows, I look at the emergent tape industry’s marketing materials, the public discourse of intellectuals in general interest magazines, and hobbyist publications such as how-to guides and specialty magazines to see how they collectively enunciated the sensibilities of magnetic tape users in the United States prior to its emergence as a mass medium. Intertwined with the “high fidelity” and “do-it-yourself” cultures of the late 1940s and 1950s, tape

⁷¹ Karin Bijsterveld, “‘What Do I Do With My Tape Recorder ...?’: Sound Hunting and the Sounds of Everyday Dutch Life in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24 (2004): 613-634.

⁷² Ward Cannel, “Tapeworms Tune In on Breezes in the Sahara, Singing Oysters,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 2 March 1962, 3.

enthusiasts understood the medium as a means to develop a critical relationship to mass culture through active participation in a hobbyist subculture. Reading technical manuals and magazines, building and modifying tape recorders, joining tape clubs, or going on “sound safaris,” self-proclaimed “tapeworms” tried to expand the market for magnetic tape recorders at the same time as they articulated its ideological significance as an active form of sound reproduction in opposition to the supposed passivity of broadcasting and record listening.⁷³ By positioning the tape recorder as a “creative instrument,” hobbyists tapped into a mid-century critique of popular culture as a form of passive amusement and imagined themselves as individuals who could express their identity and creativity through their active approach to listening.

*** Sound Recording From the Phonograph to Magnetic Tape ***

For many magnetic tape enthusiasts, “the full potential of sound recording was not realized until the advent of tape.”⁷⁴ When Thomas Edison patented the phonograph in 1877, the machines could both record and play back the etchings inside tinfoil and wax cylinders. In an 1878 article, “The Phonograph and its Future,” Edison predicted that consumers would use the phonograph as a dictation or education device, more than as a means to listen to pre-recorded music.⁷⁵ In actual practice, however, “the applications of the phonograph as a recording as well as a listening device were comparatively limited.”⁷⁶ In part, this was because Emile Berliner’s design for the gramophone emphasized the entertainment functions of recorded sound

⁷³ For this argument about the relation of high fidelity to notions of active listening, I rely on Keir Keightley, “‘Turn it Down!’ She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948-59,” *Popular Music* 15:2 (1996): 149-177; Keir Keightley, “Low Television, High Fidelity: Taste and the Gendering of Home Entertainment Technologies,” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 47:2 (2003): 236-259; and Eric D. Barry, “High-Fidelity Sound as Spectacle and Sublime, 1950-1961,” in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁷⁴ Tony Schwartz, “Sound for Photographers: Edison’s Sound Predictions,” *Popular Photography*, July 1966, 34.

⁷⁵ Thomas A. Edison, “The Phonograph and its Future,” *North American Review* 126 (June 1878): 527-536.

⁷⁶ Schwartz, “Edison’s Sound Predictions.”

technology. The gramophone did away with the recording function of the phonograph, and thus offered a different model of cultural production than Edison's machine.⁷⁷ In the words of historian David Suisman, this technology "introduced a structural and social division between making a recording and listening to it."⁷⁸ By the early years of the 20th century, Berliner's gramophone became the primary format for home listening, in part because it was easier for the nascent recording industry to issue reproductions in disc form than on cylinders.⁷⁹ The separation of playback and recording functions continued to dominate many consumers' experience of music listening until at least the 1950s.

In 1878, soon after visiting Edison's Menlo Park laboratory, Ohio inventor Oberlin Smith first described the principle of magnetic recording in a memo to his Ferracute Machine Company.⁸⁰ Rather than store acoustic sounds on the grooves of a recording surface, as in the phonograph, he imagined that a microphone could convert sounds into electric currents, which would pass through a magnetic coil. As a metal wire or tape passed by the coil, the magnetic flux from the converted sound would be imprinted on the metal surface. In playback, another magnetized coil would reconvert the magnetized surface of the tape into electric currents and into mechanical sound. Danish engineer Valdemar Poulsen, in 1898, built and patented the first working prototype of such a machine, the Telegraphone. Despite gaining widespread acclaim at the 1900 International Exhibition in Paris, Poulsen's device languished. Its U.S. manufacturer,

⁷⁷ On this early history, see David Morton, *Off the Record: The Technology and Culture of Sound Recording in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 17-19; Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28-36; Alex Sayf Cummings, *Democracy of Sound: Music Piracy and the Remaking of American Copyright in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11-34.

⁷⁸ David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

⁷⁹ Though phonographs typically refer to cylinder machines and gramophones to disc machines, the term phonograph tended to be used more often in popular parlance.

⁸⁰ David Morton, "'The Rusty Ribbon': John Herbert Orr and the Making of the Magnetic Recording Industry," *Business History Review* 69 (1993): 590-591.

the American Telegraphone Company, sold fewer than a thousand machines as a result of poor management and manufacturing struggles. According to one historian, that company's struggles "made it almost impossible to raise money for magnetic recording research in the United States until the Second World War."⁸¹ As such, the boundaries of production and circulation remained rigid within the recording industry.

European companies had an easier time raising such money in the 1920s and 1930s, in part because state broadcasters there had a bigger political impetus to benefit from magnetic recording. In Britain, the BBC developed a steel tape recorder based on the Telegraphone to rebroadcast materials in different time zones over its Empire Service. The German firm *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft* (AEG), meanwhile, developed the *Magnetophon*, which used a BASF-manufactured plastic based tape coated with magnetized iron oxides. Funded by the German state broadcaster, *Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft* (RRG), recordings made with these machines achieved higher fidelity reproduction to rebroadcast political speeches and music over the radio.⁸² In the U.S., where broadcasters relied on live programming, historian David Morton explains that "[r]ecording represented a threat, both because the recording of a network program was piracy of the network's product and because it was technically possible to operate a network by distributing recorded rather than live programming."⁸³

As the popular story goes, soldiers returning home from World War II, such as Jack Mullin and John Herbert Orr, spurred innovations in tape recording technology when they brought back copies of the German-made *Magnetophon* recorder for further study and

⁸¹ Mark Henry Clark, "The Magnetic Recording Industry, 1878-1960: An International Study in Business and Technology History" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1992), chapters 2 and 3, quote from 99.

⁸² For more on the differences between structures of radio in the United States as opposed to Western Europe, see Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Mass Communication* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 339-346.

⁸³ Morton, "The Rusty Ribbon," 594-595.

development.⁸⁴ In one of the few histories of magnetic recording technology's development, however, Mark H. Clark points out that companies the Armour Research Foundation and the Brush Development Company won military contracts on the basis of their innovations in the magnetic wire recording field during World War II, and that their work was well underway before German machines became available in the United States.⁸⁵ As a result, they were well positioned to become early postwar leaders in the research, development, manufacture, and marketing of magnetic recording technology.

Despite broadcasters' reservations about moving away from live programming, the earliest adopters of magnetic tape in the U.S. were radio performers who relished the idea of recording a program in one time zone and repeating it for listeners to the west, or for recording several programs at once and transmitting them throughout the week. The networks may have preferred to have a simultaneous and standardized broadcasting schedule across the country, since it would have helped to solidify the idea of a national audience to sell to advertisers. But Bing Crosby, for example, famously chafed at the restrictions of live broadcasting, especially when NBC network had him performing for East Coast and West Coast audiences on its national network. In 1947, Crosby gave significant financial support to Ampex in its efforts to further develop magnetic taping technology in the hopes of being able to pre-record his shows. While the use of pre-recorded content was anathema to NBC, Crosby negotiated with ABC and became the first performer to pre-record his radio program on tape prior to broadcast, and thus paved the way for the future use of magnetic tape for broadcasting purposes.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ For a history on the early days of tape recording in the United States from the perspective of one G.I. that sent over the taping machines he found in Germany, see John T. Mullin, "Creating the Craft of Tape Recording," *High Fidelity*, April 1976, 62-67. Another tape pioneer who brought back German technology is described by Morton, "The Rusty Ribbon."

⁸⁵ Clark, "The Magnetic Recording Industry, 1878-1960," especially chapters six and seven.

⁸⁶ Mullin, "Creating the Craft of Tape Recording," 64-67. See also Cummings, *Democracy of Sound*, 68-70.

Shut out from earlier developments in German tape technology due to the war, Brush turned to engineers at Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M) to expand on that company's expertise with adhesive tape to bind iron oxides first to rolls of paper tape, and then to acetate. Among the advantages of tape, recording machines generally ran at 15 or 7.5 inches per second (ips), rather than at the 24 ips rate used by wire recorders, which lowered the required lengths for a reel of tape. More importantly, the lower speeds and 1/4" width of tape reduced the risk of unspooling and snarls that was common to wire as it wound its way through the recording and playback mechanisms. At 15 ips, a 1,200 foot reel of tape sitting on a 7" reel of 3M Scotch Sound Recording Tape could record 15 minutes of music at a cost of \$5.50 in 1949, and could also be reused almost indefinitely.⁸⁷ At 7.5 ips, that same reel could provide half an hour of listening, albeit at a slightly lower recording quality. Unlike cylinders and discs, tapes could easily be edited with scissors and adhesive tape. In this, magnetic tape was more similar to film than it was to previous sound recording techniques, though with the added advantage that it could be heard without chemical processing. The machines would also quickly become more portable than previous disc recording systems, as a single person could reasonably carry a tape recorder outfitted with its own power supply.

When wire and reel-to-reel tape recorders first appeared on the consumer and industrial markets, however, marketers puzzled through the problem of what consumers might actually do with the machines. Just as Edison had laid out a long list of possible uses for his phonograph in 1878, companies like 3M offered several possible uses for tape recorded sounds other than reproducing music. A 1948 brochure sent by the Minnesota tape manufacturer to retailers and sales personnel asked, "How will 'Scotch' sound recording tape be used?" At home, the

⁸⁷ List prices found in memo from March 14, 1949, in "Scotch Recording Tape Mailings, 1949," folder 3, box 132.G.13.2F, 3M Historical Corporate Records, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN. Hereafter 3M Records.

company imagined that people would use tape to document the sounds of their children growing up, record their parties, provide soundtracks to home movies and slide shows, record their own music, and “for recording favorite radio programs and phonograph records.”⁸⁸ More fancifully, the Amplifier Corp. of America extolled the benefits of “hypnopaedia.” With an automatic timer, a pillow speaker, and the right tape recording, “anybody can learn anything during the ‘wasteful’ hours of sleep.”⁸⁹ For corporate offices, 3M emphasized the efficiencies brought on by tape. Dictation had long been an imagined use of recording technologies, but 3M also pointed out that companies could use tape to record meetings, to broadcast messages over public address systems, and to do the work of salesmen in absentia. School teachers could use tape for music lessons, language practice, or “corrective speech classes,” while preachers might rehearse their sermons or use recordings of choirs to augment small parishes.⁹⁰ While the precise uses differed according to local context, early marketers imagined the machine as one that required creative work on the part of users.⁹¹

Many marketing materials offered disciplining functions for the technology that required the ability to hear oneself from the outside. When parents recorded unruly children at the dinner table, “playing the recording back demonstrated effectively to the children just how noisy they were and how bad it sounded.”⁹² One hobbyist magazine related a story about an intransigent child who demanded dessert before he finished eating dinner. Once “his tantrum was recorded on

⁸⁸ Brochure, “The Miracle Tape That Talks,” in “Scotch Recording Tape Mailings, August 28, 1948,” folder 2, box 132.G.13.2F, 3M Records.

⁸⁹ A.C. Shaney, *Elements of Single and Dual Track Magnetic Recording and 1001 Applications* 2nd ed. (New York: Amplifier Corp. of America, 1950), 125.

⁹⁰ Brochure, “The Miracle Tape That Talks.”

⁹¹ For more on the marketers’ vision of tape recorders, see Karin Bijsterveld and Annelies Jacobs, “Storing Sound Souvenirs: The Multi-Sited Domestication of the Tape Recorder,” in *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*, ed. Karin Bijsterveld and José van Dijck (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 28-34.

⁹² Unknown typescript, “Uses For a Tape Recorder,” 20, between 1951-1955, folder 10, box 132.G.13.2F, 3M Records.

tape and played back for him to hear as the rest of the family had heard him, all defenses crumbled.”⁹³ Turning the microphone around, Webcor asked potential buyers, “Do your friends listen when you speak? Are they concentrating on what you are saying or are they conscious only of the distracting faults in your speech?”⁹⁴ A recorder could help speakers identify “careless and lazy” phrases like “Javva goo-time?” or “Swata thought,” and replace them with “proper” diction and articulation.⁹⁵ Standardizing speech through self-monitoring, Webcor argued, could be key to one’s aspirations for greater success in life. In these examples, the technology allowed listeners to hear themselves as others might hear them. Self-improvement could be better achieved with the help of an outside ear.

As with the disciplined child, though, recordings could be used as potential leverage against those in subordinate positions. 3M suggested that “Employers through the strategic placement of tape recorders throughout the office and factory are able to easesdrop [sic] on candid and frank statements of employees.”⁹⁶ Recordings might similarly allow “employees [to] get the full story of labor-management meetings.”⁹⁷ 3M too, found that “monotonous work is eased on assembly lines and in offices through the use of continuous music tape recorded.” Background music on tape could also create an appropriate soundtrack for “restaurants, cocktail lounges and supermarkets” hoping to put customers at ease.⁹⁸ Whether by shaming, surveilling, or sculpting

⁹³ “While we cannot help but sympathize with Johnny in his frightened amazement, the solving of household discipline problems is fairly typical of the use being made of tape recorders in thousands of American homes.” Jeffrey Grant, “Your Tape Recorder,” *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, June 1954, 24.

⁹⁴ Brochure, “Talk Pleasantly, Talk Distinctly, Talk Effectively, With your Webcor Tape Recorder” (1955), in folder 12, box 728, Records of Consumers’ Research, Inc. Records, MC 3, Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries (hereafter CRI Records).

⁹⁵ Webcor brochure, CRI Records.

⁹⁶ “Uses For a Tape Recorder,” 20, 3M Records.

⁹⁷ “Sound Ideas for business and industry with Scotch Sound Recording Tape” brochure, no date, in “Scotch recording tape product brochures, 1950s” folder 6, box 132.G.13.2F, 3M Records.

⁹⁸ “Uses For a Tape Recorder,” 3.

sound environments for children, workers, and consumers, parents, teachers, employers, and business owners could use tape to discipline themselves and others.

If tape disciplined some workers, it could also put others out of a job. Movie theaters or funeral parlors could get rid of announcers and organists, only to replace them with tapes.⁹⁹ Entrepreneurs who found ways to market tape, though, could profit from the new medium. Beginning in 1950, an East Lansing, Michigan company, Tape Recording Industries, provided Midwestern roller rinks with tape recorded music. “Since conventional discs are recorded at different volume levels,” 3M noted, “it was formerly necessary for a rink employee to adjust the volume of each recording. With tape, the desired volume is maintained throughout the entire skating session.”¹⁰⁰ If organists or disk jockeys might be cut out in the process, the American Federation of Musicians saw to it that its members would at least be paid for making the tape recordings. Rink operators rented dozens of tapes at a time, then returned them for new ones every week.¹⁰¹

In terms of potential sales, however, the home market was undoubtedly the most important one for the burgeoning industry, and some wondered why the market seemed stalled. Responding to the industry’s struggles to gain a large consumer base, Ernest Dichter’s Institute for Motivational Research (IMR), which conducted pioneering motivational research studies for advertisers around the country beginning in the 1940s, proposed a study of the “tape recording field” in 1957. As one executive for the company saw it, the “field’s development has been rather unusual. It seems as though consumers became interested in buying tape recorders before

⁹⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁰ “Sound Ideas for business and industry with Scotch Sound Recording Tape.”

¹⁰¹ “Tape Recording Issues First For Commercial Use,” *Billboard*, March 4, 1950, 16; “Sound Recording Tape Memo, October 1949,” in “Scotch recording tape technical notebook with product literature, photos and specifications, 1948-1949,” folder 7, box 132.G.13.2F, 3M Records.

the manufacturers really began to understand that this was taking place. As a result, the advertising has been very largely a few steps behind the consumer's new desires, tastes, and ambitions.”¹⁰² Unfortunately for our purposes, the advertiser never followed through on the proposal, so the firm did not perform the in-depth psychological interviews it was known for. Without access either to such a study or to internal marketing materials from the tape manufacturers, it is difficult to know how the industry imagined its main features. However, the questions the firm wanted to ask of tape users had real insights into the main challenges of the medium for advertisers, and they are worth quoting and attempting to answer.

For instance, the IMR wanted to know “what resistances to purchasing a tape recorder are due to fears of the average consumer that he may be mechanically inept at ‘operating the thing’? Does the company, in its advertising and promotion, reassure him sufficiently about ‘his having nothing to fear’?”¹⁰³ Prior to its growth as a mass medium, magnetic tape marketers certainly struggled against the perception that reels of tape were unwieldy to thread and machines difficult to operate. Even sympathetic music critics like E.T. Canby wrote that “tape is also an inherently clumsy medium in the home; it must be rewound as well as threaded for playing, it is exasperatingly unsuited to the quick locating of inner movements or musical passages, nor has it the flexibility of use for long or short selections that we find on the combined disc system at all speeds.”¹⁰⁴ *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*’s editors found such criticisms of tape as difficult to use specious, since “anyone who doesn’t have more than one thumb on each hand can load a recorder and thread the tape mighty fast.”¹⁰⁵ True or not, the critiques about tape’s relative ease

¹⁰² Proposal memo from John A. Kellogg, Vice President of Institute for Motivational Research to James P. Cody of Cody Advertising, “Re: Motivational Research in Tape Recording Field,” February 7, 1957, 1-2, box 35, folder 872A, Ernest Dichter Papers (Accession 2407) [hereafter ED Papers], Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE.

¹⁰³ Kellogg, “Re: Motivational Research in Tape Recording Field,” 2.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Tatnall Canby, “Tape Records for the Home,” *Harpers*, August 1954, 103.

¹⁰⁵ “Crosstalk from the Editors,” *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, September 1959, 3.

of use affected marketing strategies. One manufacturer labeled its machine the *tape-o-matic* to emphasize that “it is easy to make professional quality recordings of favorite music, singer or loved ones' voices,” while another emphasized push-button technology to make its machine appear easier to use (fig. 1.1).¹⁰⁶ Even on this recorder, reviewers found that “unless the buttons are pressed firmly and meaningfully, you might have a tape foul-up.”¹⁰⁷ Repeatedly, how-to manuals and marketing materials alike emphasized just how easy it was to thread tape and push buttons, which suggests that they were aware of concerns like Canby's, and that the IMR had been onto something regarding consumers' fears that they might not have the technical know-how to operate tape recorders.

In addition to fears of unwieldiness, researchers at the IRM wondered whether the price of recorders was too high for mass adoption. Early on, most consumer tape recorders ranged between \$150 to \$400, depending on available features.¹⁰⁸ By way of comparison, the average price of a television dropped from \$440 in 1948 to \$239 by 1954.¹⁰⁹ While roughly comparable in price, television manufacturers had convinced most households that the object was less of a luxury than a necessity by the early 1950s. Tape manufacturers had failed to do the same. With such relatively high prices for recorders, combined with the cost of tape reels, even if recordable, home recording required a substantial investment. Given the range of prices and quality, the IMR asked “what is the most effective way to give the consumer ‘quality

¹⁰⁶ V-M tape-o-matic advertisement, *Magnetic Tape and Film Recording*, October 1954, 6. See also the RCA Push-Button Tape Recorder advertisement in *Magnetic Tape and Film Recording*, February 1954, 5, which touts “the most faithful reproduction and the easiest operation ever offered in recording equipment prices so low.”

¹⁰⁷ New product report, review of RCA Push-Button Tape Recorder Model SRT-301, *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, November 1953, 28.

¹⁰⁸ Many included microphones and built-in speakers, but varied in their available recording and playback speeds (higher quality machines went up to 15 or even 30 ips, while cheaper models recorded at 7.5 and even 3.75 ips). In general, the faster the recording speed, the greater the fidelity of the recording. For a sampling of prices, see Alan C. Macy, “Tape Recording,” *High Fidelity*, Fall 1951, 46-51.

¹⁰⁹ Lynn Spiegel, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 32.

reassurance' with regard to the lower-priced equipment?"¹¹⁰ One tester viewed early efforts to market lower price alternatives skeptically, since "misguided publicity has led many potential home users to believe that a hundred or two hundred dollars will purchase an instrument capable of delivering high quality sound reproduction from tape costing about \$4 per half-hour. Such a standard is not attainable now nor in the foreseeable future."¹¹¹ The industry's claims that tape recording was both easy and inexpensive likely overstated the case, and it would be some time before the industry could convince consumers otherwise.

Beyond the difficulties involved in selling tape recorders, the IMR also wanted to know something about the psychological profile of potential consumers. "How important is status in the decision to purchase a tape recorder? [...] What is the social role of tape recorders? Does the tape recorder under consideration, through its advertising, promotion and merchandising, communicate the variety of satisfactions that the purchaser can experience in different social situations?"¹¹² As noted with the examples above, advertisers certainly attempted to play up the situational versatility of the tape recorder, and presented it as suitable for "Home, Office, Plant, School, Or Church."¹¹³ Especially by the end of the 1950s, marketers tried to emphasize various hobbyist uses of the tape recorder. Ampex insisted that "you'll use [the tape recorder] to keep up the family correspondence by sending 'letters in sound', to tape stereo programs off the air, to preserve your best monaural and stereo discs on tape, and to acquire new musical and language

¹¹⁰ Many included microphones and built-in speakers, but varied in their available recording and playback speeds (higher quality machines went up to 15 or even 30 ips, while cheaper models recorded at 3.75 and 7.5 ips). In general, the faster the recording speed, the greater the fidelity of the recording. For a sampling of prices, see Alan C. Macy, "Tape Recording," *High Fidelity*, Fall 1951, 46-51; for quote on price disparities, see Kellogg, "Re: Motivational Research in Tape Recording Field," 3.

¹¹¹ Memo from Russ H. Snyder to F.J. Schlinck, "Critical Report on Tape Recording," April 26, 1948, folder 14, box 728, CRI Papers.

¹¹² Kellogg, "Re: Motivational Research in Tape Recording Field," 2.

¹¹³ RCA Push-Button Tape Recorder advertisement in *Magnetic Tape and Film Recording*, February 1954, 5.

skills.”¹¹⁴ While marketers emphasized the various things a tape recorder could *do*, the IMR would have likely suggested that they emphasize the ways it might make them *feel*. Even if consumers could imagine the satisfaction from the many potential uses for the recorder, researchers wondered whether the fact of hearing one’s own voice would “result in resistance to the purchase.” Narcissism, the IMR imagined, could get in the way of the tape recorder’s mass adoption, and marketers would need to “prevent any such negative responses and encourage positive responses” instead.¹¹⁵ If status was in fact an important determinant in purchasing a tape recorder, and if one could be made to feel socially insecure by hearing one’s own voice, perhaps tape manufacturers could find a way to leverage status anxieties to present the medium as a psychologically fulfilling way to produce and reproduce other kinds of sounds.

One way to do so would be to present tape recording as a fulfilling hobby that allowed users to feel like they were distinguishing themselves from the crowd. After asking, “why do some people buy tape recorders instead of phonographs or high-fidelity playback equipment?,” the IMR suggested an answer with its next question: “to what extent is the psychology of tape recorder purchasing influenced by the current do-it-yourself trend?”¹¹⁶ Finally, the IMR asked “who is the best market for tape-recorders – musicians, hi-fi fans, teachers, professionals or the general public? How can tape-recording advertising and promotion most effectively reach the professional, the intellectual and the general public?” Taken together, these were all key questions for the nascent industry. Homing in on the price point and potential difficulties of using the machine, the IMR saw the challenge of marketing the technology to the widest possible audience. Finding alternative solutions might make it easier to appeal to professionals,

¹¹⁴ Ampex 960 Stereophonic Recorder/Reproducer advertisement, insert in *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, October 1959.

¹¹⁵ Kellogg, “Re: Motivational Research in Tape Recording Field,” 2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

intellectuals, and do-it-yourself types, but such approaches might risk alienating the widest possible consumer base. If the general public saw tape recording as a difficult and expensive hobby, manufacturers would struggle to give the medium mass appeal. On the other hand, by presenting tape as the medium for discerning audiences to assert their individuality through active participation in the production of new sounds, marketers could perhaps make a more compelling case for the cultural and psychological benefits of tape recording. To understand what those might be, it is important to step back to analyze the cultural discourse surrounding sound reproduction, leisure, and hobbies in the 1950s.

*** Leisure and Passive Amusements ***

For many cultural commentators and intellectuals of the 1950s, the very difficulty of “high fidelity” music reproduction equipment seemed to offer an alternative to the perceived mediocrity of mass culture. From the earliest days of sound recording, the notion of a reproduction device’s “fidelity” to an original audio source was as much an ideologically-driven marketing statement about the value of particular modes of hearing and listening as it was a description of measurable technological advancements. Convincing listeners that recordings could and should sound like “live” performances took work, and major technological innovations often rehearsed familiar claims about the ability of new machines to imbue recordings with the “presence” of the original musicians.¹¹⁷ Even while acknowledging the familiar trajectory of this story through multiple generations of reproduction devices, the suite of new reproduction and listening technologies introduced in the late 1940s, such as wire and tape recorders, as well as

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Emily Thompson, “Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925,” *The Musical Quarterly* 79 (1995): 131-171; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Suisman, *Selling Sounds*.

long-playing 33 1/3 rpm vinyl records, achieved a higher signal-to-noise ratio than earlier electric disc recordings pressed onto 78 rpm shellac discs.¹¹⁸ For those most interested in sound quality, such advancements heralded the “high fidelity” age. Scholars of mid-century technology enthusiasts have convincingly argued that the embrace of high fidelity relied upon a denigration of mass culture as inauthentic, passive, and feminine.¹¹⁹ Postwar critics of mass culture often employed a set of discursive associations that linked radio and television broadcasting technologies with inactivity, alienation, and moral decay. In contrast, male hi-fi enthusiasts understood their listening devices “as a masculine and masculinizing piece of technology that supported ‘high’ culture,” in part because of the perceived aural sensitivity required to hear the difference between mass reproduced sound and high fidelity.¹²⁰ The rhetoric surrounding tape as a productive hobby was thus inextricably bound up with the ideology of a burgeoning high fidelity culture that denigrated popular culture, celebrated technical mastery as a masculine privilege, and upheld “highbrow” culture as an anti-mass yet democratizing ideal.

Prior to the rise of high fidelity reproduction equipment, typically dated to the introduction of magnetic recording and the long-playing vinyl record in 1948, critics accused various forms of mechanical (and later electrical) musical reproduction of creating passive forms of consumption for listeners. Compared with the self-discipline required for amateur musicians (often women) to learn to play instruments like pianos within middle-class homes for the benefit of family and friends – or in the case of amateur orchestras or marching bands, the wider community – the ability to purchase piano rolls or the latest record seemed a cheapening of the

¹¹⁸ The signal-to-noise ratio describes the level of intentional sound coming over speakers as compared to unintentional sounds like tape hiss, radio static, or surface noise on a rotating record.

¹¹⁹ See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); Spigel, *Make Room for TV*; Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Keightley, “Low Television, High Fidelity.”

¹²⁰ Keightley, “Low Television, High Fidelity,” 238.

music-making process and a reorientation from making to buying. Manufacturers attempted to allay such fears by positioning home music listening devices as instruments of cultural uplift. For example, after the initial popularity of coin-operated cylinders for public amusement among the “Coney Island crowd” at the turn of the twentieth century, the Victor Talking Machine Company began to market its Victrola as a refined piece of furniture through which one could display cultural capital by choosing the finest records.¹²¹ With this move into the space of the home, music historian William Kenney explains, “[t]he phonograph reinforced the process of musical reception (listening) activity over musical production (playing an instrument) within the middle-class American home.”¹²² Bandleader and march composer John Philip Sousa famously foresaw “a marked deterioration in American music and musical taste [...] by virtue—or rather by vice—of the multiplication of various music-reproducing machines,” from gramophones to mechanical pianos. Although his 1906 invective “The Menace of Mechanical Music” had much to do with the copyright dilemmas of music reproduction, Sousa already lamented the cultural effects of a world where amateur musicians might be replaced by “only the mechanical device and the professional executant” in “an atmosphere almost wholly monopolized by commercial pursuit.”¹²³ Not only would Americans lose out on the sense of discipline, community, and physical activity involved in learning and performing music, they too would suffer from the growing dominance of commercial music produced at a remove from the household or the marching grounds.

The commercialization of sound recording did more than get in the way of amateur musicianship; the separation of playback and recording functions on music reproduction devices

¹²¹ See William Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 23-64.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹²³ John Philip Sousa, “The Menace of Mechanical Music,” *Appleton’s*, September 1906, quotes from 278-281.

had alienating aesthetic consequences for music-lovers. By the 1910s and 1920s, record labels, popular composers and writers, music publishers, and distributors streamlined and centralized their production methods to achieve greater economies of scale in the creation of a national and international recording market. At first intended as inducement for consumers to purchase more expensive playback devices, relatively low-cost recorded music quickly became major consumer commodities in their own right. While individual recordings could be sold at a low cost per unit, record companies sought a mass audience in order to recoup their substantial investments in the recording and distribution process. Building recording studios (first acoustic, then after 1926, electric), manufacturing plants, and distribution networks – to say nothing of the exclusive contracts and publicity machines needed to establish a stable of popular recording artists associated with individual recording labels – created a high barrier for new companies wanting entry into the recording field. As a result of this economic imperative to reach the largest number of ears, argued critics, the products of the popular recorded music industry developed along formulaic aesthetic lines; that despite the public's demand for novelty, new records followed the sounds and styles of those already proven to sell.¹²⁴

Radio broadcasting also became associated with passive reception by the 1930s. During the 1920s, the medium shifted from the realm of hobbyist tinkerers building their own sets and tuning into one another's frequencies to a world of prefabricated radios sold and distributed by conglomerates who broadcasted on national networks.¹²⁵ Instead of selling songs to consumers as purchasable commodities, broadcasters gave their content to audiences for free with the hopes of selling their attention to the advertisers who subsidized the content. For such a model to

¹²⁴ Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*; Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 90-149.

¹²⁵ For more on this shift and the early history of amateur radio operators, see Douglas, *Listening In*, 55-82; Kristen Haring, *Ham Radio's Technical Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

generate the most profits, broadcasters, like the recording companies they increasingly merged with, wanted to reach the most ears. With the broadcasters' search for a mass radio audience in the 1920s and 1930s came fears among intellectuals that listeners were susceptible to manipulation from the culture industries. While Robert and Helen Lynd worried about the social isolation caused by private listening, Paul Lazarsfeld's pioneering quantitative media studies wondered about the process by which broadcasters constructed a standardized and abstracted audience to sell to potential advertisers. While recording and dissemination technologies required mass culture industries to seek ever-increasing audiences, listeners on the receiving end of these technologies and networks often had little personal or structural relation to those producing the sounds they consumed.¹²⁶

Lazarsfeld's one-time associate Theodor Adorno went further in making both structural and aesthetic arguments about the passivity inculcated by radio listening. In a 1945 essay, he lamented the psychological consequences of radio's commercial status:

Under the aegis of radio there has set in a retrogression of listening. In spite of and even because of the quantitative increase in musical delivery, the psychological effects of this listening are very much akin to those of the motion picture and sport spectatoritis which promotes a retrogressive and sometimes even infantile type of person. 'Retrogressive' is meant here in a psychological and not a purely musical sense.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ For descriptions of radio's political economy, see Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Thomas Streeter, *Selling The Air: A Critique of the Policy of Commercial Broadcasting in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Timothy Dean Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). For an alternative position that emphasizes the importance of listener reactions to programming decisions, see Elena Razlogova, *The Listener's Voice: Early Radio and the American Public* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Susan Douglas argues that Paul Lazarsfeld's wife, Herta Herzog, was more curious to research the qualitative side of listeners' relationship to radio, and found them "semi-active," rather than simply active or passive. See Douglas, *Listening In*, 124-160.

¹²⁷ T. W. Adorno, "A Social Critique of Radio Music," *Kenyon Review* 7 (1945): 213.

Either unable or unwilling to make choices about what they might listen to, Americans who tuned into their radio sets seemingly lost the ability to discern quality programming; worse, in the process of becoming part of a generalized audience, they lost their individual autonomy and identity. And rather than elevate listening practices, observers like Adorno worried that the dissemination of classical music over the airwaves debased the integrity of works of art by turning “highly integrated musical forms” into snippets of hummable melodies.¹²⁸ Even when quantitative researchers solicited first hand reactions from listeners, Adorno felt these repeated, “often literally, the announcer’s speeches in behalf of culture,” rather than giving their own autonomous accounts, so deep was the regressive influence of radio.¹²⁹ Adorno thus viewed the market imperatives of commercial radio as a process of commodity fetishization that made true participation in musical culture through radio a falsehood, and all semblance of choice an illusion.

Adorno’s invocation of “spectatoritis” put him in conversation with earlier fears about the so-called “threat of leisure” among commentators and educators of many ideological persuasions from the 1920s and 1930s onwards. Such observers wondered whether most Americans were making good use of increased leisure time with a shortened work week when faced with the rise of “passive amusements” that also separated production from consumption. “Too much play,” rebuked one commentator on the five-day week, “tends to weakness. Passive amusement, moreover, such as watching others play or being entertained in other ways, even if the amusement is not morally objectionable, tends to soften the fiber and to weaken the moral structure.”¹³⁰ An excess of diversions like sports-watching, cinema-going, or radio-listening

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 215.

¹³⁰ George B. Cutten, “The Five-Day Week is Drawing Nearer,” *New York Times Magazine*, 9 September 1928, 2-3. These views echoed a longer conversation about the effects of industrialism and mass society on American vitality,

contributed to this wider lamentation, in which many assumed (echoing Sousa) that passivity would lead to moral and physical decay among the American public. By the early 1930s, when many understood the Great Depression as a crisis of technological unemployment, the problems of leisure came to take on an even wider significance. As one historian explains, “the ‘leisure problem’ of the thirties was a problem of modernity, machine technology, mass production, and mass consumption—the problems and their solutions appeared to affect every aspect of American life.”¹³¹ According to sociologists, social workers, and educators alike, mass mediated culture stood in the way of psychological and physical fulfillment. For if Americans could not find satisfaction through regimented work processes, what hope could there be for relaxation and personal satisfaction in leisure when they turned to amusements imbued with those same characteristics?

The fundamental problem, in Jay B. Nash’s emblematic 1932 tome *Spectatoritis*, was that most people did not know how to use spare time properly: “The average man who has time on his hands turns out to be a spectator, a watcher of somebody else, merely because that is the easiest thing. He becomes a victim of spectatoritis—a blanket description to cover all kinds of passive amusement, an entering into the handiest activity merely to escape boredom.”¹³² Rather than find regeneration and sustenance through culturally enriching leisure activities, tired workers fed their minds with the empty calories of amusement. Throughout the book, Nash portrayed radio and cinema as passive media tainted by commercialism: “The spectator is satisfied as he shrivels up in the grandstand or before the radio, snug in his belief that everything

which went back at least to Progressive Era fears of mechanization in modern life and their effects on the human body. See T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

¹³¹ Susan Currell, *The March of Spare Time: The Problem and Promise of Leisure in the Great Depression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 19-20.

¹³² Jay B. Nash, *Spectatoritis* (New York: Holston House, 1932), 5.

can be bought and that nothing is worth while until it costs money.”¹³³ In contrast to the self-satisfied but spiritually withered spectator, the “doer builds the body strong and vigorous, develops skills, which not only satisfy his hunger but lay the foundation for life interests.”¹³⁴ Only by taking on productive hobbies could Americans find satisfaction and rid themselves and the nation of the spectating scourge.

Since hobbies operated at the intersection of leisure and activity, they might provide a solution to Nash’s spectatoritis. Historian Steven Gelber argues that hobbies emerged “as a way to integrate the isolated home with the ideology of the workplace” through *productive* leisure in the context of late nineteenth century industrial capitalism.¹³⁵ As work became increasingly regimented, compartmentalized, and standardized, hobbies like stamp collecting or furniture making could offer a refuge as holistic and satisfying alternatives to alienated production and consumption alike. Finding personal satisfaction through their more artisanal approach to leisure, hobbyists distinguished their pastimes as productive instead of abandoning their leisure to mass-produced forms.¹³⁶

During the 1950s, some held out hope that a growing trend towards “do-it-yourselfing” in several realms might overcome various forms of passive leisure activity. Do-it-yourself emerged as a popular phenomenon during the 1950s when suburban men across the United States took on increased responsibility for home maintenance and repair. Occasionally frustrated by the cultural

¹³³ Ibid., 188.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 20.

¹³⁶ Offering his own contemporary assessment that reinscribes the ideology behind hobbyism, Gelber argues, “In leisure, as in work, a difficult task well done is a source of pride. The most common passive forms of leisure cannot generate a sense of accomplishment. There is no pride in watching television, reading popular fiction, drunkenly cheering in a sports bar, or chatting over coffee with a friend. However, serious leisure such as helping others volunteer, creating something in a hobby, or producing professional results as an amateur are all activities designed to generate feelings of achievement.” While mass entertainment may be pleasurable in his view, it lacks the sense of dedication, craft, and accomplishment of a hobby. See, *Hobbies*, 12.

imperative towards “togetherness” as a family ethos in suburban homes, many such men took over attics, dens, or garages in order to establish separate workshop spaces for themselves.¹³⁷ Practical hobbies like home repair or furniture craftsmanship “evoked the image of the independent artisan who produced an object by himself from start to finish.”¹³⁸ Observers explicitly contrasted such do-it-yourself activities to various forms of passive recreation. For example, *Harper’s* praised the new craftsmanship for giving the lie to “grim forebodings about American ‘non-participation,’ the fear that we were turning into a nation of passive consumers of amusements.”¹³⁹ Similarly, the *New York Times Magazine* approvingly noted, “our most meaningful types of recreation – gardening, carpentry, fishing, sailing – are really jobs without pay.” As a result, “the Age of Leisure will see less passive amusement and more participation (a trend that is already well on its way).”¹⁴⁰ Researching the psychological factors motivating purchases in 1964, the Institute for Motivational Research described hobbies as an outwardly directed way for successful men to assert that they are “versatile, masculine, talented, and not limited to the articles of [their] business, trade or profession.”¹⁴¹ Internally, such a person might “recognize that he should do something distinctly different from his usual occupation in the new leisure yielded by his success;” something that could provide a therapeutic “emotional release” in its difference from regular working patterns.¹⁴² Defined as “practices in which consumers buy

¹³⁷ Steven Gelber, “Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing, and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity,” *American Quarterly* 49 (1997): 69. For more on suburbia and notions of family togetherness, see Spigel, *Make Room For TV*; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

¹³⁸ Gelber, *Hobbies*, 290.

¹³⁹ “Armory 1953,” *Harper’s Magazine*, May 1953, 95.

¹⁴⁰ David Dempsey, “Myth of the New Leisure Class,” *New York Times Magazine*, 26 January 1958, SM24.

¹⁴¹ Institute for Motivational Research, Inc., “A Creative Memorandum on the Buying Preferences of Socially-Secure People,” submitted to *U.S. News & World Report*, Washington, D.C., September 1964, p. 25, in box 81, folder 1806E, ED Papers.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 25-26.

semi-finished materials that they then use in the creation of something of their own design,” do-it-yourselfing was also situated at the intersection of mass culture and artisanal practices.¹⁴³

Though they substituted tape recorders for bandsaws and reels of tape for sandpaper, hobbyist tapers fit squarely within this tradition. Since they bought their working materials commercially but injected their own creativity in deciding what to record, how to record it, and how to edit it, they could craft an individualized relationship to commercial culture. But if music listening was inherently a passive amusement, as a generation of critics had been asserting, how might music aficionados and other avid listeners square the circle? How could they devote themselves to musical reproduction without merely consuming the culture industry’s wares as passive recipients?

Since Americans seemed to measure cultural achievement through box office numbers and broadcast ratings, rather than through the quality of their expression, what place was there for “every enterprise which is not based on mass appeal?”¹⁴⁴ Such was critic Joseph Wood Krutch’s lament in the title essay to his 1954 edited anthology *Is The Common Man Too Common?* Responding to charges that critics were antidemocratic aesthetes who wanted to override the cultural preferences of the majority, Krutch and others in the collection wondered whether democracy could be meaningful in the context of mass programming from the monopolistic “purveyors of mediocrity” and their “encouragement of passivity.”¹⁴⁵ At an earlier moment, observers might have said the same about the phonograph. High-fidelity listening devices, however, especially with “the invention of tape recording and LP,” finally allowed the

¹⁴³ Kevin Melchionne, “Of Bookworms and Busybees: Cultural Theory in the Age of Do-It-Yourselfing,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57:2 (1999): 247.

¹⁴⁴ Joseph Wood Krutch, “Is the Common Man Too Common?” 12, in *Is The Common Man Too Common? An Informal Survey of Our Cultural Resources and What We Are Doing About Them*, ed. Joseph Wood Krutch (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14, 10.

recording industry “to cater to relatively small minorities.”¹⁴⁶ Positioning himself and other high culture enthusiasts as marginalized figures, Krutch linked his critique of mass culture with a desire to have his cultural needs met in the marketplace. He thus concluded that salvation:

may be made by technological developments like those in the phonograph industry which tend to break monopoly and permit the individual to assert his preferences and his tastes. But the possible will not become the actual if in the meantime the desire for excellence has been lost and those who should be leaders and willingly become followers instead. In the Age of the Common Man is not to become the Age of the Common Denominator rather than what it was originally intended to be—namely an age in which every man had the opportunity to become as superior as he could—then the cultural as well as the political rights of minorities must somehow be acknowledged. There is not really anything undemocratic about either the desire for, or the recognition of, excellence. To prove that ours is the most cultured nation which ever existed will constitute only a barren victory if we must, to prove our point, use nothing but quantitative standards and reconcile ourselves to the common denominator as a measure of excellence.¹⁴⁷

Minority rights, technological mastery, and excellence went hand in hand for Krutch. Only by creating a space for unpopular desires within the marketplace—and this is what he meant by the political rights of minorities—could new technologies bring fulfillment to listeners, and edification for the nation as a whole.

Reuel Denney, a co-author of *The Lonely Crowd* with David Riesman and an associate at the Center for the Study of Leisure at the University of Chicago, described the challenge of finding individual satisfaction through mass leisure for *Esquire*. Denney developed a typology of active leisure and echoed Krutch’s assessment of high-fidelity listening as a form of active leisure consumption. Developing a vocabulary of leisure types that included the “Spectatorial

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 12; D.W. Brogan echoed Krutch’s assessment elsewhere in the collection, writing “the interest in high-fidelity recordings, like the increase in the number and proficiency of American amateur musicians... are signs of grace.” See “The Taste of the Common Man,” 144 in *Is The Common Man Too Common?*.

¹⁴⁷ Krutch, “Is the Common Man Too Common?,” 18-19.

Purist” and the “Reality Purist,” who sought active mastery over consumption and production respectively, Denney also outlined his vision of a:

Participative Purist, who conspicuously escapes from mass-spectatorship with some activity that, as he says, ‘challenges him.’ [...] He *does* things. He would rather direct the symphony orchestra by fiddling with his hi-fi control board than just sit and listen. In his most characteristic moods, he involves himself deeply with questions of standards and moreover imagines that everyone else is apathetically viewing a TV commercial.¹⁴⁸

Just as with Nash’s doer, the do-it-yourself hi-fi tinkerer satisfied his needs through active listening. As Dick Kenny “The Crazy Tapeworm” put it in 1962, “What’s the point of listening to music when you can get that by turning on the radio?”¹⁴⁹ Instead of merely relying on pre-recorded music to satisfy your cultural needs, you could be better served by getting the reels rolling and becoming an active participant in hobbyist taping circles.

*** “The Tape Recorder is on the Side of Individuality and Imagination” ***

Like the do-it-yourself mechanics and builders who consulted how-to guides to learn car or home repair tips, tape aficionados in the U.S. turned to several magazines and handbooks for tips to help master their new hobby. Written for an affluent white male readership, *High Fidelity*, *Better Listening Through High Fidelity*, and *Stereo Review* (founded in 1951, 1955, and 1958 respectively) reported on the wider world of a burgeoning high fidelity scene, with features on stylish home sound systems in well-appointed suburban homes, stereo listening, loudspeaker placement, phonograph maintenance, tape recorders, product reviews, and (mostly) classical music reviews. Many of the features in hobbyist magazines focused on the technical, rather than

¹⁴⁸ Ruell Denney, “Individuality and the New Leisure,” *Esquire*, October 1958, 91.

¹⁴⁹ Ward Cannel, “Tapeworms Tune In on Breezes in the Sahara, Singing Oysters,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 2 March 1962, 3.

ethical or even aesthetic aspects of recording and listening. *Magnetic Tape and Film Recording* (established in 1953, it switched its name to *Hi-Fi Tape Recording* in 1956 and *Tape Recording* in 1960), trod much the same ground as *High Fidelity* and *Stereo Review*. In contrast to the other magazines, however, this specialty periodical exclusively covered tape and tape machines, and it devoted more page space trying to highlight innovative practices and practitioners (like Tony Schwartz and Columbia University music professor and composer Vladimir Ussachevsky), to give nuts and bolts descriptions of tape techniques like splicing and librarying, and to promote tape clubs. The magazine even solicited taped letters to the editor, in which correspondents would send 3” reels of tape in the mail asking a question, and the editors would respond in kind.¹⁵⁰ While emphasizing the technical aspects of sound reproduction, these magazines and how-to manuals expressed the pleasure and personal satisfaction one could find through taping. One guide produced for Philips addressed itself to “all who are conscious of the real enrichment which tape recording as a pursuit can bring into their lives.”¹⁵¹ In order to demystify the recording process for beginners, they often used colloquial language and easy to understand examples to make it clear that anyone could take advantage of the technology.

Broadening the base of active tapers, though, did not mean relying on lowest common denominator writing or publishing strategies, since mass addresses were contrary to the subjectivities privileged by many tape users and electronic tinkerers. “The fact is,” *High Fidelity* editors argued, “and we know what we are talking about, that the customers don't think of high fidelity wares as mass-production items, and don't want to think of them that way. They have enough mass production in their lives already...”¹⁵² To those who chided record collectors for

¹⁵⁰ *Magnetic Tape and Film Recording*, Feb. 1955, 19.

¹⁵¹ C. G. Nijssen, *The Tape Recorder: A Guide to Magnetic Recording For the Non-Technical Amateur*, 2nd ed. (New York: Drake Publishers, 1971), vi.

¹⁵² “How to Make Friends and Save Money,” *High Fidelity*, September 1956, 35.

their “sheer passivity,” music critic E.T. Canby responded out that “we can be active too, on the technical side and plenty of us are ‘doing,’ most actively, in the building of better and better high-fidelity outfits.”¹⁵³ One British hobbyist handbook extolled the tape recorder as “part of the electronic revolution which is changing our lives from day to day; but unlike many other products of that revolution it does not contribute to the process of standardisation and regimentation. The tape recorder is on the side of individuality and imagination.”¹⁵⁴ With its connotations of passive reception, then, mass production was antithetical to the connoisseurship embodied in a more artisanal approach to listening, and according to its advocates, tape and hi-fi equipment facilitated practices of active listening.

Despite the variety of imagined uses for magnetic tape discussed above, the dominant use of tape recorders in the home was to reproduce music from radio or records. Through the “miracle of home recording,” a Sears Roebuck Silvertone wire recorder advertisement hailed consumers with the promise that they could “build [their] own music library at a 50% saving” by recording music from the radio rather than purchasing it (fig. 1.2).¹⁵⁵ Even here, however, tape enthusiasts promoted the process as an active form of media consumption. Emphasizing the need for high quality equipment, one handbook wrote, “if you have a good FM radio receiver, you won’t have to apologize for the quality of the reproduction.”¹⁵⁶ Writing in *Saturday Review*, Robert Oakes Jordan compared tape recording to amateur radio listening for an older generation: “The old boast, ‘I got WLW last night—175 miles—good too’ has given way to something like ‘I taped “Norma” from the Met—good signal-to-noise ratio too.’”¹⁵⁷ Beyond concerns about

¹⁵³ Edward Tatnall Canby, “Make Your Own LP’s,” *Saturday Review*, August 25, 1951, 48.

¹⁵⁴ Douglas William Gardner, *Tape Recording as a Pastime* (London: Souvenir Press, 1959), 13.

¹⁵⁵ Sears Roebuck Silvertone wire recorder advertisement, July 1947, found in folder 15, box 728, CRI Papers.

¹⁵⁶ Arthur Zuckerman, *Tape Recording For the Hobbyist*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: H. W. Sams, 1967), 7.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Oakes Jordan, “Introducing Tape Recorders,” *Saturday Review*, 29 May 1954, 36.

audio fidelity, E. T. Canby believed a tape machine was useful “when it comes to preselecting a whole program of records by copying them onto tape in advance.”¹⁵⁸ A host could, for instance, make a custom mix for a party, or simply produce a half-hour program of their own choosing without having to switch discs. Record collectors could also preserve favorite discs by recording them onto tape and not worrying about wearing the disc down with repeated plays. Even when how-to guides admitted that users might want to copy music other than the classics recorded by the masters, they suggested that tape could be useful: “Popular music may also be recorded, and those selections which become boring thru constant repetition can easily be erased and that section of the tape reused for a later release.”¹⁵⁹

At the same time, tape advocates suggested that listeners take great care to decide what was worth recording, whether a broadcast of a favorite symphony or radio drama, or a rare recording belonging to a friend. “Is one of the world’s great symphony orchestras broadcasting?,” a 1946 Brush Soundmirror ad asked, “Push the button and you’ll have a complete uninterrupted recording to play over and over again.”¹⁶⁰ Beyond the utility of making off-the-air recordings, those who promoted tape recording also focused on the fun and excitement that could come from making such tapes. “Experience the creative thrill of building your own tape recorded library,” touted another print ad.¹⁶¹ A writer for the *New York Times* breathlessly agreed:

There is an undeniable thrill waiting for the music-lover who successfully tapes an outstanding performance. A much closer sense of participation and identification is possible with, let’s say, a Toscanini reading lovingly recorded off the air as against the impersonal purchase of a Toscanini record in a store.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Edward Tatnall Canby, *High Fidelity and the Music Lover* (New York: Harper, 1958), 250.

¹⁵⁹ Harold D. Weiler, *Tape Recorders and Tape Recordings* (Mineola, NY: Radio Magazines, Inc., 1956), 12.

¹⁶⁰ Brush Soundmirror Magnetic Ribbon Recorder-Reproducer (Model BK401) advertisement, in Box 728, Folder 15, CRI Papers.

¹⁶¹ V-M Tape-o-matic advertisement from 1954, found in folder 11, box 728, CRI Papers.

¹⁶² Anson Peckham, “Tape Recorders For Use in the Home,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1954, p. XX12.

The ideals of accurate reproduction and discernment in choosing what merited recording, scholar Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman points out, “took on valences of progress, connoisseurship, control, and perfectibility.”¹⁶³ But the tape recorder, she continues, “was partly a product of 1950s anxieties about distinguishing selective and perfectible reproduction from rote copying.”¹⁶⁴ Instead of simply purchasing a record at the store, the avid home taper could acquire music of distinction through the use of a tape recorder, which could continue to bolster a self-image of discernment and mastery when recording music from other sources.

Though certainly many women used tape recorders, tape hobbyism depended on an ideal of male technical mastery through leisure that struggled to imagine how women might actually use the machines for themselves. When hobbyist magazines made reference to women, they often played on the trope of the long-suffering wife who put up with ugly gadgets in the living room or became “hi-fi widows” due to the amount of time husbands were spending with their devices.¹⁶⁵ Over the course of the 1950s, tape manufacturers responded to such critiques by replicating the earlier history by which gramophones became incorporated into households as large pieces of attractive furniture rather than simply gadgets, while hobbyist magazines presented do-it-yourself projects to hide machines behind cabinets.¹⁶⁶

When magazines tried to address other possible obstacles to women’s interest in taping, however, they did so with reference to existing expectations about forms of unpaid and paid

¹⁶³ Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman, “Reproducing US Citizenship in *Blackboard Jungle*: Race, Cold War Liberalism, and the Tape Recorder,” *American Quarterly* 63 (2011): 783.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 785. She argues, too, that the language of “reproduction” was particularly potent in the early postwar years, as “Americans worried about reproducing the nation as an appropriately unified citizenry and exceptional world power,” 783.

¹⁶⁵ See, Jack Bayha, “Stereo – Why Bother?,” *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, December 1956, 34-36; On this dynamic more generally, see Keightley, “‘Turn it Down!’ She Shrieked.”

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Mildred Stagg, “Beautify Your Recorder,” *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, October 1955, 38-40; W.R. Blackwell, “Apartment Hi-Fi Furniture,” *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, August 1958, 24-26.

labor within the home. Writing about the apparently difficulties of threading tape, one of the few female writers on staff at *Hi-Fi Tape Recording* argued that married men should teach their wives how to use the machine, because “any woman who can thread a needle, balance a budget or run a household can work a tape machine with ease. Under your supervision have her put on one of her favorite selections and see how easy it would be for her to have music while she goes about the house ‘working her fingers to the bone.’”¹⁶⁷ Despite trying to claim that everyone could use tape recorders, and pointing to the importance of women’s labor to the economy of the household, this kind of language tapped into the perception that this technology was largely for men. It was up to husbands to teach and supervise their use in order to convince their wives of the merits of the machine, and thus convince them to release the purse strings when it came time to investing in new gadgets. Another writer for the magazine touted the benefits of tape for women:

Any housewife will tell you that soft, well-chosen background music makes morning household drudgery almost a pleasant, floating dream. Any housewife will also tell you that the right kind of soft dinner music in the evening, together with candlelight, will add additional flavor to the best cooked meal. Furthermore, any housewife will tell you that well-chosen romantic music is a good tonic for tired husbands, can help establish a more receptive mood for presenting a particularly harsh bill from the milliner.¹⁶⁸

Not imagining any autonomous space women for to approach the technology as a means to find individual fulfillment, except by relieving household labor, articles like this instead presented tape’s main use for women as a way to soothe their savage husbands returning from work after a hard day at the office and get them to overlook spendthrift shopping.

In another telling example of the magazine’s gendered imaginary, *Hi-Fi Tape Recording* attempted to make the case for individuals and workplaces ways to make money off tape

¹⁶⁷ Georgia Sigsbee, “New Tapes,” *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, February 1957, 6.

¹⁶⁸ Jeffrey Grant, “So You Got a Recorder for Christmas!,” *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, December 1955, 29.

recorders as a strategy to make the medium more popular. They listed the benefits of tape machines for recording in-depth marketing interviews, for doing inventory within retail spaces, for playing repeated messages in stores, or for recording weddings as a photographer might. They also explained that “crack ex-secretaries, unable to leave home because of small children, now can solve secretarial problems for many a firm. A recorder enables the business man to dictate at a time most convenient for him,” send it to a secretary, and get a typed version in return (fig. 1.3). The article suggested that the biggest benefit to such activities would come for “the business man [who] pays only for those letters he dictates,” rather than keeping more secretaries on staff.¹⁶⁹ Not discussing either the leisure function of tape recorders for women or the possibility that they might be able to generate income for themselves, the magazine was happy to portray tape recording as the domain of men.

Even though many tape users seemed content to leave their practice at recording pre-recorded music, active hobbyists touted alternatives that would have users capture and distribute otherwise unrecorded sounds. As with hobbyist photography, however, enthusiasts needed to make sure that they had some technical expertise in order to make quality recordings. “With a tape recorder the overexposed picture becomes the distorted recording; the fuzzy picture has its analogy in the recording made with a microphone too far away from the performer.”¹⁷⁰ Indeed, some early manufacturers of tape recorders, such as Revere and Wollensack, had been known for their cameras before they branched out into audio recording devices. Hobbyists too made the connection, as many listed photography among their interests in tape club directories. Manufacturers, advertisers, magazine editors, and hobbyists repeatedly likened tape recording to

¹⁶⁹ Geoffrey Grant, “Extra Income From a Recorder,” *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, April 1957, 26-28.

¹⁷⁰ Harrie K. Richardson, introduction to Weiler, *Tape Recorders and Tape Recordings*.

photography, both in terms of ease of use, and as a means of preserving cherished memories of family and travel, only with more power to activate the senses (fig. 1.4).

Beyond the fact that both photography and tape recording required a level of technical knowledge, tape enthusiasts liked to assert that aural forms of documentation had a richer capacity to evoke memories than visual ones. One “gadget minded” traveler who took his Magnemite recorder to Europe in 1952 claimed “that recording has it all over pictures as far as bringing back memories is concerned.”¹⁷¹ Another article painted an atmospheric portrait of the potency of tape recorders in travel:

You stand there in the crowd at New York’s Idlewild Airport, your wife beside you, waiting for your Air France flight to be called. You are nervous and you shift your tape recorder occasionally from hand to hand. You are nervous because this is the first time you are going back since your troopship left Le Havre in 1945 [...] You tried to explain to many that special quality that is only in Paris night spring air, how it feels to walk down century-old streets in a German town. But it was no good: it didn’t come out right in words [...] you want to capture these six weeks in a form you will never forget. That is why you are carrying a tape recorder in your hand.¹⁷²

The depiction reveals much about the imagined world of the hobbyist magazine reader.

Presumed to be a male soldier returning to Europe for the first time since the war, the G.I. is armed not with guns and ammunition but with a tape recorder and reels of tape. He struggles to communicate to not the harrowing experience of combat, but of refined French and German culture. Photos could not communicate the grandeur of his experience, so he needed to plan a trip around the recording of sounds to take back to friends in Minneapolis.¹⁷³ By capturing sounds of faraway places, the traveling taper could convey his ineffable sonic experiences to others.

¹⁷¹ Murray Teigh Bloom, “And This Little Recorder Went To Europe,” *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, July-August 1954, 19.

¹⁷² Jeffrey Grant, “Sounds That Keep Your Trip Alive,” *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, August 1955, 21.

¹⁷³ The recurrence of Minneapolis or Minnesota in general in these narratives, fact or fiction, is not surprising, given the large role of the 3M Corporation in the rise of magnetic tape within the U.S.

The metaphorical replacement of guns with tape recorders in this particular story was not surprising. Hobbyist tapers, especially those who used their machines outside of the home and communicated with others around the world, often spoke in the language of the hunt. In Europe, a Dutch tape club called itself the Society of Sound Hunters, joining the Swiss Sound Hunters Association, the *Chasseurs de son belges*, and *Deutsche Tonjäger-Verband*.¹⁷⁴ Bird enthusiasts, wrote *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, “creep on hands and knees through underbrush to record the call of a new warbler,” while “folklore fanciers armed with a portable tape recorder find that there are folk songs everywhere.”¹⁷⁵ Always on the lookout for tape superlatives, one hobbyist handbook claimed that “recording birds and animals... is more difficult than hunting them with a gun. A bullet will accomplish its purpose at a much greater distance than a microphone and a tape recorder.”¹⁷⁶

This language also overlapped with quasi-imperialist aspirations to document and preserve exotic sounds.¹⁷⁷ Advertising materials from the Amplifier Corporation of America touted their Magnemite recorder’s ability to withstand “the jolts of hundreds of miles of back packing in the rugged interior of New Guinea’s central highlands [...] where no white man is ever believed ever to have visited” (fig. 1.5). Even though they used an image of African American composer and choral arranger at the Tuskegee Institute, William Levi Dawson, on the cover of the brochure, they did not think it relevant to speak about his experiences producing field recordings of West African musicians as part of his wider musical ambitions within the text of the brochure. The practices of everyone else on the cover, like CBS radio correspondent

¹⁷⁴ See Bijsterveld, ““What Do I Do With My Tape Recorder ...?””

¹⁷⁵ George Adamson, “Hitch Your Mike to a Portable,” *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, August 1954, 34.

¹⁷⁶ Weiler, *Tape Recorders and Tape Recordings*, 154.

¹⁷⁷ Early hi-fi culture’s interest in sound effects overlapped with exotica as a new modes of listening. See Tim J. Anderson, *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Dwight Cooke, or botanists and ornithologists who made recordings of rare birds in Papua New Guinea, seemingly warranted description where Dawson's didn't.¹⁷⁸ Dawson's image appeared in a few hobbyist sources, including one that positioned him recording "music of West African tribe," because "taping sounds of far off places is interesting tape club activity," even though Dawson went in order to develop his compositional and arranging practice and not as a tape club member.¹⁷⁹ Emphasizing the exotic sounds one could record on portable recorders, companies like the Amplifier Corp. of America framed the practice as one for white men to record culturally othered people in faraway places.

This rhetoric was not unique to this company. Another ad for Audio Devices tape featured "Colin M. Turnbull, noted explorer" subjecting the manufacturer's Audiotape brand to an "African Torture Test" and finding it up to the challenge of "the worst possible conditions for recording work."¹⁸⁰ When the DuPont Company developed its Mylar brand polyester film, which became a standard plastic backing for most tape manufacturers, it similarly focused on the brand's ability to withstand extreme conditions. It hired engineer Emory Cook, who released sonically impressive recordings of storms, oceans, trains, whales, and calypso and steel-drum musicians through his own Cook Records label, as a spokesperson for Mylar.¹⁸¹ Ad copy noted

¹⁷⁸ Amplifier Corp. of America, "The Magnemite Portable: Battery-Operated Spring-Motor Tape Recorder in Action Around the World," 1953, folder 12, box 728, CRI Records.

¹⁷⁹ Dawson's experience warrants further study. As a composer associated with the Harlem Renaissance during the 1930s, he revised his folk music influenced *Negro Folk Symphony* (1934) after his trip to emphasize rhythmic similarities between his own composition and the music he heard in his travels. In addition to the Magnemite ad, he also appeared in Lee Sheridan, *More Fun With Your Tape Recorder and Stereo* (Los Angeles: Trend Books, 1958), 121. A more respectful description of his work appeared in a brief caption in Adamson, "Hitch Your Mike to a Portable," 33. For more on the reception of Dawson's original piece, see John Andrew Johnson, "William Dawson, 'The New Negro,' and His Folk Idiom," *Black Music Research Journal* 19 (1999): 43-60; Gwynne Kuhner Brown, "Whatever Happened to William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*," *Journal for the Society of American Music* 6 (2012): 433-456.

¹⁸⁰ Audio Devices, Inc., "African Torture Test" advertisement, *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, August 1955, 2.

¹⁸¹ A profile in *High Fidelity* referred to Cook's "bent for tinkering" and his desire to "thunder-hunt" to document storms in Long Island. See John M. Conly, "Adventurers in Sound: Brahms, Thunderheads, and Cachalot Courtship," *High Fidelity*, October 1954, 50.

that he “records his ‘sound safaris’ on tough, long-lasting tapes of MYLAR,” because “My tapes have to stand up in the heat of a West Indies jungle or the freezing cold of Mount Washington.”¹⁸² Another Mylar ad featured a Washington, D.C. area tape retailer who could promise customers in the diplomatic corps that “they’ll always get superior performance no matter what the conditions.”¹⁸³ To be sure, with heat and humidity, tapes could stretch and snap, preventing such sound hunters from preserving their handiworks. The specific associations with faraway travel to exotic locales, though, placed the hobbyist home taper within a cosmology that linked active do-it-yourself tinkering with intrepid exploring in faraway places.

** *Magnetic Recorded Friendship* **

Yet members of organized tape clubs did find a way to channel their exploratory tendencies in more concrete ways. *Magnetic Tape & Film Recording* enthusiastically reported on the many tape clubs that sprang up around the United States and abroad in regular columns. Club members paid dues and in return received a regular newsletter as well as a directory with lists of interested correspondents from around the world, along with their addresses, biographical information, interests, the equipment they used, and the languages they spoke.¹⁸⁴ According to their own literature, tape clubs existed “to promote ‘magnetic recorded friendships’ and to help . . . members make the greatest possible use of magnetic recording equipment.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Emory Cook Mylar advertisement, December 28, 1959, box 57, folder 9, E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., Advertising Department Files, Film Dept. Files, 1958-1961, (Accession 1803), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE (hereafter DuPont Papers).

¹⁸³ Tape dealer Harry Sackser Mylar advertisement, June 3, 1960, box 58, folder 2, DuPont Papers.

¹⁸⁴ For one example describing how these clubs operated, see Charles Owen (secretary, Voicepondence Club), “Join a Tape Club,” *Magnetic Film & Tape Recording*, December 1955, 30. A membership directory from the World Tape Pals is also available in folder 1353, “World Tape Pals. Dallas, Tex.” in the Southern Folklife Collection Discographical Files #30014, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁸⁵ The Voicepondence Club, *The Voicepondent: Directory of Members*, August 1974, Shillington, PA, 1. Copy in author’s possession.

“Tapesponding,” as this type of exchange was called, created an independent distribution network of sounds among tape enthusiasts, but it also attempted to turn a recording medium into a more active communication medium.

Perhaps more than anyone else, the hobbyist enthusiasts who belonged to tape clubs enunciated the importance of participation. One club secretary argued, “We would prefer to have a small number of active tapers, rather than a large list of names of members who ‘just sit there’.”¹⁸⁶ While tapespondence became a hobby in its own right, tapers often used this form of communication to share information about their other hobbies. For the printed directories, club members were encouraged to present short biographies and lists of interests in order to find one another based on shared interests. Among the most popular hobbies were radio and photography, but also activities like gardening, woodworking, or stamp and coin collecting. Take the following listings from the 1957 directory of one tape such tape club, the World Tape Pals (WTP):

Chemical processor; married, age 38. Pentron. Son, John Joseph, age 14; daughter, Cheryl, 12. Interests: Hi-fi, electronics, radio-shortwave, music, record collecting, model railroad (H.O. gauge), woodworking. English only spoken. I wish to exchange tapes with anyone from anywhere. Object – friendship. Aim – to please.¹⁸⁷

Sound studio owner and photographer; age 41. I have six tape recorders and my foreign car equipped to make or play a tape from a large-size ATR inverter. 2 Berland recorders, one Revere T-1100 and one TR-800, one Ampro hi-fi and one Bell Cubcorder (battery operated). English only spoken.¹⁸⁸

Broadcast radio technician; married, age 41. Webcor Royal 2611. Interests: Photography, amateur radio, psychology, metaphysics, philosophy, gardening, travel, radio programs of foreign countries, and general discussions of how people live in other countries.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Jean Cover, “Worldwide Hobby—Tape Clubs.”

¹⁸⁷ Listing for John Barylski of Putnam, Connecticut, *World Tape Pals Directory* (Dallas, TX: World Tape Pals, 1957), 9 in folder 1353, “World Tape Pals. Dallas, Tex.” in the Southern Folklife Collection Discographical Files #30014, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁸⁸ Paul C. Stillwell of Washington, DC, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 9.

¹⁸⁹ Listing for Henry G. Kuhn of Williamsville, New York, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 26.

Accountant and tax consultant, age 66; married (Mabel). I was editor-owner of country weekly newspaper for 35 years. Ekotape recorders. Interests: Shortwave radio listening, hi-fi music systems; mycology (study of fungus); photography (still and movie, color); woodworking; recording documentary and nature sounds; American Indians and Indian lore; model making of old spinning wheels. English only spoken.¹⁹⁰

Record clerk, married, age 27. Interests: Radio and TV repairs, record collecting, all western pop, rock n' roll and blues. I collect Jimmy Rodgers, H. Williams, Tony Pastor, Phil Harris recordings. My collection now numbers 2,900.¹⁹¹

Former X-ray technician, now a homemaker and part-time free-lance photographer; married, age 32. Ampro recorder. Interests: Photography, tape recording, collecting phonograph records (both old and new), hi-fi, music (except western), traveling. I am a member of Photographic Society of America and active in camera club work.¹⁹²

As much as the medium seemed suited to listing the substance of conversations people might have on tape, such listings often linked tapers' technical interests to their broader pursuits. While it might have been difficult to know how, exactly, an interest in mycology or model railroads might translate to a taped conversation, these snippets were meant as an invitation for further contact, rather than precise delineations of individual members' world views. In broad outlines, however, the biographies of club members matched much of the popular discourse about do-it-yourself hobbyism as the province of middle-class and middle-aged married men, many of whom worked in the communications industry.

Yet as the final listing above demonstrates, the interest in communication via tape was not exclusive to such men. Another woman who described her occupation as "homebound," was "interested in exchanging tapes, letter writing, still and movie photography, organ music, amateur radio, books and scrapbooks."¹⁹³ A Spanish teacher in Birmingham, Alabama put in a

¹⁹⁰ Listing for Russell B. Harris of Arcanum, Ohio, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 32.

¹⁹¹ William J. Legere of Toronto, Ontario, *World Tape Pals*, 50.

¹⁹² Listing for Alice L. Bethel, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 3.

¹⁹³ Rebecca K. Ellis of Jackson, Mississippi, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 22.

listing for herself, her niece, and the Spanish club she sponsored at school, and described her interests as “world understanding, United Nations, travel, music, dancing. English and Spanish spoken (want to learn Esperanto).”¹⁹⁴ Although only a few other Tape Pals spoke Esperanto, this desire to learn a language founded on the principle that it would be easy to pick up and that would make it simpler for people to communicate with one another while traveling stood in for many of the desires of tape club members. And for those who found travel difficult for a variety of reasons, tapesponding might provide an alternative means of hearing sounds from other places. One Wisconsin woman explained that “I have had poliomyelitis and have been in a wheelchair for 15 years. I am joining WTP so I can see the world via tape and meet new friends.”¹⁹⁵ The WTP and other clubs waived or reduced membership fees for all “handicapped persons,” which helped to attract many blind tapers who appreciated the ability to talk to one another via tape, or to receive “descriptive material of any kind.”¹⁹⁶

The notion that exchanges of tape across vast distances could reveal important information about people in different places was at the core of tapespondence. Many listings included phrases like “world understanding,” “world affairs,” “world customs,” or “peace through United Nations,” which were encouraged by the leaders of these organizations. Indeed, the rhetoric employed by leaders of tape clubs like the WTP, the Voicepondence Club, Tape-Respondents International, International Tapeworms, and the United Recording Club revealed a mid-century liberal optimism that “World Peace is Simply a Matter of Understanding” (fig. 1.6). One article asked members “to remember that you are not just a member of a club, but an ambassador of the U.S.A. Your friendliness and helpfulness is representative of our country and

¹⁹⁴ Listing for Ruth Hilleke of Birmingham, Alabama, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 1.

¹⁹⁵ Eva L. Kastberg of Superior, Wisconsin, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 43.

¹⁹⁶ Listing of Lester H. Warren of Dallas, Texas, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 41. The Voicepondence Club in particular gained a reputation as friendly to blind members.

the impression you make will be a lasting one.”¹⁹⁷ A World Tape Pal told *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, “Honest tape-recorded sound is, I think, the best instrument of world good will I ever thought of or could imagine. By means of it, I know more about my foreign neighbors than I could find by any other source.”¹⁹⁸ By 1959, the WTP counted over 2,500 members in 56 countries. President Dwight Eisenhower’s “People to People Program” appointed Harry Matthews, the Dallas-based founder of the club, as the head of a “Tape Recordings Exchange” subcommittee within a Hobbies Committee devoted to cultural exchange between individual citizens as a means to reduce international conflict.¹⁹⁹ “If our American ideology is eventually to win out in the great struggle being waged between opposing ways of life,” Eisenhower explained, “it must have the active support of thousands of independent private groups and institutions and millions of individual Americans acting through person-to-person communication in foreign lands.” With this in mind, World Tape Pals who “compose and mail letters in sound” could participate in cultural diplomacy through their active approach to home recording.²⁰⁰

Hobbyists were well suited to Eisenhower’s desires for such private forms of cultural diplomacy. As historian Christina Klein explains, the People-to-People program was part of a greater political effort to reorient America’s relationship to the rest of the world after World War II. Doing away with the isolationism of an earlier generation, and wanting to contain communist influence around the globe by presenting the United States as an open and tolerant country, the Eisenhower administration proposed such popular internationalism as “a valuable device to

¹⁹⁷ Jean Cover, “Worldwide Hobby—Tape Clubs,” *Tape Recording*, October 1962, 23.

¹⁹⁸ Charles V. Mathis, “Recorded Ribbons of Peace,” *Hi Fi Tape Recording*, February 1959, 30.

¹⁹⁹ Harry Matthews, “People to People Program,” *Magnetic Film & Tape Recording*, July 1958, 18-19; for the wider historical context, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

²⁰⁰ Eisenhower quote from “World Tape Pals Shrink The Globe With Friendship,” originally in *Dallas* magazine, July 1957, published by Dallas Chamber of Commerce. Reprinted in folder 1353, “World Tape Pals. Dallas, Tex.” in the Southern Folklife Collection Discographical Files #30014, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

create a sense of participation in the government's Cold War policies."²⁰¹ Unlike higher profile forms of Cold War cultural diplomacy that have garnered recent historical study, this emphasis on hobbyists, rather than celebrities, as everyday representatives of U.S. mores both helped make the case for American openness to non-citizens and created incentives for citizens to try to bridge cultural differences with people elsewhere.²⁰²

For all this emphasis on learning from others, many members of U.S. clubs nevertheless partook of a mentality that emphasized the country's ideological righteousness in the Cold War. Matthews claimed that "we have no political platform," but he also told an interviewer that "where there is no language barrier, we hope to start off more long-distance conversations on such subjects as freedom."²⁰³ One World Tape Pals offshoot, the Freedom Crusaders, announced its intention to "obtain personal freedom recordings from Spanish-speaking people to be exchanged with Latin Americans to help combat the spread of communism in those countries." "If we don't act," the founding crusader declared, "we are going to lose Latin America to the Reds."²⁰⁴ Only two years before the Cuban Revolution, a Cuban WTP member specified, "No interchange with Russia or satellites," though the directory had no such listings to begin with.²⁰⁵ Another taper, a small town minister from upstate New York, was hopeful about the potential for tapesponding to be "most worthwhile but will need careful watching to avoid perversion of the idea and subversion of the American Way."²⁰⁶ Outside of the tape clubs, other avid recorders similarly used their machines to extoll the "American way of life." One woman taped tales of

²⁰¹ Secretary of State Dulles quoted in Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 51.

²⁰² For one prominent example, see Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up The World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 2004). Klein's discussion of the People-to-People program is in *Cold War Orientalism*, 49-60.

²⁰³ Charles V. Mathis, "Recorded Ribbons of Peace," *Hi Fi Tape Recording*, February 1959, 29.

²⁰⁴ "Tape Club News," *Tape Recording*, January 1962, 15.

²⁰⁵ Listing for Armando Llorente of Caibarien, Cuba, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 53

²⁰⁶ Rev. George H. Smith of Sauquoit, New York, *World Tape Pals Directory*, 25.

Soviet and East German émigrés and the state of communist parties in various European countries for her Minnesota Republican friends.²⁰⁷ As we will see in subsequent chapters, tapespondence could just as easily lead to the sharing of sounds among those sympathetic to progressive politics through the trading of vernacular forms of music prized by left-aligned folklorists. No matter how participants might identify their political allegiances, however, tape clubs relied on an idea of intensive engagement with the medium.

Even though hobbyists found much joy and satisfaction in the tape clubs, the burgeoning interest in tapespondence did not necessarily help tape machine manufacturers shed the label of producing novelty gadgets. The struggles of the industry to gain greater sales did trouble many active tapers and especially those in the business of selling magazines to them. One editor made his dissatisfaction clear in an editorial that compared tape's relative lack of popularity in the U.S. to that in England: "in England there are any number of active face-to-face tape clubs who conduct regular meetings, have guest speakers, put on contests, and make tapes." If the active tapers in the U.S. tended to be more geographically disparate and communed at a distance, he wondered whether the medium could truly bring people together in a way that combated the perils of other forms of entertainment:

Could it be that the daily pressures of earning a living are so great that, come evening, the American is just fit to flop down in front of the TV set and remain there until the end of the late, late show? Surely we are a more creative people than that. TV is the great national soporific and tranquilizer but sooner or later the magic of the tube begins to pall.

[...]

The tape recorder, especially now that there are numerous high-quality portables on the market, is just as much a creative instrument as a camera and its results are immediate, you don't have to wait for developing or printing to take place.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Murray Teigh Bloom, "And This Little Recorder Went To Europe," *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, July-August 1954, 19.

²⁰⁸ "Crosstalk," *Tape Recording*, February 1963, 10.

To tape's true believers, the medium had seemingly solved the problem of passivity by providing a means of active engagement with sound recording. Through their practices, they hoped to reveal themselves as actively engaged producers, as well as consumers, of media. If their numbers were small compared to those lulled to sleep by "the magic of the tube," at least they were active in their use of tape.

*** Conclusion ***

In a March 1962 edition of *Stereo Review* magazine devoted to magnetic tape, tape hobbyist, audio documentary producer, advertiser, and lay media theorist Tony Schwartz too wondered whether tape users were making the most out of the new recording technology. "Most people today use the tape recorder in a way that seems to me to be self-limiting, if not actually self-defeating. They will buy a portable recorder that is capable of recording the sound of life anywhere and then use it only as a copying device to record sounds from the radio, sounds from records, sounds from television." This use, Schwartz intimated, "is rather like using a camera only to photograph paintings in an art museum or photographs in a magazine."²⁰⁹ In the place of such derivative actions, Schwartz hoped to convince readers to think beyond the technical capacities of tape machines to reproduce sounds with the highest possible sonic fidelity, and to consider instead the emotional, psychological, and even political capacities of magnetic tape to change listeners' relationships to the sounds around them. Audiophiles enamored of technical expertise, he believed, were incapable of using the magnetic reproduction of sound to truly communicate with one another.

²⁰⁹ Tony Schwartz, "Communicating With Tape," *Hifi/Stereo Review*, March 1962, 43.

Judging from the marketing materials of manufacturers and the discussions within hobbyist magazines, the stuff of middle-class suburban life seemed most worth communicating through tape. Whether taping sounds from the radio, recording a child's first words, documenting one's travels, chasing trains or bird calls, or communing with faraway friends, tape hobbyists had developed a habit of making choices about what sounds warranted recording. What is clear is that the language of active taping within these early hobbyist communities had relied upon a series of assumptions that, consciously or not, denigrated mass culture as the realm of the passive, designated women as (at best) peripheral supporters of their own habits, exoticized non-white cultures as atavistic relics of the past, and presented white men as those most responsible for making something valuable out of the medium. But the notion that tape hobbyism was a form of active leisure that could solve feelings of alienation from mass culture through technological mastery, cultural discernment, and masculine prerogative, and that it should be the sole province of mid-century men in comfortable suburban homes was anything but resolved.

A commercial visual artist in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Schwartz had been an early adopter of magnetic recording technology. In 1947, he outfitted his first tape recorder with a portable battery so that he could take it outdoors.²¹⁰ In documenting the sounds of the city, along with his practice of "tapesponding" with other hobbyists and folklorists around the world, Schwartz amassed an extensive collection of sounds that he presented in a regular program on New York's WNYC radio station and in a series of long-playing records for the Folkways label.²¹¹ He too was skeptical of mass culture's alienating force and for the exclusions and potential falsehoods perpetuated by commercial media. Taken together, his early works evinced

²¹⁰ David Lander, "Tony Schwartz Tape Master: The *Audio* Magazine Interview," *Audio*, March 1994, 3-4.

²¹¹ Schwartz's personal collection is currently housed at the Library of Congress' Recorded Sound Reference Center in Washington, D.C.

a concern with the capacity for news media to shape public discourse and a desire to amplify sounds and stories that didn't otherwise find their way onto radio or records. Navigating between categories of hobbyist, politically engaged folklorist, and professional sound artist, Schwartz's experience with magnetic recording technologies beginning in the late 1940s reveals the extent to which we should not take the dominant ideology of active taping as a given. As we are about to learn in the following chapters, he was initially less interested in the politics of technical mastery than many other of the hobbyists he found frustrating. Instead, he was motivated by a desire to communicate the sounds of everyday life as animated by the people around him, and as connected to the progressive politics of mid-century New York City.

Save the sounds that bring you joy...

V-M HIGH FIDELITY
tape-o-matic[®]
Vivid Memory
TAPE RECORDER

Experience the creative thrill of building your own tape recorded library. With *tape-o-matic* it is easy to make professional quality recordings of favorite music, singer or loved ones' voices.

Conveniently located, easy-to-use controls make *tape-o-matic* operation a joy . . . and the high fidelity results are completely satisfying! With a V-M *tape-o-matic* you record, from radio, TV, phonograph or microphone, *only* what you want to save. V-M silent Pause Button stops tape instantly to let you eliminate commercials, lulls in conversation, etc. You quickly locate any recorded selection you wish to play . . . and the two *tape-o-matic* speakers reproduce it with authentic high fidelity! Add external speakers if you wish, just plug them in to *tape-o-matic*, the heart of your complete high fidelity music center! Model 700 only \$179.95*. Made by V-M Corporation, world's largest manufacturer of phonographs and record changers.

It's True!
Top ten *tape-o-matic* features are exclusive in its price range!

Partial list includes:

- **Precision Tape Index Timer**
—quickly locate any selection on the tape.
- **Pause Button**
—stops tape travel instantly, silently. Locks in position if desired.
- **Record Ready Light**
—glows when *tape-o-matic* is on "Record."
- **Automatic Shut-Off**
—shuts off mechanism and amplifier at end of reel.
- **Dual Input Receptacles**
—includes microphone and radio-phonograph jack plus magnetic phono jack with built-in pre-amp.
- **Dual Output Receptacles**
—Jack No. 1, controlled by Monitor Switch, cuts off internal speakers. Jack No. 2 permits operation of external and internal speakers.

*Slightly higher in the west. UL approved.

V-M CORPORATION
BENTON HARBOR 13, MICHIGAN

Please send me full-color literature immediately.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____

the Voice **M** of Music

Figure 1.1 – V-M tape-o-matic advertisement (1954)

Promising “creative thrill” and “easy-to-use controls” for a father recording his young girl’s birthday wishes, advertisements like this tried to convince potential buyers that tape recording was easy, fun, and could document important events to a family. As much as it upheld one set of domestic norms, however, the advertisement hinted at the technology’s more subversive possibilities, since the “Pause Button stops tape instantly to let you eliminate commercials, lulls in conversation.”

From *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, October 1954, 6

IT'S A MIRACLE IN HOME RECORDING

RECORDS a Full Hour of Radio Programs
ON ONE SMALL SPOOL OF WIRE

RECORDS a Complete Symphony
ON ONE SMALL SPOOL OF WIRE

RECORDS a Full Hour of Your Favorite Records or Albums
ON ONE SMALL SPOOL OF WIRE

RECORDS Voices of Children as They Grow
TREASURE THOSE YEARS ON ONE SMALL SPOOL OF WIRE

RECORDS a Full Hour of Party Fun—Birthdays
ON ONE SMALL SPOOL OF WIRE

Yes! **ONE FULL HOUR OF UNINTERRUPTED ENTERTAINMENT ON ONE SPOOL OF WIRE —that Fits in the Palm of Your Hand**

It's a 3-in-1 combination . . . A glorious tone radio . . . a phonograph that reproduces the full range of your favorite records . . . AND A WIRE RECORDER THAT WILL MAKE YOUR EYES POP WITH DELIGHT. Silvertone's new, miracle, wire recorder combination gives you all this plus a simplicity of operation that assures you of home recordings with that professional like clarity. Build your own library of favorite radio programs . . . record them as you listen. Take your favorite albums or single records and make them into one full hour of smooth, uninterrupted pleasure. Record historical events as they happen . . . record youngsters voices as they grow . . . cherish on wire those grand holiday or birthday parties that will live forever in memory . . . relive them and laugh again. Yes, a full hour of uninterrupted recording on a spool of stainless steel wire . . . so compact that it fits in the palm of your hand.

LOOK WHAT IT DOES AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

THE WIRE RECORDER

- (1) Records a full hour of Radio, Records or Voice . . . without interruption. Can be played back immediately.
- (2) No Needle, No Discs, No Shavings, No Scratches . . . to worry about.
- (3) Build your own musical library at a 50% saving.
- (4) Compact, easy to store a complete library of recordings on wire.
- (5) No warping . . . not affected by temperatures, pressure or position.
- (6) Permanent . . . will last forever. Rust-resistant.
- (7) Easily erased if you desire. Any part of the full hour recording can be easily eliminated, such as radio commercials. Mistakes of voice recording can be changed without wasting wire.

THE RADIO

- (8) Super sensitive, standard broadcast . . . radio programs sparkle with zest . . . its listening pleasure at its best.

THE PHONOGRAPH

- (9) A smoothie. New crystal pickup is as sensitive as a kitten . . . reproduces the full tone range of your favorite records . . . Over-size motor maintains the proper number of revolutions . . . eliminates slowing of the tempo. You'll like it!

SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW

Wire recording is the most practical and economical means of recording ever invented. Its principle was first conceived in 1898 by a Danish scientist, Valdimar Poulsen with his famous Telegraphone. Since that time, its development has been slow until recent years. During the war the armed service used wire recorders for recording "On The Spot" News in both the European and South Pacific theatres of operations. Now it's yours to enjoy on the home front.

**IT'S A RADIO—IT'S A PHONOGRAPH—
IT'S A WIRE RECORDER—IT'S A**

No. 99082—

Figure 1.2 – Sears Roebuck and Co. Silvertone wire recorder advertisement (1947)

This early advertisement sold magnetic recording on the basis of one's ability to record from radio and other records before suggesting that users produce their own sounds.

From Consumers' Research, Inc. Records, Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries



Thanks to tape recorders, crack ex-secretaries, unable to leave home because of small children, now solve secretarial problems for many a firm. A recorder enables the business man to dictate at a time most convenient for him. The reels of tape are then delivered to the ex-secretary's home, she transcribes and returns them typed on the businessman's own stationery. Thus, the businessman whose volume of work does not justify a full-time secretary pays only for those letters he dictates.

Figure 1.3 – A “crack ex-secretary” working from home (1957)

Even when hobbyist magazines portrayed women using tape recorders, they often emphasized the benefits such use might have for men. In this case, an “ex-secretary” cut down on labor costs for a small firm by remaining on call as a transcriber of dictated notes.

From *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, April 1957, 26.

A NEW SENSATION IN SOUND!

High Fidelity
Tape Recorder
by RCA Victor
only \$199⁹⁵



SIS SPEAKS FOR HERSELF . . . and you can enjoy it forever, just as you hear it today. Three-speakers give you high fidelity playbacks.



AS YOU LIKE IT. Music, from Bach to Pop, is on RCA Victor Hi-Fi pre-recorded tapes.



BLOW YOUR OWN HORN, then hear the playback to help improve your playing.



LAUGH OF THE PARTY. Watch guests' faces when they ask, "Is that really me?"

Take "pictures in sound" with this fine three-speaker recorder

CLICK! Easy as taking a snapshot, you press a button and the sound is yours forever — exactly as you hear it today. Why exactly? Because this is an RCA Victor New Orthophonic High Fidelity Tape Recorder — with only those features from the world's finest sound engineers.

For example, you can record at 2 speeds — one for music — one for voice. A numbered, window-type counter-wheel lets you locate any part of any recording. And push-button

control makes operation a snap. There's even provision for remote control.

But it's the playback that's most amazing. RCA Victor's Panoramic three-speaker High Fidelity Sound System actually makes you sound like you!

For proof, visit your dealer's now. He'll give you a convincing demonstration of this new RCA Victor *Judicial*, Model 7TR3, \$199.95. You'll want to start your "family album of sound" then and there!

Other RCA Victor tape recorders include a portable model at \$159.95 and a deluxe High Fidelity console on clear plastic wheels in mahogany finish (light rift oak finish, slightly higher) at \$279.95.

RCA VICTOR
RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA



Manufacturers' National Advertisers' List prices shown, subject to change.



PUSH-BUTTONS DO IT! Here's the professional quality tape recorder an amateur can run. Buttons control "Rewind," "Playback," "Forward," "Recording," "Stop." Gray simulated leather case.

13

Figure 1.4 – RCA Victor High Fidelity Tape Recorder advertisement (1956)

"Easy as taking a snapshot," ads like this one made explicit links between sound recording and photography as means to "take 'pictures in sound,'" whether of children, musicians, or friends coming over to record their voice during a party.

From *Hi-Fi Tape Recording*, December 1956, 13.



Figure 1.5 – Amplifier Corp. of America, Magnemite Portable tape recorder advertisement (1953)

Playing up exoticizing tropes in the imagery on the cover of this brochure for a portable tape recorder, the Amplifier Corp. of America framed tape as a way for white men to document and preserve sounds from faraway places. Even though they used an image of African American composer and choral arranger at the Tuskegee Institute, William Levi Dawson, on the cover, they did not think it relevant to speak about his experiences producing field recordings of West African musicians as part of his practice within the text of the brochure.

From Consumers' Research, Inc. Records, Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries

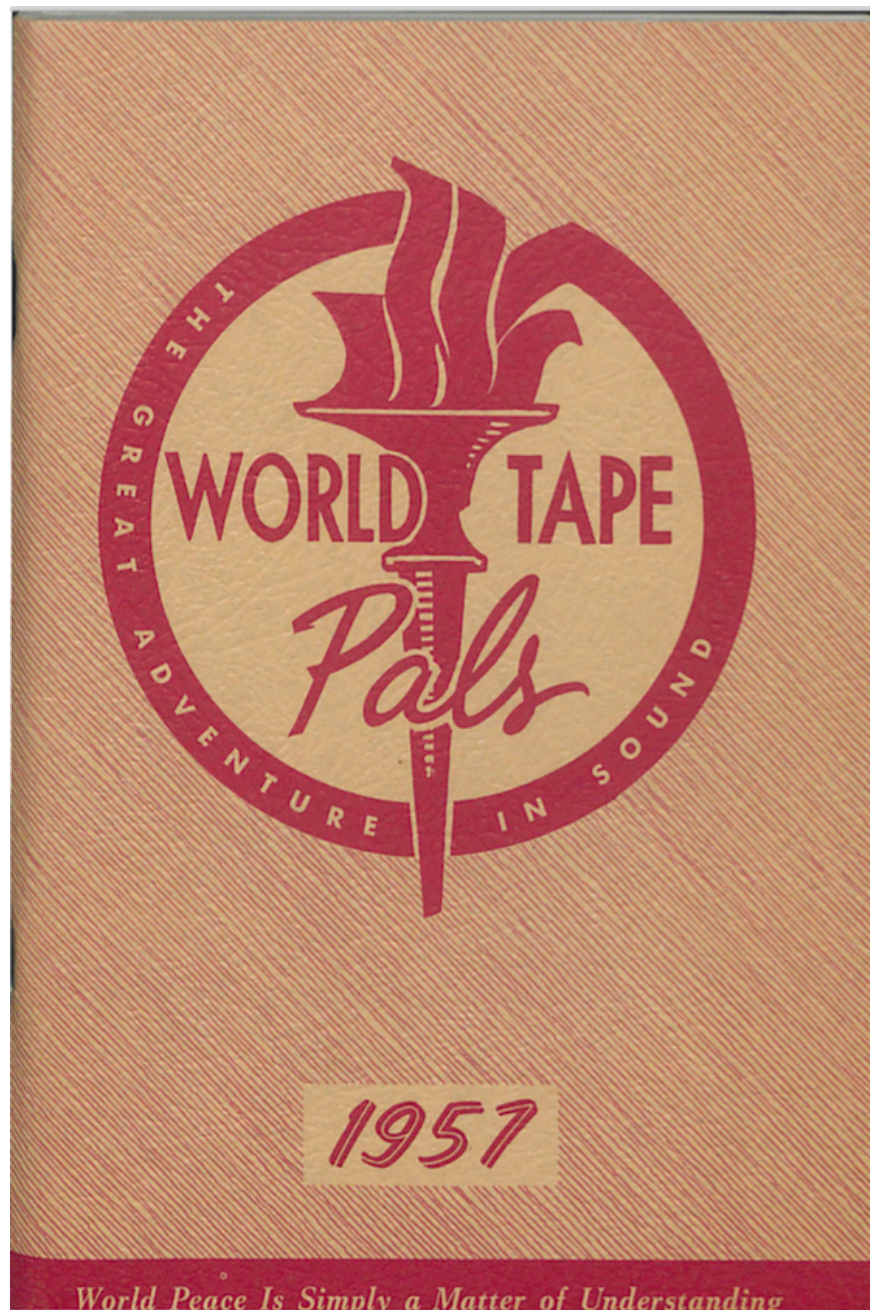


Figure 1.6 – World Tape Pals Directory (1957)

The cover to the 1957 members' directory of the World Tape Pals brought together both the desire for adventure through sound and made claims to a higher social purpose for the active use of tape technology.

From Southern Folklore Collection Discographical Files, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Chapter Two

Tony Schwartz's Sonic Subversion: Anti-Fascism and the Sound of the Popular Front

A reel of tape from Tony Schwartz's personal archive begins. On it, the mechanical whirrs of a Webster Chicago magnetic wire recorder, copying the pops and static of a 78 rpm shellac record. On the record, the sounds of crowds cheering to the strains of John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever." Speaking above the crowd is Schwartz's voice, asking listeners:

Remember the end of the war? Remember the sounds of it? People cheering and shouting their heads off, the bands playing? Strangers kissing on the streets. Remember the faces of the people? The shining eyes and the free-flowing tears of happiness? Do you remember how peace was welcomed home? What has happened to the piece that was won by our blood and our struggles? Why are the headlines shouting war? Why after winning the war are we losing the peace?

After inserting the German national anthem, "Deutschland Über Alles," he continues: "This is a familiar theme song. We thought it had been silenced forever, and the ideas it represented. But there are frightening echoes today, echoes of the big lie." Over the course of the eleven minutes that make up this unreleased 1949 recording, Schwartz tries to answer the questions raised in the introduction by splicing together sounds from Nazi Germany with contemporary radio recordings from ex-British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, American generals, and President Harry Truman, all speaking about the threat of communism to Western democracies. In so doing, he links the increasingly common rhetoric of Cold War anti-communism with the threat of fascism in the U.S. Countering their appeals for increased military spending, the establishment of NATO, and a comprehensive nuclear warfare policy against the Soviet Union, Schwartz then presents the voices of Popular Front favorites Paul Robeson and Henry Wallace as bearers of an

anti-fascist internationalist position that sees American militarism and big business profiteering as the real threat to democracy in the United States. Their “theme song[s] for peace and happiness,” drawn from the promise of popular internationalism, he hoped, could provide an alternative political path without the antagonisms of the Cold War.²¹²

In the 1950s, Schwartz was best known for a series of innovative New York City soundscape recordings released on Folkways Records, before he later went on to a career in sound design, media theory, and political consulting for the Democratic Party in the 1960s and 1970s.²¹³ Prior to such work, however, are recordings like this 1949 “Program Against Fascism,” as it was titled on a reel of tape at the Library of Congress. Though the sound quality is poor, the splices are clunky, and the politics somewhat naïve, this piece from the early days of magnetic recording offers a useful sonic glimpse into alternative hobbyist recording practices in the early postwar era that came out of the politics of the Popular Front. Compared to the elitist and often conservative cultural politics of those who used sound reproduction technology at mid-century, Schwartz’s early work points to some possibilities and pitfalls for those attempting to enact progressive politics through tape recording. Schwartz hoped that magnetic wire and tape’s capacity to capture and repurpose the sounds of powerful voices could provide listeners with tools to counter anti-communist narratives in the media and to amplify voices silenced by anti-communist blacklists.

²¹² Tony Schwartz, “Tony Schwartz program against fascism, 1947,” Title 1811089, circa 1949, audiorecording, Tony Schwartz Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Center, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Hereafter cited as TS Collection. Though the tape lists 1947 as the program’s date, it refers to events from 1949, such as the establishment of NATO “four years after Roosevelt died.”

²¹³ For academic references to Schwartz’s work, especially his Folkways recordings in the 1950s, see Jennifer Stoeber-Ackerman, “Splicing the Sonic Color Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar *Nueva York*,” *Social Text* 28 (2010): 59-85; Jentery Sayers, “How Text Lost Its Source: Magnetic Recording Cultures,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, 2011), 128-142; Lisa Hollenbach, “Sono-Montage: Langston Hughes and Tony Schwartz Listen to Postwar New York,” *American Literature* 87 (2015): 275-302.

Schwartz's recordings engaged with a broader critique of the relationship between mass media organizations and the population at large. Mid-century intellectuals often feared the potential for mass media organizations to pave the way for totalitarian politics in the U.S. by transmitting and repeating dangerous ideas to a presumably passive populace. Scholarly accounts of these conceptions of audiences as passive vessels for media messages have often focused on the written record from a range of figures including the New York Intellectuals, philosophers associated with the Frankfurt School, social scientists, market researchers, or quantitative communications scholars. This chapter, however, critically listens to several of Schwartz's 1949 anti-fascist recordings in order to better understand how hobbyist tape enthusiasts understood themselves to reduce the distance between consumers and producers of media. Magnetic recording technologies facilitated a sonic form of address that simultaneously made it easier for Schwartz and his allies to insert their own marginalized voices into an imagined conversation with other media accounts, but also to repurpose the speech of dominant voices so that they might be made to tell different stories. While these recordings might convince listeners to become more active participants in media reception by producing their own critical readings of the press, they risked recapitulating the mid-century critique of passive audiences by attempting to convince listeners of the merits of Schwartz's position through his own critical engagement with the media.

*** A Life Among the Left ***

Placing Schwartz within the political context of the early postwar Popular Front left is not evident from his public self-pronouncements, nor from listening to his later recordings like *New York 19* or *Sounds of my City*. He typically presented himself as an independent actor, did not

actively associate with easily identifiable artistic or social movements, and often found inspiration in unexpected places. Nor did he come from a working-class background, tell stories of class conflict, or speak explicitly about the politics of the Popular Front cultural figures that he recorded, including people from Pete Seeger, Richard Dyer-Bennet, Josh White, and Harry Belafonte, to W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, and Dalton Trumbo.²¹⁴ Census documents and archival audio recordings, however, reveal a deeper connection to leftist politics than Schwartz himself would explicitly suggest.

To the extent that academics and journalists have been interested in Schwartz's life and career, they have relied on his own telling of his life history. This 1964 *New Yorker* profile, for example, which explored his life in relation to his 1950s recordings for Folkways, offered this biography:

"I was born in Manhattan in 1923," he said, in a soft, rather hesitant voice. "My father, who came here from Rumania, used to tell me about the experiences of Jewish immigrants on the lower East Side. I later found that the Puerto Ricans told identical stories, and I recorded them. Most of my recordings are the result of ten of twelve years' work in a particular area. I've done a Columbia album on taxi-drivers; I must have taped several hundred of them. My family moved to Peekskill when I was four. Father was a civil engineer, and he commuted to New York. I went to Peekskill High School and then to the Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn. I took a radio course in school and got interested in short-wave radio. I found that most short-wave fans were interested in how they were being received in Australia, say, rather than in what was going on in Australia. My interest was in people, not in technique. I started to earn my living as a commercial artist—at first as art director of Graphics Institute and then in my own advertising agency, the Wexton Company. I recorded sounds on the side, and after my records began to sell and I began to do the sounds for TV commercials—I've done them for American Airlines, Johnson's baby powder, Polaroid cameras, Ivory Snow and Ivory Flakes, and Alcoa—I turned the agency over to my only brother and a cousin."²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Some of these recordings appear on Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson, "The Listening Life," *On the Media*, WNYC, aired June 27, 2008, online at <http://www.onthemedialife.org/2008/jun/27/the-listening-life/> (accessed September 10, 2013).

²¹⁵ "The Talk of the Town," *New Yorker*, November 21, 1964, 49.

Many strands of his known personal experience come together in this quote. His father appears first in the stories of his Lower East Side upbringing—which inspired Schwartz’s recordings of new migrants to his neighborhood—then as a civil engineer who commuted from Peekskill, described in another profile as “at that time a pleasant little town on the southern fringe of the Catskills borscht belt.”²¹⁶ Schwartz then narrates his interest in sound as a medium for story telling and communication, rather than as a medium to exert one’s technical prowess, before telling of his graphic design training and subsequent work translating his hobbyist interests into a career in advertising’s nascent craft of sound design.

It was true enough that Samuel Schwartz, Tony’s father, was born in Romania around 1890, came to the U.S. at the turn of the century, and grew up in the Jewish immigrant hub of Lower East Side Manhattan. Samuel’s father, listed as a furniture agent turned underwear jobber in the 1900 and 1910 federal censuses, moved his family from tenement building to tenement building around the Lower East Side before settling on West 134th Street. For his part, Samuel became a civil engineer for the city, then moved to a home near Peekskill in his thirties, soon after marrying Esther Levy.²¹⁷ Levy, meanwhile, was a daughter of Russo-Lithuanian parents who was born (in 1891) and raised in Pittsburgh, and worked as a stenographer in both

²¹⁶ Arthur Whitman, “Sounds of the City—On Tape,” *Modern Hi-Fi* (date unknown), 71. In box 8, folder 4, TS Collection.

²¹⁷ “United States Census, 1900,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MSV7-NLQ> : accessed 19 March 2015), Samuel Schwartz in household of Leon Schwartz, Borough of Manhattan, Election District 6 New York City Ward 10, New York County, New York, United States; citing sheet 34A, family 638, NARA microfilm publication T623 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 1,241,091; “United States Census, 1910,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MP1X-41X> : accessed 19 March 2015), Samuel Schwartz in household of Leon Schwartz, Manhattan Ward 17, New York, New York, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) 903, sheet 9B, family 162, NARA microfilm publication T624 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 1,375,045; and “United States Census, 1920,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MJBF-4VT> : accessed 19 March 2015), Samuel Schwartz in household of Leone Schwartz, Manhattan Assembly District 13, New York, New York, United States; citing sheet 5B, family 111, NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 1,821,209.

Pittsburgh and New York. After her marriage to Samuel Schwartz, she became a commercial writer.²¹⁸ As Esther L. Schwartz, she published stories for Bernarr Macfadden's *True Story* magazine and other pulp publishers. In addition, she authored several guides to writing, including *So You Want to Write!* (1936), *How to Write Confessional Stories* (1937), and *How to Become a Professional Writer* (1939).

Rather than a somewhat conventional story of two working-class parents moving from the city to the bucolic suburbs after getting married and moving up to white collar jobs, however, it is important to note that when Schwartz's parents moved from Manhattan, they decided to live not in Peekskill, but in an area four miles away later known as Crompond.²¹⁹ At the time, it was known as Mohegan Colony, one of the most prominent radical settlements of the 1920s and 1930s. Set up as an anarchist outpost in 1923 by Harry Kelly, Mohegan Colony was attractively located in a hilly, wooded area in the Lower Hudson Valley near Lake Mohegan, some forty miles north of Manhattan. Kelly purchased the land from the Baron de Hirsch organization, which had tried to establish an earlier Jewish agricultural settlement on the site, then reached out to Lewis Mumford for help with the physical layout of the new community. According to its initial constitution, Mohegan was created with the "hope that we may free ourselves and our children from at least some of the diseases of city life; to give free rein to our thoughts and ideals; to offer our children a libertarian education which will fit them to be fighters for a better

²¹⁸ "United States Census, 1910," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MGW1-8YS> : accessed 19 March 2015), Esther Levy in household of John J Levy, Pittsburgh Ward 25, Allegheny, Pennsylvania, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) 618, sheet 6A, family 93, NARA microfilm publication T624 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 1,375,320.

²¹⁹ "United States Census, 1930," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/X4GQ-LJZ> : accessed 19 March 2015), Anthony Schwartz in household of Samuel L Schwartz, Cortlandt, Westchester, New York, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) 0115, sheet 7B, family 172, line 53, NARA microfilm publication T626 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2002), roll 1659; FHL microfilm 2,341,393.

world.”²²⁰ After an initial group of twenty-five mostly anarchist-oriented households moved to live year-round in houses on one-acre lots in the area, Mohegan eventually attracted growing numbers of communists, socialists, and liberals from New York City throughout the 1920s and 1930s, leading to several ideological conflicts over the direction of the colony and its school.²²¹

Samuel and Esther Schwartz’s political persuasions are unknown, but it is likely they were among the many Jewish liberals who moved to the colony. On the 1930 census, they were listed as one of only forty-two households with the colony as home address, which meant that young Anthony’s neighbors were often devoted radicals who decided to surround themselves with likeminded people. Among the Schwartzes’ most well-known neighbors were George Seldes, a single-taxer and utopian communalist as well as the father of popular arts critic Gilbert Seldes and muckraking journalist Henry George Seldes; German anarcho-syndicalist philosopher Rudolf Rocker, who rented a cabin on Forest Lane beginning in 1937; and the printer Marc Epstein, who was responsible for printing the anarchist journals *Mother Earth* and *Vanguard* in the 1930s. Meanwhile, the future New York Intellectual Daniel Bell used to visit his aunt and uncle who lived in the colony in the summer time, when Mohegan’s population expanded every year.²²² Unlike the native-born working-class population in Peekskill next door, moreover, the vast majority of Mohegan Colony’s residents were first and second generation Eastern European Jews, with occupations ranging from printers, carpenters, leather workers, and furriers to bank

²²⁰ Constitution quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 290.

²²¹ The history of the Mohegan Colony is explored in Laurence Veysey, *The Communal Experience: Anarchist and Mystical Counter-Cultures in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 163-177; Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, 290-311. On Mohegan as one of many leftist colonies in Westchester County, see Baila Round Shargel, “Leftist Summer Colonies of Northern Westchester County, New York,” *American Jewish History* 83 (1995): 337-358.

²²² For more on Seldes, Rocker, and Epstein’s presence in Mohegan, see Avrich, *Modern School Movement*, 297-301.

clerks, jewelers, accountants, grocery store owners, and yes, civil engineers and writers.²²³ Not only did the Schwartzes have notable neighbors, but Mohegan, like many other leftist colonies in Westchester County, also held many musical, literary, artistic, and educational events for children and adults alike. Frequent concerts, symposia, and exhibitions, many of which served to raise money for the colony, brought in prominent visitors from throughout the leftist-radical spectrum, including then-Communist philosopher Sidney Hook, *New Masses* editor Mike Gold, singer and actor Paul Robeson, and anarchist Lucy Parsons.

Within his own home, Schwartz received a different kind of education in creativity, one that linked everyday storytelling and the growing mass culture industry. His mother's decidedly non-radical writings, which included several books offering advice on how to get paid for one's writing by mass publishers like Macfadden's *True Story*, or the pulpy Phoenix Press, still had a connection to the countercultural infrastructure of Mohegan Colony while opening up onto the larger world of mainstream commercial culture industries. Her book *How to Become a Professional Writer* was self-published, but printed by neighbor Marc Epstein's Marstin Press. She took to writing relatively late in life, but as she found that she could make some extra money for it, she wanted to teach others, mostly women, to follow in her footsteps. "I'm forty-five years old," she wrote in her 1936 book *So You Want to Write!*, "and I have been writing for eight years. My earnings have averaged about a thousand dollars a year while I have been learning how to write."²²⁴ As she explained it, she turned to writing "when I sat out in front of my home, taking care of my two little boys. I saw an advertisement of a True Story contest," and decided to enter.²²⁵ She claimed not to "have an arty bone in my body," but she felt pride in crafting stories

²²³ "U.S. Census, 1930," Cortlandt, Westchester County, New York, citing enumeration district (ED) 0115, sheets 7A-7B for occupations of Mohegan Colony residents.

²²⁴ Esther L. Schwartz, *So You Want to Write! How to Make Money By Writing* (New York: Phoenix Press, 1936), 1.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

pulled from her experience and the lives of those around her. And in receiving checks in her name.

Macfadden's publications occupied a curious position in the culture industries of the 1920s and 1930s. As cultural historian Ann Fabian explains, they exemplified "the dialectic between passive consumption and active participation that lies at the heart of even the most commodified forms of twentieth-century mass culture."²²⁶ Macfadden, for instance, claimed that a "whole new layer of society is taking its first cultural steps in what might be termed its primitive or folk literature" through stories like the ones he published.²²⁷ His magazines invited readers like Esther Schwartz to participate in the process of cultural production by soliciting confessional tales drawn from details of everyday life, resulting in a literary form that linked writers and readers together into a single imagined public. Giving advice to potential writers, she suggested that they "write the things you would want to read if you were the reader of the magazine you sent your story to."²²⁸ Schwartz found ample fodder for confessional tales in her daily life: "All around me people are living stories. Everyone has at least one story to tell. A person doesn't have to tell me his story in order for me to write it up as a confessional. Through seeing it lived, I get the point."²²⁹ Elsewhere, however, she made reference to the fact that the editing choices of the publications and the formal conventions of the genres she wrote meant that these were anything but the unmediated true stories of people like her: "Keep your love story characters young. People don't want to feel that they have to wait until they're thirty-four before devastating love strikes them. A girl wants to believe that some wonderful experience is just

²²⁶ Ann Fabian, "Making a Commodity of Truth: Speculations on the Career of Bernarr Macfadden," *American Literary History* 5 (1993): 52.

²²⁷ Fabian, "Making a Commodity of Truth," 67.

²²⁸ Schwartz, *So You Want to Write*, 26.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15, 27.

around the corner for her, and your story ought to give her just that sort of lift.”²³⁰ For someone who first married at the age of thirty, perhaps she had harbored such feelings herself as a younger woman. But with her keen commercial eye, she was more interested in the monetary value of generic storytelling conventions than with any truth claims embedded in her stories.

Who knows what her radical neighbors might have thought of such literary productions, but many on the left were skeptical of Macfadden’s publications, in part because of his flirtations with fascism in the 1920s, but also because of the non-radical or revolutionary nature of the texts produced and read by women like Esther Schwartz. But if they were hardly the stuff of radical egalitarianism, in a very real way, those texts and their readership were the outcome of a complex negotiation “between the designs of a manipulative entrepreneur and egalitarian promises that the people could represent themselves on the cultural as well as the political front.”²³¹ By the time he began work in the advertising industry in the late 1940s, such negotiations and the world that had created them would be part and parcel of her son’s life.

*** The Cultural Front and the Politics of Mass Culture in New York ***

Anthony Schwartz was interested in art and design at a young age, though like his mother, perhaps not always from a politically radical perspective. As a teenager living in Crompond and attending Peekskill High School, he picked up work making posters and signs for people in the neighborhood, designed the cover of his high school yearbook in 1939, and learned a variety of printing and design techniques through his education (fig. 2.1).²³² After going

²³⁰ Ibid., 27.

²³¹ Fabian, “Making a Commodity of the Truth,” 65. Similarly, see Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

²³² “1939 Year Book is Dedicated to Miss Ella Comfort,” *Peekskill Highland Democrat*, June 6, 1939, 11; “Design Class Goes to Ossining,” *Peekskill Highland Democrat*, May 16, 1940, 10.

temporarily blind at the age of 16, however, he became increasingly interested in sound. He also began suffering from severe agoraphobia as a teenager, which made it difficult for him to travel far from his home. At Peekskill High, Schwartz joined a high school amateur radio club as one means to commune with people from a distance. Even as a self-proclaimed “gadget hound,” he often recalled frustration over the fact that “those who engaged me in long-distance radio talk were primarily interested in the technical aspects of ham radio [...] when I asked questions about their work or life and culture in their part of the world, the answers I received almost sounded like, ‘Mind your own business.’”²³³ Given the lively political and cultural life surrounding him growing up, it is unsurprising that by the time Schwartz got to Peekskill High and began communicating with short wave radio enthusiasts around the world, he preferred to find out about the whole of their lives, rather than simply the machines they used to communicate. As much as he might have learned his tinkering tendencies from his engineer father, he also drew upon his mother’s desire to tell the stories of everyday life through the communication technologies at his disposal.

After graduating from Peekskill High School, Schwartz pursued a degree in graphic design from Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute in 1944. Pratt Institute had been established in 1887 as an affordable vocational school to train an industrial workforce in a variety of design skills. By 1938, it began issuing four-year professional degrees, and inaugurated an industrial design program. Its aim, according to co-founder Alexander Kostellow, was “to train students of the Art School to fit definitely into [a] social technico-economic picture of cultural America” that saw “commerce and industry hungrily absorb the artists who think of a machine as a contemporary

²³³ Tony Schwartz, “A New Era For Communication,” *Media Industry Newsletter*, February 26, 1979, 7, in box 159, folder 2, TS Collection.

tool for mass production.”²³⁴ There, Schwartz trained with German émigré designer Will Burtin, who would later use his modernist information design aesthetic to influence *Fortune* magazine’s corporate branding strategy. After graduating, Schwartz briefly served in World War II, where he designed training posters for the U.S. Navy. When the war was over, he reversed his parents’ migration and that of many other white New Yorkers leaving the city by settling in the west side midtown Manhattan postal zone of New York 19. He briefly worked for French émigré graphic designer Jean Carlu, who was then known for his modernist and cubist-inspired posters for the U.S. Office of War Information and the Container Corporation of America, which touted American industrial capacity as key to defeating Hitler.²³⁵ After another brief period working as art director for the Graphics Institute firm on 44th Street, he then founded his own advertising agency (the Weston Company, later Solow/Wexton) and continued to work as a commercial visual artist near his home. Already drawn to communication technologies and electronics, Schwartz came of age at the dawn of the magnetic recording era in the U.S. and purchased early wire and tape recorders soon after the war. In 1945, Schwartz bought a Webster wire recorder at the record store next to his design shop, then upgraded to tape machine two years later. Thus began his long history of working with recorded sound, first as a hobby, then as a vocation.²³⁶

With his upbringing in Mohegan Colony and his early training and burgeoning career in Manhattan’s advertising industry, Schwartz’s first encounters with magnetic recording

²³⁴ Alexander J. Kostellow, “Design and Structure Program of the Pratt Institute Art School,” *Design* 41.9 (May 1, 1940), 7. For more on Pratt’s influence on the emergence of industrial design programs in the United States, see Arthur J. Pulos, *The American Design Adventure: 1940-1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 164-167.

²³⁵ The Container Corporation of America commissioned designs from several Bauhaus-associated modernist artists in the late 1930s and 1940s, including Herbert Bayer, Gyorgy Kepes, and others. For more, see Michele H. Bogard, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 259-269.

²³⁶ The most detailed information on Schwartz’s education and early advertising career can be found in Whitman, “Sounds of the City—On Tape,” See also David Lander, “Tony Schwartz Tape Master: The *Audio* Magazine Interview,” *Audio*, March 1994, 3-5; and “Daisy: The Complete History of an Infamous and Iconic Ad – Part Two,” CONELRAD website, (<http://www.conelrad.com/daisy/daisy2.php>, accessed March 10, 2015).

technologies were situated within the broad and complicated postwar legacy of the Popular Front left. This social democratic urban tradition had its heyday from the 1930s to the late 1940s, and it differed markedly from the suburban imaginary of tape recording hobbyists discussed in my previous chapter. In Michael Denning's account, the Popular Front—a broad coalition of communists, socialists, and the left wing of the New Deal Democratic Party that came together as a result of official Communist Party doctrine in the mid-thirties in order to present a united front against fascism—sought to bolster the cultural resonance of progressivism in the U.S. by organizing culture workers under the ideological banners of industrial unionism, anti-fascism, racial and ethnic pluralism, and social democracy, and thus bringing the concerns of labor and progressive politics to the fore of cultural production.²³⁷

During and after World War II, it was fair to wonder whether the culture industries would indeed serve the pro-business politics of *Life* publisher Henry Luce's "American century," or the democratic yearnings of Henry Wallace's "century of the common man."²³⁸ As historian Wendy Wall has argued, in its starkest formulation, the great debate facing the U.S. as it emerged from the Great Depression was between industrial democracy and free enterprise. On the one hand, Luce and his allies in the National Association of Manufacturers "emphasized individual rights and the libertarian dimensions of 'freedom,'" and portrayed business leaders as the rightful stewards of American politics. On the other hand, Wallace and those allied with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) "emphasized the struggle of 'the people' against monopolistic capital and called for mutualistic responses" to economic and political problems facing the

²³⁷ While the official "Popular Front" policy put forward by the Community Party of the USA ran from 1935 to 1939, I follow Denning in using the phrase here to refer to the unofficial social movement that bound this broad coalition together until at least the second red scare of the late 1940s. See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997).

²³⁸ See Wendy Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112-119.

U.S.²³⁹ These responses often entailed state intervention into economic problems, participatory democracy within industrial unions, and farmer and consumer cooperatives to give individual buyers and sellers more leverage within the marketplace. However, this battle played out as much on airwaves and newsstands as within voting booths, shop floors, or grocery stores. Luce's ability to command a large readership through his publications (*Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, *The March of Time* newsreels) made it easier for him to shape popular discourse in favor of business interests and to prioritize the freedom to consume as the most meaningful freedom to be found in the U.S. But even there, his power was limited by the need to sell magazines. Luce employed many popular writers and photographers whose politics aligned them more closely with the Popular Front, not because he agreed with their politics, but because they could attract readers.²⁴⁰

As a lifelong worker in the advertising industry, Schwartz embodied something of the contradictions of the cultural front. Working both in his own advertising practice and for others, he contributed to the establishment of marketing strategies that further entrenched the dominance of ad-based culture industries that defended "free enterprise" as key to American life. However, in both his hobbyist tape recording practice and his later advertising work, he was also a critic of U.S. culture industries for their failure to represent the totality of lived experience, especially when it had to do with the perspectives that were privileged by the recording and broadcasting industries. Further, the massification of cultural production through the growth of culture industries like newspapers, publishing, films, and music, along with government agencies increasingly concerned with matters of representation, created a new class of culture workers within the U.S. This "cultural mass," the newly professionalized and bureaucratized graphic

²³⁹ Wall, *Inventing the "American Way,"* 35. On the efforts of business to roll back the New Deal since the 1930s, see Kimberly Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

²⁴⁰ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 83-90.

artists, writers, copy writers, photographers, editors, artists, teachers, and other performers that formed the rank-and-file base of these industries, could either change popular culture from the inside by infusing cultural production with the problematics of labor, or serve to perpetuate the interests of capital within the culture industries by allowing their labor to be expropriated by the sellers of mass culture.²⁴¹

Cultural front activists who wanted to turn popular culture into a contested political space sought appropriate aesthetic forms and cultural tropes to express their views while appealing to the widest possible audience. One of the most common to emerge from this world was the figure of “the people.” Like many other capacious keywords that drive political discourse in the U.S., such as “democracy,” “freedom,” the “American way,” “free enterprise,” or “consensus,” the “people” was a highly contested signifier.²⁴² It could equally mobilize conservative populist rhetoric representing homogeneous white Americans under siege from outside threats, liberal mainstream humanist populism that lionized the “forgotten man” as victim of social circumstances beyond his control, or a social democratic vision of heterogeneous workers trod upon by capitalist power structures.²⁴³ For the Popular Front, this latter conception predominated, and it was inflected with a profoundly internationalist worldview that saw strength in regional and ethnic diversity and imagined that democracy was meaningless without cultural pluralism to match.²⁴⁴ “The result,” according to Denning, “was a paradoxical synthesis of competing nationalisms and internationalism – pride in ethnic heritage and identity combined with an assertive Americanism and a popular internationalism” that stood at odds with narrow

²⁴¹ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 38-50; 83-96. See also Shannan Wayne Clark, “‘White-Collar Workers Organize’: Class-Consciousness and the Transformation of the Culture Industries in the United States, 1925-1955” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2006), 1-4.

²⁴² For more on the genealogies of such terms, see Wall, *Inventing the “American Way.”*

²⁴³ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 126-128.

²⁴⁴ See also Rachel Clare Donaldson, *“I Hear America Singing:” Folk Music and National Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 3-5.

invocations of U.S. patriotism.²⁴⁵ For the Popular Front to succeed in its broadest goals, it would need to present “the people” as simultaneously united under the banner of social democracy, and celebratory of ethnic, racial, or national differences between different members of the working classes in the U.S. and abroad.

Along with documentary photography, folklore had become a primary aesthetic site for the exploration and expression of “the people’s” voice from the 1930s onwards. Folk revivalists like Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Alan Lomax, and Ben Botkin saw folk music and folklore in the U.S. as an expression of a romantic and vernacular American tradition that was simultaneously radical in its politics, regionally/ethnically specific, and untainted by commercial pressures.²⁴⁶ Botkin argued that “the whole American Folk tradition is a progressive people’s tradition” that could include virtually anyone, though most folk revivalists on the left emphasized the socially, economically, politically, and culturally disenfranchised.²⁴⁷ They also imagined that folk music, by its very nature, facilitated the practice of participatory democracy because anybody could learn to play, sing, or even simply attend hootenannies to listen folk songs, and thus participate in the crafting of their meaning.

Even if the Popular Front succeeded in getting progressive ideas into the mainstream, anti-Stalinist critics of this perspective, who were associated with the New York Intellectual

²⁴⁵ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 130.

²⁴⁶ The story is more complicated than they imagined, since folklore had long been established as a form of invented traditionalism. On this argument, see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Marybeth Hamilton, *In Search of the Blues* (New York: Basic Books, 2008). For more on history of left wing folk music, see Richard A. Reuss and JoAnne C. Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000); Robbie Lieberman, “My Song Is My Weapon:” *People’s Songs, American Communism, and the Politics of Culture, 1930-1950* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); and Donaldson, “I Hear America Singing.”

²⁴⁷ Botkin quoted in Donaldson, “I Hear America Singing,” 87.

magazines *Partisan Review*, *Politics*, and *Commentary*, wondered whether the populist sentimentality that it traded on ultimately resulted in the degradation of culture as a whole.²⁴⁸ In Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald's view, *kitsch*, or middlebrow art, stood somewhere between vulgarized mass culture and elite avant gardeism, and included the artistic productions of the Popular Front. These works risked "capitulating to the spirit of fascism while ostensibly combating its letter," because populism relied on a veneration of the folk in ways reminiscent of Hitler's mass rallies and Stalin's forced collectivization alike.²⁴⁹ These critics also worried about the role of intellectuals in responding to the cultural products of the Popular Front. "For the first time," Robert Warshow wrote in *Commentary* in 1947, reflecting on the legacy of 1930s radicalism, "popular culture was able to draw its ideological support from the most advanced sectors of society. If this represented a lowering of the level of serious culture, it also raised the level—or at least the tone—of popular culture. This is precisely what made it a 'problem.'"²⁵⁰ If popular culture became increasingly influenced by the politics of the left, and if intellectuals and critics shared many of the same political views, could they judge the popular arts on their artistic merits, rather than their ability to convey the "correct" ideological line? For Warshow, the risk was "a culture solidifying in vulgarity and dishonesty, of which [the intellectual] was a part."²⁵¹ This was especially so, William Phillips argued later on, because in "choosing the 'folk' tradition

²⁴⁸ For an overall assessment of the New York Intellectuals' response to the Popular Front, see Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals & Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 84-120; Terry A. Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and Its Circle* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 196-250; Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 151-185; Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Cultures in the Postwar World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 19-30.

²⁴⁹ This quote from Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 119. Originally from Dwight Macdonald, "Kulturbolshevismum Is Here," *Partisan Review*, Nov.-Dec. 1941, 443-451.

²⁵⁰ Robert Warshow, "The Legacy of the 30's," in *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre & Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 34-35. Originally published in *Commentary*, December 1947.

²⁵¹ Warshow, "The Legacy of the 30's," 37.

while repudiating the ‘intellectual’ one, the radical movement was taking a political as well as a literary stand,” against complexity and for populism.²⁵² In short, for the New York Intellectuals, the use of art and literature as a proxy for committed politics risked producing overly programmatic art that told people how to feel and how to think about the world.²⁵³

Beyond the content of any cultural commodity, for many leftist intellectuals in the mid-1940s, the fact that mass culture was an industry that needed to sell its wares invariably corrupted or diluted any critical or aesthetic impulse that might be contained within its products. Though the overall effects of the culture industry on the molding of minds were complex, Frankfurt School intellectuals Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno believed that mass media had paved the way for Hitler’s seizure of power in Germany, and might yet allow for the imposition of a subtler totalitarianism in postwar Europe and North America by “promot[ing] a false consciousness among consumers, degrading their lives and lulling them into passivity,” in the words of historian Daniel Horowitz.²⁵⁴ If consumers’ access to cultural commodities was underwritten by advertising, this ultimately made them susceptible to psychological suggestion: “The blind and rapidly spreading repetition of designated words,” wrote Horkheimer and Adorno, “links advertising to the totalitarian slogan.”²⁵⁵ Though they might “recognize as false” the promises of advertisers, consumers could not escape receiving their potentially dangerous

²⁵² William Phillips, “What Happened in the 30’s,” *Commentary*, (September 1962), online at <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/what-happened-in-the-30s/> (accessed March 9, 2015).

²⁵³ This view of the Popular Front was not unique to the anti-Stalinist New York Intellectuals. Warren Susman similarly saw the culture of the thirties as fundamentally sentimental and inward looking, in large part because “American culture,” even with the influence of the Popular Front, “continues to be largely middle-class culture,” and that “if we keep our focus on the middle class, we may also be better able to understand why some shifts to the Left proved so temporary or even why the period proved in the end so fundamentally conservative as it concentrated on finding and glorying an American Way of Life.” See “Culture and Commitment,” 192 in *Culture As History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

²⁵⁴ Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures*, 34.

²⁵⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1944]), 135.

messages through the consumption of cultural commodities.²⁵⁶ New York Intellectual Dwight Macdonald shared much of their pessimism about the products of the culture industries: “Mass Culture is imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying.”²⁵⁷ While earlier forms of folk art might have had some relationship to the communities from which it sprang, kitsch could only represent people’s lived experiences insofar as it served to exploit them as consumers. Yet as Denning and others have more recently argued, the very fact that the number of media workers and consumers grew larger with the expansion of the culture industries potentially turned the production of popular culture into a contested space in which processes of belonging, identification, and meaning-making could be hashed out on the levels of cultural production, circulation, and consumption.²⁵⁸

Those who believed in both the capacity and the necessity for cultural workers to advance social democratic politics through the mechanisms of mass culture believed that building and sustaining a movement culture (or in Gramscian terms, achieving cultural hegemony) would require the establishment of alternative networks of cultural production. As Denning has put it elsewhere, “The building of hegemonic formations is not only a matter of ideas, and of winning hearts and minds, but also an issue of participation, in the sense of involving people both in cultural institutions [...] and in long-term historic projects.”²⁵⁹ For many artists affiliated with

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 136.

²⁵⁷ Dwight Macdonald, “A Theory of Mass Culture,” in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, eds. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), 60. The essay originally appeared in 1953.

²⁵⁸ For these arguments, Denning draws heavily on C.L.R. James and Stuart Hall, particularly on the latter’s reading of Antonio Gramsci. See, for example, Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems,” in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, eds. Stuart Hall et al., (London: Hutchinson, 1980); and Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Popular,’” in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel, (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 227-240.

²⁵⁹ Michael Denning, “The End of Mass Culture,” in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, (New York: Verso, 2004) 110.

Popular Front politics, access to mainstream cultural institutions was often limited and precarious, and thus participation was difficult to assure. Announcing the 1949 establishment of People's Artists—a collective of folk singers to perform at labor, civil liberties, and civil rights rallies, and an outgrowth of the earlier People's Songs organization—a committee including Paul Robeson, Betty Sanders, and Pete Seeger argued: “The commercialized standards of Hollywood, radio and Tin Pan Alley have subverted the musical life of our country. The concert halls reach, at best, only a very small portion of the American people, and then at prices usually beyond the reach of working people.”²⁶⁰ In contrast to the commercialized sounds around them, People's Artists wanted to promote “a music rooted in the democratic past of America and which is an integral part of the struggles shaping our country today.”²⁶¹ If concert halls were difficult to reach, commercial broadcasters susceptible to the whims of sponsors, government agencies subject to political machinations, and record labels unwilling to support musical recordings until they proved that they could sell—to say nothing of the fear of blacklisting—what hope could there be for forms of cultural expression that were explicitly leftist in their politics?

Through the founding of new journals, newspapers, and magazines; the establishment of photography, folk song, and writing collectives; the running of film production studios, recording labels, and performances spaces; and the programming of radio shows, art exhibits, and performance series, cultural front artists and supporters thought that a wide ranging institutional apparatus might sustain community, collaboration, and production along different lines than the profit-driven culture industries, even as they recognized the importance of those industries to a wider cultural politics. In New York of the mid- to late-1940s alone, folklorists

²⁶⁰ People's Artists was an outgrowth of the earlier People's Songs collective, active around the country from 1945-1948. Quote from its founding in Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 62. For more on People's Songs, see Lieberman, “*My Song Is My Weapon*”; and Donaldson, “*I Hear America Singing*,” 84-97.

²⁶¹ Quoted in Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 62.

built and relied upon several cultural front institutions to express such ideas, including *PM*, People's Songs/Artists, Disc and Asch Records, Barney Josephson's integrated venue Café Society, The Village Vanguard, Alan Lomax's CBS radio broadcasts, and Oscar Brand's WNYC program *Folk Song Festival*.

By the end of the 1940s, when Schwartz first obtained his magnetic recorders, he was interested in many of the forms of cultural production associated with progressive politics, most notably, folk music. Initially, he began interested in the genre because he believed that “folk music is direct,” “the nearest thing to traveling to a locality and hearing a song in its setting,” “real,” and “from the people,” unlike (in his estimation) popular music.²⁶² He began by recording episodes of Oscar Brand's *Folk Song Festival* so that he could have copies of radio performances for posterity.²⁶³ Brand, who had grown up in Winnipeg's Jewish community before traveling around the United States and settling in New York after the war, had been a participant in People's Songs in the mid-1940s. He believed that the organization had helped create a progressive political atmosphere “filled with infinite possibilities” in which “the common man was to be once again enthroned,” though by the end of the decade, he distanced himself from the radical left.²⁶⁴ Still, as director of folk music at the municipally-owned broadcasting station, Brand brought in artists from the left-wing folk community like Huddle Ledbetter, Pete Seeger, Richard Dyer-Bennet, and Woody Guthrie, among many others. While listening to the show at home, Schwartz thought about the fact that “the average folk singer had no money and couldn't cut a disc to hear how his songs sounded. These people didn't have recorders.”²⁶⁵ Since he did,

²⁶² Fred Rayfield, “How Tony Schwartz Collects Some Unique Folk Music,” source unknown, 1951, found in box 8, folder 1, TS Collection.

²⁶³ Lander, “Tony Schwartz Tape Master,” 4.

²⁶⁴ Oscar Brand, *The Ballad Mongers: The Rise of the Modern Folk Song* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1962) 85.

²⁶⁵ Lander, “Tony Schwartz Tape Master,” 4.

he contacted musicians who had performed on Brand's show to see if they wanted to listen to their performances and perhaps record some new songs at his West 57th Street apartment. Through this technique, he gathered unique recordings from the likes of Josh White, Burl Ives, Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte, and Yma Sumac (fig. 2.2).²⁶⁶ In a private letter to Schwartz, Brand expressed gratitude "for your past contributions and help," since "your special recordings of The Weavers, Yma Sumac, and many others have helped enliven our weekly activities for many years now."²⁶⁷ Though Schwartz would later dismiss off-the-air recordings as a derivative use of magnetic recording devices, it did allow him entry into the world of folk recording, and that through one of the key postwar institutions of the Popular Front's folk music orientation in New York, *Folk Song Festival*.

After the heady days of the early postwar years, however, the second Red Scare dealt a serious blow to most of the institutions and cultural figures at the center of the Popular Front. As anti-communism became official federal policy with the Taft-Hartley Act, which fractured the links between industrial unionists and communists, President Truman's Executive Order 9835, which mandated a loyalty oath from federal employees, and the growing reach of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which led to the blacklisting of several left-wing culture workers from the film, recording, and broadcasting industries, the political climate of the late 1940s and the 1950s in the U.S. presented serious obstacles for the Popular Front and its fellow travelers. Barney Josephson shut the doors to his Café Society venues in Greenwich Village and on East 58th Street in 1947 after HUAC subpoenaed his brother, Asch Records went bankrupt the same year, and *PM* and *New Masses* both suspended circulation in 1948. The

²⁶⁶ Jeanne Lowe, "Tony Schwartz: Master Tape Recordist," *Magnetic Film & Tape Recording*, June 1955, 24.

²⁶⁷ Undated letter from Oscar Brand (signed, "Your friend,") to Tony Schwartz, on WNYC letterhead. Box 154, folder 2, TS Collection.

failure of Progressive Party standard-bearer Henry Wallace to win more than 2.5% of the popular vote during the 1948 election, moreover, particularly after musicians affiliated with People's Songs performed at Wallace rallies throughout the country, seemed clear and compelling evidence that the cultural front had overestimated the reach of leftist politics in the U.S. and that they still had work to do in convincing the rest of the country that its program was right for the U.S.²⁶⁸ Rather than narrate this as a declension story about the failure of the cultural front, however, it is more helpful to understand this history as the bedrock upon which future alternative cultural institutions and productions that shared the same vision would be built. In the following chapter, I will take up Schwartz's New York 19 project as an extension of this Popular Front framework. First, however, it is necessary to explore some of his earliest extant recordings.

*** Anti-Fascist Recordings of the Early Cold War ***

At the same moment as cultural producers associated with the Popular Front faced many difficulties during the late 1940s, Tony Schwartz produced several unreleased recordings critical of Cold War anti-communism. In later profiles and interviews, Schwartz often described three principal methods of producing and otherwise acquiring new non-commercial recordings; recording folk musicians over the radio then inviting them to his home, trading reels of tape and wire through the mail, and going outdoors to record the sounds of his city. Unreleased recordings prior to his work on Folkways, however, reveal alternative recording practices that explicitly articulated the anti-fascist, anti-racist, and pro-Soviet politics of many within the Popular Front. Practicing a kind of "annotative journalism" similar to that of Henry George Seldes, son of

²⁶⁸ Donaldson, "I Hear America Singing," 92-93.

another Mohegan Colony resident, Schwartz recorded news reports and other sounds off the radio in order to produce critical accounts of anti-communist politics at mid-century.²⁶⁹

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the muckraking pro-labor journalist Seldes published several accounts that promised to correct the journalistic record by exposing links among oligopolistic media ownership, right-wing politics, and the advertising industry, including works such as *Freedom of the Press* (1935), *The Facts are...* (1935), *Witchhunt* (1940), *Lords of the Press* (1941), and *The People Don't Know* (1949).²⁷⁰ Most notably, his independently owned and edited *In Fact* newsletter—which ran from 1940-1950 with the subtitles *For the Millions Who Want a Free Press* and *An Antidote for Falsehood in the Daily Press*—circulated to some 176,000 subscribers at its high-point mid-decade, many of whom were CIO-affiliated union members. After the war, the rise of the Cold War led to a precipitous drop in subscriptions to 56,000, which prompted Seldes to conclude the following about the role of the media in fomenting anti-communism in the U.S.:

The American newspaper and magazine press (and the radio and other means of making public opinion) have already done their part in the cold war not only by an attitude, a prejudgment of cause and effect, but by actually manipulating facts, news documentation, happenings, interviews, speeches, and other actions and expressions, for propaganda purposes.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ George Seldes' *In Fact* offered a left-wing critique of mainstream news organizations and often reported on the links between American business interests and fascist countries during World War II. *In Fact* was a precursor to I.F. Stone's *Weekly*, which did much the same kind of reporting on the media. For more on "annotative journalism," see Lucas Graves, "Blogging Back Then: Annotative Journalism in I.F. Stone's *Weekly* and Talking Points Memo," *Journalism* 16 (2015): 99-118. Graves offers the following definition of annotative journalism: "journalism that proceeds mainly through the critical analysis of published texts, where those may be news accounts, official documents, or other material, publicly available texts," 100.

²⁷⁰ Among Seldes' most prominent critiques was an argument that the press had conspired to avoid reports of the health dangers associated with smoking, since the tobacco industry was one of the major advertisers whose dollars underwrote mass media publications and broadcasters. See Pamela A. Brown, "George Seldes and the Winter Soldier Brigade: The Press Criticism of *In Fact*, 1940-1950," *American Journalism* VI:2 (1989): 85-102 for an assessment of Seldes' media criticism. See also Robert W. McChesney and Ben Scott, "Introduction," *Our Unfree Press: 100 Years of Radical Media Criticism*, 1-30, eds. Robert W. McChesney and Ben Scott (New York: New Press, 2004) for more on Seldes' place within the genre.

²⁷¹ George Seldes, *The People Don't Know: The American Press and the Cold War* (New York: Gaer Associates, 1949), 306.

If, as he believed, “America is one of the most misinformed countries in the civilized world,” it was not because “people get the newspaper press they deserve,” but because media owners and publishers were free to “use free enterprise for [their] personal gain—financial, political or otherwise—and to fail in all [their] social obligations.”²⁷² Believing that the politics of the United States and the world at large were otherwise moving to the left in the postwar era, but that the structural conditions of media ownership prevented those politics from having an open hearing, Seldes claimed that an independent media would be necessary to verify the facts of the mainstream press and present a story suitable to leftist aspirations in the country.

If Seldes’ leftist critique of the links between latent U.S. fascism and media ownership focused on the structural dynamics of the publishing industry, others were more explicit to state their fears about the mass media’s capacity to turn independent citizens into uncritical thinkers susceptible to authoritarian political influence and to seek alternatives for this state of affairs. Before and during World War II, communications scholar Fred Turner has recently argued, many social scientists in the U.S. sought to account for the rise of European fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, and cast blame at the hands of mass media organizations for widely disseminating dangerous views. Hitler’s stated plan had been to claim power by repeating “simple, single messages over and over again,” messages disseminated over state owned airwaves that guaranteed “that every member of the radio audience should hear the same voice that others heard in person at mass rallies, and that they should feel the same irrational bond to one another and to the Führer.”²⁷³ As discussed earlier in reference to Horkheimer and Adorno, since the mainstream broadcasting industry in the U.S. adopted a “one-to-many” transmission model that

²⁷² Ibid., 2, 304, 305.

²⁷³ Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 27.

distributed centrally produced content to mass audiences in order to maximize revenue dollars from advertisers, passive audiences across the country might be susceptible to suggestion. If totalitarian regimes and ad-driven culture industries relied upon repetition and one-way transmission for their effects, how might democratic citizens resist their influence? A variety of thinkers proposed to understand how a perceptual training in the techniques of propaganda might serve to gird individuals against the threat of fascism. Broadcast media and film, claimed Margaret Mead in an unpublished 1941 manuscript, created a situation in which “the spectator is the passive recipient of whatever stimuli are flung at him, and, whatever he may digest of the message, he will at least spend his hour learning passivity.”²⁷⁴ Instead, she and others who shared her concerns hoped it would be possible to produce interactive cultural products that might “free the individual citizen from his fear of being moved, to restore to the individual his belief that HE CAN MAKE CHOICES, HE IS NOT JUST A HELPLESS MUSICAL INSTRUMENT ON WHICH THE PROPAGANDIST PLAYS WHATEVER TUNE HE WISHES.”²⁷⁵ Democratic politics thus required democratic personalities which in turn required modes of communication that resisted the one-way transmission belt of fascist loudspeakers and mass media alike.

By the early postwar period, after a brief period of optimism about the ability of the United States to work with its wartime Soviet ally, mainstream opinion in the U.S. came to see worldwide communism as the largest threat to democracy. For many intellectuals building on the earlier research from Mead and her cohort, totalitarianism replaced fascism as a key object of study, since they saw Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia as equally capable of molding authoritarian personalities. But here too, they feared the potential for authoritarianism to take root in Western Europe and North American through the mass media. Once again, perceptual

²⁷⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 75.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

training in the techniques of propaganda would be required in order for U.S. citizens to maintain their individuality, to resist the pernicious influences of mass culture, and to reimagine communications along more flexible, interactive, and heterogeneous lines.²⁷⁶

The remnants of the Popular Front, however, were less willing to give up their opposition to fascism as a key analytic, and criticized those who saw communism as an equal threat to democratic ways of being. While others on the left like Seldes challenged the print and broadcast media and claimed that fascism continued to represent a bigger threat to U.S. democracy than communism after the war, Tony Schwartz came to his own critiques through his use and understanding of sound. Since he did so with magnetic recording technologies, though, he also challenged the notion that listeners were inherently passive recipients of one-way media messages that found it impossible to speak back.

Let us return, then, to Schwartz's unreleased recording from 1949, "Program Against Fascism," which offered a pointed sonic critique of early Cold War anti-communism along lines similar to Seldes.²⁷⁷ It is unclear what purpose Schwartz had in putting this program together, whether he hoped it might air on the radio, or if he distributed it to friends, or if he simply made it for himself in order to respond to the perspectives he heard on his radio. But the archival recording itself makes clear the extent to which he feared that a growing anti-communist sentiment in the United States might pave the way for fascist politics at home, and it is worth listening carefully in order to consider the affordances of magnetic recording technology to his

²⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 151-180.

²⁷⁷ All descriptions of this recording from Tony Schwartz, "Tony Schwartz program against fascism, 1947," Title 1811089, circa 1949, audiorecording, TS Collection. The program is mislabeled as being from 1947, but it contains references from several events in 1949, such as the establishment of NATO. Hereafter cited as "Program against fascism."

early engagement with sound recording. Rather than evaluate the truth claims of his recordings, the analysis that follows focuses on the formal and technical qualities of this piece.

From the beginning, Schwartz's narrative choices, vocabulary, and editing techniques suggest that sound is key to his political intervention. Situating listeners in a crowd celebrating the end of World War II, his words at the introduction evoke a sonic landscape by asking listeners to remember what the end of the war sounded like, before going on to enumerate the threats to peace from a return of dangerous "theme songs" like Deutschland Über Alles. Beyond the clarity of his words, Schwartz's tape editing techniques throughout amplified the message he attempted to get across. In the first part of the program, Schwartz attempts to explain "the big lie" perpetrated by fascism by combining his own voice with original recordings to drive his points home. After splicing in segments of a Hitler speech from a 78 rpm record, he intervenes to say, "This fella said that if you told a lie, and repeated it often enough, and loud enough, the people would eventually believe it." Interspersing sounds of crowds shouting "Sieg Heil" in agreement with the speech, Schwartz's voice interrupts the speech and the crowds: "His biggest lie was this. He said that there was no real quarrel between fascism and the democracies. That the real enemy of civilization was communism, and communist Russia. He repeated it again and again, and his people said." Schwartz immediately splices in more "Sieg Heil" chants as a quote to punctuate his statement. He continues, "And then they smashed the shops of the Jews. And marched into Czechoslovakia. Poland. France. And the Soviet Union."²⁷⁸

Transposing the example to the United States, he expands on his understanding of "the big lie," which consisted, in his words, in "the thief joining the crowd and crying stop thief. First, you create an aggressor. Then, in the name of stopping aggression, you build up a huge war

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

machine, anxious for action.” Schwartz then splices in a radio recording of Winston Churchill telling a U.S. crowd that the Soviet Union is “something quite as wicked, but in some ways more formidable, than Hitler,” and an unnamed American general, who says, “there is only one major military threat to the security of the United States and to the peace of the world. This threat comes from the Soviet Union.” Schwartz chimes in: “It’s the big lie, repeated, again and again,” before using the general’s voice to repeat his last sentence three times, each repetition growing subtly louder than the previous iteration. By the end of this section—which goes on to edit in President Truman telling Congress of the need for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, General Omar Bradley noting the ramp up of military spending, and the earlier unnamed general calling for a nuclear warfare policy—Schwartz intervenes to claim that “the echo of Hitler’s theme song is heard again, around the world” before once again replaying “This threat comes from the Soviet Union.” Immediately, he returns to the recordings of crowds chanting “Sieg Heil” and the German national anthem.²⁷⁹

Instead of wholeheartedly believing official claims that presented the Soviet Union as a mortal threat to the United States, Schwartz presented a much more sympathetic reading of communism and Soviet Russia. In the second part of the recording, he pivots to sound “another side of this story [...] another theme song, a theme song for peace, and happiness!” by playing a recording of the “United Nations March” by Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich as sung by Paul Robeson. “The idea for this theme,” Schwartz’s voice tells us, “was expressed way back, by Wendell Willkie,” the liberal Republican whose 1943 book *One World* attempted to create a “sense of public feeling for worldly connection” through a popular internationalism that

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

challenged American exceptionalism and isolationism in foreign policy.²⁸⁰ Making his own political convictions clear, Schwartz then plays a recording from President Roosevelt praising Stalin as a worthy wartime ally in 1943 and then claims Henry Wallace as the true heir to Roosevelt and Willkie's vision. Wallace's voice, taken from recordings during the 1948 presidential campaign, challenges the belief that the Soviet Union represented a threat to the U.S. by claiming that "there's only a threat to the super profits of American monopolies [... who are] using fear to silence protest against their own policies. They use fear to ensure control, both at home and abroad." Speaking above the sound of Robeson's voice, which returns for a verse and chorus of the "United Nations March," Schwartz concludes the piece with an uncharacteristically explicit statement of his own views:

But it won't work, for the only thing that will work is peace. Peace and friendship with our great wartime ally, an enduring peace, growing out of a united United Nations, out of friendship with the Soviet people and the people of the new democracies! Out of an outlawing of the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb, and of a reduction of armaments, and of a genuine return to a one world policy, a policy of one world, at peace!

Updating popular wartime internationalism for the postwar era, Schwartz sought to link anti-communism with the fascism defeated in the war and called for citizens to remain vigilant against militarism and nuclear warfare in the United States in the late 1940s.²⁸¹

Using the language of "theme songs" that need to be silenced or amplified, or "echoes" of lies that resonate in far away lands, the piece makes a case that sounds have a capacity to mobilize fears and stir alternative political possibilities. Beyond his choice of words, his insistence on repeating the same recordings of generals and Nazi crowds to make his point about

²⁸⁰ "Sense of public feeling" quote from Samuel Zipp, "When Wendell Willkie Went Visiting: Between Interdependence and Exceptionalism in the Public Feeling for One World," *American Literary History* 26 (2014): 486.

²⁸¹ Schwartz, "Tony Schwartz program against fascism, 1947."

the “big lie” demonstrates the fact that he first used his magnetic recorders as means to refashion the raw materials of recordings off the radio and 78 rpm records into progressive sonic critiques of anti-communism. If listeners should approach statements by U.S. generals and government officials with a critical ear, Schwartz’s recording seemed to suggest that they listen to voices on the left with an open one.

It is telling that he chose to use Paul Robeson’s voice in such a recording in 1949, due to a series of events that amply demonstrated the challenges for those enacting Popular Front strategies during the anti-communist political climate of the early Cold War. On August 27th 1949, People’s Artists organized an outdoor concert near Schwartz’s hometown of Peekskill starring Robeson, Pete Seeger, and Hope Foye, among others, in support of the Harlem branch of the Civil Rights Congress. Four months earlier, Robeson had delivered a controversial address to the World Peace Conference in Paris, in which the U.S. press quoted him as saying, “We colonial peoples have contributed to the building of the United States and are determined to share its wealth [...] It is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those who have oppressed us for generations against the Soviet Union.”²⁸² Liberal organizations seeking to distance themselves from communist affiliations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Jewish Committee, denounced Robeson’s misquoted words and backed away from their previous support of the famous singer, actor, and activist.²⁸³

²⁸² Paul Robeson, Jr.’s biography of his father instead quotes Robeson as having told the conference: “We in America do not forget that it was on the backs of the white workers from Europe and on the backs of millions of blacks that the wealth of America was built. And we are resolved to share it equally. We reject any hysterical raving that urges us to make war on anyone. Our will to fight for peace is strong. We shall not make war on anyone. We shall not make war on the Soviet Union.” From *The Undiscovered Paul Robeson: Quest for Freedom, 1939-1976* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 143.

²⁸³ Historical accounts of the events in Peekskill that focus on their place within the politics of Popular Front folk music include Reuss and Reuss, *American Folk Music & Left-Wing Politics*, 226-228; Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 165-166; Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 62-63; and Tony Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance*

When the concert in Westchester County was announced, the local press opposed Robeson's appearance because "every ticket purchased for the Peekskill concert will drop nickels and dimes into the till basket of an Un-American political organization."²⁸⁴ It was not the first time Robeson had performed in the area. In fact, this was the fourth in a yearly series of concerts that attracted many Jewish New Yorkers who went to nearby leftist "colonies" in the summer.²⁸⁵ On the first occasion, in 1946, he performed right in Schwartz's hometown of Mohegan Colony. But by 1949, with rising anti-communist feeling coinciding with opposition to Robeson's statements in Paris, the Peekskill *Evening Star* further editorialized, "The time for tolerant silence that signifies approval is running out. Peekskill wants no rallies that support iron curtains, concentration camps, blockades, and NKVD's, no matter how masterful the decor, nor how sweet the music."²⁸⁶ Before the performers could take the stage on August 27th, local residents of Peekskill, particularly members of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, protested the concert and attacked audience members with bricks and stones while police and state officials looked on. Especially concerning to concertgoers were the resonances between the opposition to Robeson and fascist rhetoric. Howard Fast, for instance, reported hearing the shouts, "We're Hitler's boys," "God bless Hitler and fuck you nigger bastards and Jew bastards!" and "Lynch Robeson!" while escaping the violence of the first attempted concert.²⁸⁷

Complex (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 91-159. For more on divisions revealed in the aftermath of the incident, see Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 135-147; Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 26-36.

²⁸⁴ Peekskill *Evening Star*, August 23, 1949. Quoted in Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 137.

²⁸⁵ Shargel, "Leftist Summer Colonies of Northern Westchester County, New York," for more on the cultural and political context of the nearby summer camps and other leftist settlements nearby. On Robeson's earlier appearance in Mohegan, see John J. Curran, *Peekskill's African American History: A Hudson Valley Community's Untold Story* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008), 74-76.

²⁸⁶ Peekskill *Evening Star*, August 23, 1949. Quoted in Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 137.

²⁸⁷ Howard Fast, *Peekskill: USA, a Personal Experience* (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951), 29.

Refusing to be intimidated by what they saw as native fascism in the U.S., a week later, on Labor Day, People's Artists reconvened the concert with a volunteer guard of union members to protect performers and the fifteen to twenty thousand concertgoers, many Jewish and African American, that attended the performance. This time, Robeson performed his usual mix of African American, Yiddish, and Russian folk songs and spirituals. After the concert, a group of parading anti-communist protesters, who numbered five to eight thousand people, confronted concertgoers with racist and anti-Semitic epithets, and once again attacked several of Robeson's allies and supporters. Around 140 people were injured by the attacks, which led to a national debate over the causes for the violence and the relative merits of defending the free speech and civil liberties of communists.

The event and its aftermath provoked serious divisions among liberals and progressives in the U.S.²⁸⁸ New York governor Thomas Dewey accused concertgoers of fomenting the violence by supporting "Red totalitarianism" and defended the police's lack of action to protect them during both incidents.²⁸⁹ Robeson's supporters, including the novelist Howard Fast who later published an eyewitness account of the events at Peekskill, vehemently disagreed, depicting the violence in Peekskill as "a decisive step in the preparation for American fascism."²⁹⁰ Fast also held up the "white workers and Negro workers" who defended Robeson from the threat of violence as heroes who refused to back down to intimidation from fascist elements in Westchester County.²⁹¹ The American Civil Liberties Union pulled back from the rhetoric of fascism, but nevertheless denounced the Westchester County grand jury for backing the police

²⁸⁸ See Staub's *Torn at the Roots*, 26-36 for a nuanced reading of the Peekskill riots. He argues that it helped to sever the link within the Jewish press between an early post-war association of "racism and antisemitism in America and German fascism," as both the mainstream Jewish and African American civil rights press began to distance themselves from the left during the cold war.

²⁸⁹ Dewey quote from Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 29.

²⁹⁰ Fast, *Peekskill: USA*, 95.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

and blaming communists for the provocation, and claimed instead that the event had resulted from a growing conflation of anti-Semitism, racism, and anti-communism in the area. Pushing back against this willingness to equate anti-Semitism and racism with anti-communist politics, James Rorty and Winifred Raushenbush carved out an opposing position in *Commentary* by claiming that liberal Jewish groups would fail to integrate into mainstream American society, “if we allow Communist propaganda to convince Jews and Negroes that only the Communists have the interests of these groups at heart.”²⁹² For those trying to use cultural production to advance leftist politics, the event clarified both the stakes of their actions and the difficulties they would face in continuing to mount popular productions like the Peekskill concerts, especially if liberal organizations would use them as opportunities to distance themselves from the left.

While many historians have explored the written record of the events in Peekskill, it is striking that they have not attended to the many sonic accounts of the violence, including several extant radio broadcasts and on-the-spot recordings, as well as a 78-rpm record featuring The Weavers and narrated by Fast. For his part, Schwartz responded to the events in and around his hometown by producing an unreleased nine-minute recording in his own narration.²⁹³ Beginning and ending with recordings of Robeson singing at the Peekskill concert, the piece castigated Peekskill police and state officials for refusing to prevent the violence and blamed the local media for inflaming residents with calls to stop the concert. As with the program against fascism, he used recordings obtained from the radio and other sources in order to mount a critique of the official response to the attacks.

²⁹² James Rorty and Winifred Raushenbush, “The Lessons of the Peekskill Riots: What Happened and Why,” *Commentary* 10 (October 1950): 321.

²⁹³ Tony Schwartz, “Audio: Song & Rock,” Title 1808164, audio recording, TS Collection.

But he also used radio sources accuse print and broadcast media of complicity in the violence. Early on, Schwartz's voice introduces a radio report: "A few days after the riots, this newscast was heard," before we hear a click as he starts up a tape machine:

NBC News reader: The latest news bulletins. Governor Dewey has ordered a grand jury investigation of the disturbances which followed two recent Paul Robeson concerts near Peekskill. [tape splice] Dewey told reporters that the incidents were a disgrace. He charged that Robeson's communist followers had provoked the disorder. The governor added that the investigation will seek to determine whether the violence was the result of planning, and whether the meeting itself was calculated to incite disorder. [tape splice] He said the inquiry would be complete and impartial.

Schwartz interrupts the reporter, incredulous about what he has just heard, "Holy cow, listen to parts of this again!" This time, he re-edits the statements, then editorializes based on what he plays back:

NBC News Reader: Governor Dewey has ordered a grand jury investigation of the disturbances which followed two recent Paul Robeson concerts near Peekskill. [tape splice] He said the inquiry would be complete and impartial. [tape splice] He charged that Robeson's communist followers had provoked the disorder.

Tony Schwartz: It's unbelievable. A call for a complete and impartial investigation and a verdict, all in the same breath.

Again, Schwartz enacts a critical listening practice through repetition that asks direct questions of news accounts recorded from the radio, and asks listeners to understand what he is hearing in the account, rather than accept the claims of public figures on first listen.²⁹⁴

"We better look into the real facts ourselves," Schwartz intones next, before playing radio clips from news bulletins and on-the-spot recordings. Beyond looking into the facts, Schwartz felt it important that the public should *listen* to voices on the ground as testimony in order to understand what happened in Peekskill. After splicing in several newscasters and reporters describing the outbreak of violence, he imagines that Dewey did not spend enough time

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

listening to the voices of attackers themselves if he could come to the conclusion that the violence was caused by Robeson's followers. Schwartz then edits in recordings from the road outside the concert ground obtained from a CBS program that aired the night of the attack.²⁹⁵ As evidence of their conflated racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism, Schwartz splices in protesters shouting racial epithets: "Come on you white niggers! Go back to Russia!" and "Jews! Jews!" Midway through the clip, Schwartz repeats it so that listeners can hear the epithets for themselves one more time. Next, his voice notes that "the police jointed in too" before going on to press play on his tape machine so that we hear the sounds of a harried reporter telling his microphone that "they are beating up a Negro," and the voice of a concertgoer who tells a reporter, "the cop says, 'shut up you black son of a bitch, and get on that bus,' and at that time he socked me in my mouth." Schwartz concludes this section of the recording by editing in some recollections from protesters who were proud to have thrown stones to stop the concert.²⁹⁶

Following these testimonials, Schwartz refocuses his attention to the press and accuses news outlets of fomenting the violence. First, he plays a recording of a radio newscaster reading words quoted earlier, from a Peekskill *Evening Star* editorial: "The time for tolerant silence that signifies approval is running out." Schwartz then goes on to claim, "Radio did its bit too. Hour after hour, and day after day, listeners were bombarded by this type of incitement," before splicing in a series of news reports:

Radio voice #1: "Under the sponsorship of the People's Committee for the benefit of the Harlem branch of the Civil Rights Congress, listed by the government as a Communist front" [splice]

Radio voice #2: "because of charges of left-wing activities of the negro baritone." [splice]

Radio voice #3: "protests against groups whose pro-Russian views" [splice]

²⁹⁵ The CBS on-the-spot recording, hosted by reporter Don Hollenbeck, can be heard online through the Gordon Skene Sound Collection, <http://pastdaily.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/CBS-Radio-Peekskill-Riots-August-1949.mp3>, (accessed February 13, 2015).

²⁹⁶ Schwartz, "Audio: Song & Rock."

Radio voice #4: “pro-Communist organizations” [splice]
Radio voice #5: “Dewey calls the concert a pro-Communist meeting” [splice]
Radio voice #6: “pro-Communist meeting, however hateful the views [splice] by Paul Robeson, the baritone author of a recent statement that American Negroes would not fight against Russia” [splice]
Radio voice #7: “subversive organization” [splice]
Radio voice #8: “subversive” [splice]
Radio voice #9: “subversive” [splice]
Radio voice #10: “subversive”

Rather than understanding these charges as objective reporting on the part of reputable news organizations, by editing these similar clips together one after another, Schwartz attempted to turn the oft repeated charges of “pro-Communist” and “subversive” into a critique of reporting practices that uncritically accepted the Cold War line on Communism and motivated local residents into action against Robeson and his supporters.²⁹⁷

Near the end of the piece, Schwartz gives pride of place to Robeson’s voice in order to “get an idea why these interests consider him subversive,” and to better understand the meaning of Robeson’s associations with organizations like the Civil Rights Congress. Schwartz used audio recordings (likely recorded himself) from a rally at Harlem’s Rockland Ballroom on June 19, 1949, held to welcome Robeson back home from a four-month tour in Europe and the Soviet Union.²⁹⁸ Robeson used his first major address since the World Peace Conference as an opportunity to expand on his Paris statements by linking the causes of anti-colonialism, domestic civil rights, and anti-fascist politics in the United States. “We must have the courage,” he addressed the crowd, as Schwartz fiddled with the microphone and the controls to better capture Robeson’s stentorian tones on the tape recorder, “to shout at the top of our voices about our

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Since Schwartz was known to have recorded many of Robeson’s speeches, it is likely that he gathered the raw material himself. A full transcript of the speech can be found in Paul Robeson, “For Freedom and Peace,” in *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews, 1918-1974*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1978): 201-211.

injustices, and we must lay the blame where it belongs, and where it has belonged, for over three hundred years of slavery and continuous misery, right here on our own door step, not over anywhere.” The tape skips ahead to another part of the speech with a splice: “For any kind of decent life, we need, we want, and *we demand* our constitutional rights, right here in America. [splice] We do not want to die in vain any more on foreign battlefields,” he then exclaimed, to rapturous applause from the audience.²⁹⁹ For Schwartz, Robeson’s meaning in the speech is clear. Because the United States repeatedly failed to guarantee the constitutional rights of African Americans, whether by failing to prevent lynchings in the South or by condoning the questionable arrest and indictment of six Black men in Trenton, New Jersey by an all-white jury in 1948, Robeson felt it was not worth fighting other countries before ensuring democracy for all at home.

Despite their “subversive” labels, the fact that the CRC had been at the forefront of the Trenton Six’s defense and that Robeson used his celebrity to address civil rights violations, were reasons enough for Schwartz to support this woman’s views about the events in Peekskill, which followed Robeson’s voice on the recording: “The fact that Robeson is a Communist or isn’t a Communist is not the issue. The issue is that he wanted to have a concert here, a concert that he should have had, because that is his privilege as a person living in the United States. They’re told that it’s communism we must be afraid of, but it isn’t communism so much as it’s fascism in this country.” Finally, the recording ended with sounds from the finale of the Peekskill concert, as Robeson defiantly re-wrote the final verse to his signature song, “Ol’ Man River” with police helicopters circling above: “But I keep laughing, instead of crying / We must keep fighting, until

²⁹⁹ Schwartz, “Audio: Song & Rock.”

we're dying / And old man river, he'll just keep rolling along."³⁰⁰ As with the other piece against fascism, then, this unreleased recording began by building a case against dominant Cold War anti-communism through a critical engagement with media, then countering those positions with the words of those with whom Schwartz most agreed.

Duplicating key statements on his tape recorder and repeating them after inserting his editorial position, or splicing disparate voices together into single collages to empty the words of their meaning, Schwartz hoped to turn media accounts on their head so that he could tell a different story about their process, rather than accepting their statements as fact. If the media increasingly silenced voices like Robeson's by parroting government claims that they belonged to subversive organizations, it would be up to people like Schwartz to record and amplify their words. However, it's unclear whether Schwartz ever attempted to release such recordings into the world, since doing so would have been a risky gesture, given the larger political climate of the early Cold War.

*** Conclusion: Holding the Line, Avoiding the Blacklist ***

One such recording that did get released is instructive of those potential risks. A week after the second incident in Peekskill, People's Songster and founder of Charter Records Mario Casetta decided to release a combination folk song and documentary recording of the event, edited in Schwartz's apartment.³⁰¹ Casetta and writer Howard Fast produced a script and used

³⁰⁰ The original lyrics, penned by Oscar Hammerstein, went "I git weary / An' sick of tryin' / I'm tired of livin' / an' skeered of dyin' / But ol' man river / He jes keeps rollin' along." For more on this re-writing, see Perucci, *Paul Robeson and the Cold War Performance Complex*, 122-129. Rather than the individualized world-weariness of the original, Perucci argues that Robeson's rewritten song rings out as a collective anthem evidence of leftist unwillingness to be silenced by anti-communist action.

³⁰¹ For more on Casetta and Charter Records, see liner notes to *Songs for Political Action: Folkmusic, Topical Songs and the American Left, 1926-1953*, eds. Ronald D. Cohen and Dave Samuelson, Bear Family Records, BCD 15720, 1996, 159-167.

wire recordings of the confrontation. Fast later produced a written account of the events based on his experiences at Peekskill, but Casetta thought it important to respond immediately to the national controversy with a visceral audio account.³⁰² Fashioned as an alternative news account of the events, the 78 rpm record, “The Peekskill Story,” purported to tell the story of “two fascist attacks” against Robeson and his supporters, since “you won’t get the true facts from the daily press or the radio.” Fading in and out of the narration by Fast was an original song about the event by Pete Seeger and Fred Hellerman, entitled “Hold the Line,” performed by the Weavers.³⁰³ Likely recorded by Schwartz himself, it was in fact the vocal quartet’s first appearance on a record.³⁰⁴ At the climactic moment on the recording, the Weavers sang that “without any warning the rocks began to come / the cops and troopers laughed to see the damage that was done,” while Casetta faded-in the sounds of protesters shouting the epithets that appeared on Schwartz’s private recording as well. These epithets begin to drown out the song before Fast’s narration interrupts the din of the crowd: “That’s the sound of fascism. Not in Germany, but here in America. Remember it.” As with Schwartz’s private recording, the cries, “Come on you white niggers! Go back to Russia!” and “Jews! Jews!” are repeated on “The Peekskill Story” as visceral markers of the stakes for potential listeners. Seeger then tells his version of the story before Fast criticizes Governor Dewey and the state troopers for failing to protect concertgoers. Finally, the voice of Robeson addressing supporters: “These Klan-inspired and police condoned hoodlums cannot stop the song of freedom in America,” then the Weavers

³⁰² Fast, *Peekskill: USA*.

³⁰³ The Weavers & Howard Fast, “The Peekskill Story (Parts 1 & 2),” *Songs for Political Action: Folkmusic, Topical Songs and the American Left, 1926-1953*, edited by Ronald D. Cohen and Dave Samuelson, Bear Family Records, BCD 15720, 1996, 10 compact discs. For more on the recording process, see liner notes to same, page 166. Incidentally, the printed music and lyrics to “Hold the Line” appeared in the first issue of *Sing Out!*, the official publication of People’s Artists.

³⁰⁴ Evidence for this last fact is somewhat limited. Schwartz appeared to record the Weavers in his apartment on several occasions. If in fact the editing for “The Peekskill Story” was done in Schwartz’s apartment, it would not be surprising if he was responsible for recording the Weavers performance that appears on the final product.

return with their final stanza, “We shed our blood at Peekskill, and suffered many a pain / But we beat back the fascists and we’ll beat them back again / Hold the line, hold the line / We will hold the line forever ‘til there’s freedom everywhere.”³⁰⁵ They may have held the line at Peekskill, but many anti-communists, liberal and otherwise, drew a different one between themselves and the Popular Front strategies that animated Robeson and the Weavers by believing that the concert itself had been a provocation.

Though Schwartz’s name didn’t appear on the credits, it was not surprising that he didn’t list it within his oeuvre, either then or later on. Two years later, once the Weavers became one of the most popular singing groups in the country, anti-communists pounced on “The Peekskill Story” as evidence of the Weavers’ leftist sympathies. American Business Consultants, the main force behind blacklists in the entertainment industry, published the following account in a 1951 issue of their newsletter *Counterattack*, which was entered into the *Congressional Record* by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy: “After the Communist Party-inspired riots at Peekskill, N.Y. in 1949, the Weavers made a record, ‘The Peekskill Story,’ for People’s Artists (successor to People’s Songs) with Paul Robeson and Communist Harry Fast. All royalties from this record were turned over to People’s Artists, which provides entertainment for Communist Party conventions, May Day parades, and other party functions.”³⁰⁶ *Counterattack*’s allies used the publication to put pressure on broadcasters by claiming that they would get sponsors to pull funding from broadcast programs if producers continued to book artists associated with the left.³⁰⁷ As this report circulated around the entertainment industry, the Weavers found fewer and

³⁰⁵ All quotes and descriptions from The Weavers & Howard Fast, “The Peekskill Story (Parts 1 &2).”

³⁰⁶ “The Weavers are Going Places,” *Counterattack*, 1 June 1951 in *Congressional Record*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., 7 June 1951, Vol. 97, Part 13, A3367.

³⁰⁷ For an account of how the blacklist worked, see Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Volume II—1933 to 1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 254-257, 265-268.

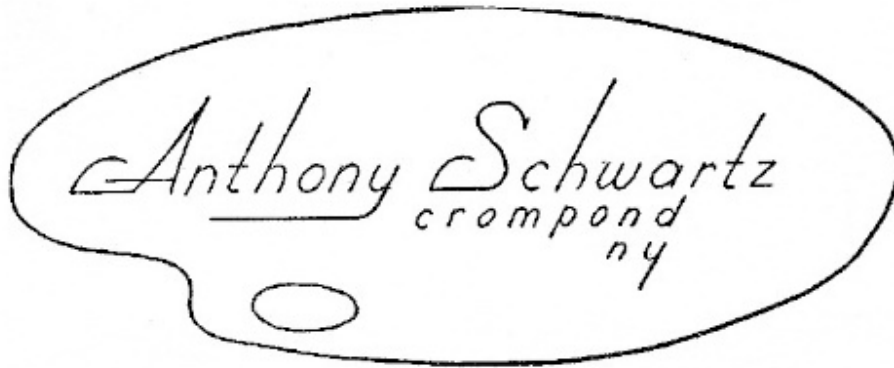
fewer opportunities to appear on television and radio, even as their renditions of songs like Huddie Ledbetter's "Goodnight Irene," the Israeli song "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena," and the popular South African tune known as "Wimoweh" rose to the top of the charts in the U.S. Such associations could have been devastating to Schwartz's attempts to establish a career in advertising.

Whether Schwartz feared the possible effects of the anti-communist blacklist on his career, whether he distanced himself from the politics of the post-war progressive Popular Front, or whether he came to believe that he could produce more interesting art along a less programmatic basis, it is difficult to know why he turned away from these topical and explicitly radical recording practices. All of these earlier pieces, however, implied that mainstream media organizations could simply transmit ideas from one person to another. By presenting fascist claims about the "big lie," or repeating radio accounts of Paul Robeson and the Civil Rights Congress as "subversive," or insisting that "you won't get the true facts from the daily press or the radio," the recordings all asserted that audiences were inherently malleable and open to suggestion, and that repetition itself might convince a passive population of listeners to support policies of wartime aggression. Through the "hard sell" of his sonic editorializing, Schwartz's position in these pieces is clear.

In terms of the critique contained within their production, though, these pieces could all be understood in multiple ways. On the one hand, they could be heard as dangerously close to propaganda in precisely the ways suggested by the New York Intellectuals who criticized the Popular Front's populist artistic strategies for their links to Stalinism. By maintaining skepticism only towards the mainstream press and U.S. politicians, and not towards voices like Robeson's or Henry Wallace's, these pieces risked being subservient to the official program of the

Communist Party, even if Schwartz did not identify as a member. But Schwartz's approach, which gathered, rerecorded, and recontextualized sounds from a variety of sources, ranging from 78 rpm records to radio accounts to live speeches, could potentially reduce the distance between consumers and producers of media by allowing anyone with a tape recorder to produce their own commentary in response to the sounds they heard. Whether such an approach merely sought to convince listeners of the merits of his position through his own critical engagement with the media or whether it suggested alternative modes of listening that might make listeners more active participants in media reception is unclear. But the fact of their skepticism towards the sounds of anti-communism could also be heard as part of an emergent critique of the idea that consumers were inherently passive recipients of media messages. When Schwartz began taking his tape recorder into the streets of his Midtown Manhattan neighborhood, he did so with the hope that his active use of the technology could further erode the boundaries between consuming and producing culture while maintaining some connection to the politics of the Popular Front.

POSTERS + ADVERTISING + SIGNS



PHONE + PEEKSKILL + 2839-R

Figure 2.1 – “Anthony Schwartz, Crompond, NY” business card

Dating from his time in high school, this business card points to Tony Schwartz’s early entry into the world of advertising. Likely from the early 1940s, before Schwartz left the Peekskill area for New York City.

Courtesy Anton Schwartz

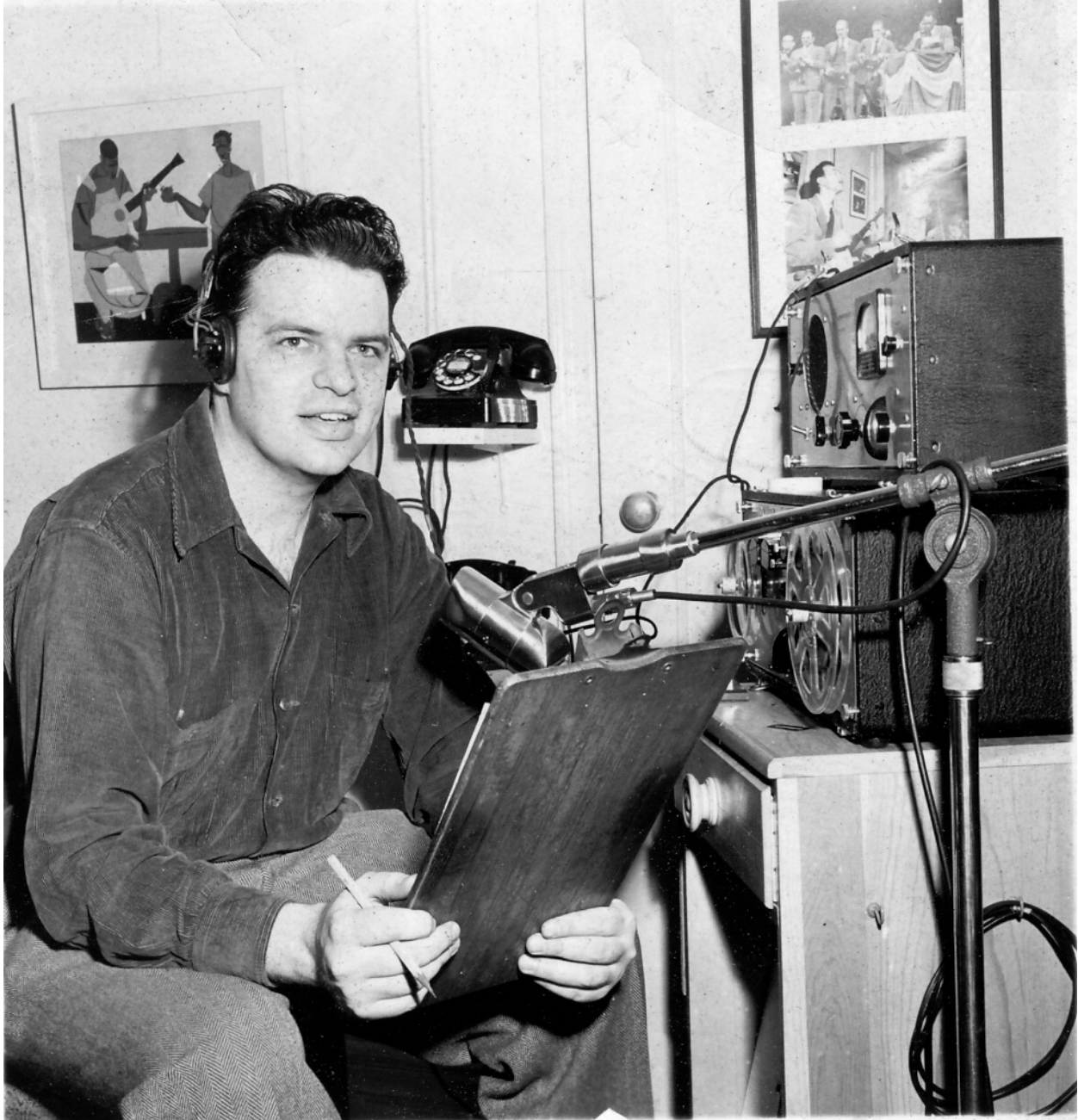


Figure 2.2 – Tony Schwartz in his home recording studio, between 1949 and 1951

With clipboard and pencil in hand, Schwartz sits in front of his Magnecord PT-6 tape recorder and amplifier. Note the photograph of Paul Robeson on the top right, and Pete Seeger and Fred Hellerman of the Weavers just below. The latter photograph appears to have been taken within Schwartz's apartment, as the same picture frame appears in the photograph itself.

Courtesy Anton Schwartz

Chapter Three

Tony Schwartz's Popular Phonography in New York 19

Sometime in the early 1950s, Tony Schwartz walked to Times Square, Carnegie Hall, and a stretch of Sixth Avenue in the West Fifties near the Museum of Modern Art in Midtown Manhattan. With a microphone at his wrist and a control box at his neck to operate the tape recorder in his car, he went not as a tourist taking in common sights of the city, but as a resident who wanted to document the sounds of his neighborhood. Though he went to landmarks familiar to residents and visitors alike, Schwartz was less interested in the sounds of Broadway theaters and bustling crowds surrounding Times Square, virtuosic performers on the stage of one of the country's foremost venues for symphonic music, or hushed voices and reverberant footsteps inside art museums. Schwartz stopped to listen to sounds that others might simply hear while passing by on foot to more important destinations. While cars drove past around him, Schwartz listened to a blind accordionist playing a jaunty melody while passers by dropped change into his bucket. Another blind street musician, Moondog, was a fixture of the neighborhood. One foggy night, beneath the booming sounds of boat whistles echoing from the Hudson River, Schwartz recorded the composer – later known as “the Viking of Sixth Avenue” for his eccentric cloak and horned helmet – playing his own music on homemade string and percussion instruments like the *oo* and the *trimba*. Schwartz also listened to Professor Giuseppe Ravita, otherwise known as “Little Paganini” and the “Carnegie Hall Fiddler,” play violin on West 57th Street.³⁰⁸ All the

³⁰⁸ All recordings here from Tony Schwartz, “Street Musicians,” *New York 19*, Folkways FD 5558, 1954, LP. Additional context about the recordings from the liner notes to same. A digital copy of the entire album, along with

practice in the world couldn't get his untutored rendition of Schumann's "Träumerei" inside the doors, so Ravita played outside on the sidewalk. "The professor doesn't make much money," Ravita told a reporter for *PM*, New York's progressive daily newspaper, in 1948, "because he does not show his cup, so people don't know if he plays for pleasure or money."³⁰⁹ Either way, Schwartz found his playing compelling enough to record, if not to compensate. He might have even agreed with Ravita's sentiments about the relationship between music making and politics: "If we want more music, we need more musicians. Like a good democracia, you need more democrats. If you had more music you would have no war. This would be peace and paradise, because music [...] belongs to the angels."³¹⁰ If the sound of music in the streets belonged to the angels, perhaps Tony Schwartz's tape recorder could bring it into the homes of mere mortals.

The three recordings—the Times Square accordionist, Professor Ravita, and Moondog—followed one another on the opening band of side B, "Street Musicians," from Schwartz's 1954 long-playing record for Folkways, *New York 19*.³¹¹ Named for his home postal zone on the west side of Midtown Manhattan, the recording typified Schwartz's effort to document the otherwise unheard sounds of his neighborhood during the 1950s. Encompassing the southern edge of the Upper West Side, Hell's Kitchen, and Times Square, and just south of San Juan Hill and Lincoln Square, Schwartz's Midtown Manhattan area was a compelling site for a sonic documentary project of this sort. Not only was it "the center of the commercial music world," since "Tin Pan Alley is in it. All the big record companies. Theatres. Movies. Night spots. Hotels."³¹² It was also an ethnically mixed lower middle-class neighborhood undergoing a dramatic transformation as

the liner notes, can be heard via streaming audio on the Alexander Street Press Database at: <http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/work/72041>.

³⁰⁹ Jean Evans, "How Prof. Ravita Got to Carnegie Hall," *New York PM Daily*, 8 February 1948, M3.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, M4.

³¹¹ Throughout this essay, I will use "band" rather than the more anachronistic "track" to refer to the divisions on these long playing records, since that's how they appeared at the time.

³¹² "Tony Schwartz: Sounds of the City," *Daily Mirror*, 4 March 1954, 28.

“New Yorkers of Irish, Italian, Jewish, and German descent began leaving in droves and Puerto Rican migration brought more than a hundred thousand new residents” to Midtown.³¹³ Despite the proximity of such new migrants – to say nothing of the long-established working-class African-American community in nearby San Juan Hill – to many central institutions of the entertainment industry, Schwartz felt that their sonic imprint on the city was ignored by the mainstream recording industry.³¹⁴ “None of them realize,” he told the *Daily Mirror* in 1954, “it’s the richest center of folklore in the world.”³¹⁵ Only, that is, if you turned your microphones outside of those buildings and trained them on the multi-ethnic street barkers, musicians, children, and preachers that populated the city’s streets. Offering his project as an example, Schwartz hoped to educate other enthusiasts in methods to turn tape recording from a technical hobby to one concerned with marginalized forms of human expression.

Unlike hi-fi hobbyists who imagined their active use of tape as a tool to combat individualized alienation in the face of mass culture’s passive pandering to lowest common denominator audiences, Schwartz believed that the decentralization of sonic production through magnetic tape could give users the means to enact a more collective form of participatory cultural production from the streets up. The nascent scholarship on his recordings has compellingly argued that Schwartz attempted to use sound recordings to reveal dominant forms of racism and Cold War jingoism as “exercise[s] of power and xenophobia.”³¹⁶ At the same time, scholars argue that Schwartz struggled to extricate himself from the complex power dynamics involved in

³¹³ Jennifer Stoeber-Ackerman, “Splicing the Sonic Color-Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar *Nueva York*,” *Social Text* 28 (2010): 60.

³¹⁴ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*, Folkways FD 5558, LP, 1954.

³¹⁵ “Tony Schwartz: Sounds of the City,” *Daily Mirror*, 4 March 1954, 28.

³¹⁶ Quote from Stoeber-Ackerman, “Splicing the Sonic Color Line,” 63; other scholarship includes Jentery Sayers, “How Text Lost Its Source: Magnetic Recording Cultures,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, 2011), 100-143; and Lisa Hollenbach, “Sono-Montage: Langston Hughes and Tony Schwartz Listen to Postwar New York,” *American Literature* 87 (2015): 275-302.

recording and repackaging the sounds of marginalized communities from around the world for well-to-do, mostly white audiences in the U.S. By presenting his recordings with minimal narration, Schwartz tried to let the voices of people he recorded speak for themselves, but his curatorial choices revealed the extent to which he imagined himself as both an amateur ethnographer and an artist with the capacity to craft his own narrative of the city's folklore for listeners. Rather than attempt an objective sonic documentary of urban life, he presented his *New York 19* project as the "sound of *my* city," and one that sought to reform the politics of white listeners. Without eliding the powerful ways in which he crafted his own narratives, his project nevertheless reveals a far-reaching effort to imagine how tape could give voice to a "people" restricted from recording studios throughout the 1950s and is worth trying to understand on its own terms.

Despite the fact that Schwartz often portrayed himself as a lone tinkerer who took his tape recorder out of the studio and out into the streets, combing Schwartz's personal archive, listening to his recordings for Folkways, and reading his published writings reveals a much wider network for his cultural practice.³¹⁷ It was no accident, for instance, that Professor Ravita appears in the historical record on *New York 19* as well as in the pages of *PM*, a progressive New York daily newspaper, or that his photograph appears in Ben Botkin's *New York City Folklore*, for these sources all attempted to document the city in populist ways.³¹⁸ Placing Schwartz within the context of other New York-based radical and progressive folklorists, folk enthusiasts, and folk musicians, like Pete Seeger, Moses Asch, Ben Botkin, Oscar Brand, and Harry Belafonte allows

³¹⁷ Schwartz's personal collection is currently housed at the Library of Congress' Recorded Sound Reference Center in Washington, D.C.

³¹⁸ B. A. Botkin, ed., *New York City Folklore: Legends, Tall Tales, Anecdotes, Stories, Sagas, Heroes and Characters, Customs, Traditions and Sayings* (New York: Random House, 1956), photograph on plates following page 334.

us to see the extent to which this version of “applied folklore” involved a collective attempt to reimagine U.S. culture industries from within. Many of the institutions that had arisen to support left-populist cultural production during the 1930s and 1940s, however, struggled to sustain themselves during the early Cold War as a result of blacklists in the entertainment industry. Although folk enthusiasts all criticized the ways in which the culture industries centered in New York 19 marginalized the perspectives of “the people,” Schwartz used his position as an advertiser living in the neighborhood to bring some of the political concerns of progressives to the fore of his cultural productions in ways that more explicitly radical cultural workers might have found difficult.³¹⁹ More than a folklore-based alternative to the mainstream culture industries in the city, Schwartz’s New York 19 project makes audible a continued effort to sustain progressive populist politics through cultural institutions based in and around his neighborhood, even as he distanced himself from the radical politics of his youth.

³¹⁹ This work is part of a larger reevaluation of the continuities between the earlier leftist activism of the 1930s and 1940s and that of the so-called “New Left” of the late 1950s and 1960s. Along with the now relatively established argument about the “Long Civil Rights Movement” and its connections to the anti-racist labor activism of the Popular Front outside of the South, it is important to acknowledge the fact that despite blacklists against left-associated cultural producers, a wide variety of artists continued to work towards bringing progressive concerns to the fore of their productions as much as possible. It would absolutely be misleading to portray Schwartz’s productions as at the forefront of explicitly anti-racist civil rights struggles in the city, but his connections to New York’s broad progressive cultural left at this moment are undeniable. On the Long Civil Rights narrative, see for example Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91 (2005): 1233-1263; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). On the lasting legacy of the Popular Front’s cultural wing into the 1950s, see Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* (New York: Verso, 1996); Paul Buhle and David Wagner, *Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Alan Wald, *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Judith Smith, *Becoming Belafonte: Black Artist, Public Radical* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014); Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

** *Applied Folklore in New York City* **

If the topical acts of reportage discussed in the previous chapter were out of the question for Tony Schwartz during the 1950s, he turned to other potential uses of tape recording technology in the world of folklore that nevertheless maintained a connection to the Popular Front. After holding a job in the English department at the University of Oklahoma in the 1930s, folklorist Ben Botkin went on to forge a role as folklore editor for the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers' Project from 1938 to 1941, and as a head of the Library of Congress' Archive of American Folksong from 1942 to 1945. Creating links with folklorists around the country, Botkin affirmed the importance of collecting folklore from a diverse set of sources with the purpose of "giving back to the people what we have taken from them and what rightfully belongs to them," rather than leaving folklore to the academy.³²⁰ Collecting folklore by conducting oral history interviews with people across regions and ethnicities and popularizing the materials by compiling them in published anthologies could challenge dominant and narrow conceptions of "Anglo-Saxon American culture as the source of legitimate American culture," in the words of historian Jerrold Hirsch.³²¹ By the early 1950s, after losing his institutional positions to changing political tides, Botkin advocated an "applied folklore" that brought folklorists out of government agencies and the academy and into marginalized communities. "In a time of increasing standardization," he believed, "it becomes an increasingly important function of the applied folklorist to discover and keep alive folk expressions that might otherwise be lost." Not because, as people like John Lomax would have it, mass culture erased "pure"

³²⁰ B. A. Botkin, "WPA and Folklore Research: 'Bread and Song,'" 209, in *America's Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture*, eds. Lawrence Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010). Piece originally published in *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 3 (1939): 7-14.

³²¹ Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 110.

cultures, but because “applied folklore goes beyond cultural history to cultural strategy, to the end of creating a favorable environment for the liberation of our creative energies and the flourishing of the folk arts among other social, cooperative activities.”³²² It was important for Botkin that folklorists come from the communities they documented, so that they could produce “history in which the folk are both the history and the historians.”³²³ Key to this was for urbanites to record the folk expressions of city dwellers in their midst. As Botkin put it, “For years American folklorists from the cities have been going into the Kentucky mountains and other remote places to gather folk songs and stories, while all the time folklore was all around them on the sidewalks of America.”³²⁴ For Schwartz, rather than simply collecting such urban folklore on the sidewalks of New York 19 with a pen and paper, he sought to capture it using a microphone and reels of magnetic tape.

While this extensive collection of recordings from these sources alone might have made Schwartz a compelling figure among amateur folklorists, his most lasting contribution to the history of sound recording had to do with his desire to take the tape recorder out of the studio and into the streets, in his version of Botkin’s “applied folklore.” In order to do so, he left his advertising job for a year after receiving financial assistance from Sears Roebuck heir and neighborhood-based sculptor Robert Rosenwald, who had heard some of Schwartz’s recordings shared on WNYC.³²⁵ With this support in hand, Schwartz proposed to “channelize my recording

³²² Quotes from B. A. Botkin, “Applied Folklore: Creating Understanding Through Folklore,” 225 in *America’s Folklorist*. Piece originally published in *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 17 (1953): 199-206.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 223.

³²⁴ B. A. Botkin, ed., *Sidewalks of America: Folklore, Legends, Sagas, Traditions, Customs, Songs, Stories and Sayings of City Folk* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954) vii.

³²⁵ Various sources have reported that Schwartz received funding from William Rosenwald, while others state the funding came from Robert Rosenwald. Given Schwartz’s acknowledgements of the latter and use of his cover illustration for *New York 19*, it is much more likely that the support came from Robert. References to Schwartz’s precise relation to the Rosenwalds are unclear, but alluded to in “Tony Schwartz,” *Communication Arts* 10:4 (1968): 32-36; and in an indirect way, in Tony Schwartz, *The Responsive Chord* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973), xiii, where Schwartz refers to “A wealthy New Yorker who listened to my programs [...] and suggested that I leave

activities to a thorough study of the folklore of the community in which I live,” especially “the non-commercial musical expression of people now living and working in New York 19.”³²⁶ In his own telling, he came to this project in the early 1950s. “What I’m interested in,” he told Leo Mishkin at the *New York Morning Telegraph*, “is the development of a public archive of the sounds of our times. With the development of magnetic tape recording, much historical material is recorded by private companies or organizations, in the normal course of radio operations, or the activities of news agencies, government bureaus, schools, and social and business organizations.” Rather than leave the documenting, “analyzing, classifying, or preserving or using all this wealth of material” to those institutions, Schwartz wanted to do so himself.³²⁷

In his artistic and pedagogical stance—for Schwartz often tried to educate his listeners and readers in his techniques and methods—he believed that technology users ought to employ the tools at their disposal to overcome the power of dominant culture industries and to preserve sounds that might not otherwise be heard. Previous to the rise of tape technology, sound reproduction had required large capital investment in recording studios and record pressing plants, or in the case of folklore, funding from libraries or universities to conduct ethnographic research. John and Alan Lomax’s field recordings of folk music in the U.S. south, for instance, had been supported by grants from the Library of Congress, while Frances Densmore and other anthropologists turned to the Bureau of American Ethnology for financial support in producing audio recordings of Native American peoples throughout the first half of the twentieth century.³²⁸

By the 1950s however, Schwartz felt that the technology made “it possible for a middle-income

my job and devote full time to a project in sound. They offered to pay me more than I was currently making, and gave me complete freedom in choosing the project.”

³²⁶ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*, Folkways FD 5558, LP, 1954

³²⁷ Leo Mishkin, “Sounds of New York Recorded for Posterity,” *New York Morning Telegraph*, date unknown, likely from 1951. Found in box 8, folder 1, TS Collection.

³²⁸ For more on the politics of ethnographic cylinder recordings, see Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999).

person [like himself] to undertake projects which were previously limited to well-endowed individuals or libraries.” It was important, in Schwartz’s mind, that he treat his recording practice as a hobby, because “there is no need to accept the various forms of restriction and censorship that may be imposed by institutions or industry.”³²⁹ If he had depended on his recordings, rather than a separate advertising career, as sources of income, “I’d try to record things that would sell, rather than things that interest me.”³³⁰ The censorship of market logic thus constricted the kinds of sounds available to radio listeners and record consumers, and Schwartz hoped to subvert that logic by preserving the otherwise unheard sounds of daily life. Freed from the demands of the market or state oversight by his benefactor Rosenwald, he believed he was well suited for such a project.

Avid tapers, he later told a hobbyist tape magazine, should “make the world [their] recording studio.”³³¹ Beyond the progressive political reasons to document the sounds of people marginalized by the recording industry, Schwartz developed a critique of the recording companies’ sonic preferences, since he felt that recording studios tended to isolate and deaden sound. He explained his dual critique at length in a brochure for his work on Folkways Records:

The radio and recording field have, as a whole, dealt with the prepared expression of people, and the cultural industry. The people and material to be recorded or broadcast, were always brought to the microphone and its surroundings. The things that interest me the most are the things that happen in the course of every-day life and these things cannot be re-created effectively. I felt that I wanted to work toward the development of equipment and techniques that could take the microphone to life and record what it found. Also, I wanted my equipment and me to be the minimum participants in a situation. To me, acoustics is not the problem. Whether someone is speaking in a small ‘live’ room or out in a field is unimportant; I just do my best to record him. I don’t find people objecting to *where* things are recorded; in fact, to the contrary, they enjoy hearing people in different acoustical situations.³³²

³²⁹ Tony Schwartz, “The Work of Tony Schwartz,” Folkways brochure, box 154, folder 1, TS Collection.

³³⁰ Robert Angus, “Tape, Talent and Imagination,” *Better Listening Through High Fidelity*, July 1957, 6.

³³¹ Jeanne Lowe, “Tony Schwartz: Master Tape Recordist,” *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, June 1955, 26.

³³² Schwartz, “The Work of Tony Schwartz.”

The “prepared expression” of professional musicians might have value, but Schwartz privileged the spontaneous everyday event over that which could be brought to the studio and recorded onto microphones in otherwise silent settings. If record companies located near his neighborhood refused to document the sounds of a changing city around their studios, and if ethnographers and folklorists tended to romanticize rural or non-industrial societies, the sounds of the city itself would go undocumented.

The impulse also ran counter to longstanding efforts to legislate “noise” in New York City and elsewhere. At the same time as acoustic scientists transformed the design of indoor studios, performance halls, and cinemas to make sound more predictably controllable for engineers and other technicians, urban reformers tried to ensure that outdoor sounds might be kept under control. At the turn of the twentieth century, they wanted to ensure that urbanites could continue to find quiet refuges in the city, but reformers in the 1920s and 1930s also believed that a preponderance of noise might be a marker of urban inefficiencies and a lack of orderly growth processes. Whether sounds labeled as noise were generated by the behavior of certain groups, as in the cries of pushcart vendors; technologies such as radios and gramophones sounding into the streets; transportation devices like elevated trains or private cars and their honking horns; construction noises like jackhammers; or urban services like garbage collection or milk delivery; noise abatement advocates believed that regulations limiting noise could create a more orderly urban environment. Though the definition of “noise” might be in the ear of the hearer, in that one person’s music might be another’s aggravating noise, the sounds most likely to be named as noise by reformers had origins in class and ethnic divisions, and it was hypothetically easier to legislate the sounds of marginalized people than to restrict the sounds of construction or traffic that marked the city’s economic vitality. When radical protesters made

themselves heard in the streets, when immigrant pushcart vendors hawked their wares, when organ grinders walked through the city, or street musicians played for pennies, middle-class residents and urban elites heard the sounds of social disruption.³³³ As New York embarked on a project of economic growth liberalism after World War II exemplified by the works of planners and engineers like Robert Moses, cracking down on working-class activities like street hawking could be the first step towards trying to raise property values and make neighborhoods attractive to residents with more money.³³⁴

These anti-noise politics also had a racialized component. Though in interviews Schwartz often gave the official boundaries of New York 19 as his area of interest, he also ventured further north into the neighborhoods of San Juan Hill (roughly six blocks north of 59th Street between Amsterdam Avenue and West End Avenue), and Lincoln Square (which surrounded San Juan Hill to the east and north, running between 59th St and 70th St from West End Ave to Columbus Ave), and it is significant that he did. At the time, San Juan Hill had been a long-established working-class African-American neighborhood with a large Afro-Caribbean presence, while Lincoln Square too was a multi-ethnic working- and lower middle-class neighborhood. Since the Home Owners Loan Corporation gave such neighborhoods a “D” rating, which led to redlining from banks and made it difficult for property owners to invest in their housing stock, San Juan Hill and Lincoln Square suffered significant economic decline since the Depression.³³⁵ Among

³³³ For an argument about noise as social disruption, Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); On the long history of battles over noise abatement, particularly in early 20th century cities, see Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 115-130; Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Lilian Radovac, “The ‘War on Noise’: Sound and Space in La Guardia’s New York,” *American Quarterly* (2011): 733-760.

³³⁴ See for example, Daniel Bluestone, “‘The Pushcart Evil’: Peddlers, Merchants, and New York City’s Streets, 1890-1940,” *Journal of Urban History* 18 (1991): 68-92; Radovac, “The ‘War on Noise,’” 750-757.

³³⁵ For more on the process by which state-sponsored discrimination baked into the housing market through the Federal Housing Authority’s programs helped develop U.S. suburbs at the same time as it pulled financing away from cities, see, for instance, Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of America* (New York:

policy-makers who turned this perspective into tautology, ethnically and racially mixed neighborhoods invariably led to declining property values and “blight.”

During the 1950s, the politics of “urban renewal” made both visual and aural representations of this area in the media an important cultural battleground. To the *New York Times Magazine*, which saw only “tenements stand[ing], blowing and run-down, in silent shoulder-to-shoulder misery, full of filth and vermin,” or city planners like Robert Moses and Frederick Gutheim, who saw only “overcongestion, disease, delinquency, crime, and other attendant ills of a cramped and scrambled population,” or *Architectural Forum*, which saw only “one of New York City’s most traffic-tangled socially polyglot renewal-ready areas,” such neighborhoods were an obstacle to orderly development and worthy of “urban renewal” projects such as the one that would replace Lincoln Square with the cultural hub of Lincoln Center.³³⁶ In order to use Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 to gain funds for the Lincoln Center project, the city’s governing liberals needed to make the case that these neighborhoods were “slums,” and did so by emphasizing their poor housing conditions, their traffic, their “thoroughly mixed” nature, and their penchant for crime. They also equated these neighborhoods with an abundance of noise. Mainstream representations of African-American and Puerto Rican life in the city, for instance, imagined a “sonic color-line,” in scholar Jennifer Stoeber-Ackerman’s terms, that demarcated the loud city from the quiet suburb. The *New York Times* described Puerto Rican Pentecostal churches, for instance, as filled with “noisy hymn-singing camaraderie and handclapping,” or streetscapes full of “wild shouts [of] children,” or new neighborhoods as

Oxford University Press, 1985); Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); David Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Most relevant for this discussion of the Lincoln Square area, however, is Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³³⁶ All quotes in Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 222-224.

“hives of buzzing Spanish.”³³⁷ At the very moment that Schwartz moved into New York 19 and took an interest in the multitude of sounds around him, dominant discourse about these neighborhoods portrayed them as relics “of the horse-car days” that had little to offer to the culture of the city at large.³³⁸ For someone embedded in a strong tradition of pluralist mid-century politics, taking his tape recorder out into the streets became an obvious strategy to try to counter such narratives.

But in order to record outdoors prior to the availability of light portable recorders, Schwartz needed to modify several machines so that he could document the everyday sounds he cherished, and taught his methods to others so that they might follow in his footsteps in several of his albums and magazine profiles. In one such account, he explained that he first built a generator that could power a recorder that sat in his car. With the help a control box at his neck and a microphone in his hand, he “could record anything on the street or walk into a store, an auction, whatever.”³³⁹ Later, he carried a self-powered twelve-pound Magnemite tape recorder (the same from fig. 1.5), which looked something like a bulky briefcase with holes cut away for easier access to the control knobs, to give him even more portability. With a microphone strapped to his wrist, he could record the sounds around him with a less intrusive presence, even if it occasionally required him to hold a cigarette in his hand so that it looked more natural to hold it up in the air (fig. 3.1).³⁴⁰ Once he got to his home studio, he would listen to his recordings, catalog them meticulously, and then set to cutting, splicing, and editing his recordings together for others. Though Schwartz worked hard to find the right tools for his task,

³³⁷ Stoever-Ackerman, “Splicing the Sonic Color-Line,” 69.

³³⁸ Quote from Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 222. Ideas about Schwartz’s effort in “countering ideological assaults on the city’s residents through artistic representation” from Stoever-Ackerman, “Splicing the Sonic Color-Line,” 70.

³³⁹ Lander, “Tony Schwartz Tape Master,” 3.

³⁴⁰ Lowe, “Tony Schwartz: Master Tape Recordist,” 27.

the important thing in his mind was to approach recording as a quest to document sonic experiences as they were, extraneous sounds and all: “Acoustics should not be a problem in documentary recording... You should accept where you are and make the recording as clearly as you can.”³⁴¹ Unlike the acoustically controlled environment of the recording studio, Schwartz felt that the street could provide local character and give listeners the ability to put themselves in faraway places. Access to the mobile means of magnetic reproduction could thus have both political and perceptual consequences, in that microphones could come out of the studio to record the everyday life of people whose voices remained unheard, or worse, dismissed, in mainstream discourse.

*** Folkways Records ***

Yet New York 19 was not only home to the dominant institutions of the recording industry. It was also home to Folkways Records, one of the few institutions that could be said to fly the flag of the cultural front during the 1950s. In its relentless internationalism, its focus on “the folk,” its attempt to create an institutional space for non-commercial forms of music (even as a business entity), Folkways was, in several ways, a quintessential Popular Front institution.³⁴² Coming from a European Jewish family with radical roots, label head Moses Asch identified, according to his son Michael, as “a ‘progressive,’ part of a community [...] committed to creating a world without hunger, discrimination or exploitation.”³⁴³ Prompted by his father, renowned Yiddish novelist Sholem Asch, and family acquaintance Albert Einstein, Asch decided

³⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

³⁴² Rachel Clare Donaldson, *“I Hear America Singing:” Folk Music and National Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 122.

³⁴³ Michael Asch, “Folkways Records and the Ethics of Collecting: Some Personal Reflections,” *MUSICultures* 35 (2013): 116.

to try to document the world's sounds through his own recording label, with the hope of bringing the sounds of the "common people" to the turntable. "We believe," he told a hi-fi magazine in 1958, "that sound has more truth than sight."³⁴⁴ Like Schwartz, Asch too had been an amateur radio enthusiast and electronics tinkerer, but he similarly sought to use his technical expertise as a means to document and collect, rather than an end to express mastery over technology. In time, his label would release a wide variety of children's records, pioneering compilations of jazz and folk music, and ethnographic recordings from around the world.

After two previous attempts to launch record labels to release folk, jazz, and poetry records from the likes of Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Josh White, Huddie Ledbetter, Mary Lou Williams, and Langston Hughes in the mid-1940s, Asch and Marian Distler founded Folkways Records and Service Company in 1948 with an unusual business model. The mainstream recording industry, as Asch had learned in his previous efforts, was built upon producing and selling as many copies of hit songs as possible, which was a high risk but potentially lucrative process, since the individual unit costs were quite low when producing records on a mass scale. Publishing firms and record labels only needed to capitalize on enough hits to underwrite the much more common failures in order to be commercially viable enterprises. Rather than deal with the distribution problems inherent in trying to produce hit records in such an unpredictable marketplace, scholar Tony Olmstead explains, "Asch decided instead to sell hundreds of records slowly, but to have such a large catalog that the overall size of the business would be sufficient to meet its costs and provide him with a reasonable living."³⁴⁵ In addition to the fact that magnetic tape was more portable (not to mention cheaper) than previous recording methods,

³⁴⁴ Frank Jacobs, "A Round-up of Recorded Noises—Odd and Otherwise," *HiFi & Music Review*, September 1958, 35.

³⁴⁵ Tony Olmstead, *Folkways Records: Moses Asch and His Encyclopedia of Sound*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 64.

which made it easier for Asch to solicit and pay for recordings made around the world, the advent of the long-playing record proved better suited for distributing the kinds of projects that interested him. With 10" 78 rpm (or 7" 45 rpm) records limited to about three minutes per side, musicians had little room to stretch out ideas. With each side of a long-playing record capable of holding over 20 minutes of music, musicians and compilers like Schwartz could develop their ideas more fully.

Folkways also cut costs with some of their production choices. Instead of paying for prints of every cardboard record sleeve, Folkways used a mass produced black sleeve that could be partially covered over by glued-on custom artwork, and extensive liner notes could be printed separately in small-runs to contextualize the recordings and give additional information about the artists or compilers.³⁴⁶ While Asch tried to keep production costs down, the small runs of his releases necessitated higher prices for consumers, which resulted in a somewhat upscale specialist clientele. Moreover, his encyclopedic approach resulted in fairly small sales numbers and almost non-existent royalty payments, but it did afford folk musicians, ethnomusicologists, and documentarians like Schwartz an opportunity to make their recordings available to a wider public. Folkways sales records are notoriously unreliable and difficult to find, but most of Schwartz's recordings tended to sell between 50-200 copies per year throughout the 1950s.³⁴⁷ Despite their occasional conflicts over royalty payments, Schwartz recalled Asch fondly, telling an interviewer in 1994, "He would never censor anything you did and he would always publish

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 64-65.

³⁴⁷ According to a handwritten sales record kept by Schwartz midway through 1958, *New York 19* (1954) had sold 1,532 copies to date. Following that was *I, 2, 3 and a Zing Zing Zing* (1953) at 920, *French Folk Songs* (1954) at 810, *Millions of Musicians* (1954) at 457, *Nueva York* (1955) at 426, *Exchange* (1955) at 317, *Sounds of My City* (1956) at 270, *A Dog's Life* (1957) at 124, and *Music in the Streets* (1957) at 117 units sold. "Folkways Royalties," box 153, folder 10, TS Collection.

the notes you wanted to write. He had real respect for the artist.”³⁴⁸ And even if records might be priced relatively high compared to other kinds of releases, Asch envisioned libraries, schools, and museums as major purchasers of Folkways releases.³⁴⁹ From there, he hoped that the world’s sounds would find as many receptive ears as possible, and thus fulfill something of the cultural promise of the Popular Front.

** *The Art of Selling* **

As the namesake of his neighborhood, *New York 19* (1954) is the archetypal work from Tony Schwartz’s early oeuvre on Folkways. Not only was it the biggest selling record that he produced for the label (though with relatively modest sales figures of 1,500 volumes by 1958), it contained a sampling of sounds and topics that he would later expand upon in other full-length recordings. As such, I will use it to anchor my close listening of Schwartz’s work on Folkways, while occasionally referring to other recordings. Over the course of 38 minutes on two sides of a long-playing record, Schwartz presents a highly curated collection of sounds from throughout his neighborhood, with extensive notes documenting his relationship to tape recording, his perspective on folklore in his neighborhood, tips for listeners to make their own recordings, and comments on particular tracks on the album. In a brief introduction, Schwartz’s own voice claims that “Recordings can capture qualities of music and speech that cannot be written down on paper,” before contrasting two radically different versions of a Mexican cowboy song

³⁴⁸ Quote from Lander, “Tony Schwartz Tape Master,” *Audio*, 4. In the mid-1960s, Asch resented Schwartz’s decision to release his *New York Taxi Driver* album (1959) through Columbia Records instead of Folkways, and felt that Schwartz had been unfair to demand further royalty payments when his records weren’t selling. “I have kept you alive in my catalogue for many years items such as Millions of Musicians and The Nueva New York albums. These I not only dont sell but they cost me a lot of monwy [sic] to keep reprinting in our catalogue and paying rent for the stock in the warehouse.” Letter from Moe Asch to Tony Schwartz, January 24, 1965, box 153, folder 11, TS Collection.

³⁴⁹ Olmstead, *Folkways Records*, 104.

performed by the same Anglo New Yorker.³⁵⁰ Then, in a series of thematically linked edits, each band explores different facets of the neighborhood: music from around the world that Schwartz received in his local mailbox; songs from neighbors, acquaintances, and nightclubs from a variety of national groups; religious sounds from outdoor preachers nearly drowned out by cars to choirs in storefront churches; recent migrants to the city translating records in ethnic bars; musicians busking to the sound of onlookers or foghorns; street vendors and theatre barkers vying for attention; children from various backgrounds jumping rope, clapping hands, and banging makeshift drums; jackhammers drilling and elevated trains clanking; and finally, the musical qualities in the speech of a grocer, an elderly woman reminiscing about her sadly departed cat, and a plumber dissatisfied with the rhythms of daily life in the city. Taken together, the recordings on the album represented a wide-ranging sonic portrait of what were for Schwartz otherwise unheard and undervalued sounds.

When the album came out, reviewers praised the way that “Schwartz wisely adds little in the way of commentary and lets his subjects speak, or play, for themselves.”³⁵¹ His technique on the Folkways albums was noticeably different from the early recordings discussed in the previous chapter, where Schwartz often responded directly to radio accounts and other recordings, and where the splices and edits were audible throughout. Gone are the rough sounds of mid-sentence splices, or the mechanical clanks of a tape recorder starting up, replaced by relatively seamless edits that fade out from one and into another. Ralph Gleason at the *San Francisco Chronicle* equated Schwartz’s tape recorder with a candid camera that produced art that stood up “against almost anything produced by our major labels.”³⁵² In *Saturday Review*,

³⁵⁰ Tony Schwartz, band one, “Why Collect Recordings? El Venadito (medley),” *New York 19*.

³⁵¹ Frank Jacobs, “A Round-up of Recorded Noises—Odd and Otherwise,” *HiFi & Music Review*, September 1958, 35.

³⁵² Ralph J. Gleason, “Candid Tape Recorder Listens In on New York,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 June 1954, 16.

meanwhile, Oscar Brand heard “proof that the voice of the great wicked city can be heard in other places than the night clubs, the theaters, and the great television and radio centers.”³⁵³

Folklorist Ben Botkin believed that Schwartz “succeeds in catching the idiom, accent, and character of the man in the street [...] And unlike the collector who comes in from outside, he is able to do this for ordinary people by working in his own neighborhood and participating in its daily life.”³⁵⁴ The album’s pointillist cover art indeed invites us to eavesdrop on the city from a balcony overlooking Lincoln Square (fig. 3.2). Tempting as it is to hear it as an objective record of the way things were, it would be naïve to listen to *New York 19* as *the* sound of New York 19 in the 1950s. Holding up his tape recorder and his microphone as he walked through the city, choosing where and when to start and stop recording, splicing disparate recordings together into a coherent thematic mix, Schwartz’s hands, if not always his voice, imbue the album with his presence throughout.

Let’s listen more closely to side two, band two, simply titled “Selling.”³⁵⁵ Billed in the liner notes as documenting those who “have developed the art of selling to a high level,” it begins with Schwartz’s simple comment, “barkers, vendors, and pitchmen,” (0:00-0:05) before we are thrust into a hot and crowded Saturday night street, straining to hear an amplified voice inviting passers-by into an “ice cool” theater above the sound of footsteps and traffic (0:05-0:20). Next, a doorman on 52nd Street sidles up to the microphone, promises “no waiting, gents,” for an all-girl show with no cover; “in fact it’s the only show on the block for the next 75 minutes” (0:20-0:37). From outdoors, Schwartz splices us into the space of a theater lobby, where a man

³⁵³ Oscar Brand, “Manhattan Polyphonies,” *Saturday Review*, 25 September 1954, 48.

³⁵⁴ Review quoted in Tony Schwartz, “Folk Recording Your Community,” for Folkways Records. In [FOLDER AND BOX] Moses & Frances Asch Papers, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archive, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

³⁵⁵ All quotes and time stamps below from Tony Schwartz, “Selling,” *New York 19*.
<http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/work/242070>

selling programs for *The World of Sholom Aleichem* with original artwork “by the noted artist Ben Shahn” speaks above the sound of ticket takers and ushers (0:37-1:05). Two hawkers sing the names of newspapers they are selling (“*Times, Tribune, American, News, Mirror*”), while a vendor also competes with traffic while singing “flower plants” into the street (1:05-1:29). “We’re gonna get started with some of the household merchandise,” a voice intones over a public address system in an auction house, selling toasters, alarm clocks, cameras, and carving sets (1:29-1:59). For a brief moment at 1:59, Schwartz’s technique becomes audible. We hear a momentary disjuncture as he splices in an edit and the tape gets up to recording speed. Then, in the same tones as before, the voice over the PA asks, “Just let me talk, let me do the talking from now on. You’re not gonna run in and out are you? [a quiet no, possibly from Schwartz] You’re not double parked by any chance?” A woman’s laughter, close to the microphone, followed by that of a small child. “Because when you went out, you took six people with you before. I’ve gotta get an audience!” Waiting for a bigger audience after those people followed Schwartz out of the room, the auctioneer stalls while mentioning other items to go on sale. (1:59-2:31).

Next, the recording returns to a more intimate form of address, “Look mister, why give me 50 cents a week, it’s 52 cents a week” when a door-to-door policy salesman tries to convince a potential client to get a better rate on insurance (2:31-2:50). Two longer segments round out the track. A man who sharpens scissors and cuts glass is on the street, telling a crowd about the quality of his wares while Schwartz’s microphone picks up the faint sound of glass being cut and falling on the sidewalk as vehicles drive by and honk. “We sell ‘em and we sell ‘em cheap, it cuts glass like a machine, double thickness,” he continues, before cutting the price from the dollar it commands on television to 35 cents (2:50-3:48). Continuing in the same manner, a man selling pens for a quarter on 42nd Street between Sixth and Broadway:

... number two is a fine line. Now here is a pen that hasn't got the feature of a number on it, but it gives you any sort of line without changing the point. Now if you understand, realize, and appreciate a real good value, and if my physiognomy is not too conspicuous to be comprehended I'm gonna clarify to such an extent that each and every individual, standing here at the present time can very well afford it, I'm gonna give you this Parker 51 type. Now don't forget, you can take my pen and bring it into any pawn shop, ask him for ten dollars, see how quick they'll chase you out, but you ask him for five dollars they may give it to you, look. And today I'm not gonna charge you no dollar bills for the pen, but the first lady or gentleman gives me 25 cents gets the pen. And I think it's worth a quarter to anybody. Anyone who understands and realizes and appreciates something real good, you can go downtown, uptown, out of town, into town, in the summertime, in the wintertime, in the [?] time, all the way through, you never get a pen like this. By golly, that was a heavy quarter. Thank you. [sound of change falling in a bucket] Everybody gets the same chance. Here's another one like the last one. Look, not to discriminate to make fish of one and flesh of another, [quiet splice] believe you me, as long as you live, and may you live as long as you wish, and don't forget all the money that you spend with me goes to a good cause, 'cause my wife wants money, the butcher, the baker. Everybody wants money. Look at this, you can write Yiddish, you can write English, you can print, you can sketch, with this very same pen. Can you show me another pen, regardless how much you may spend for it, will give you this service and satisfaction? (3:48-5:16)

After all of that, Schwartz writes in the liner notes, "The pen pitchman was demonstrating his pens on top of a cardboard box." The brevity in his printed comment is belied by the space he devoted to the pitchman on the record. To Schwartz, it was a performance for the ages.

Over five minutes and ten separate vendors and pitchmen, Schwartz takes listeners from crowded public streets to semi-public spaces like theater lobbies and auction houses, to liminal ones like an apartment's threshold, then back into the street. Listeners are hailed as large groups ("Ladies and gentlemen," "Folks"), small ones ("Listen, gents"), and individuals ("Look, mister"). As with the rest of the album, Schwartz presents many sounds and experiences that are linked together in their location and theme, and that are meant to make listeners marvel at the human capacity for variety in the act of selling. Moving between these different spaces and modes of address, moreover, emphasizes what is, for Schwartz, the democratic possibility of various marketplaces, since "each and every individual, standing here at the present time, can

very well afford” to purchase pens to write in any language he or she might desire, or attend plays, or buy flowers and newspapers.

Schwartz wasn't the only one to feel that acts of street selling were worth documenting. The trope of the loquacious street spieler had a long history in urban folk writings, of a piece with the confidence man or sightseeing barker preying on greenhorns coming to the big city for the first time. Ben Botkin transcribed Schwartz's recording of the pen pitchman in two separate accounts of street folklore. In "The Spiels of New York," written for *New York Folklore Quarterly* in 1953, Botkin was interested in the multiple characters that sold goods and services in the street, in part because of "their association with swindling and quackery."³⁵⁶ Spielers, Botkin surmised, "are masters of crowd psychology [...] because the New York City man in the street is a well-known pushover for gadgets and novelties, bargains and gimmicks."³⁵⁷ In this, he wasn't sure if their techniques were so different than those of advertisers on Madison Avenue. Perhaps Schwartz the advertiser found something admirable in these selling techniques, especially because they were firmly rooted in place.³⁵⁸ Botkin described the fountain-pen man, for instance, as "a fount of the New York vernacular, wisecracking and kibitzing."³⁵⁹

While Botkin used Schwartz's recording in this piece from 1953 to develop a typology of selling, he repurposed it in his 1954 folklore compilation, *Sidewalks of America*. The pen salesman returned in a chapter entitled, "From This They Make a Living," a kind of labor history through folklore. Botkin compiled these stories from a wide variety of written and audio sources, from Schwartz's recordings to workers' diaries to Federal Writers' Project folklorists' interviews

³⁵⁶ B. A. Botkin, "The Spiels of New York," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 9 (1953): 167.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Indeed, Schwartz wrote about the pen pitchman again during a section on advertising in his much later book, *The Responsive Chord* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), 59-60.

³⁵⁹ Botkin, "The Spiels of New York," 170-171.

to Anzia Yezierska's autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*. Here, Botkin wrote that "While the salesman, of whom the pitchman may be taken as the type and symbol, tends to steal the show, he is not the whole show in the city's occupational life and lore," before noting that, when he was in charge of Federal Writers' Project's Living Lore Unit, he sent folklorists into the city "to find out to what extent modern industrial workers are producing a folklore comparable to that of the sailor, the cowboy, the lumberjack and the farmer."³⁶⁰ This folklore was especially important to people like Botkin because street sellers and pushcart owners were most likely to be poor people selling cheap goods to other poor people. As the city increasingly criticized street sales as an impediment to traffic and rational urban development, and tried to crack down on peddling of various kinds to direct commerce into established storefronts in an effort to raise property values, the livelihood of Schwartz's salesmen was at risk.³⁶¹ Schwartz's pen salesman thus occupied a liminal place in this narrative. On the one hand, he could be taken as an example of the overemphasized pitchman of yore. On the other hand, by placing his unedited spiel in the middle of other laborers' tales—Jewish shoemakers and sweatshop workers on the Lower East Side, cigar makers in Tampa Bay, tobacco warehouse workers in Louisville, steel workers in Pennsylvania, burlesque dancers on 52nd Street, and cab drivers roaming the streets of New York—Botkin made the case that this was more than simply a local character. He had a job worth consideration as a form of labor.

Even when presenting the oft-reviled sound of jackhammers for the band "Sounds of the City," Schwartz made sure to include the perspective of someone wielding the machine. After fifteen seconds of loud drilling, a male worker responds to the popular dislike for his occupation, "We've had things thrown out the window at us, people curse us, and call the cops sometimes to

³⁶⁰ Botkin, *Sidewalks of America*, 267.

³⁶¹ For an example of this dynamic at work a generation earlier, see, Bluestone, "'The Pushcart Evil.'"

try to get us to stop but we have a permit from the city to do it so there's nothing they can do about it." Given the frequent questions and popular opposition, he went on offer his, "stock answer for them. We always tell them that we lost a quarter here about three years ago and [?] we're looking for it now."³⁶² On the one hand, the quick witticism was of a piece with Schwartz's appreciation for the ritualized patter of barkers and sellers of all kinds. On the other, it also pointed listeners to consider the fact that, no matter how much they might be annoyed by the drills, they brought income to those who relied on construction jobs for a living. Rather than simply present this as a recording of an objectively annoying sound, Schwartz's Botkinesque decision to place this statement right after the sound of the jackhammer exemplified his populist attempts to sympathize with all the city's folk.

Despite the length of the pen pitchman's spiel on *New York 19*, the transcripts in both of Botkin's written versions are over twice as long. In the extended version, the pen pitchman develops the analogy between himself and a noted performer: "Believe me, this fellow Milton Berle—there's only one little difference between Milton Berle and myself: he gets a thousand dollars for one song and I get a dollar for a thousand songs. Here is the greatest value you ever anticipated in having in a long while."³⁶³ Is he describing the value of his performance or the value of the pen? For Schwartz and Botkin, it might not matter. As Botkin put it, "the pitchman is a showman as well as a salesman; his spiel and his routine are a performance and an entertainment as well as a puller-in's come-on."³⁶⁴ Those selling pens might just as well be working on a nearby stage, though their show was free for those walking the streets of the city.

³⁶² Tony Schwartz, "Sounds of the City," *New York 19*.

³⁶³ Botkin, "Spiels of New York," 172.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

They were simply making a living on the street, contributing to the folklore of the city, and were just as important to its culture as Berle and his ilk.

We can't know why Schwartz decided to cut this part out of the version on *New York 19*, but Botkin's pieces are notable for giving us brief glimpses into Schwartz's recording and editing process. Elsewhere in "The Spiels of New York," Botkin describes the scene for another recording that likely appeared in edited version on the album: "Outside a night club on Fifty-second Street a doorman interrupts his patter long enough to confide in an inquiring recorder, Tony Schwartz, who, or rather whose companion (who asks the questions while Mr. Schwartz is busy at the controls), wants to know the secret of a good spiel."³⁶⁵ Simply from the context provided on the album and its liner notes, a listener might assume that Schwartz simply walked down the street and heard the doorman giving this spiel to anyone who passed by. Botkin's transcription thus reveals that Schwartz's unnamed companion asked the doorman to describe his methods:

Here's my opinion. Any man, any feller, that works around here—if he's lively, or if he has a nice personality, a nice smile—you have a lot of pep in you—in order words, you're willing to make friends with the average person that passes—understand me? So I feel by doing that and being lively, you have a good spiel. Yes, that's fifty percent of it. That encourages the average person in. You got to do something to attract a person's attention—sailor, service man, or even a civilian—you've got to do something to attract his attention...
... You must be careful. Therefore you can say certain things that might insult him whereas a man that has his wife with him you must have respect for her to a certain extent... We tell him: "We have the most exciting show on the block." You've got to clean it up a bit. "We have music for your dancing and listening pleasure. Presenting the sensational and lovely amazon..."³⁶⁶

Is the recording on the album then this sanitized version of the doorman's pitch? Schwartz presents it as a sound that anyone might hear, but the comments transcribed from the original

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 174.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 174.

recording seem to suggest that different people—especially women or couples—walking on 52nd Street might hear different sounds as they passed through the city. Moreover, the fact that Schwartz elided his companion’s aid from descriptions of his process emphasizes the difficulty for individuals to simply go out and collect the sounds around them as he wanted them to do.

While ostensibly about a piece about the art of selling anything and everything, it is striking that the culture industries are invoked in at least half of the recordings here. Schwartz must contend with “the commercial music center of the country” head-on in order to make his point that there are unheard sounds even within these industries.³⁶⁷ He doesn’t record the sound of Broadway shows, Hollywood films playing inside air-conditioned theaters, or popular songs that might be playing in a burlesque show, but he does home in on the sounds of sellers who try to lure audiences in. The newspaper industry too is present. Rather than the sound of people reading the newspaper to one another, Schwartz picks up on the variety of newspapers being sold by vendors to show their ubiquity in the life of the city. The singing of their vendors, in Schwartz’s narrative, is more culturally significant than any of the news that might appear within the papers they sell.

Significant, too, was the one specific theatrical space invoked within the piece. It is no accident that Schwartz ended up in the lobby for a performance of *The World of Sholem Aleichem*.³⁶⁸ Like the label that delivered *New York 19* to a wider audience, it was the kind of production that came directly out of the Popular Front. Writer Arnold Perl and actor/producer Howard Da Silva dramatized several Yiddish stories by Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz for an off-Broadway English-language production at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel in 1953. With minimal staging and adaptation from sources like *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, the three plays (“A Tale

³⁶⁷ Language from Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*, 2.

³⁶⁸ While the author’s name usually appeared as Sholem Aleichem, the program for the play had this spelling.

of Chelm,” “Bontche Schweig,” and “The High School”) moved from “cute folktale to moral parable to modern predicament, from storybook theater to stately presentation to realism.”³⁶⁹ The effect was to build towards the final act, which adapted Sholem Aleichem’s “Gymnasia” to tell the story of an intelligent young man, Moishe Katz, whose desires to attend a local high school are thwarted by quotas for Jewish students. After he and his parents unsuccessfully attempt to bribe the high school principal then relocate several times to find an appropriate school, Moishe and a gentile student walk out of class together after joining a student strike against quotas. Initially horrified that all of his hard work will go to waste if Moishe is expelled, the father comes to believe that “This is the dawn of a new day. No more pogroms, no ghettos, no quotas... In this fine new world, there will be no Jews, no gentiles, no rich, no poor, no underdogs, no undercats,” as long as people stood up against injustice by going on strike.³⁷⁰ Da Silva hoped that audiences might move along the same trajectory: “If we have succeeded in moving from fantasy to mild criticism to statement in the three pieces, the audience will move with us.”³⁷¹ Many audience members sitting in the repurposed recital halls at the Barbizon-Plaza did just that, for it was, according to the *New York Folklore Quarterly*, “the most effective medium for giving folklore back to the people and for utilizing folklore to create understanding—of one’s own heritage as well as that of others.” Attending the play, they wrote, was something of a ritual in which “there is no sharp distinction between participant and spectator,” a claim that echoed that of many folklore and tape enthusiasts (including Schwartz) about their medium.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Alisa Solomon, *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013) 66.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁷² Review in B. A. Botkin and William G. Tyrrell, “Upstate, Downstate: Folklore News and Notes,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 10:1 (Spring 1954): 72-73.

But perhaps more notable than the didactic message of the dramatization itself was the group of people involved in putting it together. Da Silva, a veteran of the Federal Theater Project and the Group Theater collective, had appeared as a hostile witness before HUAC in 1951, while Perl had been cited in *Red Channels* as a radio writer with ties to the radical left.³⁷³ By the time they decided to stage *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, they were both blacklisted from radio and television work, so they established Rachel Productions in New York 19 to put own their own plays. Many other actors had also been blacklisted, including Morris Carnovsky, Phoebe Brand, Will Lee, and Sarah Cunningham. The producers also made a point to cast Ruby Dee, a member of the American Negro Theater group, as an angel in the second act, and employed her husband Ossie Davis as a stage manager for the integrated play. They also commissioned music from Serge Hovey, a folk oriented ethnomusicologist who studied with Arnold Schoenberg and Hanns Eisler and worked with Bertolt Brecht in the 1930s, and Robert DeCormier, a Julliard graduate with ties to Seeger and fellow Weaver Fred Hellerman, and who would later work as an arranger for Harry Belafonte.³⁷⁴ Meanwhile, as heard on *New York 19*, artist and photographer Ben Shahn produced a series of illustrations for the playbill and the programs for sale in the lobby of the Barbizon-Plaza (fig. 3.3).

Once the play proved enough of a success off-Broadway to mount a touring production around the country, it attracted the ire of the anti-communists at *Counterattack*, who claimed that *The World of Sholom Aleichem* disingenuously worked “to give the impression that it is ‘Jewish theater’ and thus win the support of unsuspecting Jewish individuals and groups.”³⁷⁵ But as

³⁷³ Both Da Silva and Perl, as well as Morris Carnovsky and Will Lee, were cited in American Business Consultants, *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influences in Radio and Television* (New York: Counterattack, 1950).

³⁷⁴ An original program with the full cast for the performance at the Barbizon-Plaza Theater can be found in box 154, folder 2, TS Collection.

³⁷⁵ Quoted in Solomon, *Wonder of Wonders*, 70.

historian Alisa Solomon argues, “If there was any Marxism behind the project, it was in Perl’s and Da Silva’s understanding the relationship among production, distribution, and consumption: they had not only tapped a market of second- and third- generation Jews eager for positive public portrayals of their heritage but also may have helped to invent it by creating a product the community hadn’t yet known it needed.”³⁷⁶ Between its attempt to use Yiddish motifs to tell a universal story, its invocation of the folk, its cast and crew of actors blacklisted from the broadcast and film industries, and its location in New York 19, it was exactly the kind of performance that Schwartz found affinities with.

Writing in the Ben Shahn-illustrated program that is being hawked on *New York 19*’s “Selling,” B. Z. Goldberg praised the way in which “every scene, every character, is presented in a Jewish but also in a universal spirit; lively and hearty, but not sweet and sugary; theatre ‘wise,’ but with depth and an appreciation of cultural values,” a description that might have suited Schwartz’s album as well.³⁷⁷ Those affinities were reciprocal. Though he made no mention of this fact on *New York 19* (nor does he even highlight anything about this performance in the liner notes), the producers thanked Schwartz on the playbill, perhaps for helping to record segments of the play for wider distribution on a long-playing record (fig. 3.4).³⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Shahn responded positively to the album that featured his name. “Moved to write in appreciation [...] after having carefully played over New York 19 some sixty times,” he asked Moe Asch to send several copies to friends. In a handwritten postscript, he added, “Please tell Tony Schwartz he’s

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 71.

³⁷⁷ B. Z. Goldberg, “Yiddish Culture in English,” in program for original production of *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, 1953, box 3, folder 7, Arnold Perl Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

³⁷⁸ It is unclear why they thanked him, though circumstantial evidence links Schwartz to an LP version of the play released by Rachel Records (and Tikva Records as well). He doesn’t appear to be listed in the credits anywhere on the recording, but it is up on the wall in his home studio along with several other records that he produced, in a photo in the *Nueva York* liner notes. *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, Tikva Records, T-28, 1953, LP record. A version exists online at: <http://archives.savethemusic.com/bin/archives.cgi?q=albums&id=145> (accessed February 11, 2014).

my kind of artist, hard boiled and beautiful.”³⁷⁹ The kind of artist, moreover, whose instincts told him that the mainstream culture industries could not tell the stories of the city.

*** The Art of Exchange ***

It would be up to fellow tapers and participants in the folk music community to tell such stories. Taking on the role of pedagogue, as he often did, Schwartz used the album to make suggestions for listeners to do their own collecting. On side one, band two, “Exchange by Mail,” Schwartz raised some rhetorical questions for listeners: “You live in a neighborhood, you want to collect folklore. Where can you go? What can you find?”³⁸⁰ “First, your local mailbox,” he answered. Around the same time that he produced his anti-fascist programs and began amassing his collection of folk recordings from within his home, he had started soliciting recordings from faraway places through the mail in a variety of ways. Like many other hobbyists described in chapter one, he joined the Voicespondence Club (first known as the Webster Wirespondence Club), one of many tape correspondence (or “tapespondence”) clubs that flourished in the early 1950s. Schwartz had found much of what he was looking for in those networks. Unlike his high school amateur radio experience, where he felt technical acumen overrode communication, the content of mailed spools of wire and reels of tape seemed to trump the novelty of distance and technique. “I’m interested in songs or music,” he wrote in one of his 1951 calls for tapespondents, “that people sing or play in their conscious or unconscious efforts to make the

³⁷⁹ A copy of this letter written by Ben Shahn to Moe Asch on 24 July 1954 appears in “Tony Schwartz Proposal to Sony,” August 1990, box 136, folder 11, TS Collection. Schwartz appeared to appreciate the compliment, and later recorded Shahn in a one on one interview.

³⁸⁰ Tony Schwartz, “Exchange by Mail,” *New York 19*.

<http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/work/242065>

world a better place to live in.”³⁸¹ The implication here was that by recording and distributing “songs of work, dance, protest or pastime,” he and other enthusiasts could counter the recording industry’s reluctance to release music from the world’s disenfranchised.³⁸² If he could not travel the world on his own due to his agoraphobia, he could at least bring it to his house, since “the widespread possession of the inexpensive magnetic recorder makes it possible for people all over the world to exchange recordings.”

Schwartz’s 1955 Folkways LP, *Exchange* featured “a few of the more than ten thousand folk recordings I have exchanged with people in forty countries,” including South Africa, Peru, Ireland, Haiti, India, and Mexico, as well as tapes from U.S. soldiers stationed abroad. The album also included detailed liner notes with several reproductions of letters from his correspondents to help listeners understand how to forge new relationships via magnetic tape.³⁸³ For instance, he wrote letters to tape clubs, newspaper editors, folk musicians, and strangers whom he’d read about in newspapers to exchange reels of tape, in addition to placing classified ads and sending demo recordings to radio stations around the world. In so doing, he “hope[d] this record will be an incentive for other people to establish and publish exchanges of this and other types of material.”³⁸⁴ Evidence from the album itself pointed to the fact that Schwartz likely overemphasized the ease and accessibility of tape recording as a popular hobby. For example, Schwartz reproduced letters he had received in 1951 from Max Nicholls of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa in the liner notes. Nicholls reciprocated Schwartz’s desire to hear “music which one

³⁸¹ “Musical Swap Shop: Tony Schwartz, Commercial Artist, Collects and Exchanges Recorded Folk Music From Around the World,” in *Audio Record* (March 1951). This was a newsletter sent out by Audio Devices, an early tape manufacturer. Found in box 8, folder 1, TS Collection.

³⁸² “Musical Swap Shop,” *Audio Record*, March 1951.

³⁸³ Tony Schwartz, “Introduction — South Dakota Farmer,” *Exchange*, Folkways FP 62, 1955, LP. The album was reissued as *The World in My Mailbox*, available online at <http://search.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/work/72044>

³⁸⁴ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *Exchange*, 1955.

cannot hear every day,” but asked Schwartz to send the first spool of wire in the mail “because these comodities (sic) are very scarce and expensive in S.A.” He promised to “return it promptly [...] to you with some of S. Africa’s folk music.” Once Schwartz sent Nicholls the first spool, he did in fact reply with “some typical South African songs in the Native language of Zulu and in Afrikaans,” before signing off “Wirespondingly yours, Max.”³⁸⁵ Notwithstanding the potential difficulties and expenses involved in obtaining recordings, many of the recordings that Schwartz collected were of vernacular, work, and protest musics from around the world.

New York 19 also contained evidence of these exchanges. On “Exchange by Mail,” Schwartz spliced in some recordings he had traded through the mail with other magnetic recording enthusiasts (0:00-0:10). A South Dakota farmer introducing himself before playing some cowboy songs on the guitar (“I don’t know whether you fellas in New York City appreciate this kind of music, but we folks around here do, this hillbilly stuff”) (0:10-0:50) fades out to voices of Irish (0:50-0:55), Greek (0:55-0:59), and South African “tapespondents” who traded recordings with Schwartz (0:59-1:20). Schwartz used one of the recordings he obtained from Max Nicholls in South Africa, Solomon Linda’s “Mbube” (1:20-2:08), before inserting his own recording of folk singer Pete Seeger leading a group of teenagers in a New York 19 housing project in a rendition of the same song, known in the United States as “Wimoweh.”³⁸⁶ Over the course of these four and a half minutes, Schwartz suggests that anyone could find connections between the sounds of their neighborhood and the sounds they could obtain from across the world through active tape trading networks.

³⁸⁵ Letters from Max H. Nicholls to Tony Schwartz, 31 July 1951 and 5 October 1951, in TS Collection, box 156, folder 9, reproduced in liner notes to *Exchange*.

³⁸⁶ Tony Schwartz, “Exchange By Mail,” *New York 19*.

As with “Selling,” however, “Exchange By Mail” reveals more than simply the presence of folklore within *New York 19*. It also makes audible Schwartz’s active role in forging connections between the people of his neighborhood and the wider world of folklore. Elsewhere on the album, on side two, band three, “Children,” Schwartz devotes almost two minutes to recordings of teenagers in the basement of a housing project “using one bongo drum, several chairs, a long wide wooden bench, metal waste baskets, several sticks and an empty Pepsi-Cola bottle” to create a polyrhythmic improvisation.³⁸⁷ It is unclear whether he returned to the same housing project with Seeger, but he described the *New York 19* rendition of “Wimoweh” as such in the liner notes:

One evening I took Pete Seeger, lead singer of the Jenkins-Weaver version of ‘Wimoweh,’ to a basement of a housing project where a group of teen-agers had outfitted a room as a social center. Every week or two these fellow would have a jam session, beating out the most complicated rhythms on boxes, wooden benches, a drum, folding chairs, sticks and an empty soda bottle or two. After listening a while I asked the fellows if they would like to hear Pete sing a song. They did not know who he was but politely said yes. As soon as they realized he was introducing ‘Wimoweh,’ they started shouting, ‘Oh, we know that.’³⁸⁸

Yet it would also be too simple to tell this as a story of folk music coming from the people contrasted with the culture industries producing music for the people, and Schwartz noted as much himself in staging the story of this song on the record. As Seeger says in his introduction, “the song happens to come from South Africa, it’s only got one word in it, and it’s a popular song, it’s not an old song there, and this one word is Wimoweh” (2:11-2:22). The teenagers quickly reply: “Oh yeah,” “We know that joint,” “We all know that” (2:22-2:28). They knew the song because Seeger’s popular folk group The Weavers had recorded a hit version orchestrated by Decca Records arranger Gordon Jenkins in 1952, and was thus part of their strategy to use

³⁸⁷ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*. His first album for Folkways, *1, 2, 3, and a Zing Zing Zing* also features the same recording on its final band, “Rhythm.”

³⁸⁸ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*.

pop music as a vehicle for their left progressive politics. In Schwartz's words, it "became part of New York 19" through that pop record, and he orchestrated the meeting between Seeger and the teenagers of the neighborhood who'd heard Seeger's rendition of a song that came to Schwartz straight from a South African wire recording.

Schwartz similarly bridged the gap between tapespondence networks and local folklore on the following band, "National Groups, Visitors, Students, Concert Hall," which purported to demonstrate music from people coming to New York "from all over the world," since "New York 19 has people representing many national groups living and working in it."³⁸⁹ Schwartz introduces the second selection: "a young woman from Pittsburgh brought a Roumanian song, learned from her mother."³⁹⁰ A sketch of the unnamed woman appears in the liner notes, beside an explanation from Schwartz that he recorded her singing "at a neighbor's home," before writing that "when I was replaying the tape a 78-year-old housepainter, painting my apartment, started to cry," because it was a song he had known as a child.³⁹¹ Schwartz almost presents the story as a coincidence, as if he happened to find himself in a neighbor's home recording this average singer from Pittsburgh, then happened to play it for a housepainter. In fact, in an earlier call for wire correspondents, Schwartz had exchanged letters with Vivien Richman, a transplanted New Yorker living in Pittsburgh who later recorded an album of Western Pennsylvania folk songs for Folkways (fig. 3.5).³⁹² "I have a Webster Wire Recorder in rather dubious condition, but I think I might be able to send you some decent stuff with it," Richman wrote to Schwartz, before noting that she was interested in knowing what kinds of recordings she

³⁸⁹ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*.

³⁹⁰ Tony Schwartz, "National Groups, Visitors, Students, Concert Hall," *New York 19*.

³⁹¹ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*.

³⁹² Vivien Richman, *Folk Songs of West Pennsylvania*, Folkways FG 3568, 1959, LP. Streaming audio via Alexander Street Press Database, <http://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/71432>.

might receive in exchange. “Of course, I am most interested in adding to my library. Could you tell me too, if you are planning to use any of these recordings commercially?”³⁹³ Perhaps getting exposure on a recording from Schwartz could help in her efforts to make a name for herself as a folk singer. Given the fact that he had corresponded with Richman, and that he likely ended up recording her at a neighbor’s house as a result of that correspondence, it is curious that Schwartz did not name Richman as the “young woman from Pittsburgh.” It is doubtful that she wanted to remain anonymous on the recording, since she touted her appearance on *New York 19* and *Exchange* when she released her own album on Folkways.

It is also curious since Schwartz concluded the piece with a recording of an Israeli song performed in a New York 19 nightclub by Martha Schlamme.³⁹⁴ Schwartz named Schlamme as the singer, and pointed listeners to an album she had recorded for the Israeli Music Foundation, *Israeli Folk Dances, 2nd Series* if they wanted to hear a studio recorded version of “Lech Lamidbar.”³⁹⁵ Speculation about why Schwartz decided to name Schlamme and not Richman aside, the track once again makes it obvious that the recordings Schwartz decided to feature on his albums had as much to do with the networks he had created for himself in New York 19 as they were expressions of the folklore he found on the streets, clubs, and private homes of his neighborhood.

Schwartz’s intermediary position between tape hobbyists, folklorists, and people in the neighborhood found full expression at the end of the record’s first side, on a band called

³⁹³ Letter from Vivien Richman to Tony Schwartz, 2 August 1951, box 156, folder 9, TS Collection.

³⁹⁴ Like Richman, Schlamme also recorded for Folkways. See Martha Schlamme and Pete Seeger, *German Folk Songs*, Folkways, FW 6843, 1954, LP. Streaming audio via Alexander Street Press Database, <http://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/72192>. As further evidence of the dense social networks of folklorists and progressive musicians I have identified above, Schlamme also collaborated with *The World of Sholom Aleichem* composer Robert DeCormier for arrangements on at least two albums, *Martha Schlamme Sings Jewish Folk Songs, Volume 2*, Vanguard VRS-9049, 1969, LP, and *Kissin’s No Sin*, MGM SE-4190, 1963, LP.

³⁹⁵ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*.

“Translations.” Here, Schwartz recorded two people translating records in real time. For the first, a woman living in New York 19 translated a 78-rpm record owned by her Italian-speaking parents, operatic baritone Gino Bechi performing the popular Sicilian song “Lu Me Sciccareddu (My Little Donkey).” As translated, the song told of “a little donkey / but truly sweet / they killed him on me / my poor little donkey,” whose braying made him seem “like a great tenor.”³⁹⁶ In the liner notes, Schwartz explained that “she had never translated the song before,” and that “what you hear was our first and only take.”³⁹⁷ But when the chorus approached, the translator anticipated the song’s key moment by rushing through the line, “and when he sang he used to do,” before giving way to Bechi’s imitation of a donkey’s cry. Whether she had translated it before or not, her easy familiarity with the song from her Italian parents’ record collection spoke to the ways in which migrants to the city might retain cultural connections to their places of origin through popular music.

If that song spoke to an earlier migration history, the second translation attempted to reveal something of more contemporary experiences. Rather than an old record from someone’s childhood collection, Schwartz recorded a man standing beside a jukebox inside a “restaurant catering to Puerto Rican New Yorkers.” With the music playing faintly in the background, the translator recited the jukebox record’s words, which claimed “to be peasant, a *jíbaro*, is an honor,” even though “the country in which I was born is suffering many many bad economic things.” The singer would not change Puerto Rico for five hundred New Yorks, the chorus went, and the translator laughed as he recited the next verse in which “I wouldn’t change Puerto Rican chickens by frozen chickens in the iceboxes here / when I saw the snow coming down, like coconut flakes from heaven, I was going crazy seeing that kind of stuff coming down / my soul

³⁹⁶ Tony Schwartz, “Translations,” *New York 19*.

³⁹⁷ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*.

was very disconsolate / I wouldn't change Puerto Rico by four thousand New Yorks."³⁹⁸ Though Schwartz did not identify it as such, the song was "No Cambio A Puerto Rico (I Wouldn't Change Puerto Rico)" by Flor Morales Ramos, better known as Ramito.³⁹⁹ A former sugar cane worker from Caguas in Puerto Rico's mountains south of San Juan, Ramito's *jibaro* songs were popular among migrants to New York for their depiction of the city's cold and harsh reception in compared to a Puerto Rico that, despite economic struggles, "remains the warm, lush, spiritually endowed *patria*," in the words of one musicologist.⁴⁰⁰ Though the record valorized a rural peasant life at the expense of the city, the fact that the song was on a jukebox in the city revealed something of the extent to which folk cultures, mythical and constructed as they were, co-existed with the commercial culture of contemporary life in New York. As with so much else on *New York 19*, this translation condensed Schwartz's vision of folklore as a living presence within the city.

But as a translation, this band pointed to the fact that this record was largely meant for English speakers. As much as Schwartz wanted to give voice to non-English speakers or otherwise underrepresented voices, those on the receiving end were likely to be part of the dominant culture. Jennifer Stoever's important work on Schwartz's subsequent record, *Nueva York: A Documentary of Puerto Rican New York* (1956) rightfully points to the risk that his "various aural translations [...] yield to the listening ear of white consumers and amplify his own

³⁹⁸ Tony Schwartz, "Translations," *New York 19*. The same man translated two more songs on Schwartz's *Nueva York* album. Tony Schwartz, "Translation of Juke Box Record," *Nueva York: A Tape Documentary of Puerto Rican New Yorkers*, Folkways, FD 5559, 1955, LP. Streaming audio via Alexander Street Press Database, <http://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/72042>.

³⁹⁹ At one point, the translator reiterates the chorus, "No cambio a Puerto Rico" in Spanish before his translation, which allowed me to locate the original by searching for the song lyrics. The version heard on Schwartz's recording is Ramito con Claudio Ferrer y Su Conjunto, "No Cambio A Puerto Rico," 1950, Ansonia 5168, 78 rpm record.

⁴⁰⁰ Peter Manuel, "Representations of New York City in Latin Music," 28 in *Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Identity in New York*, eds. Ray Allen and Lois Wilcken (New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College, 1998).

privileged access to recording technology and radio media, largely unavailable to Puerto Ricans themselves.”⁴⁰¹ To be sure, Schwartz’s ability to edit, stage, and narrate *New York 19* presented a circumscribed space for the people whose voices could be heard on the record. But with those limitations in mind, Schwartz tried to reform listeners with his subtle everyday progressive politics.

Even with Schwartz’s wide connections to New York’s left cultural producers, his most critical messages were more likely to be personal and psychological rather than structural and economic. At the end of the record, on “Music in Speech,” Schwartz presents “a grocer making change,” who goes on to make one of the most explicit anti-racist statements on the record. “There was a storekeeper like me, and two young fellas went and held him up and they killed him, they shot him, he died,” while Schwartz listens. “Before he died he says, ‘I wanna tell you,’ he says, ‘before I die,’ he says, ‘was white boys killed me, not colored fellas.’ You know what I mean? The man was as conscientious man that he says they might blame it on the colored people, that was the object, he was a Jewish man, my milkman told me that.” Claiming that white New Yorkers often rushed to accuse people of color for criminal acts, he continued, “My own kind is just as bad, my own child will be a thief, he’s just as bad as the next one, I don’t care if it’s a white, colored, black, whatever it is, or I mean, 3, 6, 16, 19, 5, 9, 11, 15 [sound of paper bag] \$1.79, is that right?”⁴⁰² Though ostensibly closing out the record with a demonstration of the musical speech of daily life, the man’s comment instead attempts to serve as “an example of the consideration people can develop in a city with a population of different backgrounds.”⁴⁰³ Presenting the grocer counting up change as he goes, Schwartz hears the man’s casual

⁴⁰¹ Stoever-Ackerman, “Splicing the Color Line,” 62.

⁴⁰² Tony Schwartz, “Music in Speech,” *New York 19*.

⁴⁰³ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *New York 19*.

consideration, located in the daily rhythms of the neighborhood and its inhabitants, as an object lesson for anyone listening to the record. Not only that they could be thoughtful in their daily interactions, but that by bringing tape recorders into the spaces of their everyday lives, they too could capture and listen to the basic humanity of the people around them. Sentimental or not, Schwartz felt these were stories too seldom told, and they were a far cry from the steady beat of racist hatred he had put on tape years earlier, after the events of Peekskill.

*** Afterlives of New York 19 ***

For all that Schwartz's own recordings revealed the depths of his connections to other cultural production networks in New York, the small audience for his works revealed some limits to his strategy to transform popular culture from within. However much the artistic autonomy granted by Moe Asch's Folkways allowed Schwartz to pursue the recording and presentation of his city's sounds on Schwartz's own terms, the fact remained that his albums rarely sold more than a few hundred copies. By 1958, *New York 19*, his biggest seller, had just topped 1,500 units sold. How much could recordings with such sales numbers really *amplify* the voices of people marginalized from the culture industries' practices, even if they subtly embraced some mechanisms of mass culture? The afterlives of the New York 19 project are thus instructive. For even when the populist sounds of Schwartz's neighborhood had an advocate who could reach a much wider number of ears, there were other obstacles to the sentimentally populist program of the postwar Popular Front's sonic imaginary. Just as the case of the blacklisted Weavers tested the limits of Schwartz's anti-fascist recording approach in the late 1940s, Harry Belafonte's efforts to mount New York 19 as televised spectacle in November

1960 revealed the culture industry's continued reluctance to create space for the voices of "the people" as they were imagined by the Popular Front.

Belafonte and Schwartz had long run in some of the same circles. Just a few years younger than Schwartz, Belafonte split time between Harlem and his parents' Jamaica while growing up. After a stint in the Navy during World War II, he became interested in the interracial anti-fascist politics of the Popular Front after his return. Returning to New York after his service was completed, he acted in plays put on by the American Negro Theater (ANT)—which sought to "break down the barriers of Black participation in the theater; to portray Negro life as they honest saw it, to fill in the gap of a Black theatre which did not exist"—attended People's Songs events, befriended Paul Robeson, participated in the Dramatic Workshop associated with leftist theatrical activism in Greenwich Village, and started singing both bebop and folk music in venues like the Royal Roost and Cafe Society. When he began making a name for himself as a folk singer in the late 1940s, Belafonte took his act to Schwartz's living room and recorded several of his songs on the latter's tape recorder; one of many such musicians to do so. But Belafonte was much more plugged into the efforts to reshape popular culture industries by working through their mechanisms than Schwartz.⁴⁰⁴

Deeply influenced by Robeson's pioneering efforts to inject performance with politics, he attended meetings of the Committee for the Negro in the Arts (CNA), which, like the ANT, tried to create roles for African American artists on radio, television, and the theatrical and musical stage, and in the process, create productions that gave voice to diasporic black culture and

⁴⁰⁴ On Belafonte's association with the early postwar left and his efforts to increase African American representation in the arts, see Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*, 8-54.

history.⁴⁰⁵ While anti-communists targeted groups like the Committee, which made associations to such groups politically perilous in the 1950s, Belafonte continued to struggle through the complicated dynamics of getting stage and screen time without adhering to racist stereotypes that were stock and trade of many popular productions. Earlier, calypso had been one of many vernacular musical forms embraced through the internationalist vision of the Popular Front, and Belafonte increasingly took it upon himself to perform music from the Caribbean while pursuing his mission to promote Black arts in his productions. During the 1950s, it was part of the white middle-class embrace of so-called “exotica,” and Belafonte capitalized on the interest in the genre. In 1956, his album *Calypso* outsold every other album that year, beating out Elvis Presley’s debut album as well as the original cast recordings of *My Fair Lady* and *The King and I*.⁴⁰⁶ Throughout the rest of the decade, he leveraged his growing popularity on stages, screens, and jukeboxes to establish his own film production company, Harbel Productions, to try to desegregate venues, and to raise money for civil rights organizations in the aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education*, becoming one of Martin Luther King Jr.’s main confidants and fundraisers in the process.⁴⁰⁷

Around the same time as Belafonte released his popular records, *Belafonte at Carnegie Hall* (1959) and *Belafonte Returns to Carnegie Hall* (1960), he also worked to secure airtime on CBS for a series of television specials. Building on the success of his stage shows in Las Vegas

⁴⁰⁵ For more on African American artists’ efforts to control the terms of representation in popular culture, see Washington, *The Other Blacklist*; Rebecca Welch, “Spokesman of the Oppressed? Lorraine Hansbury at Work: The Challenge of Radical Politics in the Postwar Era,” *Souls* 9:4 (2007): 302-319.

⁴⁰⁶ “Best Selling Pop Albums,” *Billboard*, January 26, 1957, 74. On the complicated history of exotica’s embrace in the United States, see Tim Anderson, *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and on the curious reception of calypso in the United States from the 1930s to the 1950s, see Michael Eldridge, “There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow,” *Callaloo* 25 (2002): 620-638; Shane Vogel, “Jamaica on Broadway: The Popular Caribbean and Mock Transnational Performance,” *Theatre Journal* 62 (2010): 1-22.

⁴⁰⁷ Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*, 55-175.

for largely well-heeled white audiences, Belafonte wanted a mass stage for his act that could be accessible to everyone. Negotiating a deal for a Revlon-sponsored series on CBS, he insisted on complete control over the production of *Tonight With Belafonte* in 1959. Attempting to fulfill the mission of groups like the CNA, it was a broad celebration of African-American arts for a mass audience, and featured guest performances by the likes of Odetta, Popular Front folk favorites Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, dancers Mary Hickson and Arthur Mitchell, and included tributes to both Huddie Ledbetter and Langston Hughes. Garnering high viewership, favorable reviews, and an Emmy for Belafonte, *Tonight With Belafonte* set the stage for the next round of negotiations with Revlon. Together, they agreed on a deal for five more specials in subsequent years. The first of these, to air on November 20th, 1960, would be entitled *New York 19*.

Where the earlier program focused on a variety of African American cultural expressions, Belafonte staged *New York 19* as an explicitly interracial performance on a largely segregated medium. In press leading up to the televised spectacular, Belafonte described the show (and the neighborhood) in much the same language as Schwartz's earlier recordings:

The show [...] deals with the folklore of Manhattan Island in one specific area – postal zone 19. It has a great concentration of national and cultural groups, Puerto Rican, Jewish, Irish, Italian, Greek, a French quarter, and in it you see kids skipping rope all the time – but you also have Madison Square Garden and Stillman's gym, rehearsal halls and Carnegie Hall, Birdland and its jazz, the museum of Modern Art, and "My Fair Lady" is running there. It encompasses Broadway, a part of the theatrical district, and the docks with big and little liners and freighters. The area is from 48th 59th Street and from Fifth Avenue to the Hudson, and we'll do the life of the community through its music. This includes the children's street songs, which are highly indigenous to the place.⁴⁰⁸

On the whole, the program focused on the neighborhood's music, rather than the more capacious understanding of folk culture from Schwartz's collection. Whether he got the idea from Schwartz

⁴⁰⁸ "Belafonte's New York 19 Gives Folk Singing Bounce," *Atlanta Daily World*, November 16, 1960, 2.

or not, it is clear that both productions were cut from the same internationalist, multiethnic cloth. Jumping rope with children from a variety of backgrounds, Belafonte sang the kind of game songs that Schwartz recorded throughout the decade. Three years before Pete Seeger included an arrangement of it on his album *We Shall Overcome*, and six years before The Sandpipers would make a top-ten Billboard hit out of it, Belafonte performed a version of the popular Cuban song “Guantanamera” on the program. Continuing with the Caribbean theme, he sang a Trinidadian calypso, “Bedbug.” With a group dancing the hora behind him, he sang the Israeli song “Hava Nagila,” which he helped to popularize in the United States. Broadly sentimental as it might have been, the production nevertheless presented a vision of the city as socially integrated and created exposure for artists with similar sensibilities.⁴⁰⁹

Emphasizing both the multiethnic character of the neighborhood and the curious relation between its well-known cultural institutions and folk expressions, Belafonte imagined *New York 19* as “a program with a point of view—not just a bland thing with guest stars. Seventy per cent of my real-life day is spent in that area.”⁴¹⁰ But the television program was not lacking in guests. Belafonte dueted with jazz singer Gloria Lynne. He invited the Modern Jazz Quartet to perform a piece called “Django.”⁴¹¹ He included dance performances from his wife Julie Robinson and Asian American ballet dancer Pat Dunn among others. He commissioned set drawings by social realist artist Charles White and neighborhood photos by Harlem-based photographer (and one-

⁴⁰⁹ Unfortunately, the whole program is unavailable. Excerpts can be seen as part of a recent documentary on Belafonte, including the full performances of “Lil’ Liza Jane” and “Hava Nagila.” See *Sing Your Song*, directed by Susanne Rostock (New York: Docurama Films, 2012), DVD. The other descriptions are dependent on the press reviews, and Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*. As an aside, it’s both ironic and indicative of the differences between network television and Folkways’ mission that Belafonte’s program, despite the fact that it was seen and heard by millions more than Schwartz’s records, cannot easily be seen today while Schwartz’s Folkways recordings should be available as long as Smithsonian Folkways continues to exist.

⁴¹⁰ Doc Quigg, “Belafonte Selects ‘Home’ For TV Special Setting,” *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*, November 20, 1960, 9D.

⁴¹¹ The Modern Jazz Quartet went on to include a song named “New York 19” on their 1962 album *Lonely Woman*.

time student of White) Roy DeCarava to punctuate the Norman Jewison-directed special.⁴¹² The fact that both Schwartz and Belafonte could imagine their daily lives in the neighborhood as being outside the realm of star culture, even as they forged strong connections to New York's progressive cultural producers, was telling of the ways in which they leveraged their own production capacities to include other like-minded artists.

Like *Tonight With Belafonte, New York 19* garnered largely favorable reception in the press. Cecil Smith in the Los Angeles *Times* saw the show as “fitted together with the precision of a Swiss watch. While it was a sociological study as well as a piece of entertainment, the sociology was so expertly fitted in that there was never a classroom feeling.”⁴¹³ *Variety* was not as convinced that Jewison had handled the direction as seamlessly: “The nearly bare settings, the excessive use of art photography stills to relay the picture of the city and its people and the soupy commentary took a lot of fun out of the session.”⁴¹⁴ The *Washington Post*'s television critic Lawrence Laurent, however, believed the host's “forceful, arresting personality” had earned him the right to make “a sly remark about the unfortunate, anachronistic legalism, ‘separate but equal,’” without being an “outrage against television entertainment.”⁴¹⁵

In the African-American press, reviewers emphasized Belafonte's difficult position in negotiating the demands of the advertiser, Revlon, to get a mass audience without courting controversy with the message he wanted to get across. Ralph Mason in the Baltimore *Afro-American* argued that the cast “nobly fulfilled the promise to show us New York as a melting pot,” where “white, colored, Oriental and other racial strains played together amicably – just as

⁴¹² Smith, *Becoming Belafonte*, 208-212. For more on White and DeCarava, who, like Belafonte, attended meetings of the Committee for the Negro in the Arts, see Washington, *The Other Blacklist*, 69-122; Maren Stange, “‘Illusion Complete Within Itself;’ Roy DeCarava's Photography,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9 (1996): 63-92.

⁴¹³ Cecil Smith, “Belafonte: Man of Charm, Spirit,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1960, A8.

⁴¹⁴ “Television Reviews: Belafonte, New York 19,” *Variety*, November 23, 1960, 35.

⁴¹⁵ Lawrence Laurent, “Harry's Husky Urgency Gives Any Show Pace,” *Washington Post*, November 22, 1960, A17.

they do in everyday life.”⁴¹⁶ In the *Chicago Defender*, reviewer Lori Nails was reluctant to criticize Belafonte’s production too much because the star “is the first and only member of his race to be entrusted with presenting his own telecast.” Since he had set the bar so high the previous year, Nails continued, “once on the ‘inside,’ the successful agent cannot allow his product to stand still, rather it must be an improved commodity with each appearance.” Jesse Walker in the *New York Amsterdam News* believed the interracial portrayal of the neighborhood “added charm” and that the program as a whole “was a superb example of what good, thoughtful planning, unfettered by Madison Avenue cliches can do.”⁴¹⁷ Building on the *Defender*’s argument about the commodity status of the show, Walker continued to say it “should give Madison Avenue pause for thought. The sponsor, Revlon, must share the praise for backing such a show, and if you feel as I do about it, you should not hesitate in making them aware of your appreciation.”⁴¹⁸ As for Belafonte himself, he was less enthused about the advertiser: “The best thing about New York 19 is that Madison Avenue, the single biggest social cancer of the U.S.A., is nowhere near it. The only thing wrong with New York 19, the show, is too many commercials.”⁴¹⁹

As it turned out, Belafonte was right to be skeptical of the advertiser. Surprisingly, given the ratings and reviews, Revlon did not continue to support Belafonte for the agreed-upon production the following year. Citing a shift from an advertising strategy that sponsored yearly hour-long specials towards regular weekly sponsorships, Revlon paid out Belafonte for breaking their earlier contract.⁴²⁰ At the time, Belafonte expressed frustration because “I believe my

⁴¹⁶ Ralph Mason, “Bright Spot in a So-So Season: Belafonte Rings the Bell With a Superb Production,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 3, 1960, A5.

⁴¹⁷ Jesse H. Walker, “Theatricals,” *New York Amsterdam News*, November 26, 1960, 15.

⁴¹⁸ Walker, “Theatricals.”

⁴¹⁹ Quigg, “Belafonte Selects ‘Home’ For TV Special Setting.”

⁴²⁰ Val Adams, “Sponsor Cancels Belafonte Shows,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1961, 61.

creative juices are at their prime [...] and television filters through to so many needs, reaches so many people.” His plans for a pan-Africanist program “Africa Speaks” with Miriam Makeba, and a program on the folklore of the Mississippi put on hold, Belafonte lamented the fact that despite his star power, he could not gain a regular spot on television. “I played to 30,000 people a week at the Greek Theater,” he told *Los Angeles Times* TV reporter Cecil Smith, “Do you know I’d have to play there 25 years to reach the people I reach with one television hour?”⁴²¹ Though he went along with Revlon’s story that the shift in advertising strategy from yearly to weekly had caused the rift, Belafonte later argued that the real conflict had to do with the advertiser’s reluctance to pressure Southern television stations who did not want to air interracial programs. The head of Revlon allegedly told him that Southern stations were “ok with an all-black cast. They just don’t want to see white singers and dancers on the stage together with them.”⁴²² Refusing to yield to the demands, especially after his previous program condemned “separate but equal,” a disappointed Belafonte felt it best to plow money from lucrative engagements in Las Vegas or cruise ships, as well as best-selling records, back into civil rights organizations that might combat the white supremacist culture he encountered first hand on television.⁴²³

Belafonte’s experience mounting *New York 19* on television provides a telling strategic counterpoint to Tony Schwartz’s own efforts to express the many sonic cultures of his

⁴²¹ Cecil Smith, “Why No Niche For Belafonte?,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1961, A8.

⁴²² Harry Belafonte, *My Song: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

⁴²³ In the midst of another televised controversy in 1968, when a sponsor worried about the fact that singer Petula Clark touched Belafonte’s arm during a duet of an anti-war song she had written, “On the Path of Glory,” Belafonte wrote an impassioned editorial for the *New York Times* arguing that television executives acceded to the demands of white supremacy in their programming choices. Elaborating on his frustration that he wasn’t able to pursue further specials on CBS, he stated that executives “are simply not prepared to show the racial inhumanity of the white world, and yet it is only when America faces these truths about herself that we can be assured of fulfilling the dignity of man.” See Harry Belafonte, “Belafonte: ‘Look, They Tell Me, Don’t Rock the Boat,’” *New York Times*, April 21, 1968, D21.

neighborhood on tape and LP. Schwartz made a virtue of his ability to take his recorder out into the streets as a hobby, freed from questions about advertisers and sales. Schwartz's experience had indeed shown that tape recording could be used for more than simply copying pre-recorded music, even if he had struggled to grapple seriously with the naïveté of sentimental populism as a cultural strategy for political transformation. As the *New York Times* put it in 1962, Schwartz often left "his listeners with a sense of dignity instead of stupidity about 'simple' people."⁴²⁴ Whatever the aesthetic merits or representativeness of his portrayal of the neighborhood, Folkways, WNYC, and Robert Rosenwald had largely granted him the freedom to express the sounds he had gathered as he desired. The tradeoff was that relatively few heard the sounds he prepared. *New York 19* the album could not compete with Belafonte's televised special of the same name. But Belafonte's frustration with the advertiser, particularly when Revlon reneged on their deal for future productions clearly pointed to the strategic difficulties for those wanting to work within the centers of the culture industry. Even as Belafonte also made a virtue of the neighborhood's complex juxtaposition of culture industry and multivalent folklore, the fact that television productions relied on the whims of advertisers meant that it could not be a reliable means of transforming popular culture through the interracial political imaginary of the Popular Front, despite the potential to reach unheard-of numbers.

Some years later, a new generation of radical producers took up the banner of Schwartz's *New York 19* when they mounted a critique of the city's displacement of a functional multiracial community in order to build Lincoln Center.⁴²⁵ Not content to allow others to speak on their behalf, anti-colonialist leftist activists in the United States formed Third World Newsreel in an

⁴²⁴ "Mr. Schwartz is Always on Hand," *New York Times*, May 20, 1962, X15.

⁴²⁵ For more on the history of Lincoln Center's displacement of the Lincoln Square neighborhood, see Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 197-249.

attempt to pursue their own critiques of structural inequalities and racism within the U.S. A 1968 production, *The Case Against Lincoln Center*, contrasts film footage of a lively neighborhood's street scenes, with people chatting on stoops, walking in front of mom and pop grocery stores, and children playing in the streets, against the silent concrete environment of Lincoln Center. With stark angled shots portraying the new cultural hub just outside New York 19, a narrator explained that "In 1955, the destruction of an entire thirteen-block neighborhood was begun so that a cultural center could be built. Under Title I slum clearance laws, over twenty-thousand poor people were removed from their homes in order to make way for Lincoln Center" for the benefit of the "richest families and the richest corporations in America."⁴²⁶ Lamenting the fact that the center did not represent the culture of the people displaced to make way for it, the film returned to the sight of children playing music in the street. To dramatize the culture being lost, the filmmakers used several recordings from Schwartz's oeuvre, including excerpts from *New York 19's* "Children" and *Nueva York's* "Folk Song, 'Juan Charascado.'" Schwartz had addressed the issue of Lincoln Center on his program for WNYC, and hoped that the construction "brings as much culture to the community as did the people who were displaced," and the recordings he had made of it had attempted to document what might be lost in the displacement.⁴²⁷ The short newsreel ended with more sterile shots of Lincoln Center to conclude, "And now with the massive urban renewal plan, New York City will turn the entire Upper West Side into a high income, high profit bargain for the patrons of Lincoln Center."⁴²⁸ Though Schwartz might have become as interested in the sounds coming from inside Lincoln Center by the late 1960s, in its own way, it was fitting that a new generation of radical cultural producers

⁴²⁶ Newsreel, *The Case Against Lincoln Center/El Caso En Contra del Centro Lincoln*, (1968; New York: Third World Newsreel, 2007), DVD.

⁴²⁷ Quoted in Stoever-Ackerman, "Splicing the Color Line," 71.

⁴²⁸ *The Case Against Lincoln Center*.

used the neighborhood sounds he had recorded. Nurtured in the leftist colonies of the Hudson Valley and expressive of the progressive desires among many of midcentury New York's cultural producers, his practice, sentimentally humanist as it may have been, had deep roots in the area's complicated efforts to represent the "people" in New York 19.

*** Conclusion: From Populism to the Politics of Perception ***

While others used the New York 19 project as a launching point for wider conversations about the structural inequalities generated by urban renewal, Schwartz increasingly turned away from his populist commitment to document the sounds of the city towards a more perceptually oriented project to consider the nature of sound itself. As Schwartz gradually moved away from the hobbyist environment, he also found himself increasingly at odds with the most common approaches to the medium he'd found so liberating. Let us briefly return to the moment that ended chapter one, when Schwartz expressed his frustration with tape hobbyists for using the medium in derivative ways. Schwartz felt that tape recording ought to be treated as an aural equivalent to photography, rather than as a means to copy pre-recorded music. Schwartz took up these issues in a regular column for *Popular Photography*, "Sound for Photographers" in the 1960s. The magazine wrote that "he gets much more of his inspiration and ideas from the literature on photography which he reads than in literature on recording which is usually over-involved with technique at the expense of the expressive possibilities of the medium."⁴²⁹ In Schwartz's first column for *Popular Photography* he quoted the photographer Edward Steichen's 1936 edict that "The lens records with equal fidelity the trite, the superficial, and the significant. It is the photographer's perception that must differentiate." "The same comment holds just as

⁴²⁹ Charles R. Reynolds, "A Man Behind a New Art - Images in Sound: Focus on Tony Schwartz," *Popular Photography*, September 1963, 60.

true,” Schwartz added, “for the tape recorder.”⁴³⁰ To date, the significant had been the sounds of the street, but that began to change by the early 1960s.

On his 1962 LP *You're Stepping on my Shadow*, Schwartz hoped to “demonstrate the use of the tape recorder as a tool similar to the portable camera and that some day, soon, the term ‘the art of recording’ will really mean something more than the technique of recording.”⁴³¹ At times, the recording was a compendium of the 1950s hobbyist magazine suggestions for creative tape recording. The “sound stories” in this collection included a nine-year history of his niece Nancy’s voice, which fulfilled the early predictions that tapers could craft aural equivalents to family portrait albums on tape. Another piece featured Schwartz and his Polish-born father-in-law trying to pronounce words in one another’s language. But the recording also shifted from the quotidian realm of the home and the street to the realm of the artist; from the streets outside MoMA that opened this chapter to the exhibits within its halls. A collaboration with jazz clarinetist Jimmy Giuffre playing along to the sounds of dripping water and footsteps on a marble floor, or a showcase of French neo-Dadaist sculptor Jean Tinguely’s self-destructing musical sculpture “Homage to New York,” with words from the artist. The liner notes here also gave listeners tips on what kind of equipment to buy, in the hopes that they too would turn the world into their recording studios.⁴³²

⁴³⁰ Tony Schwartz, “‘Why’ Instead of ‘How,’” *Popular Photography*, October 1963, 12.

⁴³¹ Tony Schwartz, liner notes to *You're Stepping on my Shadow*, Folkways FD 5582, 1962, LP. Streaming audio via Alexander Street Press Database, <http://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/72050>. Schwartz’s interest in the medium was reciprocated by the interest of photographers like Ben Shahn and Edward Steichen. Also in the liner notes, Shahn wrote a brief essay that extolled “‘How many sounds [...] become intensely human as Tony picks them out, listens to them, carefully frames them for us to hear.’” Schwartz’s interest went further. A decade after Steichen’s famous collective exhibition *The Family of Man* opened at MoMA in 1955, Schwartz would edit some of his favorite recordings for an audio accompaniment to the exhibition that he sent to friends in a private record pressing. In addition to street sounds of the kind he had recorded over the previous 15 years or so, Schwartz included interviews with Steichen. Tony Schwartz, *The Sound of the Family of Man: A Sono Montage by Tony Schwartz*, unreleased LP, 1965, Ralph Rinzler Archive, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Digital copy in author’s possession.

⁴³² All bands here described on Schwartz, *You're Stepping on my Shadow*.

All of Schwartz's thinking about the similarities and differences between forms of visual and aural documentation paralleled the increasing popularity of a communications theorist who would become a good friend by mid-decade, Marshall McLuhan. Books like *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964) introduced oft-repeated aphorisms like "the medium is the message," which asserted that the content of any message was less important than the way in which it was delivered.⁴³³ If, in McLuhan's world, print retained the characteristics of rationality, linear thought, and the alienation of consumption from production, electronic media involved listeners in an immersive auditory world characterized by interactivity, integrity, and audience participation. Recapitulating his grand metahistorical argument with reference to recorded sound, for instance, McLuhan argued, "The brief and compressed history of the phonograph includes all phases of the written, printed, and the mechanized word. It was the advent of the electric tape recorder that only a few years ago released the phonograph from its temporary involvement in mechanical culture," in part because of its "acceptance of multiple facets and planes in a single experience," through multitrack recording, and stereo separation, rather than the "fixed point of view" of the gramophone.⁴³⁴ Or from the liberation of the recording device from the sterile environment of the recording studio. Whether he had hobbyist tapers and producers like Schwartz in mind when developing these typologies or not, it was clear that they found much common ground through their understanding of communications media, especially magnetic tape, as a locus for consumers' active engagement.

Schwartz's increasing interest in McLuhan's work coincided with his move from sound hobbyist to audio professional. Using the sonic expertise he had developed through his hobbyist

⁴³³ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (New York: Signet, 1962); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1964). For my interpretation of McLuhan's work, see introduction above, 20-24.

⁴³⁴ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 243, 247.

recordings, Schwartz worked with advertisers to consider their sound design with the same attention to detail and potential effect as they did to visual design. As a relatively new field, sound design offered Schwartz a clear opportunity to transform the sound of radio and television for mass audiences, most notably, coming up with the infamous “Daisy” ad for Lyndon Johnson’s 1964 presidential campaign. Once Schwartz encountered *Understanding Media*, though, he began to see that he had already brought McLuhan’s insights into the world of advertising: “I was playing the same ball game – commercials – as other people were playing, but [...] they were playing in a print-oriented ball field and I was playing in an auditory-structured ball field.”⁴³⁵ As a favorite example, he liked to describe an ad he worked on for a candy company. In it, he emphasized the chewiness of the product by getting a teenaged girl to eat it as she spoke, so that the words coming out of her mouth mattered less than conveying the essential fact of the candy’s chewiness. Listening to the ad, “the writer at the agency said that she didn’t say it was chewy. Now, he couldn’t hear anything that wasn’t typewritten.”⁴³⁶ But aside from his embrace of heretofore neglected children’s voices in advertising, Schwartz’s influence was less notable in bringing marginalized voices to the fore of the advertising industry. Instead, he tried to reconsider the craft of sound design so that advertisers might think as much about the sonic effects of a message as they might think about the written ad copy.

Given the similarity of their interventions, when McLuhan took a year-long position at Fordham University in 1967-1968 at the invitation of Jesuit communications professor John Culkin, S.J., it was no surprise that he and Schwartz became fast friends. McLuhan, Culkin,

⁴³⁵ Schwartz quoted in Phillip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 197.

⁴³⁶ He presented this anecdote, complete with tape of his original idea, during a teleconferenced presentation he gave at Harvard. Typescript, “Tape 95, Tony’s Harvard Presentation, 8/5/75, Reel 3,” 1, in box 179, folder 3, TS Collection.

anthropologist Ted Carpenter, frequently found themselves speaking to one another in Schwartz's home on West 57th Street, in a series of taped conversations that a McLuhan biographer has called probably "the most significant effort put out by the McLuhan 'research team' assembled at Fordham."⁴³⁷ With the conversations ranging from the effects of instant replay on baseball broadcasts to the decentralized self-publishing modes afforded by photocopiers and tape recorders to the meaning of hi-fi to the importance of the sound of clacking typewriters on the output of canonical modernist writers, at times it was difficult to tell whose ideas might have been whose. When a speaker on one of the tapes argued, "The moment you accept the world as a recording studio, you have accepted the environment as an art form," it's surprising to learn that these were McLuhan's words and not Schwartz's, given all of the latter's statements throughout his Folkways project.⁴³⁸

It was through conversations with McLuhan, yes, but mostly through his work in advertising, through his regular columns in hobbyist magazines and media newsletters, and most of all through his work on tape that began as a hobbyist in the late 1940s, that Schwartz developed a comprehensive theory of the media that he put forward in his 1974 book, *The Responsive Chord*. In it, he argued that media theorists and advertisers both got it wrong in their belief that television and radio programs, as well as advertisements, operated as simple delivery systems for the content of their messages. Shortly thereafter, revealing the extent to which these were not simply liberatory messages about consumer empowerment, he wrote about "the audience as a work force" in a *Media Industry Newsletter* column. Rather than "attempt to teach or preach about their product," advertisers should tap into "the experiences and attitudes people

⁴³⁷ Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan*, 198.

⁴³⁸ Transcript of taped conversation between Tony Schwartz and Marshall McLuhan, reel MM15, May 24, 1966, in box 178, folder 7, TS Collection.

bring to a viewing, listening or reading situation” as “active elements that must be studied carefully in order to create a successful advertising effort.”⁴³⁹ In short, a responsive chord needed to be struck within the individual for any message to stick. Unlike the earlier “transportation theories of communication” concerned with the transmission of explicit messages, Schwartz saw listeners as active participants in constructing the messages they received from the media, and content producers would be better served to understand this instead of seeing their audiences as blank slates.⁴⁴⁰

This was a far cry from his earliest recordings. In the anti-fascist programs discussed in the previous chapter, Schwartz imagined that the repetition of anti-communist messages from positions of centralized media power could in fact transmit dangerous ideas to listeners and pave the way for fascism in the United States. Once he brought his tape recorder out into the streets, however, he began to argue about the importance of acoustic environment as central to the message of his recordings. While this had radical political potential by allowing listeners to focus on sounds and people otherwise excluded by recording studios, Schwartz’s increased focus on sonic qualities over content led him to see the politics of communication as inherent in perceptual dynamics rather than inherent in the ownership and distribution structures within culture industries. Beyond actively involving themselves in construing meaning through their engagement with media, Schwartz also believed it important to understand how listeners encountered sound:

Auditory acoustic space has no front or back, no above or below, no past or future. And it has no linear directionality. For a listener, sound does not come toward him but is present everywhere in the space he experiences, and it totally saturates his sensory receptors. Auditory acoustic space only exists for the current fleeing

⁴³⁹ Tony Schwartz, “The Audience as Work Force in a Commercial,” *Media Industry Newsletter*, December 19, 1975, box 158, folder 8, TS Collection. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁴⁰ Tony Schwartz, *The Responsive Chord* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1974). McLuhan both blurbed the book and reviewed it in *Rolling Stone*, January 3, 1974.

moment, and the current fleeing moment is the only thing that exists for those who enter it. Their relation to time and space is patterned according to their mode of receiving auditory stimuli.

Auditory space is more like something we wear or sit in than a physical area in which we move. A listener is wrapped in auditory space and reverberates with the sound.⁴⁴¹

The extent to which he was willing to do away with the contextual specificity of his New York recordings here was striking, even when he claimed to be writing about embodied experiences. By presenting sound as timeless artifact that only existed in fleeting moments of audition, he cordoned off an understanding of his earlier recordings as deeply situated within his much more interesting practice; a practice that straddled the boundaries between hobbyist tapers, folklorists, and post-Popular Front New York City cultural producers. Others would pick up on the idea that understanding the entirety of the soundscape through an abstracted perceptual approach to sound could provide the key to another form of politics in the late 1960s. Rather than focusing on the oft-ignored sounds of the city through populist commitments, however, this group of environmentalists on the other side of the continent took their tape recorders to ponds and wildlife refuges, as well as to shopping malls and busy intersections, to record both the sounds of the natural environment and the all-too-present mechanized sounds that risked silencing them forever.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 48.

Here and there in all big cities there is an ever decreasing number of fruit and vegetable peddlers who roam the streets with their wagons. Many of these itinerant merchants have unusual cries which are characteristic. A collection of these, combined with color slides of each vendor, would make a fascinating collection for any tape recordist. Note that in this picture, as well as in the others, the right hand is held in "recording position". Sometimes he holds a cigarette in that hand to make it appear more natural.



Figure 3.1 – Tony Schwartz demonstrating his outdoor recording technique (1954)

In the pages of *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, a tape magazine catering to active hobbyists, Schwartz demonstrated his attempts to make his recording process seem natural with his modified Magnemite portable tape recorder.

From *Magnetic Film and Tape Recording*, June 1955, 26.



Figure 3.2 – Robert Rosenwald, cover illustration to *New York 19* (1954)

The cover illustration by Schwartz's benefactor Robert Rosenwald, heir to the Sears Roebuck fortune, invited listeners to imagine themselves overlooking and overhearing Lincoln Square through Schwartz's microphone and home Magnephone tape recorder. The provenance of this image, scanned from a library at the University of Alberta, where Moses Asch's son Michael taught anthropology for many years, and which contains the entire Folkways catalog, is appropriate. Folkways privileged its educational mission above that of its potential for sales, which meant that many listeners likely encountered Schwartz's recording through libraries across North America.

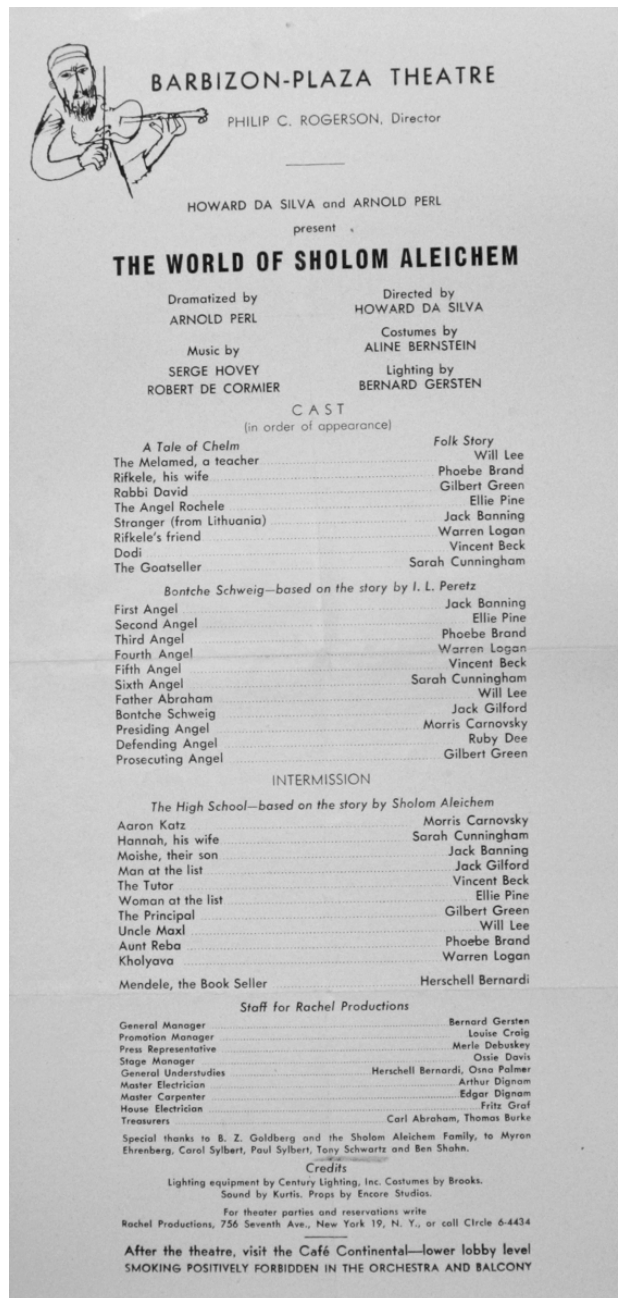


Figure 3.3 – Playbill for *The World of Sholom Aleichem* (1953)

Featuring the artwork of Ben Shahn, as noted by a man selling programs whose voice appears on *New York 19*, the cast listing for *The World of Sholom Aleichem* revealed many artists and entertainers marginalized from film and television work as a result of anti-communist blacklists in the entertainment industry. Given Schwartz's general interest in cultural productions coming out of this milieu, it is no surprise that he found himself in attendance to this play.

From Tony Schwartz Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Figure 3.4 – Tony Schwartz in his home studio (circa 1955)

Backed by his library of tape reels, as well as the records he had produced up to the point this photograph was taken for the liner notes to *Nueva York*, Schwartz's collection had clearly come a long way from his early days recording the likes of the Weavers in his home studio. In addition to his Folkways LPs and two recordings of Moondog, note the LP copy of *The World of Sholom Aleichem* on the top right.

Liner notes to *Nueva York* (1955), Folkways Records.

Vivien Richman, FOLK SINGER



August 2, 1951

Mr. Tony Schwartz
457 West 57th Street
New York, 19, New York

Dear Tony,

I was both surprised and delighted to get your note. Your enterprise sounds absolutely fascinating, but I'm not entirely sure that I understand what you have in mind. Tell me if this is what you are saying...that if I send you additional recordings of my material (and I must thank you for the generous compliments you paid me) you will swap some of the material which you have collected.

I have a Webster Wire Recorder in rather dubious condition, but I think I might be able to send you some decent stuff with it. If I understand you correctly, then you must tell me what you would like to have, specifically...and what you have to offer in exchange. Of course, I am most interested in adding to my library. Could you tell me too, if you are planning to use any of these recordings commercially?

If we can work out some sort of swap (and I hope I have gotten it straight), I'm afraid I won't be able to do very much for a few weeks. I'm in the middle of negotiating with the local TV station people who are interested in a series of folk song programs. But I imagine that by the middle of September, things will have settled down and I'll be able to do some work with you.

If you see George and Jean, please give them my love and tell them they'll be hearing from me (business-wise) in September.

Sincerely,

Vivien

6628 Jackson Street, Pittsburgh 6, Pa. . . . Hilland 1-5168

answered 8-6-51

Figure 3.5 – Letter from Vivien Richman to Tony Schwartz (1951)

A couple years before recording Vivien Richman singing in Romanian during an uncredited appearance on *New York 19*'s "National Groups, Visitors, Students, Concert Hall," Schwartz exchanged letters with this Pittsburgh folk singer asking for recordings. Correspondence in Schwartz's personal archive helps reveal that the sounds he presented on his LPs were more than simply the process of bringing his tape recorder wherever he went. Instead, they were crafted as much by the social networks he had created for himself through tape exchanges and his participation in New York City's folklore scene at mid-century.

From Tony Schwartz Collection, Recorded Sound Reference Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Chapter Four

“Listen to the Wisdom of the Natural Soundscape:” Tape Recording and the World Soundscape Project’s Acoustic Ecology

At 10 pm on October 29th, 1974, listeners tuning their radios to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s national FM network were treated to a peculiar choral work. “It begins very quietly,” said composer R. Murray Schafer during his brief introduction to the program, “like all true miracles, and builds in a long crescendo as the various species of birds awaken and begin to sing.”⁴⁴² Schafer did not compose or conduct this work – birds and bullfrogs are not exactly known for their ability to follow musical scores – but he was responsible for its recording and presentation on the CBC. Earlier that year, on the summer solstice, researchers at the World Soundscape Project (WSP) under Schafer’s direction set up their Nagra IV-S portable tape recorder and dual cardioid microphones at the edge of a pond (fig. 4.1). For twenty-four hours beginning at midnight, the researchers based at Simon Fraser University (SFU) took turns swapping out reels of tape, noting the time every hour, and listening quietly to the croaking frogs, chirping birds, passing trains, droning airplanes, and pealing bells that could be heard on the grounds of the Westminster Abbey monastery in Mission, British Columbia, some fifty miles away from campus. It provided a setting quiet enough, they hoped, to record and study the interplay of various species over the course of one day. Very early in the

⁴⁴² World Soundscape Project, “Dawn Chorus,” *Soundscapes of Canada* program 7.1, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 29, 1974. Obtained from the World Soundscape Project database, <http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/WSPDatabase/index.html>. Accessed November 18, 2015. The WSP database includes digitized versions of all the WSP’s print and audio publications, as well as raw audio files from digitized reels of audiotape from recordings throughout Vancouver, Canada, and western Europe. As yet, the material is not openly accessible to the public, but can be accessed by researchers. Access can be requested via <http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio/>. For materials not otherwise published, hereafter referred to as WSP database.

morning on the longest day of the year, the first bird sounds began to accompany the solitary call of the bullfrogs in the otherwise silent soundscape of the monastery, and by the end of the “Dawn Chorus,” a full array of bird species, including a crowing rooster, could be heard across the left and right channels of the recording. In Schafer’s estimation, it was “one of the most miraculous transformations of the natural soundscape,” the sonic transformation from night to day.⁴⁴³ He feared, however, that “the elegant give and take” of such a transformation might be “disappearing from the modern urban world, where the continuous sludge of traffic and industrial noise obscures the more subtle variations.”⁴⁴⁴ In order to hear them, listeners would need to pay attention.

The “Dawn Chorus” and “Summer Solstice” programs that aired as part of *Soundscapes of Canada*, a ten-part series on CBC-FM’s *Ideas*, exemplified the WSP’s mission to study the totality of the contemporary acoustic environment. Not only did it typify their recording technique, which consisted in trying to record and study all sounds in their original context with state of the art recording equipment, and the principles of “acoustic ecology,” which consisted in listening to the interaction between various elements of the sonic environment that responded to one another, but its presence on the radio also manifested their desire to craft more salubrious soundscapes and educate listeners in techniques for attentive listening. Based at SFU in Burnaby, BC (a suburb just outside Vancouver), the WSP brought together composers and researchers interested in recording, documenting, and analyzing the sounds of the world around them. The “soundscape” has emerged as a key term for the recently ascendant field of sound studies, and the influence of soundscape composition and “acoustic ecology” have been profound within

⁴⁴³ WSP, “Dawn Chorus,” *Soundscapes of Canada*.

⁴⁴⁴ World Soundscape Project, “Summer Solstice,” *Soundscapes of Canada* program 5, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 25, 1974, WSP database.

musicological circles.⁴⁴⁵ For the most part, the latter studies have had an ear to the genre of electroacoustic music known as soundscape composition, which uses and manipulates recordings of specific soundscapes. Focused studies of the WSP's theories about sound that interrogate the historical context for their development, however, are critical. As Ari Kelman has usefully argued, the soundscape is not merely a descriptive apprehension of the sonic environment in its historical context, but a prescriptive one "suffused with instructions about how people ought to listen," and it was a vocabulary developed as part of the WSP's mission.⁴⁴⁶ Throughout the 1970s, Schafer and the other researchers that joined him at SFU began conducting door-to-door interviews with Vancouverites about their experience of sound, studying Canadian noise by-laws and other noise abatement policies, collecting written descriptions of the city's sonic landscape ("earwitness" accounts) from its earliest days, making tape recordings of the city and its surroundings in order to develop an account of its soundscape, moving out to record throughout Canada and Western Europe, and authoring their critical glossary *Handbook of Acoustic Ecology* to disseminate their methods to other interested researchers.

Just as the growing environmental movement pointed to smoke-belching and chemical-dumping factories polluting the air and water as deserving of regulation, Schafer and his

⁴⁴⁵ Exceptions include a series of musicology dissertations from Canadian graduate schools, including Keiko Torigoe, "A Study of the World Soundscape Project," (MFA Thesis: York University, 1982), an institutional history of the WSP with an overview of its published documents; Andra Shirley Jean McCartney, "Sounding Places: Situated Conversations Through the Soundscape Compositions of Hildegard Westerkamp," (PhD Dissertation, York University, 1999), a study of Hildegard Westerkamp's soundscape compositions as feminist electroacoustic epistemology, largely with works after the period discussed in this chapter; and Mitchell Akiyama, "Transparent Listening: Soundscape Composition's Objects of Study," *RACAR* 35 (2010): 54-62, and Mitchell Akiyama, "The Phonographic Memory: A History of Sound Recording in the Field," (PhD Dissertation: McGill University, 2014), which both look at the relation between the WSP's emphasis on place and the construction of soundscape recordings as a genre. For influential works on the historical soundscape, see Alain Corbin's influential *Village Bells: Sound & Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 [1994]); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). A review of the literature here can be found in Ari Y. Kelman, "Rethinking the Soundscape: A Critical Genealogy of a Key Term in Sound Studies," *Senses & Society* 5 (2010): 212-234.

⁴⁴⁶ Kelman, "Rethinking the Soundscape," 214.

researchers began labeling rumbling air-conditioners, roaring jet engines, and “moozak” emitting loudspeakers as noise polluters that needed to be held accountable for their sonic nuisance in the late 1960s. As a result, wrote Schafer in the book that traveled widest of all his publications, *The Tuning of the World* (1977), “it would seem that the world soundscape has reached an apex of vulgarity in our time, and many experts have predicted universal deafness as the ultimate consequences unless the problem can be brought quickly under control.” The “indiscriminate and imperialistic spread” of sound from all fronts needed to be named and analyzed.⁴⁴⁷ These were not idle ecological or environmental metaphors, as Schafer and other WSP members attended meetings of an influential but briefly lived anti-pollution group that emerged in the late 1960s as part of Vancouver’s burgeoning environmental movement. It was a movement rife with tensions over its attitude towards scientific expertise, its attribution of responsibility for the impending ecological collapse, and the proper modes for addressing it through policy or collective action.

In addition to labeling the problem of noise pollution, researchers, composers, and music educators like himself, Schafer believed, could play their part in restoring sonic cohesion, not only by teaching people to listen attentively outside of the concert hall, but in crafting a better sonic environment as sensitive acoustic designers. Whether sounds emanated from jackhammers in urban construction sites, traffic in city streets, church bells in town steeples, foghorns in maritime villages, power lines in the expanse of the prairies, train whistles throughout the country, jet engines in the air above, or loudspeakers nationwide, the researchers at the WSP hoped that recording them on tape could provide both raw materials for understanding the soundscape and transforming them into a healthier acoustic environment.

⁴⁴⁷ R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 3. In 1993, the book was published as *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. While it circulated most widely, *The Tuning of the World* recapitulated almost all of the work he had done alongside the WSP from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. As a result, this chapter will largely focus on the writings produced during his time at the WSP.

Program founder and director Schafer drew on the ideas of compatriot Marshall McLuhan, with whom he shared a deeply conservative disposition, as he believed that societies like his own focused too intently on visual modes of understanding their world at the exclusion of aurality. Schafer sounded a McLuhanite fear that “In the West the ear has given way to the eye as the most important gatherer of environmental information.”⁴⁴⁸ This distorted sensory balance had serious implications, not only for individual mental health but also for social cohesion. If viewers, as McLuhan and Schafer both believed, passively took in visual information with their eyes, active listeners instead immersed themselves in the acoustic world as participatory creators of meaning and community. But unlike McLuhan, who believed that electronic media might restore a proper balance between aural and visual senses and usher in a more communitarian “global village,” Schafer lambasted audio recordings and broadcasts for making the problem worse. While the WSP often directed its recording activities towards the sounds of the “natural” environment, loud industrial processes, and what it called “soundmarks” (derived from landmarks, and meant to denote commonly known sounds that might evoke a sense of place within a community) like foghorns or church bells, it also hinted at the need to systematically study the soundscapes created by commercial media. It was not surprising that such an undertaking would emerge from Canada, where many elites had worried about the undue influence of commercial media that crossed the southern border, and associated commercialism with the threat of cultural Americanization. The WSP came to the conclusion that “schizophonia,” the splitting of sound from its source, made attentive listening—to both electronic media and the increasingly loud non-musical soundscape—more difficult. If people did not seem to know how to listen properly anymore, they could not hear the riot of deleterious

⁴⁴⁸ R. Murray Schafer, *Music of the Environment* (Vancouver, BC: Universal Editions, 1974), 8.

sounds that risked rending the social fabric apart and stripping Canadians of their autonomous cultural identity.

This chapter thus traces the work of the World Soundscape Project up to the *Soundscapes of Canada* series in relation to histories of environmentalism in North America and the history of mass culture debates in Canada. Using the WSP's online database, which includes versions of all the WSP's print and audio publications, as well as raw audio files from digitized reels of audiotape from recordings throughout Vancouver, Canada, and western Europe, I listen to the WSP's sonic imaginary as rendered on records and radio broadcasts crafted from carefully culled reels of magnetic tape. While the WSP paid remarkable attention to the otherwise taken for granted sounds of rural environments, disappearing technologies, and urban soundscapes, their normative assertion of the importance of close listening as a means to solve aesthetic and environmental dilemmas of modern life often overrode the experiences of actually existing listeners. Though highly attuned to the ways in which frogs could give way to birds and insects in a quiet monastic setting as night turned to day, they were less willing to hear the chorus of voices and instruments emanating from loudspeakers with anything like the same attention to subtlety.

*** An Ear for Musical Education ***

Born at the foot of Lake Huron in Sarnia, Ontario in 1933, Raymond Murray Schafer grew up in Toronto, the son of rural Manitobans. After high school, where he was discouraged from pursuing a life as a visual artist due to a childhood glaucoma diagnosis that left him with a glass eye, he trained at the Royal Conservatory of Music and attended music classes at the University of Toronto. After obtaining his license from the conservatory in 1955, he left his

formal studies at the University—though not before encountering the influential work of English professor Marshall McLuhan and taking lessons with Chilean-born piano teacher Alberto Guerrero, who counted Glenn Gould among his most famous pupils—to pursue a life as an autodidact. Traveling to Europe with money he had saved working on barges in the Great Lakes, he started in England before making his way throughout the continent. It was no surprise he started out in the UK, as Schafer belonged to perhaps the last generation of Anglo Canadians whose cultural education was oriented towards Britain rather than the United States. At first, he had designs on work as a freelance radio journalist for the BBC, and recorded interviews with several prominent British composers on tape, which formed the basis of his first publication.⁴⁴⁹ Next, he decamped for Vienna in the hopes of tapping into the city’s innovative musical culture. Finding it more in tune with the tradition of Mozart than the Second Viennese school of composers like Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, or Anton Webern, he nevertheless stayed in Austria to work on his medieval German language skills, which he put to use in one of his first major compositions, *Minnelieder*, a song cycle based on 12th and 13th century texts. Obtaining visas to travel into Eastern Europe under the guise of studying folk music, he then went to Hungary and Romania, and then later to Greece in order to experience the ruins of ancient Greek culture first hand. By the beginning of the 1960s, Schafer returned to his native province to devote his attention to his own compositions, often song cycles or concerti for small chamber settings.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ R. Murray Schafer, *British Composers in Interview* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).

⁴⁵⁰ Schafer recounts his travels extensively, both in a list of compositional program notes available through his own publishing house, Arcana’s website, and in his recent memoir. See R. Murray Schafer, *Program Notes* (Douro-Dummer, ON: Arcana Editions, no date), available online at <http://www.patria.org/arcana/Programnotes.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2015); R. Murray Schafer, *My Life on Earth and Elsewhere* (Erin, ON: Porcupine’s Quill, 2012).

While Schafer first became known as an innovative Canadian composer, his largest early influence was as a music educator. As an artist-in-residence at Memorial University in St John's, Newfoundland from 1963-1965, Schafer began teaching courses in music education. He drew extensively on John Cage's lifelong quest to investigate the overlapping meanings of sound, noise, and silence, which opened listeners to the multiplicity of sounds in the world around them. Schafer felt it important to teach his students, whether in grade school, high school, or university, how to listen before they could begin to learn how to make music on their own. Creative music practices, he believed, could not be achieved through rote learning of scales or rhythmic exercises. Instead, they needed to be cultivated by thinking differently about all the sounds one could hear, and all the sounds one could make with everyday materials at hand. Schafer's earliest publications, conceived as cheap booklets for music instructors, *The Composer in the Classroom* (1965), *Ear Cleaning* (1967) and *The New Soundscape* (1969) documented his teaching exercises and contained activities for music educators to probe students about the meaning of sound.⁴⁵¹ The National Film Board of Canada documented his classroom activities in the 1969 film *Bing Bang Boom*, which featured many of these exercises as he guest taught a group of seventh graders in Scarborough, Ontario.⁴⁵² Go home, try to find silence, write down what you hear instead. Find an interesting sound and bring it to school, then try to describe its characteristics. Or draw what you think it sounds like. Try to move your arms in a full circle over the course of a minute in order learn about tempo and rhythm. Use a sheet of paper not as a writing device, but as a musical instrument to rip or crumple or tap or run your fingers on to

⁴⁵¹ R. Murray Schafer, *The Composer in the Classroom* (Toronto, ON: BMI Canada Limited, 1965); R. Murray Schafer, *Ear Cleaning: Notes for an Experimental Music Course* (Don Mills, ON: BMI Canada Limited, 1967); R. Murray Schafer, *The New Soundscape: A Handbook for the Modern Teacher* (Don Mills, ON: BMI Canada Limited, 1969). These documents are compiled in R. Murray Schafer, *The Thinking Ear: Complete Writings on Music Education* (Toronto, ON: Arcana Editions, 1986).

⁴⁵² Joan Henson, *Bing Bang Boom* (Montreal, QC: National Film Board of Canada, 1969), streaming video via https://www.nfb.ca/film/bing_bang_boom (accessed December 2, 2015).

learn about the innate musicality of all objects.⁴⁵³ By that time, despite his lack of a university degree, Schafer was lured away from Memorial to join the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in 1965.

It was a remarkable setting for an unorthodox educator. Only two and a half years before Schafer arrived in British Columbia, the provincial government called for a new research university site on top of Burnaby Mountain, in the eastern part of metropolitan Vancouver. SFU was part of a larger wave of new universities founded throughout the country in the 1960s, many of them located near the outskirts of Canadian cities to relieve enrollment pressures on established schools like the University of British Columbia (UBC) on the west side of Vancouver.⁴⁵⁴ Few other such schools, however, had as much of SFU's audacity in moving from idea to concrete reality within a matter of years. When Schafer arrived in 1965, continued construction on campus revealed it to be a work in progress, but institutionally speaking, the newness of the university created appealing opportunities for teachers and researchers alike. Early on, for instance, SFU privileged interdisciplinary research within the sciences and humanities by establishing institutions like the department of Politics, Sociology & Anthropology, or the Centre for Communication and the Arts in the Faculty of Education. Many of the courses throughout the university did away with exams and instead promoted grades based on semester-long projects. The Faculty of Education wanted a reputation as a place that accommodated innovative teaching methods, hence their invitation for Schafer to join the Centre. He later described it as "an experimental department very much inspired by Marshall McLuhan's

⁴⁵³ These examples are drawn both from the film and from Schafer, *Ear Cleaning*.

⁴⁵⁴ In the Greater Toronto Area, for instance, York University was founded in 1959, but its campus in North York only opened in 1965, at the same time as SFU; elsewhere in Ontario, Brock University and Trent University also opened their doors in the early 1960s; the University of Calgary opened its campus in suburban Calgary in 1966; the University of Victoria became an independent institution in 1963; the ambitious Université du Québec system started opening schools in 1969.

media studies,” that might be able to bring together theory and praxis across a variety of artistic media.⁴⁵⁵

During his early years at SFU, Schafer extended the kinds of exercises he used among grade school children to include research trips into the city. Students, he said, should go to the corner of Hastings and Carrall in downtown Vancouver and produce whatever they saw fit, whether architectural renderings, a transcript of an interview with people sitting around, or photographs. Perhaps they could collectively make a film together to fulfill the grading requirement of another class. He also arranged for John Cage and Buckminster Fuller to give lectures to SFU students. Schafer seemed more interested, in these early years, in opening students’ eyes and ears to the larger world around them than in teaching them what to think.⁴⁵⁶

The New Soundscape, published in 1969, marked Schafer’s transition from musical education to the broader program of soundscape studies. In an early passage in the teaching handbook, he wrote that his goal was “to direct the ears of listeners toward the new soundscape of contemporary life, to acquaint them with a vocabulary of sounds one may expect to hear both inside and outside concert halls.”⁴⁵⁷ As he later came to define it, the soundscape was “any portion of the sonic environment regarded as a field for study.”⁴⁵⁸ The aural equivalent to a landscape, it was a way of apprehending a sonic portrait of a place. If music educators were to draw students’ attention to the sounds outside the classroom, students needed to be aware that they might not enjoy the discordant symphony they heard in the soundscape outside. The task, for educators of all stripes, was to “reverse the figure-ground relationship,” and make it so that

⁴⁵⁵ On the history of SFU’s origins and the experimental teaching styles it encouraged see Hugh Johnston, *Radical Campus: Making Simon Fraser University* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 5-38, 184-217; Schafer, *My Life on Earth & Elsewhere*, 94.

⁴⁵⁶ Schafer, *My Life on Earth & Elsewhere*, 94-96.

⁴⁵⁷ Schafer, *The New Soundscape*, 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Schafer, *Tuning of the World*, 274-275.

the students understood their music lesson as a preparation to hear “the very cosmic symphony we have tried to shut ourselves away from,” rather than a refuge from the outside world. But the first step to reforming the soundscape was learning to pay attention to its unhealthy sounds: “Together with other forms of pollution, the sound sewage of our contemporary environment is unprecedented in human history.”⁴⁵⁹ That “sewage,” documented in a series of alarmist quotes that made up a later chapter, risked causing a host of physical and mental ailments for anyone exposed to noises for too long. Lab rats dying from exposure to loud sounds. People fainting and feeling nauseous near rocket launchings. Blood circulation going awry when people were confronted with loudness.⁴⁶⁰ Ratcheting up the alarmism about the rock music of his age, Schafer asserted, “Today’s sadist with his amplifier can kill his victims on the spot,” by making enough of a racket, since some researchers had found that any sound over 130 decibels could do irreparable harm to ear drums.⁴⁶¹

Such researchers included his own students. Since his teaching work and writings had brought him towards the study of the acoustic environment as a whole, he wanted to think of communication in broader terms. In a new autonomous Department of Communications, he began teaching courses on noise pollution, in which he commissioned students to conduct a survey on noise pollution based on interviews with Vancouverites, research that would help animate Schafer’s burgeoning activism in Vancouver’s environmental movement.⁴⁶² He also intended to formalize and extend his study of soundscapes at the school. Beginning in 1969, Schafer convinced SFU to transform its Electronic Music Studio into a “Sonic Research Studio”

⁴⁵⁹ Schafer, *The New Soundscape*, 3.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-23.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁶² According to an early survey of the World Soundscape Project, the resulting unpublished document, “The Social Survey on Noise – Vancouver 1969,” was the first document to bear the WSP’s name. See Torigoe, “A Study of the World Soundscape Project,” 47.

and submitted funding proposals for the new World Soundscape Project through UNESCO, the Donner Canadian Foundation, and the Canada Council – Humanities and Social Sciences Division, after which he was able to hire researchers on a full and part time basis.⁴⁶³ Looking into noise bylaws, surveying Vancouverites about noise pollution, gathering “earwitness” accounts of his adopted city by tracking sonic references in early historical writings about Vancouver, recording the sounds of the city, and composing multi-channel audio works like *Okeanos* (1971), Schafer and his team dove headlong into the study of the soundscape even prior to receiving funding for the WSP beginning in 1971.

Beyond his formal course assignments, he wanted readers of books like *The New Soundscape* to pursue their own qualitative research into the soundscapes around them as a first step towards taking action in reforming the soundscape. The final assignment he gave to readers in *The New Soundscape* was to keep a “sound diary” and “take note of what you hear” over the course of your daily life, for “we are all in the world symphony.”⁴⁶⁴ Taking his own advice to heart, he included his own sound diary of a 1969 trip to Turkey and Iran in a later published version of the book. In a telling passage amidst his complaints that automobile traffic and horn honking was drowning out the sounds of muezzins or Zoroastrian rituals, Schafer outlined his conception of a balanced approach to soundscape:

Sounds of the past, including many of those produced by nature and all those produced by animals and humans, were produced in the give-and-take circumstances of the living environment. One may call this acoustic ecology. In other words they depended on environmental feedback to give them their precise tone and character. Has anyone noted that the sounds of technology are not cybernated in this way?⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ The date of the WSP’s founding is under some dispute, but Schafer started submitting his funding proposals in 1969, and he convinced SFU to transform its Electronic Music Studio into a “Sonic Research Studio” the same year. However, the WSP did not begin receiving funding until 1970-1971 from UNESCO, 1972 from the Canadian Donner Foundation, and 1974 from the Canada Council – Humanities and Social Sciences Division. See Torigoe, “A Study of the World Soundscape Project,” 46.

⁴⁶⁴ Schafer, *The New Soundscape*, 62.

⁴⁶⁵ R. Murray Schafer, “Sound Diary of the Middle-East,” 165, in *The Thinking Ear*.

Using the language to imagine a balanced ecosystem in which the sounds of all creatures responded to one another in natural feedback loops, he lamented the introduction of mechanical sounds like engines as “ruthless and unecological presences that I regard as insulting and inimical to man and life in general.”⁴⁶⁶ From his use of the term “sound sewage” to describe unwanted sound, to his embrace of ecological modes of thinking about sound, to his use of the term “noise pollution” more generally, the influence of the modern environmental movement on Schafer’s thoughts and the overall mission of the World Soundscape Project was clear from the beginning.

*** Politics of Pollution ***

Indeed, Schafer’s turn to try to understand the polluted soundscape paralleled the rapid rise of the popular environmental movement throughout North America. Its success in moving from the identification of problems like pollution to the growth of a self defined environmental movement had provided something of a plan of action for those concerned with noise pollution. That history is worth exploring in order to better contextualize the development of acoustic ecology as a way of understanding the sonic environment, since environmentalism provided significant and recurring metaphors for the researchers at the World Soundscape Project, as well as concrete settings for the development of Schafer’s ideas.

Environmental concerns having to do with waste management weren’t exactly new to North American politics during the 1960s; progressive era reformers had long attempted to implement urban planning measures, workplace reforms, and wilderness conservation policies to ameliorate living and working conditions in overcrowded industrial cities, and to provide

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

“natural” spaces of retreat to get out of them at the turn of the twentieth century. Activists and reformers recognized that the presence of hazardous air particles could have negative public health consequences, for example, for those who worked in coal mines, textile and steel mills, or matchstick factories. Or that improper sewage disposal could lead to diseases like typhoid or tuberculosis in fast growing cities. Treating air or water pollution both as public health issues and as inefficient resource management, since an abundance of unintended byproducts could be seen as a misuse of raw materials, they sought to establish guidelines for rationalized management in the interests of public health and prosperity.⁴⁶⁷

A similar impulse animated those in the field of conservation. In much of the United States and most of Canada, then as now economically dependent upon primary resource extraction, proper stewardship of the environment was an economic imperative, since over-extraction could have catastrophic effects on industries from agriculture to forestry to fishing.⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, going hand in hand with increased westward expansion in the United States, scientists adapted the discipline of ecology as a means to understand the interrelation between living organisms and their environment in order to rationalize the process of engaging with novel geographies. In the early part of the twentieth century, explains historian Sharon Kingsland, “ecology was pursued in aid of a broader quest to expand human dominion over the land, and to do it in a deliberate, rational way rather than by trial and error.”⁴⁶⁹ For the most part, then, attempts to develop comprehensive solutions to the most pressing environmental concerns of the first half of the twentieth century relied on technocratic management through professional

⁴⁶⁷ See, for example, Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, rev. edition (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005), 83-106.

⁴⁶⁸ On the turn from resource exploitation to resource management and the “gospel of efficiency” in conservation circles, see Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 122-127. Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 52-60.

⁴⁶⁹ Sharon E. Kingsland, *The Evolution of American Ecology, 1890-2000* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 98.

organizations that both recognized the complexity of the environments they attempted to reshape and believed in the power of science to guide such complex systems along rational lines.⁴⁷⁰

The modern environmental movement began to challenge that understanding of the world by the late 1950s. Not only did rising living standards lead to a new emphasis on “quality of life” issues that saw the natural environment as worthy of preservation, rather than as a resource for economic extraction, but a host of physical transformations to the environment resulting from postwar economic growth raised the threat that human activity could have a host of negative consequences. Throughout North America, the postwar expansion of automobility facilitated by government subsidies for roads and suburban development, the widespread appearance of petrochemical consumer products, and the use of pesticides to increase agricultural yields and control certain insect species all had serious unintended consequences for air and water quality across the continent as a whole. As environmental historians Samuel Hays and Robert Gottlieb have written, pollution seemed to be everywhere by the early 1960s: smog in big cities, slag heaps in abandoned industrial towns, laundry detergent runoff in rivers and lakes, septic tank seepage in suburban neighborhoods, and raw sewage discharged into rivers near major urban centers all appeared to spell the failure of progressive era reforms that were meant to hold waste at bay.⁴⁷¹

Increasingly, ecologists debated one another over the place of human activities in this new dispensation, and a new brand of ecology emerged to challenge the faith that scientific progress alone could solve the complex and intractable problems that led to air and water

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 96-154.

⁴⁷¹ Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 54-55, 72-83; Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 115-120; on septic tanks, see Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103-114.

pollution. It was not enough, as some ecologists had it, to tally the complex energy inputs and outputs of ecosystems as a means to better manage environmental processes; even the most complex modeling systems would struggle to account for all possible byproducts of human activities, particularly with regards to novel petrochemical products, detergents, pesticides, or nuclear waste. And if self-regulating ecosystems could be thrown off balance by the byproducts of economic growth, planners and politicians needed to think long and hard about how to balance the priorities of their constituents. For example, as documented in one of the books that helped to popularize such ecological modes of thinking to a wider audience, Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, the widespread use of pesticides like DDT had adverse effects on bird and fish populations, which moved up the food chain and could then impact human health. Though DDT targeted specific insects seen as a nuisance to human health or agricultural crops in their own right, its introduction into the water cycle had unforeseen consequences to many more species and upset the seeming balance of natural ecosystems. Carson's book opened many eyes to the idea that the consequences of human activities on the complex ecologies were far-reaching and unpredictable. And as more and more people came to understand human actions as responsible for such pollution, either in the case of unregulated industrial polluters or government policies meant to manage insect populations, they demanded popular input into decisions about how to manage environmental policies that could have a direct impact on their own wellbeing and those of the nonhuman species on which they relied for sustenance.⁴⁷²

Popular environmentalism and ecology, though, both had complicated positions with regards to questions of technocratic management and expertise. The professionalization of

⁴⁷² On Carson's impact on this direction in popular environmentalism, see Christopher Sellers, "Body, Place and the State: The Makings of an 'Environmentalism' Imaginary in the Post-World War II U.S.," *Radical History Review* 74 (1999) 31-64; Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 121-127; Kingsland, *The Evolution of American Ecology*, 179-205.

reform in the progressive era had curbed some of the most egregious health violations created by industrial processes and urbanization, and had prolonged the profitable capacity to extract resources in industries like forestry or fishing. However, the very drive for efficiency and rational growth that animated many early conservationists and industrialists alike could further lead to unintended environmental consequences. Like other New Left social movements that challenged the liberal state's capacity to speak on behalf of the people at large, environmentalists levied the charge of government complicity in allowing industry free reign to pollute at will in the interest of unfettered economic growth. If such widespread pollution had effects beyond particular industries or living environments, people needed to understand how actions in one place could lead to a host of problems down the line, and this knowledge could not be restricted to technocrats alone. And yet, ecologists and movement activists needed to generate reliable scientific data to effectively combat the processes that led to pollution, and the complexity of the ecological systems involved often required a high degree of formal training. Popularizing ecological modes of thinking thus required a fine line between performing rigorous research and making it accessible enough to mobilize large numbers of people into action.⁴⁷³

Many of these issues played out similarly in Schafer's adopted city. As a port city wedged between the Coast Mountains and the sea, surrounded by productive forests and at the delta of the salmon-rich Fraser River, Vancouver had carved out a reputation as a beautiful city that took advantage of its abundant natural resources (see fig. 4.2 for a relevant map produced by the WSP). A city, moreover, that offered a high quality of living for postwar residents seeking to enjoy the landscape around them. Yet problems lurked in the waters as the growing city

⁴⁷³ This dichotomy between anti-technocratic beliefs in the development of popular ecology and the increasing complexity of ecological models, particularly in terms of the turn to cybernetics and systems analysis, is explored in Kingsland, *The Evolution of American Ecology*, 199-205, 207-231.

struggled with wastewater management throughout the twentieth century. Regional plans to fix sewage problems in Vancouver during the first half of the century imagined that the surrounding waters, especially the large Fraser River leading into the Strait of Georgia, could efficiently absorb, assimilate, and purify any pollutants. With a new wave of metropolitan development after World War II, continued sewage overflow in the Burrard Inlet harbor, English Bay's recreational beaches, and the Fraser River led to high counts of coliform and other bacteria in the water. In an attempt to curb such effects, city planners in the late 1950s wanted to direct all overflow away from the harbor and English Bay to treatment facilities at the mouth of the Fraser River in the hopes that the river's size could help to absorb some of the most harmful effects.⁴⁷⁴

Rather than let local experts decide on the waterways' capacity to handle effluvia, however, local environmental groups like the Richmond Anti-Pollution Association and the Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (SPEC) produced their own reports of pollution levels by the end of the 1960s. Rather than understanding the surrounding waters as a "giant flushing machine" that could absorb large amounts of waste, these reports turned to a differently ecological way of understanding the waters as part of a living ecosystem that required more a careful solution, since new science seemed to suggest that the waters could not in fact assimilate pollution.⁴⁷⁵ This turn to understanding the fragility of the local ecology, developed through a rising popular environmental consciousness, marked a strategic shift that both embraced new

⁴⁷⁴ This account is drawn from Arn Keeling, "Sink or Swim: Water Pollution and Environmental Politics in Vancouver, 1889-1975," *BC Studies* 142/143 (2004): 69-92; Arn Keeling, "Urban Waste Sinks as a Natural Resource: The Case of the Fraser River," *Urban History Review* 34 (2005), 58-70. Vancouver's nearest urban neighbor, Seattle, Washington dealt with many of the same issues regarding its sewage treatment capabilities. Liberal Republican city planners sought to deal with pollution problems in Lake Washington during the 1950s and early 1960s by directing waste towards the Duwamish River through a contentious metropolitan sewage plan. The plan succeeded in cleaning up the lake at the expense of the river, its salmon fisheries, and Salish peoples then attempting to assert treaty rights to local fisheries. See Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 203-229.

⁴⁷⁵ Keeling, "Sink or Swim," 92-101.

scientific knowledge about the environment and denied that government officials should be the only ones capable of dealing with pollution. The river, and the water surrounding the city more generally, came to embody many residents' newfound appreciation for ecological balance, and the threat that human activities posed to it. If a wide variety of stakeholders could be made to agree that better sewage treatment facilities were necessary to remove pollution from seascape, no matter the economic cost, perhaps similar decisions could be made to regulate the "sound sewers" polluting the Vancouver soundscape.

*** Cleaning up the Sound Sewers ***

When R. Murray Schafer first moved to Vancouver from Newfoundland in the fall of 1965, he was less immediately concerned with the water pollution in Burrard Inlet below Simon Fraser University's campus atop Burnaby Mountain, than with the din of construction on the brand new campus and with the buzz of seaplanes landing in the harbor near his house on Sentinel Hill in West Vancouver. As he later recalled, the area's mild weather meant that houses "were penetrated by more outdoor noise than houses in Ontario or Newfoundland because they required much less insulation for heat and were without storm windows." In the midst of what he called "the noisiest decade of the twentieth century," Schafer joined a noise abatement society and tried to mobilize his neighbors into taking action to restrict seaplane traffic, in addition to continuing to teach his noise pollution courses at SFU.⁴⁷⁶

Noise abatement, as discussed in previous chapters, had been a long running concern of urban reformers since at least the turn of the twentieth century, with many parallels to the story of environmental reform discussed above. Like the conservationists of the early twentieth

⁴⁷⁶ Schafer, *My Life on Earth & Elsewhere*, 92, 94.

century, middle-class professionals and reformers often believed that industrial inefficiency caused noise, which in turn resulted in a host of physical and mental ailments for urbanites. Creating more efficient machines, zoning certain areas as quiet spaces, and reforming public behaviors through noise by-laws were only a few strategies proposed by noise abatement groups. Meanwhile, the infrastructure projects that helped cities grow, meanwhile, from mass transit and automobiles to construction seemed inextricably linked with loud noises.⁴⁷⁷ For cities to grow and function in an orderly manner, many planners and reformers agreed, local governments would need to develop more comprehensive municipal bylaws to reign in the worst offenses and expand beyond blaming individuals for honking their horns or selling wares in the streets. By the late 1950s, though, at the same time when Rachel Carson and other ecologists began to worry about the side effects of airplanes dropping pesticides on large swaths of the landscape, aircraft noise itself came up as a serious matter for noise abatement advocates. The increasing adoption of the jet engine that decade had widened the sonic footprint of air travel, which led to the reemergence of the Noise Abatement Society in England and attempts to scientifically index their volume. The high profile case of supersonic planes and their sonic booms trailing across a fifty-mile radius of everywhere they flew, meanwhile, provided a rallying cry for all worried about the proliferation of noise in industrial societies. Houses in Oklahoma City thundered with the roar of multiple supersonic transport planes flying over daily for eight months in 1964, and the protest of residents helped galvanize public opinion against their expansion into civilian uses.⁴⁷⁸ The turn to the language of “noise pollution” in these battles emerged as a direct

⁴⁷⁷ On the long history of battles over noise abatement, particularly in early 20th century cities, see Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 115-130; Karin Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture, and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Lilian Radovac, “The ‘War on Noise’: Sound and Space in La Guardia’s New York,” *American Quarterly* (2011): 733-760.

⁴⁷⁸ Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Sound*, 193-232; David Suisman, “The Oklahoma City Sonic Boom Experiment and the Politics of Supersonic Aviation,” *Radical History Review* 121 (2015): 169-195.

consequence of the environmental movement's rapid success in defining and combating pollution as a key problem of the 1960s and 1970s.

In Vancouver, Schafer tried to link both movements by attending meetings held by the Scientific Pollution and Environmental Control society (SPEC) in Vancouver, established in early 1969 and rapidly one of the most influential popular environmental groups in the province. Though SPEC lasted only a few years, its existence paralleled Schafer's initial interest in the politics of noise pollution during the formal establishment of the WSP. SPEC had broadened the ecological debate beyond the sewage issues in the Fraser River. Bringing together an uneasy coalition of middle-class professionals, scientists, students (many from SFU), and a growing number of counterculture activists, the province-wide group brought an ecological perspective to bear on public decision-making processes regarding local environmental issues. By this time, Vancouver, along with the Bay Area and New York, had emerged as one of the biggest destinations for North Americans interested in the counterculture of the late 1960s. The Kitsilano neighborhood across from downtown was the northern equivalent of the Haight Ashbury district in San Francisco, and attracted many U.S. draft dodgers, peace activists, and Canadian hippies who played a distinctive role within the more radical wing of SPEC's environmental activism. SPEC's sense of ecologically motivated action was deeply rooted in a belief that pollution was not merely the byproduct of waste that could be easily managed by better planning. Instead, it was the inevitable outcome of industrial societies whose emphasis on economic growth and consumerism had created an ecological crisis by the late 1960s. An alternate early name proposed for the group, the Society for the Prevention of Environmental Collapse, pointed to the direness of the situation according to many members.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁹ Arn Keeling, "The Effluent Society: Water Pollution and Environmental Politics in British Columbia, 1889-1980," (University of British Columbia, PhD Dissertation, 2004), 302-322.

SPEC, then, opposed new mining projects, offshore oil exploration, oil refineries, and pollution from the pulp and paper industry. Its newsletter, *PerSPEctive*, also sought to change behavior among individuals and households by promoting recycling, reduced energy consumption, and individual accountability for consumption writ large. By 1972, SPEC began arguing that “the central premise of environmental action is shifting from that of pollution abatement to that of attacking the source of pollution, growth itself.”⁴⁸⁰ Around the same time, however, the organization struggled to keep its disparate factions together, since radical countercultural activists and middle-class professionals often disagreed on the balance between “quality of life” issues and the more radical demands to slow economic growth as a means to manage the ecological crisis seemingly engulfing the world at large.⁴⁸¹

To the extent that Schafer’s acoustic ecology drew on the experience of the environmental movement, it also inherited and grappled with some of its difficult questions. Was noise pollution an elitist quality-of-life issue, or a populist matter with severe public health consequences borne primarily by working people? Could it be dealt with by changing individual lifestyle choices, by enacting regulatory reforms mandated by the state, or by transforming the physical environment through other forms of collective action or design? Could it be restrained through policy or was it a necessary byproduct of a socioeconomic system built on unfettered growth? If growth could be restrained, what might the resulting society look like? Or more importantly to Schafer, what might it sound like? To pursue the sound sewage metaphor, what might be the sonic equivalent of a wastewater treatment facility? And what was the role of

⁴⁸⁰ Quoted in Keeling, “Effluent Society,” 319.

⁴⁸¹ Some members of SPEC, including Bob Hunter, went on to play an important role in the founding of a more influential organization rooted in Vancouver: Greenpeace. See Frank Zelko, *Make it a Green Peace!: The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33-40.

expertise in such debates, particularly in terms of measuring acceptable levels of noise pollution? Or even defining what qualified as such?

With some important exceptions, Schafer's ideas tended towards the more elitist, quality-of-life oriented wing of environmental politics. While Schafer recruited some future members of the WSP during his time at SPEC meetings, including Howard Broomfield, his views were far from those of the nascent countercultural ecologists, whose rock music he heard as an affront to good taste and (with its loudness) good aural health. Schafer was also in the minority among SPEC members in that he was most interested in noise, rather than air or water, pollution. He had at least one sympathetic ear in the person of one-time SPEC president Derrick Mallard — previously an engineer for B.C. Power and later a lecturer on acoustics and electronic physiology at SFU — who also focused on noise pollution issues at group meetings. But Mallard himself had faced considerable opposition within the organization for his interest in the issue.⁴⁸² Nevertheless, Schafer attended meetings throughout 1969 and prepared public lectures for SPEC based on the writing he had done for *The New Soundscape* and the survey he had commissioned by his communications students.⁴⁸³ It was clear to him, though that the group was not serious about putting noise pollution on the same level as air or water pollution. Still, even without the group's full support, he started to use these lectures and the writings that emerged from them as a means of public consciousness raising about the seriousness of noise pollution as he understood it.

The Book of Noise (1970), Schafer's first publication conceived explicitly as a public education document, rather than as a resource for music educators, emerged from his SPEC lectures, and was part of a much larger reorientation of the politics of noise abatement at the tail

⁴⁸² Keeling, "Effluent Society," 309, 317.

⁴⁸³ Torigoe, "A Study of the World Soundscape Project," 42-47.

end of the 1960s. In addition to *The Book of Noise*, 1970 and 1971 alone saw a flood of publications with names like *Sound: From Communication to Noise Pollution*, *In Quest of Quiet*, *The Fight For Quiet*, *The Tyranny of Noise*, and *Noise Pollution: The Unquiet Crisis*.⁴⁸⁴ They straddled the line between earlier abatement concerns about inefficiency and moral judgment and hitching their issues to the environmental movement. “We have long considered noise an annoyance,” wrote one activist, but it “is as much a part of environmental pollution as smog or garbage.”⁴⁸⁵ Another called noise “an insidious pollutant” whose “deeper physiological impact” is often hidden.⁴⁸⁶ “The goal for our cities,” concluded another activist, “must be as quiet an environment as necessary for human comfort and well-being. This goal is achievable if we end our passive acceptance of industry’s acoustic waste products.”⁴⁸⁷ Rather than springs silenced by the absence of returning wildlife, the problem here was the lack of quiet in a world where deafening mechanical birds took to the skies in ever-increasing numbers and urban cranes heralded noisy construction projects in the streets below.

Schafer’s book began with a list from “a fascinating and exasperating concert of sounds,” such as “horns, sirens, motorcycles, trucks, jack hammers, power saws and construction machinery, helicopters and jets,” then went on to document “the careless use of our technology” in cities like Vancouver.⁴⁸⁸ Unlike Tony Schwartz’s populist celebration of the multitudinous sounds of the city and the people that generated them, Schafer lamented the increasing noise that

⁴⁸⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The Book of Noise* (Wellington, New Zealand: Price, Milburn & Co., 1970); Graham Chedd, *Sound: From Communication to Noise Pollution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970); Robert Alex Baron, *The Tyranny of Noise* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970); Henry Still, *In Quest of Quiet: Meeting the Menace of Noise Pollution* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1970); Theodore Berland, *The Fight for Quiet* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970); Clifford R. Bragdon, *Noise Pollution: The Unquiet Crisis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

⁴⁸⁵ Still, *In Quest of Quiet*, 12-13.

⁴⁸⁶ Bragdon, *Noise Pollution*, xx.

⁴⁸⁷ Baron, *Tyranny of Noise*, 14.

⁴⁸⁸ Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, 2.

threatened his sense of sonic community as rooted in the natural world. Indeed, Schwartz argued in *The Responsive Chord* that the problem with the “noise pollution” framework was not that the outdoor environment was becoming louder, but that “we want to hear sounds generated within our controlled electronic environment. Outdoor sounds therefore become noise, since they interfere with sounds coming into our homes via electronic media.”⁴⁸⁹ Disagreeing with Schwartz’s diagnosis, Schafer made clear the distinctions between “the sounds of nature” and “the sounds of tools and technology,” and that the latter had made the former impossible to hear. Heightening his environmentalist appeal, Schafer asserted, “The sounds of nature are mostly pleasing to man. Consider the rustling of wind in the leaves, the arabesques of birds, the bubbling of brooks.” Water sounds, in his mind, spoke “of cleansing, of purification, of refreshment and renewal.” Whether one agreed with his interpretations or not, he hoped to convince listeners and readers that natural sounds provided humans with common symbolic tools to apprehend their world.⁴⁹⁰

But the tools of mechanized society threatened to drown out the natural soundscape, and with it, the common symbolic language of humanity. Schafer expanded upon the problems with the motorized soundscape. He began to speak of “hi-fi” versus “lo-fi” sounds; the former had a high signal-to-noise ratio, and could be easily distinguished among other sounds, while the latter tended to produce undifferentiated drones that overrode all else. It was the difference, say, between church bells that could be heard throughout a small village and the buzzsaw of snowmobiles in a rural landscape that prevented walkers from hearing their own muted footsteps in the snow. “Just as the sewing-machine gave us the long line in clothes,” he wrote in the 1973

⁴⁸⁹ Tony Schwartz, *The Responsive Chord* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), 140-141.

⁴⁹⁰ Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, 14.

pamphlet, *Music of the Environment*, “the motor gave us the flat line in sound.”⁴⁹¹ It was not only that the lo-fi sounds of machines were unpleasing; it was that their growing presence was ecologically unsound and unresponsive.

Just as environmentalists were beginning to reevaluate the meaning of “power and progress” when harmful effluvia seemed an inevitable result of “progress,” Schafer wanted them to reconsider “the hard-edged throb of motors” as the regrettable sonic byproduct of technological advancement. Fortunately or not, Schafer contended, “we are just beginning to realize that the fallout from unrestrained technological exploitation of the earth’s resources is more frightening than first anticipated.”⁴⁹² In this case, the fallout of noise pollution was not only hearing damage caused by jet engines, snowmobiles, or jackhammers, but the rending of social ties as well. To put them back together would require an embrace of quietude and a restriction of mechanized noise. He hoped to reorient the conversation about progress by equating *silence*, rather than machine noises, with “enlightenment and humanitarianism.” “Progress in noise abatement would mean less noise, not more. After all, noise in a machine is a sign of inefficiency, an escape of energy. Technology should exist to make man’s life more pleasant. When it increases pain it is worthless and worse.”⁴⁹³ He mounted his critique, then, at multiple levels. Noise, he asserted, was ugly, unhealthy, inefficient, and socially disruptive. Its causes ranged from industrial irresponsibility and reckless urban growth to a consumer culture that embraced power tools, electrical appliances, and amplified music.⁴⁹⁴ Even if other SPEC

⁴⁹¹ Schafer, *Music of the Environment*, 14.

⁴⁹² Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, 14-15.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁹⁴ In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency came to similar conclusions in a 1972 report on noise pollution, which argued that sound was “growing to such disagreeable proportions within our environment that today it is a very real threat to our health.” In addition to laying out the threats, the report pointed citizens to look at their local bylaws, including building codes, to ask public interest law firms for assistance, and to reform their own behavior. “As a quiet-loving citizen,” it concluded, “you have a responsibility not to offend your neighbors and

members were less concerned than he about the consequences of noise pollution, Schafer felt the stakes were too high not to explore various strategies for noise abatement.

The first official publication for the WSP, *A Survey of Community Noise By-Laws in Canada* (1972), sought to address the limitations of noise abatement strategies currently in place throughout Canada. Labatt Breweries provided funding for the publication “as part of their continuing policy actively to support the protection of the environment,” which revealed the extent to which environmentalism had become a watchword by the early 1970s. Even major corporations wanted to portray themselves as responsible public actors and to undercut the cry against industry as responsible for pollution. Despite its funding source, Schafer and his team at the WSP—which included Peter Huse, then assistant director of the WSP, and Kathleen Swink, an undergraduate communications student who administered the project—saw industry as a major culprit in the creating a noisy soundscape. In addition to providing survey data for the sounds that most annoyed Vancouverites and information on decibel levels for common industrial processes, transportation modes, and power tools, the document explored the strategies already taken to limit noise in Canadian municipalities. Most such noise bylaws frustrated the WSP because they dealt primarily with individual actors, rather than “the noises made by industry, construction and demolition, expressways or aircraft.”⁴⁹⁵ They cited recent 1967 legislation from West Vancouver that prohibited “hawker, huckster, pedlar, petty chapman, newsvendor or other person [...] [from] disturb[ing] the peace, order, quiet or comfort of the public.”⁴⁹⁶ In short, the sounds celebrated by Tony Schwartz in his 1950s New York recordings.

fellow man with our own noise.” See Environmental Protection Agency, *Noise Pollution* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Agency, 1972), 1, 13.

⁴⁹⁵ Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, 28. The following book produced by the World Soundscape Project, *A Survey of Community Noise By-Laws in Canada* (Vancouver: World Soundscape Project with the support of Labatt Breweries Canada, 1972).

⁴⁹⁶ WSP, *A Survey of Community Noise By-Laws in Canada*, 11.

But the “quaint eloquence” of these bylaws could not account for the continued threats like jet engines or jackhammers.⁴⁹⁷

Or the predominance of power tools throughout the metropolitan landscape. Who, for example, should be held responsible for the annoyance caused by powered lawnmowers? Manufacturers, for failing to baffle the sound of their motors? Consumers, for equating loudness with power and effectiveness? Bad neighbors, for choosing inopportune times to mow the lawn? Developers and builders, for refusing to properly insulate houses from outdoor noises?⁴⁹⁸ Rather than deal comprehensively with the problem, most noise bylaws tended to require citizens to make complaints, which often devolved “into a war of witnesses” against one another in civil suits.⁴⁹⁹ What if, instead of restricting individual actions through municipal bylaws, national governments could create noise standards that forced manufacturers of air conditioners, blenders, lawnmowers, motorcycles, or chainsaws to reduce the decibel levels of their machines?⁵⁰⁰ To internalize the cost of noise pollution rather than externalizing it by putting the onus on citizens? Whether such a strategy was possible or not, it attempted to put a price on noise pollution through manufacturing guidelines and federal regulations rather than patchwork municipal bylaws.

Crucially, however, the WSP’s survey of noise bylaws led its members to believe that the noise abatement strategy was not enough, because it focused on a negative definition of noise,

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁹⁸ This example comes, in part, from EPA, *Noise Pollution*, 11.

⁴⁹⁹ WSP, *A Survey of Community Noise By-Laws in Canada*, 11. Karin Bijsterveld sees this as part of a fundamental “paradox of control” with regards to noise abatement strategies: “Experts and politicians increasingly promised to control noise by measuring and maximizing sound levels. Yet they defined some problems, such as neighborly noise, as difficult to capture in quantitative terms, and left it up to citizens to talk their neighbors into tranquil behavior, while wrapping other issues, such as aircraft noise, in formulas beyond citizens’ reach. Citizens have thereby been made responsible for dealing with the most slippery forms of noise abatement and distanced from the most tangible ones.” See Bijsterveld, *Mechanical Noise*, 3.

⁵⁰⁰ WSP, *A Survey of Community Noise By-Laws in Canada*, 15-16.

rather than a set of positive acoustic principles to promote. If the WSP understood the “sounds of the environment as a great cultural composition, of which man and nature are the composer/performers,” then it needed to teach everyone how to be better musicians. To teach anyone willing to listen how to be more active participants in the creation of a thoughtful soundscape. “People must be stimulated to take a more *active* part in their acoustic environment, and not passively accept the ‘well-engineered’ sound effects that are presently being introduced to the ears of an ever-increasing number of people.”⁵⁰¹ Such was the ultimate mission of the World Soundscape Project; to not only study the soundscape, but to craft strategies to improve it. The specter of passive listening loomed as partially responsible for the seemingly high tolerance for noise among residents of North American cities. Changing such a state of affairs required teaching people how to listen, and in order to do so, members needed to record the sounds around them onto magnetic tape for others to hear.

** *Overcoming Schizophonia* **

Writing about the environmental catastrophe of noise pollution was one thing; but could one truly understand both the problems and potential solutions through the written word alone? The WSP pursued multiple pedagogical strategies intended to allow people to hear the soundscape as they did, including the preparation of “soundwalks,” in which participants followed a planned itinerary with the goal of listening carefully to the soundscape as they moved through a neighborhood, and the distribution of soundscape recordings. For instance, the WSP produced a two LP set, *The Vancouver Soundscape* to accompany a 72-page book of the same name in 1973, and a ten-part radio series for public radio, *Soundscapes of Canada*. The rest of

⁵⁰¹ WSP, *A Survey of Community Noise By-Laws in Canada*, ii. Emphasis in original.

this chapter will focus on the collection and distribution of these soundscape recordings, particularly as they concerned commercial media and recorded music in public places. These two extended recording projects represented a directed effort to not only collect sounds for the study of the acoustic environment, but an effort to practice sound acoustic design practices through seemingly non-ecological media antithetical to the WSP's mission.

Recording the soundscape was a vexed process for the group under Schafer's leadership. One of the main culprits for the modern soundscape's sad state of affairs was the condition Schafer identified as "schizophonia," using the Greek roots for "split" and "sound." The alienation he imagined was less about dominant cultural industries imposing their narrow choices upon the broader listening public, though it was also that. It was more fundamental. In his estimation, all forms of reproduced sound, whether on recordings or broadcasts, "split the sound from the maker of the sound. Sounds have been torn from their natural sockets and given an amplified and independent existence."⁵⁰² Echoing Walter Benjamin's observations about the mechanical reproducibility of art, Schafer imagined preindustrial sounds as "uncounterfeitable, unique" and "indissolubly tied to the mechanisms which produced them."⁵⁰³ Now, "since the invention of electroacoustical equipment for the transmission and storage of sound, any sound, no matter how tiny, can be blown up and shot around the world or packaged on tape or record for the generations of the future."⁵⁰⁴ Presuming a common unalienable ontological relationship to audition among pre-industrial listeners, Schafer blamed recorded sound for inducing "the same sense of aberration and drama" as schizophrenia might on the psyche.⁵⁰⁵ By virtue of their social

⁵⁰² Schafer, *Music of the Environment*, 15.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.; see also Akiyama, "Transparent Listening," 56-57.

⁵⁰⁴ Schafer, *Music of the Environment*, 15.

⁵⁰⁵ Schafer, "The New Soundscape," 140.

dislocation from the ordinary sound, listeners existed in a fundamental state of alienation from the sounds around them.

What did this mean in practice for recorded music in the 1960s and early 1970s? Typically, an increase in noise pollution. Transistor radios brought into public places were yet another “crude manifestation of this same imperialistic ambition” to conquer quiet through “territorial expansion.”⁵⁰⁶ It was not always that recorded or electronic sound was louder; sometimes it was just that the mechanisms which produced sound no longer had a physical presence in the soundscape. Throughout their research, for example, the WSP came across examples of churches who had replaced the ritualistic ringing of bells in their belfries with beat-up and scratchy recordings of bells that emanated from loudspeakers instead. Or instead of sounding out bells at regular hours, churches sometimes ceded their place in marking the passage of time to electric chimes on other civic buildings.⁵⁰⁷

Coming in for the most vociferous criticism, though, was the egregious attempt to achieve sound acoustic design through “Moozak.” The WSP played on the trademarked name of the distributor for preprogrammed light orchestral music for public places like factories, office buildings, shopping malls, and elevators, or in one case, a UBC barn, because “it recognizes no marked difference between humans and cows.” Often, this piped music was intended to mask the sound of rumbling ventilation systems in shopping malls, usually unsuccessfully, as Schafer demonstrated during an illustrated lecture on the last side of the second *Vancouver Soundscape* record. Instead, the music intended to offend nobody served only as a “sound-slick, which

⁵⁰⁶ Schafer, *The Book of Noise*, 13.

⁵⁰⁷ See, for example, World Soundscape Project, *The Vancouver Soundscape* (Vancouver: The World Soundscape Project with the Support of British Columbia Hydro, 1974), 38-39. Since both the book and the LP have the same title, references to the recording will be marked with the letters LP after the title, while the book will simply mark the page numbers.

spreads its artificial sweetening to all levels of the community,” whether to boost productivity in the workplace or consumption in places of commerce.⁵⁰⁸

Beyond the sounds of broadcasted and recorded music in public places, Schafer worried about the effects of schizophonia within the home. Radio broadcasts seemed to constrict the character of sounds that entered the home, as it too served the purpose of selling and buying. Initial parts of a study of Vancouver radio, published as part of the printed version of *The Vancouver Soundscape*, examined the sounds and rhythms of the city’s airwaves. Mixing together music, advertisements, announcers’ voices, station identification, news, commercial broadcasts never let up from their relentless transitions: “by means of quick cross-fades, songs and commercials flow together uninterrupted, and the ads can be insinuated into the innocent or gullible mind.”⁵⁰⁹ Beyond the anti-commercial argument, the WSP also worried about the aesthetic dimensions of radio. Its seemingly short attention span and rejection of silence, for instance, were notable. Through the use of compression, which reduced the dynamic range of recordings and pushed them up to “the maximum permissible level,” broadcasts reduced the distance between the loudest and quietest sounds coming into people’s sets (fig. 4.3).⁵¹⁰ While they felt the problems were getting worse, they introduced this written section on the radio by quoting BC painter Emily Carr in 1936, who felt “angry resentment at that horrid metallic voice” emanating from the speaker of early radios, especially when people absentmindedly turned on their sets without really listening.⁵¹¹ Like their descriptions of other kinds of “noise pollution,” the WSP thus portrayed radio as a long running homogenizing force without any sense of ecological give and take: this was a one way system, moving from transmitter to receiver.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 44.

Interaction with the sounds of radio or purchased recordings could not solve the problem of schizophonia for the active listener either. Glenn Gould's participant listeners, fiddling with knobs on their stereo systems and recording their favorite sounds onto reels of magnetic tape, merely enacted their own version of schizophonia. Such selectivity, Schafer argued, made it so that "the listener is able to influence and control matters which in the past conformed to natural laws and were quite beyond his control."⁵¹² Perhaps as a composer, he resented the ability of listeners to alter pieces of music to their own liking, and insisted instead on his ability to craft sonic environments himself. Moreover, he lamented the fact that "a record collection may contain items from widely diverse cultures and historical periods in what would seem, to a person from any century but our own, an unnatural and surrealistic juxtaposition."⁵¹³ Rather than seeing in this the possibility for new social formations or solidarities as sounds traveled the globe, as in Tony Schwartz or Marshall McLuhan's world, Schafer understood schizophonia as a primary cause for the erosion of organic communities.

Altogether, then, portable sound, unwanted sound in public places, commercial radio intruding into the home, record collections assembled across decades and continents all caused problems for the World Soundscape Project. Might it be possible to record sounds in such a way that conformed to the "natural laws" of listening? That refused to wrench sounds from their original context? The recordists for the WSP certainly hoped so, and an ecological approach to sound was key to their approach. Between 1972 and 1976, the WSP engaged in three major recording projects, of which the rest of this chapter will focus on the first two: an ongoing study of Vancouver that led to the 1974 double-LP record and accompanying book, *The Vancouver Soundscape*, a cross-Canada recording tour in the autumn of 1973 that formed the basis of the

⁵¹² Schafer, "The New Soundscape," 141.

⁵¹³ Schafer, *Music of the Environment*, 15.

ten-part radio series on the CBC, *Soundscapes of Canada*, and a set of recordings in five European villages that produced the 1977 publication *Five Village Soundscapes*. Such recording projects required serious resources, both in terms of labor and technology. Funding from UNESCO, the philanthropic Donner Canadian Foundation, and the Canada Council – Humanities and Social Sciences Division provided the WSP with money to purchase portable recorders and pay for researchers to bring them out of the Sonic Research Studio and into the world (fig. 4.4). In the spring of 1972, Bruce Davis (a Toronto born [1946] composer then teaching at SFU) and Howard Broomfield (then a graduate student at SFU and a regular attendee of SPEC meetings) began working as research assistants. They were soon joined by Peter Huse, a composer born in 1938 rural Alberta who had studied at Princeton University with Roger Sessions and neoserialist Milton Babbitt during the mid-1960s, Colin Miles, Barry Truax, the future director of the WSP who had studied composition at the University of British Columbia, and later, Hildegard Westerkamp, who had immigrated to Vancouver from West Germany in 1968 also to study composition at UBC. As part of their continued project to formalize the study of the soundscape, they often took to the streets, parks, and buildings of Vancouver and its outskirts to record the sounds they heard for more careful analysis.

Even as recorded sound seemingly contributed to the downfall of listening, the WSP hoped that its own tape recording practices, like extensive field recording in multiple locations with professional equipment, could combat schizophrenic listening by drawing attention to the entirety of the soundscape. Distinguishing, for example, between the sounds recorded on tape during his cross-Canada trip and the kinds one might find on a sound effects record, Bruce Davis noted, “that the sound effects recording is just the sound, and our recordings are not only the sound, but

also the related background material to that sound.”⁵¹⁴ This proved, however, to be somewhat of a contradictory process. On the one hand, they wanted to capture the entirety of the soundscape. On the other, Schafer believed it necessary to be able to isolate certain sounds in order to better study them. He wrote, for instance:

The tape recorder can be a useful adjunct to the ear. Trying to isolate a sound for high-fidelity recording always reminds the ear of details in the soundscape that have previously gone unnoticed. Sound events and soundscapes can be recorded for later analysis and if merited can be permanently stored for the future. It goes without saying that only the best tape recorders should be used for this purpose.⁵¹⁵

Although recordings should be located in their natural ecological context, recordists needed the ability to capture the significant sounds without interfering, even when isolating sounds proved difficult.⁵¹⁶

Doing so would require high quality machinery. Powered by twelve D cell batteries, the fifteen-pound Swiss-built Nagra IV-S portable tape recorder was a film, radio, and television industry standard for portable recording by the late 1960s.⁵¹⁷ The stereo model, new in 1971, allowed the recordists to get spatially separated sound onto two tracks of ¼” reels of tape. Despite the technical sophistication of their equipment, the WSP’s recordists wanted their technology to mimic the human body’s ways of processing sound.⁵¹⁸ As they explained in a recorded conversation with Schafer that took up a whole side of the *Vancouver Soundscape* LP, Davis and Huse measured the average width of both their heads so that they could decide on an appropriate distance (somewhere around six and a half inches) for the two cardioid microphones

⁵¹⁴ Bruce Davis and Peter Huse, “Cross-Canada Soundscape Tour 1973,” *Sound Heritage* 3:4 (1974): 32.

⁵¹⁵ R. Murray Schafer, “Listening,” *Sound Heritage* 3:4 (1974): 14.

⁵¹⁶ For more on the tensions within the World Soundscape Project’s approach to recording, including a comparison between their recording practice with landscape photography, see Akiyama, “Transparent Listening,” 57-59.

⁵¹⁷ Among other places, they listed all the equipment they used for the field recordings on the back cover of *The Vancouver Soundscape*, Ensemble Productions Ltd., EPN 186, 1973 2 LP. Digitized at WSP database.

⁵¹⁸ Schafer often wrote approvingly about Le Corbusier’s “modular man” as an example of design based on the proportions of the average human body, and argued that acoustic designers should similarly think about how humans inhabited acoustical space. See, for example, Schafer, *Music of the Environment*, 29.

plugged into the Nagra (fig. 4.5).⁵¹⁹ Those microphones recorded sound in a heart shaped pattern around each microphone, just rather than unidirectional microphones intended to isolate sounds from a single nearby location (although they also used long highly directional “shotgun” microphones capable of isolating specific sounds at a distance). Thus mounted on short stands, the cardioid microphones would be the sensitive ears plugged into recorders slung around the researchers’ shoulders as they traveled through Vancouver’s soundscapes.

*** Framing the Vancouver Soundscape ***

Compared with the deliberate pace at which Tony Schwartz assembled, edited, and presented his field recordings as a hobby while working as an advertiser, the funded team of recordists at the WSP rapidly collected a vast store of sounds in their city. Between September 1972 and August 1973, they compiled over a hundred 7” reels of tape, half an hour long each. This was a notable difference. For Schwartz, who recorded first then thought about how he wanted to present his material, the WSP went into the city backed with Schafer’s comprehensive theory before they even turned on their recorders. These early tapes quickly formed the basis of the WSP’s first major sonic document, the self-released *Vancouver Soundscape* double LP released in late 1973. The first two sides of the record presented a highly curated tour of the city’s soundscapes, from the water lapping the shore and the seaplanes droning into the harbor to a series of horns and whistles that filled the urban soundscape. Over the last two sides of the album, Schafer spoke to the recordists of the WSP about their methods, then delivered a twenty-minute illustrated lecture on acoustic design which featured some of the less desirable soundscapes recorded over the previous year, so that listeners could immediately grasp the

⁵¹⁹ “A Conversation Piece,” *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP. Digitized at WSP database.

consequences of noise pollution as laid out in earlier texts, or hear better examples of acoustic design. One favorite example of the latter, which appeared on the cover of the album as a soundwave superimposed onto a photograph of downtown Vancouver, featured croaking frogs who went silent at the sound of an approaching car, then returned to their chorus once it drove past. Humans could learn, the WSP seemed to be saying, from the frogs' response to changing sonic conditions.

Throughout the first record, they presented the recordings without their own narration; they described, for instance, the various clips in the accompanying liner notes, but they effaced their own presence from the proceedings in order to get their listeners to concentrate on the nature of the sounds themselves. And in order to find the experience satisfying, listeners would need to focus all their attention on the recordings. In the liner notes, Schafer introduced the recordings with a kind of disclaimer as to the nature of the recordings, but also the nature of the listening required:

To record sounds is to put a frame around them. Just as a photograph frames a visual environment, which may be inspected at leisure and in detail, so a recording isolates an acoustic environment and makes it a repeatable event for study purposes. The recording of acoustic environments is not new, but it often takes considerable listening experience to begin to perceive their details accurately. A complex sensation may seem bland or boring if listened to carelessly. We hope, therefore, that listeners will discover new sounds with each replay of the records in this set – particularly the first record, which consists of some quite intricate environments. It may be useful to turn off the room lights or to use headphones, if available. Each of the sequences on these recordings has its own direction and tempo. They are part of the World Symphony. The rest is outside your front door.⁵²⁰

⁵²⁰ R. Murray Schafer, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape*, LP. Schafer directed and edited the album, but the sounds were collected by various members of the WSP. Barry Truax reissued the album on compact disc in 1997 as *The Vancouver Soundscape 1973 / Soundscape Vancouver 1996*, Cambridge Street Records, CSR-2CD 9701, 1996, 2 compact discs. Although both versions of the 1973 album are quite similar, Truax re-edited one of the tracks, “The Music of Various City Quarters,” to fit the entire album onto one CD, and added Hildegard Westerkamp’s recording of “New Year’s Eve in Vancouver Harbour” at the earliest moments of 1981.

From a researcher's point of view at least, schizophonia allowed listeners to return to sounds repeatedly in order to better understand them. But to a large extent, the record was a normative demonstration of how to listen to the sonic environment, rather than an invitation for listeners to interpret the sounds of their daily lives as they might have seen fit. The record's insistence on the ecological give and take of the natural soundscape, meanwhile, struggled to approach human activities, particularly the stories and experiences of Vancouver's non Anglophone residents with the same kind of responsive feedback that they advocated for other acoustic designers.

Beginning on the first side of the record, the sequence of *The Vancouver Soundscape* moved through history as the WSP imagined it. It is a history in which the pre-human natural soundscape is a balanced one; in which local indigenous people's relationship to the soundscape is threatened by the presence of European settlers, their technologies, and their language; and which gives way to greater industrialization and noise as one moves from the outer reaches of Burrard Inlet into the heart of Vancouver's harbor over the course of the twentieth century. In the beginning, however, there was quietude. Band one, "Ocean Sounds," fades into a series of delicate waves recorded close up, in stereo, moving back and forth from left to right. With cardioid microphones near the pebble beach on Vancouver Island across the Georgia Strait from the city, we hear slight swells of small waves giving way to the gentle hiss of water foaming up before it recedes, each wave distinct from the last – a hi-fi soundscape par excellence. Another beach takes its place, this time, with larger waves denser in low frequencies as they begin to tumble over one another, recorded at a greater distance. Moving to a cove at Point Atkinson, at the entrance to Burrard Inlet, the waves grow louder and more complex still, less distinct from one another when receding water meets surges crashing into the rocks. Finally, from Wreck Beach across the outer inlet at the UBC campus, a dramatic surf on a blustery

afternoon rumbling into the beach. Here, each wave whooshes across the full frequency spectrum from low to high, as if processed through an oscillating filter. With the microphones set both close up and at a distance, the recordings attempt to capture the various sounds of the ocean that could be heard by generations of Vancouverites. Growing from the soft lapping of gentle waves to the full roar of heavy surf, the sequence exemplifies both the rich range and balance of the natural soundscape, but also the general trend from quietude to loudness as this soundscape gave way to a greater human presence.⁵²¹

For over a minute at the beginning of the next band, “Squamish Narrative,” birds recorded at the George C. Reiffel Waterfowl Refuge on Westham Island at the mouth of the Fraser River twitter above barely audible gurgling water. Herbert George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation then begins narrating the process of building racing canoes from cedar logs in the tones of his mother’s language, described here as Squamish.⁵²² Speaking above the sound of the birds, George’s voice is momentarily drowned out by an airplane panning across the sky left to right as it lands at the airport a few miles north of the waterfowl refuge. Later, searching for a word he can’t find, George is silent for about fifteen seconds, quietly asking himself, “how do you say that word?” above the sounds of the parallel birds.⁵²³ Though his narrative is presented on the record without translation, the liner notes alert English listeners to the “white man’s tools and their names” which “appear conspicuously in his narrative (spirit level, square, bit, plane, sander, marine varnish).”⁵²⁴ Once his narrative stops, the birds continue their chirps over a long forty second fade out.

⁵²¹ WSP, “Ocean Sounds,” *The Vancouver Soundscape*, LP.

⁵²² More precisely, George spoke *hənqəminəm*, a dialect of Halkomelem in the Salishan language family.

⁵²³ WSP, “Squamish Narrative,” *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP.

⁵²⁴ Schafer, liner notes to “Squamish Narrative,” *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP.

Although the intent is to give listeners access to the rich sonorities of Vancouver's First Nations peoples, the WSP's decision to sonically locate George within the refuge is a curious and telling one. Listeners hearing the recording without reading along with the liner notes could be forgiven for assuming that this was the original setting for George's statements; that his narrative about crafting canoes from local cedar trees made him at one with the sonic environment in which he spoke. In fact, as the recordists wrote in the notes accompanying the original interview on the WSP database, future researchers should "note the quiet background ambience throughout the whole interview" from George's home in what was then called the Burrard Reserve in North Vancouver.⁵²⁵ Despite the sympathy with which the recordists and editor attempt to portray his struggles to recall long-forgotten words from his home, George ultimately occupies a similar place as the waterfowl over which he narrates his story. Hemmed into isolated sanctuaries both, they are seemingly relics of an earlier age, tragically losing out to the processes of industrial modernity, whether in the loss of their language or the deteriorating soundscape as planes fill the skies with the sonic sewage of their jet engines.

For all their emphasis on recording the world's soundscapes as they were, it's clear from recordings like these that the WSP had normative ideas about how to present the sounds they recorded. During the original forty-five-minute interview, much of which consisted in the recordists asking George to recite local place names in his mother's language, the men behind the controls often asked George to repeat his statements when the occasional vehicle drove by in order to get his words with the most clarity possible. Here, the fact that the ambience at George's home was quiet made it easier for the WSP to superimpose his voice above the sounds of birds and competing with the sounds of jet engines in another part of the city. And on the original

⁵²⁵ Notes accompanying "Herb George Interview," June 5, 1973, reel 113, World Soundscape Project Tape Library, Vancouver/BC Collection, WSP database.

recording, as soon as he finished his narrative, the recordists chimed in with, “it’s a beautiful language. It’s rich, it’s rich with sounds.”⁵²⁶ In the conversation that followed, George and the recordists discussed the challenges of remembering a language without being able to practice it with others. Here, the recordists suggest that George and his brother “tape it all down” for future generations. For the rest of the conversation, he instead told the recordists about his mother’s weaving practices, bringing out baskets she had made from different native woods and barks, and talked about current efforts to revive such practices in his community. To be sure, the challenges of maintaining those practices and retaining the languages were real, and it was important for the WSP to try to include the voices of people like Herbert George in their sonic portrait for Vancouver’s soundscape. But rather than emphasize the ways in which his community continued to inhabit the area, however, the final cut of *The Vancouver Soundscape* showcased the sonic quality of his disappearing language above the words he communicated and used in his everyday life. The tragic story of a peoples’ ecologically balanced relationship to their environment defiled by settlers’ technologies was ultimately a more compelling one for the purposes of the WSP’s project.

From “Squamish Narrative,” *The Vancouver Soundscape* moves next to “Entrance to the Harbour” and “Harbour Ambience.” The sequence stages an entrance into Vancouver’s inner harbor, as punctuated by a series of foghorns, fog bells, seaplanes, seagulls, and ever-present water lapping the sides of the imagined boat. At the end of the first piece, the motor on the *Princess of Victoria* ferry idles as passengers disembark into a waiting room with a creaky door repeatedly opening and closing, which helps remind listeners that this is a constructed recording; an actual voyage on the ferry would take much longer and would feature the sounds of its

⁵²⁶ “Herb George Interview,” June 5, 1973, reel 114, World Soundscape Project Tape Library, Vancouver/BC Collection, WSP database.

throbbing motor throughout. The next piece, recorded from Prospect Point and Brockton Point in Stanley Park, continues with lapping waves, boat horns, and the continued drone of seaplanes landing in the harbor. Taken together, both pieces begin to introduce three important terms to the WSP's glossary, described in the book that accompanied the record: "keynote sounds," signals," and "soundmarks." The keynote was the ground on which other sounds were built, or "the anchor or fundamental tone" on top of which "everything else takes on its special meaning."⁵²⁷ The water here formed the basis of this piece, just as the birds formed the keynote to Herbert George's narrative, or the constant rumble of automobile traffic might be the keynote of a downtown soundscape. Lamentably, though, the seaplanes droning above were beginning to compete with the water as general keynote sound in the harbor. Sound signals, meanwhile, were those sounds intended to be heard; the figure to the keynote's ground. Foghorns, for instance, served as a locating device for navigators to hear above the sounds of water or their own boats when they could not easily see the shore through the fog.⁵²⁸

Drawing on the notion of "landmarks" as special places that helped orient people in a landscape, the WSP categorized soundmarks as special kinds of signals that did the same thing sonically, and that took on an outsized role in people's sense of place. Although many soundmarks might be loud and contributed to the general noise pollution lamented by the WSP, the researchers nevertheless believed that "once a soundmark has become established in the community it deserves to be protected, for soundmarks make the acoustic life of the community unique."⁵²⁹ Here, the initial foghorn in the harbor, operated at the Point Atkinson lighthouse, took on significance. Ringing out for up to twenty miles, the 137 decibel horn built in 1912 was

⁵²⁷ WSP, *The Vancouver Soundscape*, 29.

⁵²⁸ WSP, "Entrance to the Harbour," "Harbour Ambience," *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP.

⁵²⁹ WSP, *The Vancouver Soundscape*, 37.

under threat of replacement by a new automatic unit to be installed in 1974. For the WSP, the magisterial two-toned basso of the old device was a welcome and well-loved intrusion into the urban soundscape, while they imagined that the new version “will produce an inferior sound, and rob Vancouver of one of its most historical soundmarks.”⁵³⁰ The relative thinness of the other horns on the record proved the point, but it also made clear that the WSP’s concerns were as aesthetically driven as they were animated by any sense of acoustic community linking Vancouverites together.

Indeed, this first of four recorded sides not-so-subtly argued that the oldest sounds in the city generally contributed the most pleasantly to Vancouver’s soundscape, and that the city’s maritime history was central to its current day identity. The second side of the record finally moved inland, and focused much more explicitly on the interrelation between machine noises and human voices. After a sound collage they called “Homo Ludens: Man At Play,” which moved from children in a playground near East End train tracks to men shouting on the floor of the Vancouver Stock Exchange to a group of drunk men singing outside a Gastown pub to the “ritualized character” of infield chatter at a baseball game, the record went on to document “The Music of Horns and Whistles,” on a tour through train whistles, boat horns, and one of Vancouver’s most infamous soundmarks, the O Canada Horn that blasted the opening notes of the Canadian national anthem from the top of a downtown skyscraper daily at noon beginning in the centenary year of 1967.⁵³¹

On the original LP, the final eighteen minute cut of the second side was a curious collection of fifteen Vancouver soundmarks and music from throughout the city. The first part of the recording dealt with such soundmarks as the more rounded tones of the O Canada Horn as

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁵³¹ WSP, “Homo Ludens: Man at Play,” “The Music of Horns and Whistles,” *The Vancouver Soundscape*, LP.

heard from Stanley Park, the firing of the Nine O'clock Gun that echoed through the harbor every night, and the pealing bells of the Holy Rosary Cathedral downtown (preceded by a sound familiar to all Vancouverites: that of rain falling onto an umbrella above the microphones). The final sequence, however, proposed "a comparison of some typical Vancouver entertainments and with [sic] some typical working environments." It moved from unnamed Balkan singers at a folk festival to the sounds of an old cooperage. From a small Chinese music ensemble to "the harsh snarl of the mechanical saw ripping through timber" at a False Creek sawmill. From Greek dancing and plate smashing in a restaurant to a woodchipper in the same sawmill and howling gibbons in the Stanley Park zoo. From an ensemble of street singers in downtown Vancouver to the launch of a new ferry from the shipbuilding docks with an orchestra of power tools to see it off. From a performance of the Lion's Dance in Chinatown the mechanical drone of traffic as heard below the Granville Street bridge. And finally, bringing the record full circle, the soft lapping of waves while the captain of a small coastal freighter sounds "Alouette" from horns on his boat in False Creek.⁵³²

Taken on their own, the music sequences often complexly emphasize the responsive interaction between performers, audience, and environment, but the sequencing choices open up the question whether some members of the WSP understood this music as another variety of noise pollution. In one notable moment, the drumming at the Lion Dance in Chinatown is almost perfectly timed with the rhythmic cadence of exploding firecrackers. Both sounds accompany one another throughout the selection, and Schafer heard this particular moment as "remarkable for an example of synchronicity."⁵³³ It's possible, however, that the drummers explicitly chose

⁵³² WSP, "Vancouver Soundmarks and the Music of Various City Quarters," *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP. Notably, the 1997 CD reissue of the album removed the industrial sounds and added a few more musical clips to "The Music of Various City Quarters."

⁵³³ Schafer, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP.

the kinds of beats that might make such a synchronous occurrence more likely by mimicking the firecrackers. In other words, rather than just happenstance, perhaps the skill of the musicians in responding to their environment allowed such a moment to happen. One wonders what made Schafer decide to surround this clip, which he heard as remarkable, with the launch of a new ferry cut “from her berth with sledge hammers, jackhammers and power saws,” sounds he understood as inimical to his experience of the city, and the “predominantly mechanical” drone of traffic and squeaking cranes recorded from under the Granville Street bridge. Was it that the percussive drums and firecrackers reminded him of the jackhammers he’d sought to abate? To lend a more positive interpretation, was it that moments of beauty could be found even with harsh or loud sounds that the WSP would typically be more likely to want to avoid, provided one listened closely enough?

Similarly, the scene from the Greek Islands Restaurant is introduced and followed by the “aural health hazards” of buzzing sawmills “symbolic of Vancouver’s economic base.”⁵³⁴ One could understand Vancouver’s docks the same way, so was the sound of broken bottles and plates at the ground at a restaurant near the port yet another aural health hazard? It is significant, moreover, that the WSP felt that singular foghorns booming through the harbor better represented the “soundmarks” of Vancouver’s maritime heritage than the sounds of people who may have lived, worked, and eaten near the docks.⁵³⁵ Still, the liner notes made clear that patrons threw plates and glasses onto the ground as a mark of “appreciation of the skill and expressiveness of the dancers.”⁵³⁶ The scene could thus be understood as a demonstration of an

⁵³⁴ Schafer, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP.

⁵³⁵ For more on the association of sailors with noise in an older context, see Johan Heinsen, “‘Nothing but Noyse’: The Political Complexities of English Maritime and Colonial Soundscapes,” *Radical History Review* 121 (2015): 106-122.

⁵³⁶ Schafer, liner notes to *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP.

ecological approach to sound: patrons responding to dancers responding to music in a specific location.

This particular segment, though, also suggests important limits to Schafer's conception of schizophonia. The scene recorded here had dancers and those clapping along to the music responding not to live musicians, but to a recording of a song by popular Greek singer Stelios Kazantzidis, "Polý Psilá Se Píga."⁵³⁷ Even as sound split from its source, its existence in a Vancouver restaurant's jukebox on March 20th, 1973 is remarkable in demonstrating the speed at which recorded music accompanied the "many Greek sailors as well as local people of Greek extraction" who came to the restaurant near the docks. Presented in the liner notes as "the scene of traditional Greek dancing," this was nevertheless a contemporary song, released as a 7" 45-rpm single in Greece just the previous year.⁵³⁸ Whether it arrived in Vancouver from local record importers or from sailors carrying vinyl cargo with them on journeys across the world, its presence over 6,000 miles from Athens spoke to the ways in which recorded music could link émigrés with faraway homelands.⁵³⁹ Though one might not know precisely what made restaurant-goers clap along, or what the music might have meant to the dancers, many Greeks worldwide prized Kazantzidis's interpretations of *Laikó* as particularly successful in evoking

⁵³⁷ The date comes from the WSP database's original. See "Greek Islands Restaurant," reel 63, recordings A.1 and A.2, as well as reel 67, A.1, in World Soundscape Project Tape Library, Vancouver/BC Collection, WSP Database.

⁵³⁸ The accompanying notes specify that the recordings came from a jukebox, which makes it most likely that the record was a 7" single, rather than the full length release. The album that "Polý Psilá Se Píga" appeared on, *Gyálinos Kósmos*, was only released in 1973, so if it had been the full length version, the timing of the recording in the restaurant would have been even more remarkable for its speed. Stelios Kazantzidis, "Πολύ Ψηλά Σε πήγα / Κάψε – Κάψε, [Polý Psilá Se Píga - Káψε – káψε]" Minos, Minos 5388, 1972, 7" vinyl single; Stelios Kazantzidis, "Πολύ Ψηλά Σε πήγα [Polý Psilá Se Píga]," *Γυάλινος Κόσμος [Gyálinos Kósmos]*, Minos, MSM 172, vinyl LP, 1973. For the discographical information on the Greek releases, I've relied on the listings for Stelios Kazantzidis at discogs.com.

⁵³⁹ In this and many other ways, the recording recalls Michael Denning's discussion of mobile syncretic recording cultures at the dawn of the electrical recording age, most of which were located in working-class ports worldwide. The *Laikó* music recorded by Stelios Kazantzidis was an offshoot of *rebetika*, one of the recurring genres of Denning's book. See Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015).

“the theme of emigration and the pain of being in a foreign place,” in the words of one scholar.⁵⁴⁰ What was merely backdrop to smashed plates audible on the rotating grooves of *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP likely held deeper meanings to those who showed their appreciation at the restaurant. But the WSP’s understanding of sonic ecological give and take of the modern soundscape had little room to ask such questions of restaurant patrons or dancers, as they preferred to direct the listeners’ attention to the aesthetic qualities of sounds they recorded.

The LP set as a whole aptly demonstrated the WSP’s commitments to acoustic ecology and provided a portable model for other interested researchers. As one reviewer writing in SFU’s student newspaper pointed out, non-specialists weren’t likely to encounter the record, which “was intended for maximum distribution with minimum wax, so copies will be in libraries and other places where a number of people can have access.” Despite its limited reach, he felt “the set is literally an ear-opener and a valuable collection,” and that “much more needs to be done in aural education and aural design of the environment.”⁵⁴¹ Another reviewer picked up on “the parallel with what one may perhaps be allowed to call conventional ecology” throughout *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP and book set. Translating that movement “to our ears” was a “worthy achievement” in pointing out the noisy consequences of a “continent affected by ‘progress,’ ‘development,’ modern transportation and ‘economic growth.’”⁵⁴² The conversations on the second LP could also have given listeners a taste of Schafer’s noise pollution lectures, with examples pulled from the WSP’s local recording activities or tips on the recording techniques employed by the WSP. But it was unlikely that such tips would have been useful for hobbyist tape enthusiasts who lacked the imposing list of equipment used for the recordings as provided

⁵⁴⁰ Gail Holst-Warhaft, "National Steps: Can You Be Greek If You Can't Dance a Zebekiko?" *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 14 (2012): 36.

⁵⁴¹ Zebulon C. Kidd, "The Vancouver Sound is Noisy," *The Peak*, 11 September 1974, 10.

⁵⁴² Leonard Marsh, "Review of *The Vancouver Soundscape*," *BC Studies* 24 (Winter 1974): 98, 97.

on the back sleeve of the LP. Without the resources of the Sonic Research Studio or the grants provided by UNESCO and the Donner Foundation, non-specialists were more likely to approach the record as an evocative document of one city's soundscape, rather than as a potential blueprint to follow in their own recordings of their local environments.

*** Soundscapes of Canada ***

The WSP, however, had a somewhat larger audience in mind than specialist researchers for their soundscape project. In the fall of 1973, Bruce Davis and Peter Huse embarked on a cross-Canada recording trip that culminated in an ambitious ten-part radio series that aired the following year on national radio; broadcasts that could be heard by many more Canadians than the audience of *The Vancouver Soundscape*. By turns, *Soundscapes of Canada* was both more expansive and more difficult in its approach to the WSP's mission than their earlier documents. Individual episodes ranged from a set of listening exercises to thematically edited programs on the sounds of games or work or regional accents to tours of the country's soundmarks to the extended summer solstice recording to a historical documentary about the bells at one particular church in Québec to an experimental documentary about radio.

Before they could craft their ten episodes, however, the WSP first needed to collect more sounds from throughout the country. The series presented Davis and Huse's travels as a comprehensive national research trip, but their collecting method emerged somewhat haphazardly through their production process, which was anything but uniformly distributed throughout the country. They began in rural Alberta at the end of September 1973, had their car shipped to Newfoundland at the beginning of October, spent almost a month in the Maritime provinces, a few days in Québec, just over a week in Ontario, then quickly drove through the

prairie provinces on the way back to British Columbia.⁵⁴³ Heavily weighted towards the East Coast, the recordings focused especially on small town and rural soundscapes, sounds of disappearing technologies, and a few recurring themes throughout the country that developed through the course of their travels; namely, regional accents, sound signals like horns and whistles, bells from prominent churches, traffic from busy city intersections, and samples from radio broadcasts.

This was not only a trip to gather material for a radio broadcast, but also a continued part of the WSP's fact finding mission into the nature of the contemporary soundscape. In keeping with the WSP's critique of radio, Davis and Huse often recorded the sound coming out of their car's radio throughout the trip in order to better understand how the medium operated nationwide. For their recorded scans, they often began on the left side of the dial, spent about twenty seconds with each station, and moved on to the next station to the right, for anywhere from three to twenty minutes at a time. In Prince Edward Island, they deemed their scan an interesting one: it "contains the usual crap, but also a French speaking station, series of weather reports, beginning of a soap opera, etc."⁵⁴⁴ For the most part, though, they were disappointed by what they heard. The stations were "fairly uniform in the way that the announcers spoke," said Davis, in a conversation with Huse transcribed for the journal *Sound Heritage*. Huse continued, "most of the stations had that Midwest, American dialect and the expected razmataz commercial rap."⁵⁴⁵ Even when the announcers were Canadian, Huse and Davis associated the tones of their voices with the influence of Americanized mass culture. In addition to the "usual crap" that seemed to be on the radio nationwide, the fact that announcers sounded the same across the

⁵⁴³ This chronology relies on the dates attached to individual reels of tape from the Canada Collection of the World Soundscape Project Tape Library in the WSP database.

⁵⁴⁴ Note to "Radio Scan," reel 42, D.10, WSP Tape Library, Canada Collection, WSP database.

⁵⁴⁵ Davis and Huse, "Cross-Canada Soundscape Tour 1973," 34.

continent meant that the stations were not adequately representing the sounds of their local communities.

Schizophonia and poor acoustic design continued to be a concern for Davis and Huse. One New Brunswick restaurant produced a “very ugly soundscape,” with a “steady hum in foreground from fan, and heavy low frequency sounds from juke box.”⁵⁴⁶ Another, in the French Canadian village of Bonfield, Ontario only produced a “nice and clear ambience because the power in restaurant had temporarily blacked out. All fans and hums were silent as a result.”⁵⁴⁷ The idea that a restaurant would sound better if only it turned off all its machinery revealed much about their normative sense of the soundscape. Outdoors, a common concern was the continued proliferation of “moozak” in unexpected places. A ferry docking in Saint Siméon, Québec, on the northern shore of the St Lawrence River announced itself both with a “heavy low frequency rumble, and moozak going – female voice singing.” In short: “Terrible soundscape.”⁵⁴⁸ “Moozak” likewise continued to play in a Regina hotel lobby through two minutes of silence as part of a Remembrance Day ceremony.⁵⁴⁹ After recording the bells of the Peace Tower at the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, meanwhile, the recordists moved a block south to the Sparks Street pedestrian mall.⁵⁵⁰ Reflecting on it afterwards, they couldn’t even wait to finish each other’s sentences to describe their animus for what they’d heard:

MR. HUSE: We recorded a shopping mall...

MR. DAVIS: The first street in Canada to be turned into a mall, and, of course, they have Moozak playing sweet saccharine melodies...

MR. HUSE: A soundslick that coats the shoppers as they hustle from store to store with a glistening...

MR. DAVIS: Glint in their eyes...

⁵⁴⁶ Notes to “Restaurant Ambience,” reel 51, B.2, WSP Tape Library, Canada Collection, WSP database.

⁵⁴⁷ Notes to “Restaurant: telephone conversation in French,” reel 69, D.16, World Soundscape Project Tape Library, Canada Collection, WSP database.

⁵⁴⁸ Notes to “St. Siméon, Ferry Docking,” reel 55, A.1, WSP Tape Library, Canada Collection, WSP database.

⁵⁴⁹ Notes to “Moozak in Hotel Lobby,” reel 79, B.3, WSP Tape Library, Canada Collection, WSP database.

⁵⁵⁰ “Sparks Street Mall Moozak,” reel 62, B.5, WSP Tape Library, Canada Collection, WSP database.

MR. HUSE: As it lacquers their ears and prevents them from hearing anything real.⁵⁵¹

The fact that such a soundscape could be found only steps away from Parliament Hill only amplified the symbolism of Canadian identity losing out to homogenizing commercial forces. A national (shopping) mall slicked with inauthentic and placeless sound.

As with the self-conscious struggles to overcome the condition of schizophonia in the production of the earlier LP, the *Soundscapes of Canada* series needed to confront the WSP's continued problems with radio and other displeasing soundscapes head on. Indeed, the second half of episode eight, "Soundscape Design" presented Schafer's earlier lecture from the last side of *The Vancouver Soundscape* LP in its entirety, but added some key features. After the example of the frogs responding to passing cars as an example of sound acoustic ecology, Schafer added an extended discussion of the problems with radio:

Ironically, the medium on which we've been presenting these ideas is radio. I say ironically, because as a medium, radio has proven itself to be one of the most antithetical to the natural soundscape. I don't mean only in the sense that ignorant people who carry transistor radios to parks and beaches and thus spoil the natural settings of these environments, I mean rather in the sense that radio, by its frantic tempo, its surrealistic montages, its crosstalk and inconsistencies sets up rhythms in our lives that are quite out of keeping with true acoustic ecology.⁵⁵²

As opposed to such sounds, the opportunity to craft ten hours of radio allowed the WSP to put some of their acoustic design ideas into practice; to reimagine what radio could sound like according to their own principles. Schafer continued by arguing that art "suggested alternative modes of living," and in the case of much post-Cagean sonic and visual art, that meant "the recovery of stillness and repose in art." "Radio too," he went on, "could become an art form if it

⁵⁵¹ Davis and Huse, "Cross-Canada Soundscape Tour 1973," 43.

⁵⁵² R. Murray Schafer, "Soundscape Design," *Soundscapes of Canada* program 8.1, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 30, 1974, WSP database.

were to assist modern man by decelerating the rhythms of his life.”⁵⁵³ He offered a final example to demonstrate his hopes for the medium. Having studied the oft-recurring sounds of radio station identifications and finding them sonically wanting, the WSP proposed a quieter, stiller “sound logo” for the CBC to use during station breaks. Faint sounds of rustling water undergirded repeated haunting calls of the loon, while announcers delivered a bilingual identification: “This is Radio Canada. Ici Radio-Canada.”⁵⁵⁴ If the network were to employ it for all their IDs, it could unite listeners through the natural soundscape instead of the frantic patter of commercial radio.

Though they only occasionally spoke in the explicit language of cultural nationalism (Schafer understood himself as more of an internationalist than a nationalist), the WSP’s desire to understand and respond to the homogenizing force of radio and “moozak” tapped into long-running conversations about Canada’s deeply ambivalent relationship to its southern neighbor’s mass culture. Their ability to air the *Soundscapes of Canada* on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation emerged directly out of state policies intended to counteract the influence of U.S. commercial culture in Canadian life; policies the WSP believed that not gone far enough. After World War II, Anglophile (and often British educated) Canadian elites worried that the country’s relatively recent cultural independence from Britain required active state intervention to manage the transition to autonomy by bolstering a national arts and culture scene. Beginning at least with the Massey Commission Report in 1951, headed by soon-to-be Governor General Vincent Massey, official cultural policy attempted to prop up Canadian arts programming by setting up new agencies like the National Library of Canada (established in 1953) and the Canadian

⁵⁵³ Schafer, “Soundscape Design,” *Soundscapes of Canada*; he also expanded on his perspective on radio in a 1987 essay published in *Ear*. It appears in R. Murray Schafer, “Radical Radio,” 207-216 in *Sound by Artists*, eds. Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (Toronto: Blackwood Gallery & Charivari Press, 1990).

⁵⁵⁴ Schafer, “Soundscape Design,” *Soundscapes of Canada*.

Council for the Arts (1957), as well as increasing funding to the National Gallery (1880), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (1936), the National Film Board of Canada (1939).⁵⁵⁵ It also proposed soft quotas for Canadian content on radio, television, and the performing arts programming, often with an emphasis on “highbrow” productions in both English and French that would not be viable on a commercial basis. Masseyites imagined that cultural organizations like the CBC and the NFB could be bulwarks against the long creep of Americanization. The Canadianness of such content – much of which was directed by British-born or educated writers, directors, producers, or presenters – had more to do with its high quality than with the hands producing it or the number of eyes and ears taking it in.⁵⁵⁶

Rather than accomplish their mission of cultural uplift through state subsidized programming, however, Canadian elites quickly grew frustrated at the fact that growing audiences attendant to postwar prosperity preferred to consume commercial media produced in the United States. The irony of this association of Americanization with mass culture, writes historian Paul Litt, is that the Masseyites’ elite cultural nationalism depended on an attitude about mass culture that “was itself, to a large degree, an American import.”⁵⁵⁷ But Canadian elites succeeded in shaping their state’s policy response to the perceived threat of mass culture to a much larger degree than their American counterparts, particularly when Liberal governments gained power. Soon after the Massey Report, successive Conservative governments challenged this conception of the state’s duty to uphold elite programming by opening up broadcasting monopolies and insisting on greater competition throughout the 1950s. The net effect, however,

⁵⁵⁵ Paul Litt, *The Muses, The Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

⁵⁵⁶ Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 51-77.

⁵⁵⁷ Paul Litt, “The Massey Commission, Americanization, and Canadian Cultural Nationalism,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 98 (1991): 380.

was less to create “a greater variety of programming” in television and radio, and more to make them “more homogenously American.”⁵⁵⁸ In a country where the vast majority of the population lived within 100 miles of the U.S. border, a border that could not stop traveling radio or television airwaves coming over from cities like Seattle, Detroit, or Buffalo, critics worried about the nation’s ability to maintain a unique cultural identity. Even when citizens could not pick up U.S. radio stations, commercial Canadian broadcasters filled their playlists with U.S. artists, just as the CBC subsidized some of its own nationally-produced content with cheaper-to-acquire U.S. programs. For those labeled as “Canadianizers” in Ryan Edwardson’s history of Canadian content policies, this growing influence of American popular culture heralded the replacement of one cultural hegemon with another. As a result of this history, both Masseyites and a new cohort of cultural nationalists associated commercialism and mass culture with undue American influence.⁵⁵⁹

For new Canadian nationalists in the 1960s, this neo-colonial relationship to U.S. culture industries, where the Canadian publishing and broadcast industries both relied heavily upon U.S. content for their profits, continued to require active state management to ensure that Canadians could consume content produced within national borders. Along with such symbolic nation-building efforts as the adoption of a new Canadian flag (1965), the 1967 Canadian Centennial, and Expo ’67 in Montreal, came a renewed effort to promote Canadian publishing and broadcasting content. The failure of the elite-driven Masseyite model to capture the attention of most Canadians, however, meant that new policies needed to support less rarified forms of cultural production like popular music. Folk and rock musicians like Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, and the group later known as The Band had struggled to get airplay on Canadian radio stations

⁵⁵⁸ Edwardson, *Canadian Content*, 124.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 113-134.

and decided to decamp to the U.S. in order to establish themselves as commercial musicians. Once popular, Canadian stations happily began playing their music over the air. In response to this worry over culture industry emigration, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission established quotas in 1971, that stipulated, for example, that AM radio stations needed to play a minimum of thirty percent Canadian artists in their regular programming. Here, Canadian content could simply be measured by the citizenship of artists, songwriters, lyricists, and record producers, rather than by any attempt to legislate what Canadianization might mean on an ideological or cultural level.⁵⁶⁰ At the same time, the CBC responded to such criticisms of elitism by adopting a more open and conversational tone, especially in the programming on its AM radio network, and shifted its more highbrow productions to the CBC FM radio network (1964).⁵⁶¹

This changing media landscape accompanied other major sociocultural transformations in Canada. As Mitchell Akiyama has written elsewhere, the *Soundscapes of Canada* programs aired at the very moment that official policy moved away from the “bicultural” heritage of Canada’s “two solitudes,” its English and French history, towards more open immigration laws and an embrace of “multiculturalism.”⁵⁶² This was particularly significant because much of the new immigration from South and East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, among other places, brought in increasing numbers of non-Christians to Canada. So the WSP’s decision to focus on the importance of church bells to their definitions of community, whether the recordists themselves were Christian or not, assumed much about who belonged as part of a national

⁵⁶⁰ Edwardson, *Canadian Content*, 135-219.

⁵⁶¹ See for example, Thomas Hathaway, “CBC-FM Radio: Clearing the Air,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 92 (1985): 22-26 on the splitting up of middlebrow and highbrow content on the AM and FM networks.

⁵⁶² See his thoughtful dissertation chapter on the World Soundscape Project, “Sounding the Nation,” in Mitchell Akiyama, “The Phonographic Memory: A History of Sound Recording in the Field,” (PhD Dissertation: McGill University, 2014), 197-257.

community. Even their decision to present an entire program on the history of the church bells in Percé, at the entrance to the St. Lawrence in Québec, was out of step with the perspective of many in a province that had undergone a “Quiet Revolution” in the previous decade. Many Québécois during the 1960s rejected the conservative political and social power of the Catholic Church in favor of an aggressively secular form of Québécois nationalism.⁵⁶³ As with many of the examples on *The Vancouver Soundscape*, then, where the WSP presumed singular meanings to smashed plates in Greek restaurants or New Year’s celebrations in Vancouver’s large Chinatown, they had not stopped to ask what church bells might mean to non-Christians or those who might have felt oppressed by the church’s role in residential schools or Québec’s political system.

At a time, then, when many of the new cultural nationalists turned away from the high culture of an Anglophone and Francophone past towards an embrace of more popular forms from a wider variety of traditions, the WSP stuck with an earlier model of cultural politics drawn from the Massey generation’s promotion of European-oriented highbrow culture. Understanding the Canadian media ecology thus helps us to locate the peculiar dynamics of the WSP’s acoustic politics during the 1970s. What difference did it make, Schafer might have asked, if commercial artists were Canadian when they contributed to the overall proliferation of noise pollution nationwide? In this way, the conservatism of the lingering Masseyite perspective on Canadian culture mirrored nothing so much as elite-driven quality-of-life environmentalism; both worried about the gradual decline of “quality” standards as societies became more industrialized and commercialized. It was not surprising, then, that the WSP had its own problems with the less

⁵⁶³ For an argument about Québec’s “quiet revolution” as the partially aesthetic production of a post-Catholic secular form of nationalism, see Geneviève Zubrzycki, “Aesthetic Revolt and the Remaking of National Identity in Québec, 1960-1969,” *Theory and Society* 42 (2013): 423-475.

elite-oriented CBC radio of the early 1970s. In *The Vancouver Soundscape* book, they described Vancouver's CBC-AM affiliate as "a public enterprise that tries to be all things to all Canadians [...] It tries to feel the pulse of the nation but it wears the diplomat's white gloves." This was better, one assumes, than the popular Vancouver top-40 AM radio station that "is often heard booming from muscle cars while their owners prowl after that perfect chick they hear in the ads, or that smooth guy who plays the records," or the one that "plays rock now, but of a quiet and luscious variety that hardly ever reveals the libidinous origins of this music," but it was still a far cry from the robust public broadcaster the WSP would have preferred.⁵⁶⁴

The *Ideas* program, however, was a more natural fit for the work of the WSP, since it continued to uphold the earlier network aims of providing a space for intellectual discourse on the airwaves. Established on the FM network in 1965 as *The Best Ideas You'll Hear Tonight* by the poet Phyllis Webb and William A. Young, the still-running program began airing lengthy 55-minute radio documentaries (often in multi-part series), lectures (such as the annual Massey Lecture series), or panel discussions that focused on a wide range of topics, and often included the voices of notable public intellectuals and academics both within and outside Canada. Producers understood that they were unlikely to garner high ratings, but that they might be able to take more risks with their programming. For example, *Ideas* aired Glenn Gould's pioneering contrapuntal radio documentaries, like *The Idea of North* from 1967, which featured multiple overlapping voices in a staged discussion about the place of the Northern frontier in Canadian mythology.⁵⁶⁵ Rather than centralize production within the CBC, they often collaborated with

⁵⁶⁴ WSP, *The Vancouver Soundscape*, 44.

⁵⁶⁵ For an overview of the series and its history from the perspective of a one time executive producer, see Bernie Lucht, "The Best Ideas You'll Hear Tonight," 9-18, *Ideas: Brilliant Thinkers Speak Their Minds*, ed. Bernie Lucht (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2005); *The Idea of North* appears alongside *The Latecomers* (1969) and *The Quiet in the Land* (1977) as part of Glenn Gould, *Glenn Gould's Solitude Trilogy*, CBC Records, PSCD 2003-3, 3X Compact Disc.

non-broadcasters to create programs for *Ideas* to translate often complex ideas to engaging and conversational radio. In this case, they worked with the WSP to produce the *Soundscapes of Canada* series, which ticked off all the boxes of the Masseyite mission: representing the sound of Canada to Canadians, giving broadcast space to a major scholarly research project, and supporting a production that would not be able to air without subsidy – even if Schafer later wrote that the CBC found much of *Soundscapes of Canada* to be “boring.”⁵⁶⁶

Rather than simply try to feel the pulse of the nation, then, the WSP’s radio programs for *Ideas* tried to shape it. To promote a cultural uplift politics by teaching people how to listen to the soundscape around them. If Canadians were to resist the imperialistic spread of noise in their cities, towns, and rural areas, they needed both to be aware of the danger of noise pollution, but also to embrace modes of listening that attuned one to the healthier sounds of the environment. After the first program, “Six Themes of the Soundscape,” which introduced the series in general terms, the first half of program two, “Listening” prepared the audience for what was to come next. “For the next hour,” Schafer began, “I need your ear, for I want you do some intensive listening.” Without any additional intentional sound coming over the airwaves, he continued with measured tones and deliberate enunciation: “If you want to join me in a listening experiment, I’ll need your undivided attention, because I’m going to ask you to participate actively. And if you’re not prepared to do this, the whole exercise will probably seem rather foolish.” For the half hour that followed, he proposed a set of intensive listening exercises that harkened back to his musical education years. Demanding complete cooperation, Schafer insisted that listeners ask anyone nearby to remain silent or join in the exercises, adjust the volume on their radio sets so that his voice would be at a conversational level, and close their eyes or turn out the lights so that

⁵⁶⁶ Schafer, “Radical Radio,” 215.

they could better focus on the sounds around them. As Schafer stayed in radio silence for thirty seconds, could they hear static or interference coming over the airwaves? What kinds of sounds were being generated within their houses during the next minute of silence? Humming refrigerators? Cracking walls? Clanking radiators coming to life on a cool Canadian autumn evening? And if listeners kept their eyes closed and opened their ears to faraway sounds outdoors, what could they hear of the “orchestra of the soundscape outside your room?” Perhaps, he suggested, cars driving by? Airplanes flying above? Train whistles sounding in the distance? “If we practice ear cleaning seriously, little by little, we will begin to develop clairaudience, or exceptional hearing abilities,” such as the ability to locate the direction and provenance of the many sounds populating one’s aural environment.⁵⁶⁷ In this opening ten minutes of the program, Schafer introduced listeners to the normative practices of “ear cleaning” that allowed “clairaudient” listeners to hear the entire soundscape that would come over their radio sets for the rest of the series.

Typically, the programs began with an invocation to turn off the lights and listen quietly. But *Soundscapes of Canada* did not want to focus on placeless or homogenous sounds. In many ways, the series was an extension of the *Vancouver Soundscape* LPs, but now tailored to a national scale. Schafer began program three, “Signals, Keynotes, and Soundmarks” with a slow and deliberate call to “Listen. Listen. Listen. This is a program about special sounds.” It was an extended version of earlier tracks like “Entrance to the Harbour” and “Music of Trains and Whistles.” Along with trains recorded from Vancouver railyards, for example, listeners could hear similar train whistles on the north shore of the Saint Lawrence in Québec or passing through the Rocky Mountains near Banff, in addition to a brief lecture on the Doppler effect in a twelve-

⁵⁶⁷ R. Murray Schafer, “Listening,” *Soundscapes of Canada* program 2, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 22, 1974, WSP database.

minute segment on train whistles. Along with Vancouver foghorns, listeners could hear versions from New Brunswick and Newfoundland as well. They could also hear comparisons of air powered diaphones with electronic replacements whose sounds “may be prettier, but the fishermen claim they have better whistles on their tea kettles.”⁵⁶⁸ Such sounds might have great significance for those living by the sea, but devoting another twelve minutes of airtime to an extended meditation on foghorns might have had as much to do with the amount of time Davis and Huse spent recording in the Maritimes as it did to mark the special meaning of foghorns in Canadian life (fig. 4.6).

Similarly, the program on “Soundmarks of Canada” echoed the “Vancouver Soundmarks,” focusing yet again on foghorns, ritually sounded guns to mark time, and ringing church bells (even on occasion, the electronic carillons of pre-recorded bells). This time, however, the program recapitulated Davis and Huse’s trip by moving from east to west, beginning in Newfoundland, moving through the Maritimes, Québécois churches, the bells from the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill, rural Ontario, and the Prairies before returning to Vancouver. Along the way, they added place names as spoken by residents of those places to help associate the soundmarks with their specific locations, as with their decision to end the program with Herbert George’s voice saying “Point Atkinson” before several blows of the powerful diaphone on the entry to Vancouver’s harbor. Most notable in the program was the continued anti-urban and anti-mechanical focus of the featured sounds. Rather than turn on their recorders to the changing sound of cities (aside from Vancouver) where the majority of Canadians lived, Huse and Davis spent the vast majority of their time in rural areas and small towns. The ringing of an old cuckoo clock recorded in Viking, Alberta got equal weight to cities

⁵⁶⁸ Bruce Davis and R. Murray Schafer, “Signals, Keynotes, and Soundmarks,” *Soundscape of Canada* program 3, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 23, 1974, WSP database.

like Winnipeg and Calgary, where they only presented the sound of pealing bells from downtown churches while traffic roared past.⁵⁶⁹

Not surprisingly given such preoccupations, one of the features of acoustic design that stood out the most throughout the series was the WSP's willingness to embrace silence, quietude, and stillness, typically anathema to radio producers. "Listening" explicitly inserted minutes of silence after Schafer directed listeners to pay attention to voices inside and outside their own homes. On the other programs, like "Signals, Keynotes, and Soundmarks," or "Soundmarks of Canada," the examples of foghorns, whistles, or bells were typically preceded by several seconds of silence so that each instance could be independent from the next.

"Summer Solstice," meanwhile, stayed at a low ambient level throughout. More than any other recording they had made, this day in the life of the "natural soundscape" outside Westminster Abbey demonstrated the principles of acoustic ecology for the radio audience. The WSP produced a visual account of the recording within *The Handbook of Acoustic Ecology* (fig. 4.7) but translating this day in the life of frogs, birds, insects, and pealing church bells for radio was another matter. After a ten minute spoken introduction to the piece, "Summer Solstice" edited down each hour of the day into a two-minute segment, while "Dawn Chorus" featured a supposedly unedited twenty-five-minute segment of the transition from nocturnal frogs to daytime birds. Relishing the quiet, Schafer introduced "Summer Solstice" with another disclaimer:

As you can hear the level of this program is going to be low, for the natural environment is generally quiet. So let me warn you in advance, if you want to listen to this program, put yourself and your radio in a very quiet place. If you're listening in your car, pull off the road, well away from the highway, and stop. Otherwise, try another station. For this program requires a very special frame of mind. You must relax yourself until your whole body becomes an ear to catch the

⁵⁶⁹ Peter Huse, "Soundmarks of Canada," *Soundscape of Canada* program 4, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 24, 1974, WSP database.

tiny variations and rhythmic nuances. [...] So get relaxed then. Become very still. Imagine yourself by a pond in a monastery meadow, and listen to the wisdom of the natural soundscape.⁵⁷⁰

This notion that members of the radio audience needed both to remain quiet and imagine themselves near the pond in order to listen properly revealed a larger fear of Schafer's. That listeners, particularly those tuning into radio sets nationwide, had lost the ability to contemplate the sounds of the natural environment, which had become overrun by mechanical and industrial noises, including the sounds of recorded and broadcasted music. He was not afraid to alienate those who did not want to participate for an hour, nor was he reluctant to confuse anyone who might be tuning into the program after it had already begun, only to find themselves confronted with the sounds of birds and frogs coming over the loudspeakers without explanation as to why. Only by agreeing to participate on Schafer's terms and tuning their ears to "the wisdom of the natural soundscape" could listeners begin to demand stiller, quieter, and healthier forms of acoustic design in the world around them.

For all the emphasis Schafer and the recordists had placed on transparent recording practices, however, both "Summer Solstice" and "Dawn Chorus" retained unexplained inconsistencies that reveal much about the WSP's continued elevation of "natural soundscapes" above mediated ones, to the point where they denied the mediation that had taken place. In the introduction to "Dawn Chorus," Schafer told listeners that "The program runs uninterruptedly for about thirty minutes, so get into a comfortable position, perhaps lie down on the floor, turn out your lights, and listen to one of the most miraculous transformations of the natural soundscape." By the time the crowing roosters marked the end of that transformation from night to day some twenty-three minutes later, Schafer returned to discuss the recording with Bruce Davis. We learn

⁵⁷⁰ World Soundscape Project, "Summer Solstice," Soundscapes of Canada program 5, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 25, 1974, WSP database.

that they recorded the first birds around 3:25 am and the roosters near 5 am.⁵⁷¹ Yet, as they transitioned to the second part of program seven, entitled “Work,” Schafer reiterated that the “Dawn Chorus” was “an example of a natural soundscape, one that really hasn’t been tampered with. We haven’t composed it, we couldn’t compose it.”⁵⁷² The idea that turning an hour and a half’s worth of recordings into a seamless twenty-three-minute selection didn’t constitute tampering collapsed their soundscape recording method into a transparent document of a sonic environment as it was. Even if, of course, the constraints of time on the broadcast medium did not allow Schafer and his researchers to present the unfolding of the dawn chorus in its entirety, it is notable that they still spoke as if the natural soundscape could be wholly apprehended and presented without mediation.

Other programs as part of the *Soundscapes of Canada* series did play with the medium of tape recorded sound as an artifact. At times, the programs presented a typology of sounds recorded during the cross-Canada tour, with a typically conservative conception of the nation in mind. For instance, the program that followed “Dawn Chorus,” Bruce Davis’ “Work,” presented many industrial and mechanical sounds like East Coast sawmills and steel foundries to oil rigs in Alberta. Typically, the sounds of the machines predominated over the sounds of workers in those industries, often to make a point about the replacement of hi-fi soundscapes like the distinct hammering of wooden shipbuilding to lo-fi industrial ones of blasting foundries.⁵⁷³ Davis’ “Games,” meanwhile, mixed together the sounds of various games and sports nationwide, from the sticks dragging on pavement and bilingual yelling during street hockey games to the slashing blades on ice, pucks hitting glass, crowds roaring at a goal by Paul Henderson, and the organist

⁵⁷¹ World Soundscape Project, “Dawn Chorus,” *Soundscapes of Canada* program 7.1, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 29, 1974, WSP database.

⁵⁷² Bruce Davis, “Work,” *Soundscapes of Canada* program 7.2, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 29, 1974, WSP database.

⁵⁷³ Bruce Davis, “Work,” *Soundscapes of Canada* program 7.2, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 29, 1974, WSP database.

egging them on at a Toronto Maple Leafs game; a game that could surely be seen and heard nationwide during the weekly ritual broadcast of Hockey Night in Canada on the CBC, but whose sounds could be better heard within Maple Leaf Gardens by the WSP's tape recorders than over radio or television.⁵⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Davis compared the sounds of gliding stones and brushing brooms in reverberant curling halls to the chatter on the infield during outdoor baseball games; the incessant ringing of slot and pinball machines to the posturing of men playing pool and to the quiet repartee and cards snapped on a table during a friendly game of cribbage between old men. To a large extent, these two programs highlighted the sounds of white male work and sociability, but even then, without much of a sense of what people involved in this work and play might have thought about their experiences.

Near the end of the series, however, some of the composers involved with the WSP prepared programs that took more creative license with the raw material, which also opened up the meanings that listeners might attach to them. Rather than the didactic and overtly pedagogical move of teaching the audience how to listen to the soundscapes of Canada, Barry Truax's "Soundscape Study" offered an abstracted program that invited listeners to construct their own meanings out of the material. While still operating in a "highbrow" cultural mode, they at least raised the possibility that different listeners might encounter the soundscapes of Canada differently. In "Soundscape Study," for example, Truax took eight unnamed sounds recorded throughout Davis and Huse's trip and manipulated them by speeding them up, slowing them down, making them louder and quieter, and adding electronic filters. In short, using all the tools

⁵⁷⁴ Bruce Davis, "Games," *Soundscapes of Canada* program 2.2, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 22, 1974, WSP database. It was no accident that Davis chose a goal by Paul Henderson to exemplify the importance of hockey to Canadians. In 1972, Henderson had scored the winning goal for Canada in the eighth and final game of the "Summit Series" against the Soviet Union's hockey team, which remains one of the most watched broadcasts in Canadian television history. It is also one of the few moments, outside of "A Radio Programme About Radio," that *Soundscapes of Canada* featured sounds related to the country's cultural industries.

at his disposal in the Sound Research Studio at SFU to compose a *musique concrète* piece out of a few specific sounds.⁵⁷⁵ Schafer preferred it to the music of Pierre Schaeffer in that he felt Truax's concrete music served "to probe some of the deeper mysteries of the perception and cognition of sound." "I would hope that this composition," Truax agreed, "would be of the sort that listeners would find themselves much more aware of their perceptions in the act of listening to it." The provenance of the sounds themselves thus mattered less to Truax than "the reality of the perception" to listeners. Attentive listeners to the entire series might have picked on the hand spun wool carding device and grandfather clock from a Nova Scotia farm, footsteps, zither music, water, children playing, and ubiquitous church bells that appeared on other programs. Their rhythms and sonic qualities, however, took precedence over their provenance. In so doing, Truax opened the possibility that there was more to the soundscape than its seemingly transparent presentation over the radio for normative pedagogical purposes.

*** Conclusion: Turn the Radio On ***

Moving from Schafer's pedagogical musings, Huse and Davis' typological renderings, and Truax's abstractions of the Canadian soundscape, perhaps the most experimental program of the series came on the second last broadcast day. Howard Broomfield's "A Radio Programme About Radio" was unlike anything else the WSP aired, and little of its hour-long material came from the cross-Canada research trip. Most of it had been obtained on the radio. By temperament, aesthetic choices, and politics, Broomfield was more attuned to the radical wing of the environmental movement than the rest of his compatriots in the WSP. Broomfield's program was

⁵⁷⁵ Truax has since continued in this vein, producing many soundscape recordings based on the manipulation of the original sounds, rather than their explicitly transparent representation. Barry Truax, "Soundscape Study," *Soundscape of Canada* program 9.1, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 29, 1974, WSP database.

an exercise in creative editing, humorous outtakes, interviews on the street, popular (and unpopular) music, and a more generous and wide-ranging understanding of the medium in which he operated than anything else the WSP had presented to this point. To some extent, it also poked fun at the pretensions of the WSP's programming on the CBC. Immediately after the introduction from *Ideas* host Doug Campbell, we hear Schafer's voice stammering along with extraneous studio sounds: "Actually, listening to your program I did, um, found," before restarting, "Actually, listening to your program I did find it rather inconsistent in, in places. It's, it's, a very strange program, isn't it." Unlike the quiet studio surroundings, tight editing, and assured tones of Schafer's self-presentation in previous programs, Broomfield's choice to insert these outtakes revealed a heretofore unheard Schafer, one less in control of his surroundings. "We had a lot of discussion before we decided to accept it for broadcast," Schafer continued, "as to whether it was suitable for broadcast, whether it came up to the CBC's high standards. Let me cut that, because that's too, it's too much." From the start, Broomfield defended himself from the charges that such a program was too "far out" by claiming that it sounded to him like a lot of what he heard elsewhere on the radio. Indeed, if Schafer and the WSP truly believed that the tight editing, overlapping sounds, and rapid fire approach of commercial radio resembled surrealist art, what better way to pull back the curtain than to recreate such effects in an experimental radio piece for listeners who might have tuned into the CBC after handing out candy to trick-or-treaters late on Halloween night?⁵⁷⁶

After the brief exchange with Schafer that opened the piece, Broomfield interspersed John Hartford's 1971 recording of the 1937 bluegrass song "Turn the Radio On" with street interviews of Vancouverites speaking to him about their experiences of radio and listing their

⁵⁷⁶ Howard Broomfield, "A Radio Programme About Radio," *Soundscapes of Canada* program 9, *Ideas* CBC-FM, October 31, 1974.

favorite stations. Rather than a sonic obstacle to lament, the traffic rolling past was the setting for meeting people where they were, and the brief clips of Vancouver stations that followed gave the CBC listeners a small taste of the broadcast soundscape in Broomfield's city. The choice of song was also a wry statement. Later in the program, Broomfield later told Schafer he chose it because it was written soon after the radio was invented and that's what people had thought about it then. But its lyrics told listeners to "turn the lights down low," just as the WSP had repeatedly done, "and listen to the Master's radio / Get in touch with God, turn your radio on."⁵⁷⁷ Immediately after it ended, Broomfield inserted the sound of a man's voice: "because I enjoy many of the programs that I hear" and after a long pause created by a tape splice, "especially on CBC *Ideas* program at ten o'clock."⁵⁷⁸ Perhaps this was a recognition of the CBC as the Master's radio; the God of Canadian culture that tried to bring the national community together in a way that religion seemed unable to do anymore. Perhaps it was simply a knowing nod to *Ideas* listeners, that they were indeed tuned into someone else's favorite program.

The next extended segment was another surrealistic montage of music, soap operas, and talk radio, which included the sounds of radio tuning and static over the course of about fifteen minutes. It put up the easy listening orchestrations of German band leader James Last against the French yé-yé of Claude François;⁵⁷⁹ the electronic themes from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop against poetry readings and soap operas over the air; famed CBC broadcaster Peter Gzowski against an Italian-speaking radio host on the multilingual Vancouver AM radio station CJVB; a woman on shortwave radio show called "Youth and Struggle" saying, "I hate the capitalist system" before the station reported on the anniversary of the assassination of Black Panther

⁵⁷⁷ John Hartford, "Turn the Radio On," *Aereo-Plain*, Warner Bros. Records, WS 1916, LP, 1971, as heard on Broomfield, "A Radio Programme About Radio."

⁵⁷⁸ Broomfield, "A Radio Programme About Radio."

⁵⁷⁹ These two performances determined with use of the Shazam app for iPhone.

George Jackson in 1971. Whatever else the WSP might have thought about the radio, Broomfield seemed to hear a surprising multiplicity of sounds coming out of it. Or the variety of songs written about it. Along with Hartford's performance of "Turn the Radio On," the program excerpted outsider artist and street musician George "Bongo Joe" Coleman's "Transistor Radio."⁵⁸⁰ Radio, he asserted through his editing, was rather more than a limited array of homogenous programming.

The penultimate section, which followed another reprise of "Turn the Radio On" and street interviews, continued with a provocative historical meditation on the medium, this time sounding more like Tony Schwartz's anti-fascist recordings of the late 1940s than his street recordings the following decade. A recording of the chimes that served as station identification throughout the NBC radio network lead immediately to Adolf Hitler's voice, British authorities telling citizens not to gather "for purposes of entertainment" during WWII, air raid sirens, and an episode of the blackface radio comedy, Amos 'n' Andy, all intermingled with one another. The two bumbling characters speaking to one another about how best to speak in a minstrel show dialect are met with chants of "Sieg Heil!" from the appreciative Nazi crowd. Drawing on the popular view that the Nazis claimed power in Germany on the basis of the loudspeaker, then, Broomfield equated the United States' history of racism in popular culture with latent fascist tendencies in the commercial media that traveled across the border. Afterwards, he played a montage of radio advertisements, then audio from a primer on them which advised that "the frequency of commercials brings with it the danger of sameness." More and more sounds came into the montage, like broadcasts from Radio Moscow's shortwave service, competing station identifications from CBS Radio, all while Doug Campbell's voice struggled to get through to

⁵⁸⁰ George Coleman, "Transistor Radio," *Bongo Joe*, Arhoolie Records 1040, LP, 1969, heard on Broomfield, "A Radio Programme About Radio," *Soundscapes of Canada*. Also identified using the Shazam app for iPhone.

announce that the program coming up next was the ninth in a series of *Soundscapes of Canada*.⁵⁸¹

Indeed, a proper introduction came to the program only after fifty-two minutes of the extended piece, when Schafer told listeners that “Howard’s here to explain it to you before you listen to it.” “What I’ve tried to do in the program,” Broomfield stated, “is to take the stuff of radio, the stuff that radio’s been throughout its lifetime, since about 1920 for commercial radio [...] and compress it into an hour.” Schafer went on to say he felt Broomfield’s programs quite surrealistic, and that “I’ve always thought you are the sort of composer that collects a lot of material out of the trash can.” Given Schafer’s repeated statements about waste and sonic sewage, it wasn’t entirely clear whether he meant this as a compliment, though it’s uncertain he would have agreed to air the program had he not found it interesting. Doug Campbell returned, then introduced Schafer to begin the program. Instead, it was the radio logo the WSP had proposed for the CBC; the haunting call of loons in the Canadian wilderness drawing the program to a close and returning us to the natural soundscape after a diversion into the schizophrenic world of radio.

It was a complex and recursive piece that began with outtakes, launched into mysterious juxtapositions and unidentified montages, and finished with the explanatory remarks which did little to tell listeners the substance of the materials they had been listening to. “A Radio Programme About Radio” treated radio not simply as an inherent source of noise pollution or alienated schizophrenic experiences, nor as a medium whose meaning could be apprehended by an objective and comprehensive research program, as in Davis and Huse’s radio scans, but as a dialogic medium that listeners could and did respond to in their own ways, provided you listened

⁵⁸¹ Broomfield, “A Radio Programme About Radio.”

to it with open ears. Although Broomfield had the benefit of the WSP and the CBC's resources, he had been producing radio shows for different stations in Vancouver, and it was also the kind of program that other CBC listeners might have imagined constructing on their own. With tape recorders, some blank tape, and a splicing block, they could gather and edit together material from the radio or their record collections.

But such was not the typically endorsed method of the WSP, wedded as it was to practices of listening to the natural soundscape. After another extensive research trip to Europe in 1975, Schafer left SFU and the WSP to take up residence on a farm in rural Ontario. He continued to guest teach the occasional course elsewhere and deliver lectures on the soundscape, especially after the publication of his widely influential *The Tuning of the World* (1977), but for the most part, he committed himself to the life of a composer at one with nature. Pieces like *Music for Wilderness Lake* and certain productions from his *Patria* cycle staged performances on lakes or in the woods as a means to reconnect to the sonic environment outside of the concert hall.

The WSP continued on, however, under the leadership of Barry Truax and Hildegard Westerkamp. Though still interested in theories of communication at large and the pedagogical aspects of soundscape work, their largest interests were in soundscape composition that took increasing liberties with the raw materials recorded throughout the WSP's earlier period.⁵⁸² Westerkamp in particular took an interest in "soundwalking" as an activity, both recording her own travels throughout the city and rural areas, and leading tours of Vancouver areas for anyone who wanted to join. She also continued to use and reimagine radio as a medium, as she produced a series of programs on Vancouver Co-Operative Radio, a non-commercial station she co-

⁵⁸² Compositions include Westerkamp's "Cricket Voice" (1987) and "Beneath the Forest Floor," (1992), available on Hildegard Westerkamp, *Transformations*, Empreintes DIGITales, IMED 9631, CD, 1996.

founded in 1974.⁵⁸³ “Radio that listens,” she hoped. She would speak directly into the microphone when she recorded her sojourns into the city, responding to its sounds as she moved from one location to another.

Bruce Davis also wanted radio that listened in. In 1975, he proposed a service in which dual cardioid microphones, placed in a quiet British Columbia National or Provincial Park, could be linked to a transmitter. “The same technology that has given us run-at-the-mouth disk jockeys and spot commercials,” he argued, “can also give us the call of the loon, the voice of the wind, or the cold winter crackling of the northern lights.”⁵⁸⁴ In this world to which the WSP dreamed, anyone who wanted to hear the gentle wisdom of the natural soundscape merely had to tune their radio to the appropriate station. Schizophonic or not, it might provide a refuge from an increasingly noisy soundscape.

⁵⁸³ Hildegard Westerkamp, “The Soundscape on Radio,” 87-94 in *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound and Transmission*, eds. Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander (Banff, AB: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990).

⁵⁸⁴ Bruce Davis, “FM Radio as Observational Access to Wilderness Environments,” *Alternatives* (1975): 26.



Figure 4.1 – Bruce Davis recording the solstice (1974)

WSP researchers took turns recording the soundscape at this pond over the course of twenty-four hours on the grounds of Westminster Abbey in Mission, BC on June 21st, 1974. This summer solstice recording, produced on a Nagra IV-S portable tape recorder, formed the basis of one and a half programs on the *Soundscapes of Canada* series that aired on CBC-FM's *Ideas* later that year.

Reproduced with permission of the World Soundscape Project, Simon Fraser University.

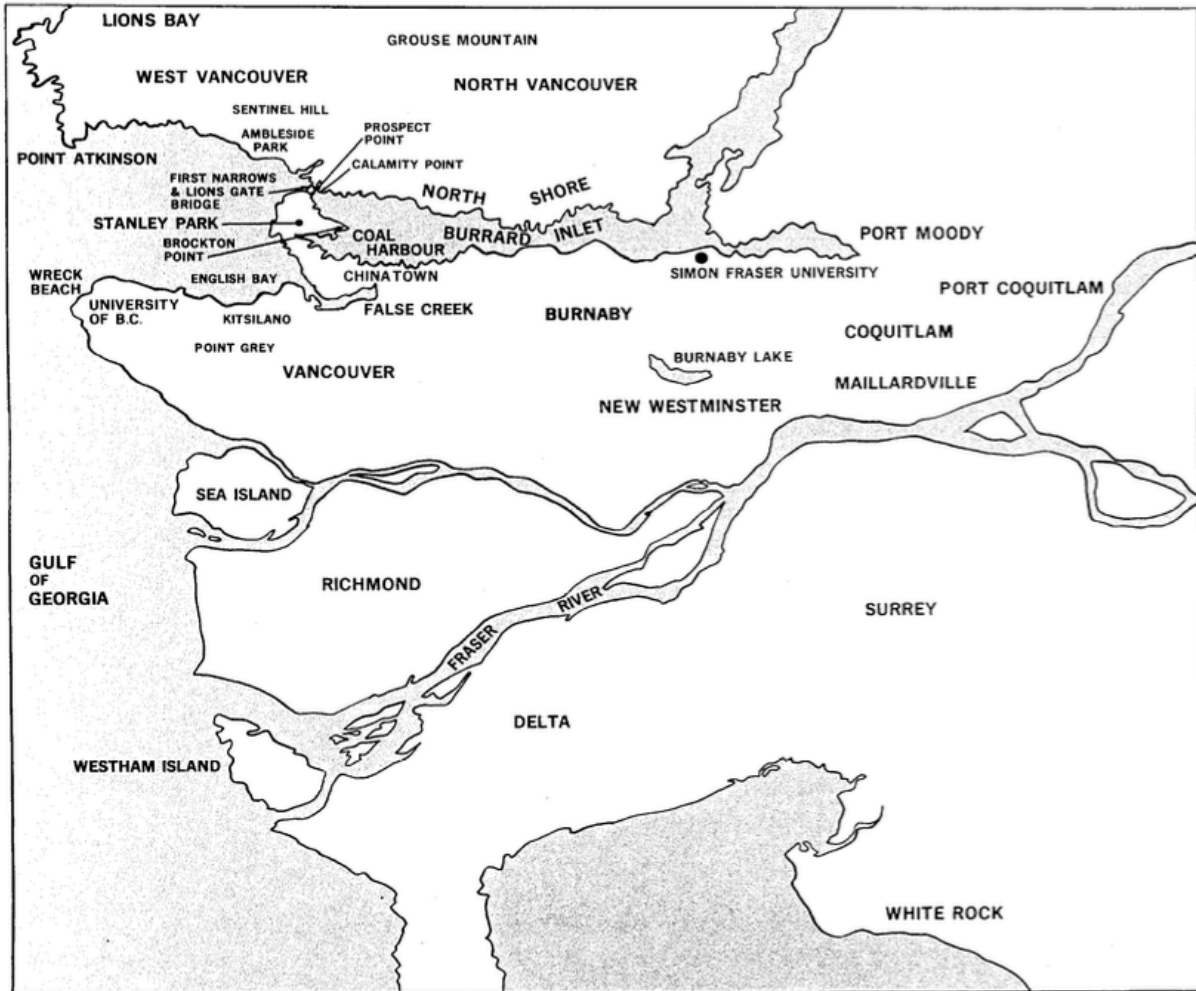


Figure 4.2 – Map of the Vancouver metropolitan area (1973)

This map appeared as part of the World Soundscape Project’s book, *The Vancouver Soundscape* (1973), a major publication that appeared alongside the LP of the same name. For scale, the distance between Simon Fraser University in Burnaby and Wreck Beach at the University of British Columbia on the west side of Vancouver is about 15 miles. One of the reasons that SFU was located in Burnaby was to attract students from fast growing suburbs like Burnaby, Surrey, and New Westminster, who would be able to drive to campus within half an hour. Vancouver’s downtown is located on the peninsula between Stanley Park and Chinatown on this map.

World Soundscape Project, *The Vancouver Soundscape* (Vancouver: WSP, 1973), 24.

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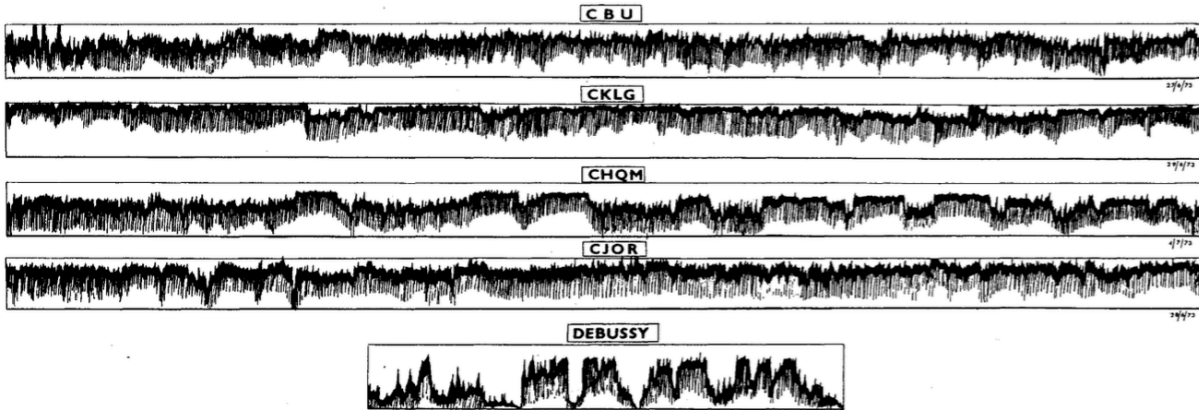


Figure 4.3 – Visualizing AM radio in Vancouver (1974)

Reproduced in *The Vancouver Soundscape*, these soundwave images depicted the decibel level of four Vancouver AM radio stations – the CBC affiliate CBU, a top-40 station, CKLG, an adult contemporary rock station, CHQM, and a talk radio station, CJOR – over the course of an hour. The WSP felt that the images adequately depicted the lack of sonic dynamics within these radio stations, as well as a general avoidance of silence, especially compared to the “rich dynamic shading” of Debussy’s *Nocturnes* as analyzed from another radio broadcast.

World Soundscape Project, *The Vancouver Soundscape*, 46.

Reproduced with permission of the World Soundscape Project, Simon Fraser University.



Figure 4.4 – World Soundscape Project team at SFU (1973)

From left to right, R. Murray Schafer, Bruce Davis, Peter Huse, Barry Truax, Howard Broomfield. Reproduced in almost all WSP publications from then, including the *Vancouver Soundscape* LP's gatefold sleeve, this image of a team of researchers carrying their tape recorders while Schafer held his notebook showed something of the confidence with which the WSP carried out its task of heading out from the concrete buildings of their new university campus to record the world outside.

Reproduced with permission of the World Soundscape Project, Simon Fraser University.



Figure 4.5 – Bruce Davis and Peter Huse at work with their field recording equipment

Equipment included a Brüel & Kjaer sound level meter and octave filter, Nagra IV-S stereo tape recorder, dual cardioid microphones, and Superex Pro headphones. Note the distance between both microphones, which matched the average distance between Huse and Davis's ears. Even with the high quality equipment, they wanted their recordings to model human listening practices.

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Figure 4.6 – Bruce Davis recording the sound of electronic foghorns (1973)

The intrepid recordist, here bringing the WSP's interest in foghorns as important soundmarks to the opposite end of the continent. Photo by Peter Huse from the Long Point Lighthouse in Twillingate, Newfoundland, 6 October, 1973.

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Chapter Five

Plagiarism® and the Network of Art in the Age of Magnetic Reproduction

Soon after Tuesday became Wednesday on the last day of August 1988, Iowa City residents tuning into 89.1 FM would have heard a series of mysterious sounds emanating from the campus radio station at the University of Iowa, KRUI. After the brief sound collage that served to introduce *RadioStatic*, a new segment on the *Curious Music* program, came a slowed down voice, unknown and unnamed: “Not that Beethoven is through, not at all... it’s just that there’s a new electricity and excitement in our young composers. Any sound, any music, and anything goes.” As if to prove the point, a nearly six-minute collage follows. Brass instruments sputtering over one another give way to a variety of electronic sounds, then the voice returns: “We all follow where the artists lead us. They are our Galileos, our Lewises, our Edisons.” Lapping waves, as if trailing the ships of explorers, submerge the voice, followed by snippets of sound ranging from bits of the Beatles catalogue and 1950s lounge jazz to Hindi songs and wordless utterances, and again, the voice: “The facilities are now enormous. This is where the young composer feeds a fragment of it into several tape recorders and gradually...” before being abruptly overtaken by another dense collage.⁵⁸⁵ Even without the de facto narration, the message was clear: magnetic tape editing allowed listeners to manipulate sounds, familiar and not, in

⁵⁸⁵ John Oswald, selection from *Mystery Tapes Sampler*, Mystery Tape Laboratories, no date. Played on Lloyd Dunn, “RadioStatic 1,” *Curious Music*, Iowa City, IA: KRUI, 30 August 1988, recorded onto audiocassette, audiocassette box 18, Lloyd Dunn Collection, MsC 520, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, hereafter LD Collection.

order to create pieces of art that could chart the path towards a new understanding of and interaction with popular culture.

After this opening piece came a shorter one with a similar message. Its sounds would have been easier to recognize for the campus radio audience, provided they were familiar with the most popular band of the 1960s. A disjointed cut up consisting of two Beatles songs, “I Wanna Hold Your Hand” and “A Hard Day’s Night,” it repeated the famous final chord from the latter as if it were a series of tolling bells undergirding a disjointed verse from the former. Following both pieces, around the seven-minute mark, the radio show’s host gave provenance to both pieces before offering a mission statement for his new program:

“A Hard Hand To Hold,” by the Tape-beatles. And before that, “Sampler,” by John Oswald of the Mystery Tape Laboratory, of Toronto, Ontario. The Mystery Tapes sampler can be thought of as a kind of manifesto of *RadioStatic*. Hello, I’m L.L. Dunn, and you’re listening to *RadioStatic*, an audio interlude which broadcasts networked audio. Audio which is produced right under our very noses, in virtually every major city. Audio which is normally only narrowly distributed. Audio which is made possible by the relative ubiquity of home tape recording, a gift of technological culture to those who will use it. Home taping gives everyone a voice, everyone becomes their own record label and distributor. Let’s hear some more.⁵⁸⁶

For almost three years, Dunn and his collaborators in the Tape-beatles, an Iowa City based multimedia collective, would deliver on that promise for more, providing listeners with a regular series of programs highlighting self-produced music from around the world sent to their college town via the United States Postal Service.

This broadcast and the ones that followed raised several key questions about the place of use and reuse of media products during the 1980s and early 1990s. Using a mystery tape from John Oswald to introduce the program helped to highlight new approaches to the use of recorded

⁵⁸⁶ Lloyd Dunn, “RadioStatic 1,” *Curious Music*, Iowa City, IA: KRUI, 30 August 1988, recorded onto audiocassette, audiocassette box 18, LD Collection.

sound among those concerned with the mediated soundscape of cultural consumers. A former member of the Sonic Research Studio at Simon Fraser University, Oswald used recorded music not as a transparent reflection of the noise pollution, but as a means to engage critically with popular culture. The process by which Oswald's cassette got to Iowa City and incorporated into a college radio show raised questions about how "networked audio" might sound different from some other kind. What virtues might come from "narrowly distributed" sounds? If "home taping gives everyone a voice," what kind of voice might that sound like? And if the "relative ubiquity of home tape recording" allowed anyone to not only produce their own sounds, but to reproduce and retransmit sounds originally created by others, what rights and responsibilities did tapers have with regards to the unsolicited and unauthorized use of other people's copyrighted sounds?

RadioStatic was only one in a long line of Dunn's cultural endeavors that engaged deeply with the politics of reproducible media. "Easy replication" through devices like photocopiers and tape machines, argued Dunn from personal experience, "lets people be not only consumers, but also creators and even publishers of their own original culture."⁵⁸⁷ Beginning in 1983, over the course of a decade, he and the other eventual Tape-beatles collectively published *PhotoStatic*, a bimonthly zine of photocopy art whose total output was almost 2,000 pages; released a series of related audio cassette compilations under the name *PhonoStatic*; produced three full length audio

⁵⁸⁷ Lloyd Dunn, "Is Plagiarism® Necessary?," *PhotoStatic* 31 (July 1988), 1070, PSRF. A brief note about the *PhotoStatic* material is in order. While all the original issues of *PhotoStatic* could be found in Lloyd Dunn's collection at the University of Iowa, he also began the process of digitizing them, along with *PhonoStatic*, *Retrofuturist*, *YAWN*, and other publications, in the early 2000s. The text in the originals was retyped in the digitized PDF versions to facilitate word searchability. As a result, the pagination in the original changed somewhat in the final digitized version. Notably, the pagination continued from one issue to the next, which is why references that follow have pages in the hundreds and thousands. Because the substance of these publications remained the same through the digitization process, which was completed in 2006, all references here are to the digital collection. Rather than denote URLs to individual issues with every citation, I will include "PSRF" at the end of the citations to alert readers to the fact that the materials are accessible online in the "*PhotoStatic* Retrograde archive," which covers materials from 1983-1998. The directory with links to all issues is at <http://psrf.detritus.net/issues.html>. Accessed April 28, 2015.

collages released on tape and compact disc (*A Subtle Buoyancy of Pulse* [1989], *Music With Sound* [1991], and *The Grand Delusion* [1993]); and aired a weekly radio show, *RadioStatic*, that focused on independent music from the emergent underground cassette network from 1988-1993. They also participated in multiple “Festivals of Plagiarism” in 1988 and 1989, performed their works live in a variety of venues across North America and Europe, partially engaged in an “Art Strike” from 1990-1993, wrote widely about their experiences, and participated in a broad conversation about the potentials for plagiarism as a politically engaged cultural practice.

Many works in recent years have investigated the relationship between aesthetic practices and changing copyright laws, but this chapter begins from the distribution network before working down to the level of aesthetic critique.⁵⁸⁸ The practice of Plagiarism®, as they began to call it, did not merely consist of the unauthorized and unattributed use of other people’s intellectual properties, or passing off another’s work as one’s own.⁵⁸⁹ It was a holistic approach to cultural production that attempted to deny the privileged status of artist as elitist, the notion of original art as a fallacy, and the property status of artwork as untenable at best, ideologically bankrupt at worst. Since they and their allies often used copyrighted sounds without permission, they came to criticize the nature of copyright law not only for putting them at legal risk for their plagiarist cultural practices—as had happened to similar artists like Negativland and John Oswald—but also for the larger social and economic implications of copyright law to the

⁵⁸⁸ Jane Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, The Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Siva Vaidyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How it Threatens Creativity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Joanna Demers, *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Affects Musical Creativity* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Adrian Johns, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars From Gutenberg to Gates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Lewis Hyde, *Common as Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010); Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli, eds. *Cutting Across Media: Appropriation Art, Interventionist Collage, and Copyright Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁵⁸⁹ For simplicity, this chapter will use the term “plagiarism” without the registered trademark sign to refer to this practice of “Plagiarism®”

commodification of sound and to the creation of artistic hierarchies. Fusing earlier collage techniques from Dada, Fluxus, *musique concrète*, and Oswald's plunderphonics with the ideas of Situationist philosophers and the practices of postal art networkers, plagiarists like the Tape-beatles sought a theoretical justification for a cultural practice that emphasized the creative use and reuse of pre-existing sounds as a strategy for subversive *détournement*. Gone was the defense of art for art's sake, since many of their influences had railed against the privileged separation of art from daily life. If the "society of the spectacle," in the language of the Situationists, insisted on turning life itself into an array of commodities meant to be passively consumed, cultural practices like plagiarism were needed in order to force spectators to see and hear the spectacle for what it was.

Though likely heard just once by the small number of listeners who might have tuned into the 100-watt FM station after midnight, the first episode of *RadioStatic* both set the stage for the programs to follow and revealed the depth of Dunn's connections to a community of sound artists who considered themselves part of an autonomous cassette mailing network. As with the other 106 broadcasts of *RadioStatic*, Dunn saved this first ephemeral episode for posterity. The 90-minute cassette holding episodes one, two, and three of *RadioStatic* is only one of some six hundred cassettes that form the bulk of Lloyd Dunn's multimedia archive, currently held by the Special Collections Library at the University of Iowa. In addition to these tapes, mostly sent in by other audio networkers, the collection also holds a wide variety of print materials mailed to Dunn, including home-made zines and publications featuring articles on the Tape-beatles and other associated groups.⁵⁹⁰ To date, very little extant scholarship has examined the development

⁵⁹⁰ For more on the history and politics of zines, most readily defined as cheap self-produced magazines often devoted to subcultures like punk rock music or queer politics, see Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (New York: Verso, 1997).

of this network and its antecedents in postal art, particularly as it congealed around practices of plagiarism by the latter part of the 1980s.⁵⁹¹ His archive thus offers key insights into the accretion of connections that allowed one particular node in the cassette network to flourish at this moment, in a location far removed from the centers of the culture industry and the art world establishment.

Examining the debates over creative practices of plagiarism in the 1980s and early 1990s through Dunn's archive, this chapter explores the philosophies, practices, and productions that coalesced around one important node on the cassette network. While the Tape-beatles cannot represent the entirety of the cassette culture, the process by which they came to their conclusions makes their experience a fitting final case study in this history of active listening through magnetic recording technologies. Despite the importance of popular culture as source material, theirs was an insular subculture in which the same names, texts, and ideas circulated on tapes and pages sent through the mail. At the risk of replicating this insularity and missing key currents in popular culture, like sampling in hip hop music and post-modernist appropriation art, this chapter is a kind of intellectual history of plagiarism on its own terms, as it was understood by a small but prolific group of self-publishers based throughout North America and Europe. The Tape-beatles' experience in international mail art and cassette trading networks had seemed to open the possibility for an alternate production and distribution system for cultural artifacts outside the

⁵⁹¹ Aside from John Held, Jr., *Mail Art: An Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1991), which mostly served as a documentary source for mail art activities; and Chuck Welch, ed., *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), an anthology of mail art works; and John Held, Jr., *Small Scale Subversion: Mail Art and Artistamps* (Breda, Netherlands: TAM Publishing, 2015); only a few academic works have investigated the aesthetic and social formations that came out of mail art networking. See Craig J. Saper, *Networked Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and selected essays from Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark, eds., *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). These works, however, deal largely with visual art, and not the cassette underground. A useful anthology here is Robin James, ed., *Cassette Mythos* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992). On the Tape-beatles and copyright critiques specifically, see Lloyd Dunn, "PhotoStatic Magazine and the Rise of the Casual Publisher" 57-75, and "Plagiarism 101: An Appropriated Oral History of the Tape-beatles," 76-83, in *Cutting Across Media*.

capitalist marketplace and outside much of the mainstream art establishment. And yet, far from circumventing the marketplace entirely, networkers like the Tape-beatles often employed the language, mechanisms, and raw visual and sonic materials of corporate bureaucracy and late twentieth century capitalism in order to critique the commodity form. Exploring a variety of technologies for reproduction, they not only used networking as a means to sidestep market sites for cultural production and distribution, but as a way to develop aesthetic practices that questioned the property status of cultural artifacts. If that property status could be transformed through an active engagement with easy-to-access photocopiers, reel-to-reel machines, and cassette decks, perhaps the media soundscape could be opened to sounds not meant for selling, and listening practices not meant as inducements to buying.

*** Network Antecedents ***

Tape musicians and hobbyists had long communed with one another through mail exchange, as with the tapespondence clubs that sprang up with the tape industry's backing in the late 1940s. To participants in the self-identified cassette underground of the 1980s however, the linking of independent musicians and sound artists into an autonomous network of like-minded cultural producers felt like something other than a fledgling industry's attempt to build a viable marketplace for a new and unknown technology. Instead, they saw their active creation of a network as a tool to free participants from the demands of popularity, propriety, and the profit motive. They found each other by jotting down addresses while reading reviews in photocopied fanzines, subscribing to mailing lists, or listening to non-commercial college radio stations that featured programs devoted to self-produced and self-published music. Though they sometimes

spoke of the “cassette culture” or the “cassette underground,” most commonly, they often referred to the community in which they took part simply as “the network.”

The cassette network emerged from a variety of experimental art traditions, most notably Fluxus, mail art, visual poetry, fanzines, xerographic art, and punk rock. Different as they were in genre and medium, they were nevertheless linked by a common emphasis on low production costs, decentralized circulation, a desire to break barriers between art and everyday life, and a shared perception that artistic gatekeeping, whether through art galleries, glossy magazines, or record labels (even among smaller independents), put fetters on creativity and artistic autonomy. Often using cheap reproduction methods, placing editorial and publishing decisions in the hands of artists themselves, and distributing works through the mail, artists working in several genres and media could communicate with one another directly and ideally sidestep any such outside editorializing. Though many prized self-reliance and independence, artists interested in these ideas still prized collaboration and needed ways of finding one another. Hence the network as cultural strategy.⁵⁹²

Consider the case of Fluxus-associated mail artists—that is, those who produced “works of art and information submitted through the postal system”—who had been at the forefront of networking practices since the early 1960s.⁵⁹³ The Fluxus movement of the 1960s was not entirely synonymous with mail art, but it had substantial overlap with it. Among other goals, Fluxus attempted to radically democratize art-making practices along a variety of lines. Drawing from Dada’s anti-art stance and the Cagean conceptual imperative, Fluxus events or “happenings” often tried to collapse the distance between performers and audience members. Conceptual pieces with ideas that typically took precedence over execution often relied upon

⁵⁹² See, for example, Saper, *Networked Art*.

⁵⁹³ Held, Jr., *Mail Art*, xvi-xvii.

audience participation in order to become realized. For instance, in 1963, Fluxus-associated multimedia artist Nam June Paik produced a piece called “Random Access,” in which he arranged fragments of recorded ¼” magnetic tape in a seemingly random pattern on the wall, not unlike an abstract expressionist painting. Mounted on the wall nearby was a set of amplified speakers and a detached tape playback head, which audience members could run over the pieces of tape on the wall, and thus compose their own music out of materials assembled by Paik.⁵⁹⁴ Such pieces challenged the idea that formal expertise should be a prerequisite for entry into the art world, and in so doing promoted the idea that audience members should consider themselves on the same level with artists.

Many Fluxus artists were also frustrated by the commodification of art in the gallery system. Throughout Western Europe and North America in particular, artists sought “an alternative standing in opposition to art as a commercial enterprise” by creating a distribution structure that linked artists to one another directly through mailing lists.⁵⁹⁵ Ray Johnson, a student at Black Mountain College in the late 1940s and a participant in Fluxus “happenings” during the 1960s, had already grown disenchanted with art galleries for their power to determine what warranted inclusion in art displays during the 1950s. By the end of that decade, he started sending small-scale artworks through the mail to friends, art world acquaintances, and artists he didn’t know. As Fluxus figure and mail artist Ken Friedman explains, “the works one might receive in the early days were highly personal, often highly crafted. Handmade collages, carefully printed photographs, even framed paintings were fairly common.”⁵⁹⁶ Johnson often

⁵⁹⁴ For a description of the piece, see Andrew V. Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 120-123.

⁵⁹⁵ Held, *Mail Art*, xxii.

⁵⁹⁶ Ken Friedman, “The Early Days of Mail Art,” in Chuck Welch, ed., *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 4-5.

included instructions for recipients to add something to his pieces before mailing them on to someone else. Through this process, more and more artists began sending pieces to one another through the mail, though they tended to belong to the same artistic circles. The New York Correspondence School of Art, as this informal network was called by 1962, provided a name, if not necessarily an organized infrastructure, for Johnson's idiosyncratic practice, which spread beyond his mailing list.⁵⁹⁷

Many came to appreciate the formal constraints of working within size and weight limits imposed by the postal system. Postcards, rubber cancelling stamps, pieces in the shape, size, and style of postage stamps, all were common features of mail art. Artists also used and reused the envelope or parcel exterior as a canvas, thus making the artwork visible from the outside and allowing the packaging to become a palimpsest that tracked the movement of a piece from one place to another. It also attempted to reduce the distance between art and the mundane qualities of everyday life. As Hervé Fischer put it in an early essay on mail art, "the stamp, the postmark with the day and place of issue, and the delivery made by the postman constitute a kind of integration of art into social life, as well as a playful activity."⁵⁹⁸ Media theorist Craig Saper has described such strategies as the creation of "intimate bureaucracies" by artists who appropriated the tools, imagery, and naming conventions of corporate capitalism in order to work through, rather than around, "quintessential forms of our often bureaucratized lives."⁵⁹⁹ Ruggero Maggi, for instance, submitted a piece to the *PhotoStatic* zine crafted with a rubber stamp that read: "MAIL ART USES INSTITUTIONS IN THE PLACES OF INSTITUTIONS AGAINST

⁵⁹⁷ See also John Held, Jr., "The Mail Art Exhibition: From Personal Worlds to Cultural Strategies," in *At a Distance*, 89-91.

⁵⁹⁸ Hervé Fischer, "Mass-Media and Marginal Communications," in *Art et communication marginale: Tampons d'artistes* (Paris: Balland, 1974), 25.

⁵⁹⁹ Saper, *Networked Art*, 16.

INSTITUTIONS.”⁶⁰⁰ Invoking and subverting the trappings of bureaucracies by creating their own postage and rubber stamps or adopting corporate sounding names, mail artists like Maggi or the A.1. Waste Paper Co. Ltd. in London hoped to transform archetypal mechanisms of bureaucratic alienation into statements of personal autonomy and craft.

To most participants, however, the formal qualities of mail art mattered less than the process of networking itself. French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou began to speak in the 1960s of an “Eternal Network” of artists working through the international postal system in a more open ended way than Johnson’s “School.” Rather than channeling activities through Johnson, this Eternal Network would distribute artistic agency, expertise, and responsibility to anyone who wanted to join and had something to contribute.⁶⁰¹ This diffusion, wrote Fischer in 1974, was not to be lamented as “a disintegration of society, but rather a process of diversification and reaction, which are inevitable and desirable in a dominant phenomenon of massification.”⁶⁰² If the creation of the mass media over the course of the twentieth century had tended to create a specialized class of culture workers in the media that would then disseminate dominant ideas to a wide audience, networking could put some power in the hands of more people who had heretofore felt alienated in their role as mere recipients of messages from on high. The decentralizing tendencies of the network thus went hand in hand with the goal to eliminate the space between producers and recipients. One needed to produce art and participate in the process of creating the network in order to receive artworks, since they could not be easily consumed in gallery spaces, catalogs, or purchased in stores.

⁶⁰⁰ *PhotoStatic* 25/26 (August 1987), 799, emphasis in original.

⁶⁰¹ Saper, *Networked Art*, 14; Held, “The Mail Art Exhibition,” 89. Other important nodes in the network early on included Anna Banana, who moved from British Columbia to San Francisco in the early 1970s, where she published *VILE* magazine, a kind of *Life* parody; the General Idea collective in Toronto, who similarly published *FILE* magazine; and Vittore Baroni in Forte de Marmi, Italy who began making pieces of mail art and stamps in the mid-1970s.

⁶⁰² Fischer, “Mass-Media and Marginal Communications,” 25

When curators and participants did want to mount exhibitions of mail art, they typically agreed on a set of guidelines that could uphold the goals of the movement. In keeping with the non-hierarchical ethics of decentralization that had motivated the creation of a mail art network, curators could propose a theme in their call for submissions, but then needed to abdicate editorial responsibilities by displaying all the artworks received. Artists would not be required to pay fees to have their works exhibited, and they could expect to receive documentation of the exhibit in the form of a catalog. Richard Kostelanetz's *Assembling* magazines operated along similar principles by soliciting artists to submit a thousand letter-sized copies of their works, to be assembled by the editors into one thousand collections for wider distribution.⁶⁰³ In the preface to its third volume, published in September 1972, Kostelanetz wrote of the importance of an "anti-authoritarian editorial structure" that "effectively engineers a redistribution of risks and responsibilities." By virtue of that structure, he hoped for the magazine to mount "an implicitly anarchist critique of the celebrity-minded and/or money-hungry authoritarianism that is primarily responsible for uniformity, flaccidity and death in American art" as a result of the "editorial result of monopoly or ego" in most art publishing and curatorial circles.⁶⁰⁴ At their core, these were not simply aesthetic critiques of editorial overreach or demands for autonomy; they were calls for political and structural change within the operation of art galleries or magazines.

For the most part, then, participants agreed on the importance of decentralization, decommodification, and distributed agency to the functioning of the network as an alternative to artistic gatekeeping. Reviewing the history of mail art up to the late 1980s, Dallas-based

⁶⁰³ For more on "assemblings," see Saper, *Networked Art*, 129-148; Stephen Perkins, "Assembling Magazines and Alternative Artists' Networks," in *Art at a Distance*, 392-406.

⁶⁰⁴ Richard Kostelanetz, "Preface to Third Assembling: Ten Polemics About Third Assembling," *Third Assembling: A Collection of Otherwise Unpublishable Manuscripts*, eds. Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn, and Mike Metz (Brooklyn, NY: Assembling Press, 1972). Viewed at "Towards and Alternative History of Graphic Design; Schmuck, POP, bRIAN, Assembling," at De La Warr Pavillion, Bexhill, England, 8 August 2015.

networker and archivist John Held Jr. argued that it “confirms the idea that art is everywhere and that everyone can be creative given the opportunity to do so; that art is decentralized and does not depend on controlling opinions emanating from centralized world centers.”⁶⁰⁵ Unlike other art scenes and movements that tended to coalesce around shared spaces, mail artists could also bypass traditional cultural centers like New York, Los Angeles, Paris, or London, in favor of say, Iowa City.

**** PhotoStatic: *From Xerography to Networking* ****

Hailing from that midwestern U.S. college town, a group of artists later known as The Tape-beatles established one well-connected node on this decentralized network, first working in visual art, then in sound. Born in Harlan, Iowa in 1957, Lloyd Dunn moved to Iowa City in the late 1970s to pursue a bachelor’s degree in linguistics at the University of Iowa. Afterwards, he continued on at the same institution, as he worked towards an MFA in Film, Photography, and Intermedia, which he completed in 1987. While a graduate student, Dunn founded a photocopy art zine known as *PhotoStatic* in August 1983, and welcomed contributions from fellow University of Iowa students like John Heck, Ralph Johnson, and Warren Ong. By the next issue, Dunn included a photocopy of a letter from Ray Johnson, welcoming him to the New York Correspondence School.⁶⁰⁶ Though this wasn’t the beginning of any official membership, Johnson’s letter marked an entry-point into Dunn’s participation in networking activities, which engaged him for the following decade. Having begun with a small circle of xerographic collaborators in 1983, his and his collaborators in the Tape-beatles were well connected enough to other members of the worldwide network by 1988 that they could air a weekly radio show, as

⁶⁰⁵ Held, *Mail Art*, xxii.

⁶⁰⁶ See *PhotoStatic* 2 (October 1983), 30, PSRF.

well as publish a bimonthly print zine and a semiannual cassette zine filled almost entirely with mailed submissions. In the process, they came to develop a cohesive philosophy and aesthetic practice of “plagiarism,” in which they used and transformed preexisting visual and sonic materials to mount a critique of mass media operations. Before delving into an analysis of this philosophy, however, it is helpful to briefly examine the history of *PhotoStatic* and its offshoots, which resulted in over 2,000 self-published pages in order to understand how plagiarist practices emerged through the networking activities of groups like the Tape-beatles.

The inaugural issue of *PhotoStatic*, edited by Dunn, featured a series of visual meditations on the xerographic process and reproduced several collaged artworks created with that medium. The zine, more image than word driven, initially operated as a means of collecting and distributing xerographical art, or art created via photocopiers. By the fourth issue, Dunn began to define *PhotoStatic* as “a bimonthly notforprofit art journal which focuses on the potentials and peculiarities of the xerographic process as it is used creatively and expressively.”⁶⁰⁷ A later issue, named “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in reference to Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay of the same name, illuminated Dunn’s thinking on those potentials and peculiarities. “Paste-ups,” he wrote, “are the essence of the process.” As a fine arts student, Dunn would have been acutely aware of earlier instances of collage art, whether from Dada, surrealism, Pop Art, Fluxus, or the Xeroxed punk rock flyers springing up around Iowa City in his own time. One of the strange aesthetic advantages of xerography, as Dunn saw it, came from its role as mechanized duplicator for business purposes. Xerography captured light with much higher contrast than other forms of photography, since “xerox machines are not manufactured to make art, they are manufactured to make duplicates of

⁶⁰⁷ *PhotoStatic* 4 (February 1984), 119, PSRF.

typographic information cheaply and efficiently.” Whatever the medium lacked in terms of the subtlety and fidelity of its reproductions, “copy artists” came to “admire the ease with which images and texts can be combined, manipulated, and recombined, to create novel juxtapositions, most of which simply were not possible before xerox became accessible.”⁶⁰⁸ Like photography and magnetic tape, photocopying offered producers the hands-on and immediate ability to edit, manipulate, and reproduce artworks (fig. 5.1). In addition to the ways in which xerography facilitated the melding of image and text, and allowed users to enlarge or shrink images at the push of a button, Dunn appreciated the way that the medium obviated the need to distinguish “between the original and the print” in the Benjaminian sense. Every copy became an original, since the xeroxed page, rather than the object on the glass plate, was the end goal.

Dunn later claimed that he appreciated “the xerox machine’s dual nature” as both camera and printing press: not only could the photocopier visually reproduce—albeit with the machine’s own idiosyncratic formal qualities—what was placed on the glass plate, it could also reproduce them at a small unit cost regardless of quantities.⁶⁰⁹ To a greater extent than offset printing methods, which had a higher fixed cost and required minimum print runs, photocopying could be economically viable on a much smaller scale, down to the individual unit.⁶¹⁰ The first issue of *PhotoStatic*, for instance, had a print run of 89, and grew to 235 by the time Dunn added the Tape-beatles’ *Retrofuturist* component in January 1988.⁶¹¹ And while they didn’t enter individual homes as readily as tape machines, photocopiers also became much more accessible as a technology by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Xerox had been marketing office photocopiers

⁶⁰⁸ Lloyd Dunn, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction and the Ontology of the Xerographic Image,” *PhotoStatic* 19 (July 1986), 554, PSRF.

⁶⁰⁹ Lloyd Dunn, “*PhotoStatic Magazine* and the Rise of the Casual Publisher,” in *Cutting Across Media: Appropriation, Art, Interventionist Collage, and Copyright Law*, 58, eds. Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁶¹⁰ Dunn, “The Work of Art,” 562.

⁶¹¹ Print runs for every issue are listed on the individual entries for each digitized zine on the PSRF archive.

since 1959, but by the late 1970s, photocopy shops began sprouting up throughout North America, particularly in college towns like Iowa City where professors might make edited course packs of class materials available for students at a lower cost than textbooks. By the middle of the decade, Dunn himself worked at a copying center on the University of Iowa's campus, and thus gained even easier access to this technology. Despite the business origins of xerography, Dunn came to see art produced in this method as "inherently democratic and accessible and the weight of capitalist machinery is never behind such work," since "the xerox artist is not someone who makes a living at it." In his reckoning, "most xerox artists speak of free exchange of ideas and communications through their artworks" and would "prefer to exchange subscriptions to each other's magazine works, rather than purchasing a subscription outright."⁶¹² For those who preferred to exchange money instead of their own artworks or magazines, the low costs involved in producing and circulating *PhotoStatic* meant that a yearly subscription was initially \$6, or one dollar per issue. For all the talk of the zine's financial and editorial independence from the arts world, however, many of its issues were supported in part by grants from the University of Iowa Fine Arts Council. Even given the zine's low production cost, the fact that Dunn was an MFA student at the time created funding opportunities to advance his artistic and aesthetic goals.

From the beginning *PhotoStatic*'s publishers also emphasized that they "hold no copyright on any of the works herein reproduced (or produced)."⁶¹³ This was at once an expedient decision and an ideological one common to participants in the mail art scene. Many of the artworks they reproduced used copyrighted works without permission, so trying to secure rights could present a difficulty. Denying their own copyrights as publishers could also serve as a potential incentive for others to share their works, since individual artists would retain their own

⁶¹² Dunn, "The Work of Art," 555.

⁶¹³ *PhotoStatic* 5 (April 1984), 126, PSRF.

rights if they so desired. As noted, however, many copy artists also disavowed copyrighting their works in the first place, since they did not seek to make money from their practice. If copyright had its origins as a method of encouraging new works by creating a financial incentive for cultural production, copy artists increasingly wondered whether any compensation was necessary to accomplish the more important goal of fostering direct communication between artists. In practice, the functioning of copy art networks, as with mail art, seemed to suggest a kind of gift economy in which money need not trade hands in order for artists to create and distribute new works.⁶¹⁴

PhotoStatic hoped to accomplish some of the decentralizing goals of the mail art movement by collecting submissions and reproducing works from artists around the world. At first, this was more of an aspiration than a reality. Many of the artists that initially contributed to *PhotoStatic* resided in Iowa, but the Dunn encouraged “any interested person/s to contribute artwork reproducible (or producible) xerographically.”⁶¹⁵ Similarly to mail art exhibitions, or publications like Richard Kostelanetz’s *Assembling* magazines, the editors announced a theme for a future issue in advance, collected submissions, then compiled them together for reproduction.⁶¹⁶ The editors of *PhotoStatic* ultimately had final say over selections and their placement within the zine, and also often repurposed and cut up artworks that they received, which led to continued debates over the place of editorship in a networking culture that prided itself on openness and a lack of gatekeeping. The zine initially reproduced many visual works

⁶¹⁴ Though he does not write about mail art specifically, writer Lewis Hyde’s transition from a theorist of gift economies in artistic production to an advocate of open copyright laws is unsurprising given the kind of intellectual trajectory traced in this chapter. See Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Poetry* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) [reprinted as *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007)]; Lewis Hyde, *Common As Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2010).

⁶¹⁵ *PhotoStatic* 5 (April 1984), 126, PSRF.

⁶¹⁶ On assembling magazines, see Saper, *Networked Art*, ch 7.

from a relatively small number of like-minded artists, such as anarcho-experimentalists Miekal And and Liz Was in Madison, Wisconsin, who published works under their imprints Xerox Sutra Editions and Xexoxial Endarchy,⁶¹⁷ and the group of visual poets (Crag Hill, Laurie Schneider, and Bill DiMichele) centered on *Score* magazine in the Bay Area. After a few years of publishing, though, *PhotoStatic* could count on increasingly frequent submissions from far-flung artists like Stephen Perkins in San Francisco, Bob Gregory in Pittsburgh, Mike Miskowski in Tempe, Arizona, Harry Polkinhorn in Calexico, California, Didier Moulinier in Boulazac, France, Ruggero Maggi in Milan, Italy, or the group behind A.1. Waste Paper Co. Ltd. in London, England.

Concurrent with their expanded presence in this network, the Iowa City artists behind *PhotoStatic* began incorporating more and more sonic elements to their cultural practice. When Dunn published issue six of *PhotoStatic* in the summer of 1984, he released a simultaneous cassette compilation under the name *PhonoStatic*, which showcased experimental audio art that came from mailed submissions. Part of this turn to sound had to do with happenstance. In 1984, Dunn moved in with a new roommate, University of Iowa undergraduate Ralph Johnson. Johnson had experimented with tape recorders on his own, and was also beginning to spend time in composer Kenneth Gaburo's electronic music studio on campus, working with and learning about a wide variety of analog electronic instruments like modular synthesizers and magnetic tape recorders. At home, Johnson and Dunn started putting pieces together on Johnson's home reel-to-reel tape recorder under the name *The Creature Comforts*. Some of these pieces, in which Johnson and Dunn were learning how to manipulate sound on tape, showed up on the earliest

⁶¹⁷ For more, see the lengthy interview, "Xexoxial Endarchy," in the neo-Situationist publication *Version 90 1* (1990), 4-15, in Zines and Periodicals Box 2, LD Collection.

issues of *PhonoStatic*.⁶¹⁸ As with *PhotoStatic*, then, many of the artists that appeared on this first cassette were from Iowa City, including Dunn, Johnson, Paul Neff, and John Heck, but future volumes would contain audio artworks from artists further afield, many of whom had provided content for the cassette magazine's visual counterpart and wanted to try their hands at audio art. Initially, the *PhonoStatic* cassettes surveyed a wide variety of experimental audio traditions from 1980s. Tapes jumped from found sound cut ups and tape loops to original spoken word pieces and free form jazz and rock improvisations. A few years into *PhonoStatic*'s run, however, the editors increasingly focused on works that manipulated pre-existing and often recognizable sounds, beginning with their own individual contributions before they called themselves the Tape-beatles, and continuing through themed releases like "Audio Anxiety" (*PhonoStatic* 7) and "Audio Collage" (*PhonoStatic* 10), with sounds we will return to later.

As their connection to other members of the network became bigger and bigger, the multimedia zine's editors decided to add mailing addresses to the credits so that readers might contact artists directly and develop their own connections to others on the network. Since they and other networkers often found out about one another through zine reviews and listings, beginning in issue 16 of *PhotoStatic* from January 1986, they also started devoting more space to publicizing other people's zines, mail art, or cassette submissions in a new "mail review" feature, again listing addresses for readers to follow up on the connections themselves. From that point onwards, issue themes became increasingly cohesive, and text essays, letters, and reviews began to rival copy art images in terms of page count. In the process, *PhotoStatic* became a more explicit venue for philosophical discussions about the nature of various correspondence networks.

⁶¹⁸ See, for example, The Creature Comforts, "Alone Together (Dr. Falwell's Lament)," *PhonoStatic* 2 (February 1985), PSRF.

For instance, in August 1987, *PhotoStatic* released a double issue of the zine devoted exclusively to the idea of networking. Fittingly, the issue had little content from Dunn and the other editors of the zine, as Dunn preferred to highlight the ideas of its contributors. Appearing alongside the table of contents, which listed contributors' names and addresses within a map of the United States, was a network manifesto of sorts, written by Lang Thompson (fig. 5.2):

Each person creates a network based on his or her needs, blended from the support and participation of others doing the same thing. It's communication and exchange but not for personal gain. It's not the same as networking practised by careerists and other professionals; we don't get better jobs or make money from it.⁶¹⁹

Thompson emphasized the simultaneously individualistic and social dimensions of networking while denying that the practice had economic benefits for participants. The core of the matter, Crag Hill agreed later in the issue, was mutual exchange between individuals who created their own networks. "People will want to meet people, however they can – even across unfriendly political forces – to exchange." New technologies like personal computing were "contributing to the reshaping, redefining of this ongoing process of human exchange," so it was up to networkers to "ask questions in and of the network. Our net is profit, but what is our net worth?"⁶²⁰ Playing with the quantitative language of the boardroom—which was particularly salient as "networking" increasingly became a buzzword of the corporate world throughout the 1980s—Hill wanted readers to consider what kind of value the networking process added to participants' lives.

Daniel Plunkett, one of the publishers of tape zine *ND* from Austin, TX, drew on a similar impulse, but questioned whether the term was useful when "'network' seems to have a corporate stamp upon all the tribal going-ons. Possibly something like 'fragmentism,' which

⁶¹⁹ Lang Thompson, *PhotoStatic* 25/26 (August 1987), 785, PSRF.

⁶²⁰ Crag Hill, "Vision Systems," *PhotoStatic* 25/26 (August 1987), 812, PSRF.

could come closer to the truth.”⁶²¹ Plunkett didn’t pull this language out of thin air. As part of the self-publisher’s efforts, *ND* released a combined cassette and print series called *Fragment*. These issues included cassette recordings and printed interviews with prominent home tape artists about their recording and distribution process. Processes of all kinds were important for *ND*. The introduction to the series noted, “The network of cassette culture is a vast array of people who share a passion to create and receive. Shed the notion of exalted teachers marketing their music as a sort of religion. The religion is the process and the exchange between us. There are too many voices that need to be heard.”⁶²² Zan Hoffman from Louisville, Kentucky, one of the most prolific home tapers in this community, agreed that the exchange was key to the joy made possible by the network in an interview within the zine: “It is a happiness, a thrill, an excitement, a feeling that sends my brain into a dizzy delirium. These are symptoms of getting great mail in the post box.”⁶²³ Like Hoffman, Los Angeles artist Agog emphasized the friendships built through the cassette network with people he had yet to meet in person: “I’ve been able to share my work with friends who live thousands of miles away, people I’ve never met face to face, yet we have a common bonding. I think this helped to push me to do even more work knowing that there were some people there who would listen.”⁶²⁴ The network allowed experimental artists like Hoffman and Agog, whose work often made for difficult listening and thus had a limited audience, to find distant listeners and to cultivate intimate collaborators from afar. Rather than a challenge to overcome, then, distance became a productive space for artists who might struggle to find ready audiences nearby.

⁶²¹ Daniel Plunkett, *PhotoStatic* 25/26 (August 1987), 848, PSRF.

⁶²² *ND*, *Fragment* 2 (no date), 1, Mixed Media Box 1, LD Collection.

⁶²³ “Interview with Zan Hoffman,” *ND Fragment* 2, 8.

⁶²⁴ “Interview with Damian Bisciglia (aka Agog),” *ND Fragment* 2, 12.

Beyond the joyful aspects of finding meaningful relationships with other participants in the cassette culture, networkers continued to work through the possible political meanings of the process. Many focused on the decentralized nature of the arrangement. Vittore Baroni, a networker based in Forte dei Marmi, Italy, wrote about networks in an essay reprinted within the newsletter of Miekal And and Liz Was. By the early 1990s, the longtime collaborators to *PhotoStatic* had moved away from Madison, Wisconsin to establish a nearby anarchist-inspired “intentional community” in rural West Lima. In the summer of 1992, they hosted several workshops as part of a “Decentralized Networker Congress” in their “Dreamtime Village” community. To publicize the proceedings, they published an article from Baroni, who summed up much of the thinking on the collaborative and responsive structure of networks:

A network is a pool of energies, a power democratically shared. Corporate networks (like big TV channels) send out only one-way messages. Public access to data and hardware defines the openness of a network. In a [sic] open network, the roles are interchangeable, the author becomes the audience and vice versa. In a closed network, the roles are fixed, the ‘artist’ is hyped and the audience patronized. Not all the independent networks are completely open. Not all the corporate networks are entirely closed. A networker is a new social figure, different from yesterday’s ‘artist,’ ‘poet,’ or ‘musician.’ The social role of the networker is still being shaped, there are only a handful of networkers who could turn their activity into a profession. [...] The process is the message is the medium.⁶²⁵

According to participants in the networking community, then, networks allowed for genuinely participatory and mutually enriching forms of communication. Networks took work to establish and maintain, but by producing one’s own art, using the postal system to distribute it to like-minded individuals, and subscribing to the right publications, theoretically, anyone could have access to such worlds, whose structure would be determined by the participants themselves.

⁶²⁵ Vittore Baroni, “After Tourism Comes Planetary Citizenship: Some Random Thoughts on Networking for H.R. Fricker,” reprinted in *Dreamtime Talkingmail 2* (Spring 1992), no page. In Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

For proselytizers like the publishers of *PhotoStatic*, the difficult work of networking went even further than most other participants in the community. Individuals within the culture began to develop their own forms of expertise to share with others, and for Lloyd Dunn and many others, that expertise manifested itself in an interest in plagiarism. Given his strong connections to his friends in Wisconsin, it was no surprise that Dunn took part in a session at the 1992 congress called “© & Beyond.” “If a copier can be had,” the program stated, “be prepared for a live demonstration of plagiarism.”⁶²⁶ By that time, it was surprising that the program made no mention of a cassette recorder, which became as important a piece of reproduction technology to Dunn as the photocopier that sustained his paid and unpaid labor.

** *Mysteries of Tape* **

As sound became more important to their cultural endeavors, the Tape-beatles took over a small section of *PhotoStatic* for their own zine at the start of 1988, which they named *Retrofuturism*, then started the *RadioStatic* broadcast in August that year. In *Retrofuturism*, the audio group playfully elaborated their philosophy by publishing falsified letters from non-existent fans conversant in Situationist philosophy, press releases sent out to nobody in particular, an absurdist serialized novella, band slogans (“Spreadsheet statistics, rigorously formatted, reveal the Tape-beatles are the locus where the avant-garde and popular culture meet.”),⁶²⁷ art jokes (“Fluxus? You don’t even know us.”),⁶²⁸ and released several plagiarist manifestos, which we will return to later.

⁶²⁶ “Dreamtime Village, West Lima, Wisconsin, Calendar of Events,” *Dreamtime Talkingmail* 2 (Spring 1992), no page. In Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

⁶²⁷ *PhotoStatic* 28 / *Retrofuturist* 1 (January 1988), 962, PSRF.

⁶²⁸ *PhotoStatic* 29 / *Retrofuturist* 2 (March 1988), 974, PSRF.

This turn to plagiarism emerged from many sources in their cassette network. Beyond the musings in *Retrofuturism*, another manifesto for an open approach to copyright appeared during the first broadcast of *RadioStatic* in August 1988, when Dunn played an excerpt from a Mystery Tape sampler and a Tape-beatles piece to open his latest cultural endeavor. It was not surprising that he used the Toronto-based composer John Oswald's work to do so. As one of the early practitioners and main theorists of "plunderphonics," a genre of appropriationist music built out of preexisting and usually recognizable sounds, Oswald provided key inspiration for the Tape-beatles' sonic practices. Oswald outlined his theory of plunderphonics in a widely circulated 1985 essay that argued for the necessity of open copyright laws as a means of protecting transformative artworks from charges of infringement. As Oswald wrote in his essay, the practice of recording and isolating bits of sound in order to create transformative works had a long history that traveled many genres, from *musique concrète* and Cageian experimental music to the emergent sample-based genre of hip hop music in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With the increased availability of both cassette recorders and new digital samplers, which simplified the process of recording and rearranging small snippets of sound at the push of a button, Oswald believed that copyright laws and artistic practice should adapt to give artists and consumers more leeway to repurpose other people's sounds. He put these theories into practice and achieved a level of notoriety among journalists and scholars when his 1989 album *Plunderphonic* received an injunction from the Canadian Recording Industry Association, which objected to his unauthorized use of copyrighted sounds on the recording. Oswald's case is particularly important to unpack as a key influence on the Tape-beatles since Lloyd Dunn had a large number of Oswald's cassettes and articles in his collection, and since the group often name-checked his ideas on copyright in their interviews and writings. It is thus worth pressing pause on the Tape-

beatles' story and rewinding Oswald's to the beginning in order to consider his influence on the group at length. In brief, Oswald's emphasis on the importance of active listening practices as the key to his interventions resonated deeply with the Iowa City sound collage artists who had built their place in the cassette network through an active engagement with technologies of electronic reproduction.

Born in Kitchener, Ontario in 1953, Oswald was steeped in postwar North American experimental traditions through his musical education. He attended Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, where his teachers included R. Murray Schafer and Barry Truax. As a member of the Sonic Research Studio in 1974 and 1975, he produced a work called "Burrows" based on the cut-up tape techniques of William Burroughs, who offered an alternative genealogy for recombinatory art-making. Rather than follow in the path of other World Soundscape Project members and focus on the sounds of the "natural" soundscape, Oswald became interested in other experimental traditions for the use of recorded sound. At York University in Toronto, he studied under experimentalists David Rosenboom, who collaborated with Don Buchla on synthesized music in the Bay Area in the late 1960s, and James Tenney, whose "Collage #1 (Blue Suede)" (1961) was among the earliest examples of plunderphonic sound collage art.⁶²⁹ Oswald first became known in Toronto in the mid-1970s as an alto saxophonist in the Canadian Creative Music Collective, an improvisatory ensemble that performed at various artist-run spaces in the city. By the end of the decade, he also recorded scores for dance performances, released albums of free improvisations with artists like guitarist Henry Kaiser, and co-founded

⁶²⁹ Tenney's piece deconstructed Elvis Presley's recording of "Blue Suede Shoes" by re-recording it onto magnetic tape, cutting that tape into smaller pieces, speeding up and slowing down those clips, playing them in reverse, and gradually moving it from a state of confusion to one of recognizability. James Tenney, "Collage #1 (Blue Suede)," *The Selected Works of James Tenney 1961-1969*, New World Records, 80570-2, 2003, compact disc.

Musicworks: The Canadian Journal of Sound Exploration, a quarterly magazine devoted to experimental sound art in Canada.⁶³⁰

In the decade that followed, Oswald established the Mystery Tape Laboratory in 1980 as a means to produce a different kind of experimental audio art based on the use of other people's sounds. Here, he began to work through many of the theoretical and artistic stances that animated his better-known writings and album releases. Through the lab, he released a series of cryptic mix tapes throughout the 1980s with photocopied liner notes that revealed little about the specific sounds contained therein. Mystery was in fact the name of the game. On the liner notes accompanying one of the Mystery Tapes in Dunn's collection, known as *X1 version 2* on one side and *X2 version 3* on the other, Oswald wrote, "Titleless, identityless, a Mystery Tape exists entirely in its aural manifestation. The initial package, this one, is devoid of the usual indications of genres, artists, styles, categories, & considerations of whether these classifications are covered in a broad range by a particular tape or are specifically focused."⁶³¹ Made up of a series of distinct pieces using unnamed and unidentified sounds—sometimes recognizable and manipulated, sometimes obscure and left in their original form, often a mixture of the two; in short, more Schaefferian than Schaferian—the Mystery Tapes series reveled in the pleasures of listening, in the notion of sound in itself (fig. 5.3). Unlike the *Plunderphonic* album, which came complete with a full list of audio sources, Oswald believed that source material attribution was generally unnecessary for this particular series: "you won't need to decipher cryptologues or unravel cosmic enquiries in order to enjoy an astonishing **Mystery Tape**." Though listeners

⁶³⁰ Biographical information from *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. "John Oswald," accessed 22 October 2015, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/john-oswald-emc/>. From 1983 to 1997, *Musicworks* included curated cassettes with issues of the magazine, which had audio examples of the kinds of issues discussed in print.

⁶³¹ John Oswald, liner notes to *Mystery Tape X1 version 2/X2 version 3*, Mystery Tapes Laboratory, year unknown, audiocassette box 17, LD Collection.

might recognize snippets of sound as they passed by, Oswald did not feel it important to cite all of the selections he chose for his collages, preferring that listeners use “your imagination to see what’s going on.”⁶³² Imagined, then, as a process of filling in the blanks, listeners could participate in the process of making meaning from these sounds, or simply find pleasure in the sounds. While he enjoyed the ambiguity that came from a lack of context, Oswald also recognized that “nagging curiosity or a wish to pursue further material by a particular artist” might lead listeners to want to know the original sources, and he suggested that they could send a self-addressed stamped envelope for a list of source materials.⁶³³

Denying easy answers to the game he set up for listeners by refusing to provide certain kinds of information about the sounds contained within the cassettes, Oswald’s contention that they existed in purely aural form did not account for the physical distribution of the sounds on cassette. Structurally speaking, the Mystery Tapes series operated along slightly different lines than most of the other products of the cassette network, in part because Oswald operated more firmly within the bounds of the experimental art establishment than a group like the Tape-beatles. According to a catalog in the Dunn collection, Oswald charged \$8-10 Canadian currency for each Mystery Tape, including shipping. Worldwide, however, he decided to keep these prices the same and accepted payment in U.S. dollars “in support of the concept of equal rights of global access.”⁶³⁴ Treating U.S. currency as the world’s monetary *lingua franca*, he hoped to make it easier for interested listeners worldwide to obtain his pieces, thus maintaining an interest in connectivity and exchange in ways similar to the cassette networker. Many of the sounds that found their way onto Mystery Tapes, moreover, also came from the mail, sent in by contributors,

⁶³² Quotes from John Oswald, liner notes to *Mystery Tapes Sampler*, Mystery Tapes Laboratory, year unknown, audiocassette box 17, LD Collection. Emphases in original.

⁶³³ Oswald, liner notes to *Mystery Tape XI version 2/X2 version 3*.

⁶³⁴ Mystery Tapes catalog, audiocassette box 17, LD Collection.

though they were rarely self-produced by the mailers themselves, as in the case of the *PhonoStatic* series. But charging money for his cassettes, especially at a rate equivalent to the cost of most commercial recordings at the time, cut against the impulses of most networkers, who preferred to charge only on the basis of raw material costs for blank cassettes and postage.

To some extent, this choice reflected Oswald's commitment to high self-imposed artistic standards, itself a reflection of his deeper connection to the experimental arts establishment in Toronto. He promised, for instance, that:

every **Mystery Laboratory** cassette is artist supervised (like a Fine Audio Print) & tested rigorously. Occasionally a flaw will escape the peering ear's scrutiny & our precisely attuned equipment. All our tapes are completely guaranteed against any defect in manufacturing: should a cassette appear to be faulty in any physical respect upon receipt, simply return it to the **Mystery Lab** for a Free Replacement.⁶³⁵

During a profile in an issue of *Musicworks* edited by Oswald himself, a mysterious "Professor X" spoke of the need to foster "a distinction between the quality of these artist-made audio prints and mass-marketed commodities such as records."⁶³⁶ Certain tapes within the series would be revised over time (hence the versioning on the tapes in Dunn's collection), which guaranteed a degree of individuality to the different copies. Taken collectively, the Mystery Tapes Lab was part research laboratory, part artist's workshop, and part playful prank to delivery quality controlled sonic art to a worldwide audience of interested listeners. Rather than cassette culture as a way to put technologies of easy reproduction in everyone's hands, this was cassette network as means to create Art.

Even though he used other people's sounds to craft his cassettes, Oswald still saw them as artistic products, and not acts of curation. His manipulation of the raw source materials, he

⁶³⁵ Mystery Tapes catalog, audiocassette box 17, LD Collection.

⁶³⁶ Lauren Drewery, "Mystery Tapes: Fact or Fiction?," *Musicworks* 34 (Spring 1986), 9.

believed, was enough to turn them into his own compositions. The transformative aspect of his work led him to clarify his complicated ethical positions on the use of copyrighted materials within the liner notes to his tapes. On the liner notes to many of the Mystery Tapes, he explained:

Particular items on X tapes are sometimes derived from sources already copyrighted. In cases where the material derived from is well known & readily available via mass media (but not necessarily legally in the public domain) this derivation may be without the permission of the copyright holder. Mystery Tape Lab endorses such borrowing only when it in no way infringes on the product reputation or commercial marketing of the original. The necessity of resorting to this popular material is based on transformational familiarity research for artistic purposes. There is no intention or desire to capitalize on the primary artist's reputation, as is the case with pirate & bootleg recordings.⁶³⁷

Distinguishing between the legal and ethical implications of his art, Oswald hinted at the notion that ready availability should be enough to warrant unauthorized use. If one was familiar with a sound, by virtue of its ubiquity in the culture at large, but could not legally use such a sound because it was owned by someone else, that person could ethically repurpose the unauthorized material for artistic uses. Within U.S. copyright law, codified "fair use" exemptions to copyright monopolies made room for unauthorized uses, provided that the resulting work was transformative, that it was noncommercial, that it did not use too much of the source, and that it did not affect the marketability of the original. Oswald's distinction wasn't between commercial and noncommercial uses here, since he put a price on his cassettes, and he couldn't deny that he used substantial portions of his sources, since he often used and transformed pieces in their entirety. His work often depended on listeners' familiarity with the source material, but he denied that this dependence would cut into profits among the artists who initially produced his sounds. This was especially so since he did not list their names on the recordings, and since his manipulation of their sounds would make it unlikely that listeners would substitute the

⁶³⁷ Oswald, liner notes to *Mystery Tape X1 version 2/X2 version 3*.

recordings on his tapes for the originals. As long as he did not impact the original market, he believed he should be in the ethical clear.

While Oswald attended to the artistic ethics of transformative use, he also believed that the rights and responsibilities of copying cut in multiple directions. “Listeners,” he continued, “have the right to audition the tapes in any way which they prefer. As in the above, direct pirating & copying or usage for profit is illegal. Home dubbing is discouraged because copies will be of inferior quality & this unauthorized copying does not support the artists involved.”⁶³⁸ Other than copying, which he believed either had adverse market effects for the original artists or resulted in poor quality reproductions of his own artworks, he felt that listeners ought to do what they wish with the recordings, as they should do with any other recordings they encountered on a daily basis. By choosing to manipulate the sounds he heard, he modeled an active listening practice for anyone who listened to his cassettes, hoping that they might do the same.

Take the sounds on the 60-minute cassette known as *Mystery Tape XI version 2/X2 version 3*. Rather than a collage of several songs at once, the tracks that made up the extended collages on each side of the tape tended to manipulate one song at a time for different sonic effects.⁶³⁹ For instance, the first track of side *XI version 2* begins with a radically condensed version of Culture Club’s “Do You Really Want To Hurt Me?” that starts unrecognizably sped up to multiple times its original speed then gradually slows down over thirty seconds to a point where listeners can vaguely make out the line “make me cry” at the end of the original, before giving way to a recording of an Italian-language radio announcer.⁶⁴⁰ Next, a bilingual song in

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ I’m using “track” here somewhat anachronistically to mark separation between the different pieces. Unlike an LP record divided into different bands, or a CD divided into different tracks, the cassettes contained no such separations. They would be played continuously and did not include any kind of listing for the different pieces. All references to the sounds on this cassette are based on Oswald, *Mystery Tape XI version 2/X2 version 3*.

⁶⁴⁰ Figuring out the source materials without any kind of track listing has been difficult, especially since so many of the originals have been transformed. Using free audio editing software “Audacity” to speed up, slow down, or

Japanese and English about ninjas,⁶⁴¹ a slowed down clip of another Japanese-language song, a sped up version of Ray Charles and Betty Carter's duet of "Baby It's Cold Outside," a snippet of orchestral film music, a cut up of the Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever," a collage of Dick Hyman's easy listening organ jazz mixed in with Aka pygmy hunting calls, and much more. To some extent, one could take the entirety of the tape side as a pleasurable and slightly off-kilter tour through a variety of the world's pop music soundscapes as presented by a skilled DJ. Rather than R. Murray Schafer's simply moralist position towards mass culture within Canadian media, Oswald emphasized the joys one might find in the highly mediated global soundscapes of radio and LP recordings that traveled through the airwaves and into people's homes.

But even, and perhaps especially, when his source materials were recognizable, Oswald felt that his creative listening practices, as modeled on the tapes, could give the originals a different meaning. Near the end of the side came a piece that rehearsed a more famous selection from his 1989 *Plunderphonic* album. Here, Oswald played a 45-rpm vinyl copy of Dolly Parton's "Jolene" and alternated back and forth between its intended speed and 33 1/3 rpm.⁶⁴² In part, the piece worked because Parton's high soprano voice could be slowed to "a slightly slurred by beautiful tenor," as Oswald wrote elsewhere, so it almost sounded as if it could be the original if you didn't know otherwise. Beyond its sonic qualities, the altered piece shifted the expected sexual dynamics of a pop song dealing with romantic jealousy. It became, according to Oswald,

reverse digital files has made it easier to hear them in their original form, and some of the foreign language sources have been identified while using the Shazam app for iPhone.

⁶⁴¹ Though not identified as such within the liner notes, it is a very lightly edited version of "We Are Ninjas (Not Geishas)," by the London-based Japanese electronic pop duo Frank Chickens.

⁶⁴² In the later version, Parton's version of Buck Ram's "The Great Pretender" begins at regular speed and gradually slows on a variable speed turntable so that the transition is less abrupt. By the end of the piece, the high and low pitched Parton synchronously sing harmony with one another in a duet made possible by technological intervention.

“a vortex of androgyny” in which “Dolly manages to sing himself into a ménage a trois.”⁶⁴³

Where the original expressed a woman’s wishes that a rival lover not “take my man,” the narrator in the slowed down sections suggested same-sex desire rebuffed by a male partner’s interest in the titular character.

Parton’s wavering voice gave way to the “Days of Emancipation” promised by the original title of the next piece, an instrumental composition performed by the Central Broadcasting Traditional Instruments Orchestra from the People’s Republic of China. Whether this was intended as a comment on the emancipatory potential of gender fluidity through sonic manipulation is not clear. If so, it would likely have been an in-joke on Oswald’s part, since his listeners were less likely to know this piece, composed soon after the Communist Revolution and released in North America in 1981 by CBS Masterworks, than they were to recognize Parton’s voice.⁶⁴⁴ Oswald’s idiosyncratic juxtapositions, though, created commonalities where none might previously exist. At the end of “Days of Emancipation,” which proceeds for the entirety of the piece without any noticeable diversion from the original recording, Oswald repeats the closing flourish of the final chord fading to silence eight separate times. Immediately afterwards, the Beatles return, with Ringo Starr’s voice singing, “In the town where I was born,” from “Yellow Submarine,” which cuts to the resonant final piano chord from “A Day in the Life” fading to silence for twenty seconds before finishing the side with the orchestral blast that immediately precedes the piano that closes out *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴³ John Oswald, “Revolutions and Mister Dolly Parton: A Vortex of Androgyny,” originally published in *Collusion* magazine in 1981, reprinted in the liner notes to John Oswald, *69 Plunderphonics 96*, Seeland 515 / fony 069/96, 2001, 2X compact disc and book, 16.

⁶⁴⁴ “Days of Emancipation,” performed by Central Broadcasting Traditional Instruments Orchestra, *Phases of the Moon: Traditional Chinese Music*, CBS Masterworks, M 36705, 1981, LP.

⁶⁴⁵ Oswald, *Mystery Tape X1 version 2/X2 version 3*.

As a closing sequence on the first Mystery Tape, this was more than mere sonic non sequitur. Even if listeners did not know the specific provenance of the Chinese orchestral music, they could recognize the ways in which Oswald equated the music of revolutionary China with the Beatles through the affinities he drew out between the conclusion of “Days of Emancipation” and “A Day in the Life.” The real revolution, from his perspective, was the ability for all listeners to manipulate the sounds they heard on a daily basis, whether ubiquitous or obscure, to make such connections. While it might be fun to listen to the tape and try to identify its sources on one’s own, the lesson here was that you too could change Dolly Parton from a woman to a man at will by switching your record player from 45 rotations per minute to 33 1/3, to engage with the ever-present sounds around you however you wished.

Alongside the cassettes and liner notes that expounded his theories, Oswald wrote an essay that clarified his thoughts even further, and traveled much wider than his tapes. A transcription of comments he delivered in 1985 to a group of electro-acoustic composers in Toronto, “Plunderphonics, Or, Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative” first appeared in the pages of *Musicworks*, in a 1986 issue edited by Oswald himself.⁶⁴⁶ A wide-ranging essay, it took on the question of originality in the production of art, the history of listening to pre-recorded music, and the ethical and legal dimensions of transformative sampling when recording technology became more ubiquitous and copyright law more restrictive. While composers and performers had been quoting one another’s work throughout the entirety of the Western art, jazz, and popular music traditions, Oswald believed that new technologies abilities to re-record and

⁶⁴⁶ John Oswald, “Plunderphonics: Or, Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative,” *Musicworks* 34 (Spring 1986), 5-8. It also circulated more widely when it was republished in a variety of spaces, including John Oswald, “Bettered by the Borrower: The Ethics of Musical Debt,” *Whole Earth Review* 57 (Winter 1987); *Cassette Mythos*, and *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004): 131-137. In the *Audio Culture* volume, the essay appears only a few pages after Glenn Gould’s “The Prospects of Recording,” which introduces this dissertation. All reference to the essay here are to the original *Musicworks* document.

manipulate sounds opened the possibility of quoting not only melodies, harmonies, or rhythms, but of repurposing pre-recorded sounds themselves. As Oswald wrote, “The precarious commodity in music today is no longer the tune.”⁶⁴⁷ It is instead sound itself, recognizable even in “a ten millisecond burst” to a public that is “bombarded by it” on a daily basis.⁶⁴⁸ If musicians could use such bursts of sound to produce something new, provided their works were “bettered by the borrower,” he believed that they should be protected by fair use, and not need to obtain authorization for their transformative art.

Whether the courts would agree was another matter. By the end of the 1980s, Oswald’s *Plunderphonic* releases put his theories to the test.⁶⁴⁹ His 1989 *Plunderphonic* album, running at 70 minutes over 24 tracks, was a clear extension of the Mystery Tapes series in its deconstruction of works from throughout the popular and classical music canons, including The Beatles, Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, Dolly Parton, Metallica, and James Brown in the first instance, and Beethoven, Stravinsky, and Glenn Gould’s rendition of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* in the second. In other ways, though, Oswald changed course. He explicitly listed every original source, stated that his recordings were not for sale, distributed them to radio stations and libraries at no cost, and allowed listeners to make copies at will, all in an effort to stay within the law as he understood it. If, as he believed, his works were transformative, non-commercial, and attributed, they should fall under the category of fair use. The Canadian Recording Industry Association believed otherwise. Alleging unauthorized use, it sought and

⁶⁴⁷ Oswald, “Plunderphonics,” 6.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6, 8.

⁶⁴⁹ He first released *Plunderphonics* as an EP (extended play vinyl 12” single) with four tracks in 1988 before releasing the full length *Plunderphonic* CD in 1989. *Plunderphonics*, Mystery Tape Laboratory, WRC1-5744, 1988, 12” vinyl record, 45 rpm; *Plunderphonic*, Mystery Tape Laboratory, 1989, compact disc. Both recordings and additional material have been made available on John Oswald, *69 Plunderphonics 96*, Seeland 515 / fony 069/96, 2001, 2X compact disc.

received an injunction against further distribution of the album. The CRIA took particular offense to the album cover, which depicted Michael Jackson's head pasted onto a nude woman's body, but it also refused to accept Oswald's assertion that he had the right to use whatever sounds he wished to use. Faced with fines and a potential prison sentence for failure to comply, Oswald agreed to erase the master tapes and destroy all remaining copies of the original CD. The quashing of the album only increased public interest in the work and the issues it raised, which led to a series of articles in music journals and general interest publications on Oswald's plunderphonic ways.⁶⁵⁰

A couple of years later, the Bay Area group Negativland also became a *cause célèbre* among the anti-copyright crowd when their single *U2* faced a similar lawsuit from the Irish rock band's record label and publishers. Since the early 1980s, Negativland had been active in sound collage art since the early 1980s, when they began hosting the "Over the Edge" radio program on KPFA FM in Berkeley. Combining collages with multiple turntables, tape machines, and occasionally live instruments with listeners' phone calls and commentary from group members, the unscripted show gave the group a regular outlet for experimental audio art throughout the decade. They also released a series of collages on the independent record label SST out of Southern California. In 1991, SST released the Negativland single, also known as "The Letter U and the Numeral 2," which took an instrumental version of U2's 1988 hit "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," and added sampled edited outtakes from a tape that caught radio host Casey Kasem introducing the song with much profanity. With the letter U and numeral 2, as well as a U2 spy plane, prominently depicted on the cover art, Island Records believed that consumers might mistake the record for an official release by U2. Despite the sound artists' attempt to

⁶⁵⁰ David Sanjek, "'Don't Have to DJ No More': Sampling and the 'Autonomous' Creator," *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal* 10 (1991-1992): 622-623.

defend their creative theft on the grounds of fair use in U.S. copyright law, Negativland's record label, SST, decided not to pursue the matter in court and agreed to pull the single from release, before agreeing to countersue Negativland for the legal damages to SST. According to Negativland, the label's failure to back them in court highlighted the uneven power dynamics at work in copyright litigation. Even though they believed they had a sound legal defense, the group simply did not have the same resources as a company like Island Records to make their case in court, and they needed their label to take a stand. The effects of refusing to fight such litigation, they believed, would be damaging to future artists who wanted to sample copyright material without authorization.⁶⁵¹ "Art needs to begin to acquire an equal footing with marketers in court. How about a thorough revamping of the antique copyright, publishing, and cultural property laws to bring them into comfortable accord with modern technology and a healthy respect for the artist's impulse to incorporate public influences?"⁶⁵² Believing that public sounds ought to be ripe for use, Negativland's single, like Oswald's album, asserted the right of the artist to manipulate sounds in the service of creativity.

When scholars and journalists have written about Oswald or Negativland, they have tended to focus on the implications of sample-based art for questions of copyright, authorship, and originality.⁶⁵³ While there's good reason to do so, I want to return to Oswald's essay to focus on his larger interest in public listening practices at the expense of the composer's prerogative. In fact, he returned again and again, both in his Mystery Tapes series and the longer plunderphonics

⁶⁵¹ Negativland told their story in multiple locations, publishing a full book and CD on their own label Seeland, *Fair Use: The Story of the Letter U and the Numeral 2* (Concord, CA: Seeland, 1995); earlier than that, they wrote an article "The Case From Our Side," for *Retrofuturist* 16 (March 1992), 1750-1757.

⁶⁵² Quoted in Brian Duguid, "The Unacceptable Face of Plagiarism?," *Electric Shock Treatment* 3 (Summer 1992), 21. In Zines and Periodicals, Box 1, LD Collection.

⁶⁵³ See, for example, Sanjek, "Don't Have to DJ No More," 607-624; Kevin Holm-Hudson, "Quotation and Context: Sampling and John Oswald's Plunderphonics," *Leonardo Music Journal* 7 (1997): 17-25; Chris Cutler, "Plunderphonia," *Musicworks* 60 (Fall 1994): 6-19.

essay, to the implications of restrictive copyright laws for non-artist listeners who were beginning to find their ability to record sounds at risk in courts and legislatures around the world. At a moment when copyright lawyers, entertainment industry executives, and legislators debated the merits of restricting the use of tape machines to record copyrighted sounds without authorization from the copyright owners through the imposition of royalty levies on the sale of blank tapes, Oswald critiqued the recording industry in terms quite familiar to this dissertation's story.

The real stakes, he thought, were not about protecting artists' moral rights to maintain control over their artworks, or about the merits of ensuring the profitability of the recording industry in the face of lost sales due to the home taping of copyrighted works by putting a price on home taping. They were about active listeners maintaining the capacity to use the means of audio reproduction to deny their status as passive consumers of recording industry commodities:

The dubbing-in-the-privacy-of-your-own-home controversy is actually the tip of a hot iceberg of rudimentary creativity. After decades of being the passive recipients of music in packages, listeners now have the means to assemble their own choices, to separate pleasures from the filler. They are dubbing a variety of sounds from around the world, or at least from the breadth of their record collections, making compilations of a diversity unavailable from the music industry, with its circumscribed stables of artists, and an ever more pervasive policy of only supplying the common denominator.⁶⁵⁴

“Separate pleasures from the filler.” “From the breadth of their record collections.” Despite the implication that the music industry only served “the common denominator,” Oswald still heard sounds of value emanating from its commodities. The problem was the notion that all listeners needed to accept them as finished products, rather than as raw materials for further exploration. Embracing listeners' ability to choose, use, and recontextualize their favorite sounds, regardless of copyright law, Oswald wanted to empower his readers and listeners to do the same.

⁶⁵⁴ Oswald, “Plunderphonics,” 5.

This was not the only place where Oswald made such arguments about active listening in the essay. Briefly reviewing the history of music listening in North America during the twentieth century, he echoed John Philip Sousa's much earlier worries in asserting, "the now primitive record playing generation was a passive lot [...]. Gone were the days of lively renditions on the parlor piano." To be sure, emergent practices of the 1970s and 80s like record scratching and beat-matching, or layering sounds over one another, as hip hop DJs or dub producers might do, revealed other active possibilities for the "record playing generation."⁶⁵⁵ Overall, though, in Oswald's mind, "passivity is still the dominant demographic." By contrast, "as a listener my own preference is the option to experiment," as in the laboratory research of his Mystery Tapes series and his later plunderphonic work.⁶⁵⁶

Adding a copyright critique to his assertions in favor of active listening, then, Oswald concluded the essay by emphasizing the ever-present nature of popular music as a justification for its transformation into public property, if not in law, than in experiential reality:

All popular music is (as is all folk music by definition), essentially, if not legally, existing in a public domain. Listening to pop music isn't a matter of choice. Asked for or not, we're bombarded by it. In its most insidious state, filtered to an incessant bass-line, it seeps thorough (sic) apartment walls and out of the heads of *walk people*. Although people in general are making more noise than ever before, fewer people are making more of the total noise; specifically, in music, those with megawatt PA's, triple platinum sales, and heavy rotation.⁶⁵⁷

If the recording industry insisted on transmitting its products directly into people's homes, without regard to individual choice, or public well being, it could not then insist on a condition

⁶⁵⁵ For more on the transformation of the record player and digital sampler into musical instrument, see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994); Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2006); Mark Katz, *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁵⁶ Oswald, "Plunderphonics," 7.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

of monopoly over the right to reproduce its materials. Combining the scolding lament of noise from his one-time teacher R. Murray Schafer, the defense of recording technologies for their compositional possibilities from Glenn Gould, and a critique of the recording industry's power to determine what the public heard, this was a comprehensive stand in favor of listeners' and transformative composers' rights. In a final flourish, he wondered how listeners might respond to this state of affairs: "Difficult to ignore, pointlessly redundant to imitate, how does one not become a passive recipient?"⁶⁵⁸ This was the fundamental question that had animated tape enthusiasts of all stripes since the introduction of the medium in the late 1940s.

It was also the key question for people like Lloyd Dunn and the rest of the Tape-beatles. The ownership structure of the recording industry and the media at large, which transmitted sounds in a one-way direction, militated against active engagement from the part of the public at large. If "fewer people are making more of the total noise," the only option was to use the recording machines at one's disposal to turn that noise against itself, and to use the networking capabilities of the cassette culture to increase the number of people making their own noises and to distribute the sounds of people turning the noise of the few against themselves. Given their own proclivities, it was no surprise that in the early 1990s the Tape-beatles members founded the Copyright Violation Squad "to make publicly available those cultural works which have been suppressed because they theoretically violated copyright law."⁶⁵⁹ The C.V.S. went on to happily dub almost 400 copies of *Plunderphonic* for anyone who sent in one dollar, a 100-minute blank tape, and a self-addressed stamped envelope to a post office box in Iowa City.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ Language from *CVS Bulletin* 1 (February 1993), 1817, PSRF.

⁶⁶⁰ See *CVS Bulletin* 1 (February 1993), 1819-1820, PSRF.

** *The Sound of Plagiarism*® **

Before that happened, the Tape-beatles started to hone their own perspective on the politics of copyright. They shared much with Oswald and Negativland, particularly in their focus on artists' rights to record and rerecord the sounds around them. One of the earliest examples audio works produced by a group member, Lloyd Dunn's solo piece "Tape Jazz 2 (West End Blues)," showed up on the February 1986 release *PhonoStatic 4, The Persistence of Hearing*, and felt much more like Oswald's plunderphonics than the later plagiarist works the Tape-beatles would be known for. It reproduced the 1928 recording of "West End Blues" by Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five in its entirety, with a slight addition.⁶⁶¹ During the fifth chorus, Dunn took a single four-bar note from Armstrong's trumpet solo, famous for its twelve-second length, and repeated it via tape loop. Rather than rework the flurry of its opening cadenza, Dunn turned to another iconic moment in "West End Blues" and turned it into a meditative minimalist vamp by stretching out Armstrong's audacious high B for over three minutes before splicing back to the end of the solo and on to the performance's conclusion. In the process, Dunn urged listeners to pay heightened attention in turn to the timbre of Armstrong's horn or the insistence of Earl Hines' piano accompaniment. It was something of a throwaway piece on Dunn's part, adding little of substance to Armstrong's bravura performance. Yet Dunn's contribution to the 1986 cassette pointed thematically to some of the Tape-beatles' future preoccupations, most notably, the use and transformation of well-known pieces of popular culture to create new audio artworks, and to reorient listeners' ears to hear something new in heretofore familiar sounds.

The following year, the Tape-beatles, then consisting of Lloyd Dunn, Ralph Johnson, and John Heck, came together to produce their first collective audio pieces. Invoking the Beatles with

⁶⁶¹ Ll. Dunn, "Tape Jazz 2 (West End Blues)," on *PhonoStatic 4: The Persistence of Hearing*, self-produced, February 1986, audiocassette, PSRF.

their name, in part because their namesakes had found a way to unite popular and avant garde traditions by the end of their career, and also because there had been a growing tradition of underground musicians using the Fab Four as source material. Already in 1974, California-based experimental group The Residents released their first album *Meet the Residents* on Ralph Records, which had a cover spoofing the Beatles' second album, *Meet the Beatles!*.⁶⁶² While it did not use Beatles songs, per se, it was a kind of audio collage performed by live musicians that proved a big influence for some of the Tape-beatles. Closer to home, in networking terms, was a mysterious 1980 tape by Italian mail artist Vittori Baroni under the name Lieutenant Murnau, *Meet Lieutenant Murnau*. Released by English sound and mail artist Rod Summers' Dutch tape label VEC Audio Exchange, it continued on the same theme by using both the Beatles and the Residents as source material. As the liner notes to the tape from Dunn's collection read, "you will hear distorted loops, 'treated' records with glue, scotch tape or scratched vinyl, excerpts from Italian soundtracks of Beatles films, Beatles covers [... and] a recurring hint to the Residents' interest in creative ethnology."⁶⁶³ In a simple gesture, the Beatles' "The Long and Winding Road," for instance, was played backwards at various speeds on a turntable as "Rewinding Road."⁶⁶⁴ And as noted above, the Beatles appeared frequently in John Oswald's work, both in the Mystery Tape series and on the *Plunderphonic* project. The kind of creative listening practices modeled by these previous examples, with both easy and difficult to identify sounds, manipulated and reproduced on cheap machines, was exactly what the new Iowa City sound collective was after.

⁶⁶² The Residents, *Meet the Residents*, Ralph Records, RR0274, 1974, LP record.

⁶⁶³ Liner notes to Lieutenant Murnau, *Meet Lieutenant Murnau*, VEC Audio Exchange, 1980, audiocassette, in audiocassette box 14, LD Collection.

⁶⁶⁴ Lieutenant Murnau, "Rewinding Road," *Meet Lieutenant Murnau*.

Gradually, they expanded their palette beyond pop music to include the sounds of all media in a critique of commodification writ-large. In September 1987, their first multipart audio collage, *The Big Broadcast* appeared in its entirety over the airwaves at KRUI, with segments chosen for release on *PhonoStatic 7 (Audio Anxiety)*, before being repurposed as the first side of their cassette *A Subtle Buoyancy of Pulse*, self-released on a label they called Plagiarism®.⁶⁶⁵ More explicitly even than the full length release, *PhonoStatic 7* combined their burgeoning interest in plagiarist audio practices with their networking tendencies, all in a cassette united under the theme of “audio anxiety.” It’s worth dwelling on the cassette first as sonic then material artifact in order to better understand the Tape-beatles’ aesthetics, both as editors and as contributors.

The Tape-beatles’ first piece on the tape followed two tracks from far afield: “Wittgenstein in Pain,” by Houston-based collaborators Bob Gregory and Jason Gibbs, and “They Call It Art,” by Aberdeen, WA artist Ken Hunt under the name Weather Nouveau. In the first piece, the artists recite lines from Ludwig Wittgenstein in echoed and muddled voices over the sound of clanging guitars. The difficulty of expressing oneself through language is made literal through Wittgenstein’s words. From the beginning, we’re introduced to the philosophy of artistic audio repurposing through a repurposing of continental philosophy as conceptual art. Hunt, meanwhile, spoke above a prerecorded keyboard loop about several pieces he had received in the mail, and questioned their status as artworks. Already, then, by the time listeners heard the

⁶⁶⁵ Several versions of this first release appeared over the years. It was initially self-released as a cassette on their Plagiarism label in 1988 and 1989 before being re-released on CD in 1998. Side two of the cassette, importantly, was entitled *Plagiarism*. The Tape-beatles, *A Subtle Buoyancy of Pulse*, Plagiarism, 1989, audiocassette; The Tape-beatles, *A Subtle Buoyancy of Pulse*, Staalplaat, STCD 129, 1998, compact disc.

Tape-beatles' first recorded contribution, they had already encountered difficult experimental art with plagiarist tendencies and art that recursively reflected on postal art.⁶⁶⁶

The Tape-beatles' "Sing Sing Sing (Sing Sing)," was a natural next step from "Tape Jazz 2," in that it used a well-known jazz recording to comment more generally on the media soundscape.⁶⁶⁷ Beginning with Gene Krupa's famous drum introduction, the Tape-beatles splice in newscaster Dan Rather's voice saying, "hard times are being blamed for more than economic problems," before the rest of Benny Goodman's orchestra jumps in to announce the head of "Sing, Sing, Sing," from the iconic 1937 recording. A woman jumps in, "I'm getting a gun. And if someone accosts me, I don't care. If it's them or me, it's gonna be them." Throughout the piece, Krupa's unrelenting tom toms are isolated when people are speaking, only to have their comments punctuated by the orchestra's brass and wind instruments. A newscaster informs listeners, "A recent newspaper poll found 34 percent of the residents don't feel safe in their neighborhoods during the day," as the woman returns out of context, "it's gonna be them." More horns. Another man is then inserted into the conversation, "I yelled, 'The police are coming!,'" sounding sarcastic. "D'you know what the response was? They laughed," before the earlier newscaster returns: "70 percent are afraid at night," and another voice affirms, "there is nobody, who, I would say, is safe." Horns and winds again. Then, the densest vocal collage on the recording, supported by Krupa again:

Male voice #1: They laughed! [shouted]

Female voice #1: I don't care.

Male voice #1: They laughed. [resigned]

Male voice #2: There is nobody, who, I would say, is safe.

Male voice #3: Just, you know, ran up down the street and shot me.

Female voice #1: I don't care.

⁶⁶⁶ Bob Gregory and Jason Gibbs, "Wittgenstein in Pain," and Weather Nouveau, "They Call It Art," on *PhonoStatic 7 (Audio Anxiety)*, October 1987, audiocassette, audiocassette box 15, LD Collection. Also at PSRF.

⁶⁶⁷ The original was the 1937 recording of "Sing, Sing, Sing," by the Benny Goodman Orchestra. The Tape-beatles, "Sing Sing Sing (Sing Sing)" on *PhonoStatic 7*, PSRF.

Male newscaster: There were 32 murders last month alone. Their anger and frustration erupted.
Female voice #1: I don't care. [splice] It's gonna be them.
Male voice #1: They laughed! [shouted]
Male voice #4: This is a city that's very much in fear.
Male voice #3: Didn't seem to make any difference to him whether he shot me or not.
Male voice #4: Blacks and poor, whites and rich.
Male newscaster: The police budget was slashed [repeated via tape splice] slashed slashed this ye[the word year is cut off] slashed this ye/ slashed [splice] beef up the police
Male voice #5: People are scared, they are concerned, and...

With that, a brief clip of Vido Musso's saxophone solo from "Sing, Sing, Sing" interrupts the proceedings without much consolation to this group of concerned residents. Voice #5 returns, identifiable by his words as a local police official: "We are trying to do everything that we can to ensure that the people are going to be safe." Now, Harry James' trumpet solo. Two minutes and fifteen seconds after the beginning of the collage, a police siren arrives, perhaps in an effort to assuage the collective fears. Then, the newscaster returns to locate listeners: "New Orleans is in the grip of a crime wave [...] Armed robbery has jumped 33 percent. [splice] Their neighborhoods have become combat zones." The female voice then repeats "I'm getting a gun" three times, followed by "I don't care." The first male voice returns a sarcastic volley, "the police are coming!" before Krupa's toms finish it off with a dramatic thud.⁶⁶⁸

So what are we to make of this short and frenzied collage? Using a classic example of northern urban swing music to frame and undergird a series of reports about crime in the birthplace of jazz, it is a curious critique of reportage. Krupa's relentless drums create a sense of sonic frenzy to match the state of mind among concerned residents, reporters, and police officials. The contrast between the drums and the band perhaps reflects the tension between residents and local authorities, with the band thumbing their nose at the endless drumbeat of fear.

⁶⁶⁸ The Tape-beatles, "Sing Sing Sing (Sing Sing)" on *PhonoStatic 7*, PSRF.

Before hearing from police, for example, the piece highlights the sounds of a woman willing to take matters into her own hands by shooting potential assailants with a new gun, and a man lamenting the police's failure to respond to his cry for help. Only by the end of the collage do the police arrive, but there is little sense that they will solve the problem, since the woman repeats her desire to get a gun and the man repeats his sarcastic cry that the police are coming. Sonically speaking, though, there is little in the selected clips to suggest that the media necessarily played up the frayed trust between residents and authorities, or even that the coverage irresponsibly stoked public fears. Since the piece showed up on the "Audio Anxiety" issue of *PhonoStatic*, perhaps the Tape-beatles' assumption was that the content of crime reporting served to raise popular anxieties anyway, and they wanted to add the exciting sounds of the Benny Goodman Orchestra to amplify such tendencies. Since it was not merely a matter of turning the sounds of the newscast against itself, but transforming it through montage, the piece risked turning other people's trauma into sonic drama for distanced contemplation. It is a disconcerting piece, and one that does not lend itself to easy conclusions.

Although the Tape-beatles were interested in using recognizable popular songs like "Sing, Sing, Sing" in their plagiarist practices, the target throughout *The Big Broadcast* was the entirety of the media soundscape, from advertising slogans and news reports to radio station identification jingles and the sounds of radio static, rather than simply pop songs themselves. Take the opening suite to *The Big Broadcast*, which also appeared on *PhonoStatic 7* as "Listen to the Radio."⁶⁶⁹ After a woman's breathy voice whispers, "listen to the radio," the sound artists insert a 1964 Beatles radio interview from Miami and splice in the word "Tape" before every iteration of the group's name. For instance, answering the interviewer's question, "Where did the

⁶⁶⁹ The Tape-beatles, "Listen to the Radio," *PhonoStatic 7*, PSRF.

name [Tape] Beatles come from?,” George Harrison begins to reply, “Well, uh, we were thinking of a name a long time ago for the group, you know, and we were just racking our brains for names, and John came up with this name,” before being interrupted by one of the Tape-beatles, “Tapeworms, but we didn’t like that, so then we changed it to the Tape-beatles.”⁶⁷⁰ As a funny introduction to the group’s cheeky name, the George Harrison interview pokes fun at the politics of celebrity and makes grandiose claims about the Tape-beatles’ cultural aspirations.

With a brief clip of static announcing the next segment, as if someone were turning the dial on a radio, we hear a tiny snippet of a female opera singer, then static again, then jaunty music and a man’s velvety voice reading advertising copy: “Oh, the things you can do with America’s number one cheese spread.” The Tape-beatles’ aspirations thus weren’t any sillier than the idea that America’s number one cheese spread could somehow evoke a world of imaginative possibilities for those who heard the ad copy that came up next. More static. The upbeat brassy sounds and driving drums characteristic of production music for newscasts⁶⁷¹ undergird several voices. In turn, they exclaim, “And the ads become the news!,” “Cameras will show up,” “Three people are on the TV set,” “I think there’s a broad assumption. What is fair? What is honest? What is factual?” The production music confronts us with the need to discern truth from fiction in a world where the ads become the news. As with Oswald’s Mystery Tapes, the Tape-beatles refused to provide sonic citations for the sounds on their collages. Rather than operating as a game for listeners to revel in the mystery, though, the anonymity of the selected clips amplified the ways in which listeners might encounter equivalent sounds throughout the

⁶⁷⁰ Whether they actually considered the Tapeworms as a name is unclear, but it would have been fitting, since tape hobbyists had already started referring to themselves as tapeworms in the 1950s.

⁶⁷¹ More generally, production music refers to libraries of music licensed for use in newscasts, promotional videos, and the like. It is difficult to cite the source material precisely, once again, since the Tape-beatles did not provide citations to their plagiarized materials.

media soundscape. Even if one did not recognize this particular advertisement for spreadable cheese, or this particular bit of production music, one would recognize similar types of sounds provided a basic familiarity with the conventions of broadcast media in the last decades of the twentieth century.⁶⁷²

In the next segment, we hear two voices separated in both channels of the recording. One, growing gradually louder on the right channel, is a woman repeating “listen to the radio” repeatedly, while the other voice on the left channel belongs to a man on a self-help record, addressing the listener directly:

You are a happy person, full of imaginative thoughts, which pour forth constantly. Each day you feel more loveable, more interesting, you become more interested in others. You recognize and accept the friendship that people offer you, for you truly deserve it. You have a deep and sincere respect for yourself and for your personal worth to others. It is easy for you to accept the help and cooperation of others. You see their help to you as an expression of mutual friendship and understanding. You now realize that giving and receiving are two sides of the single coin. You’re aware of the trust and confidence you generate in others, and it makes you feel good. You think of yourself as a warm, generous, and loving person. You easily express love and affection, as you find it easy to accept love and approval. You like yourself because you are a friendly and giving person. You accept yourself as a unique and valuable person. You’re open, honest, and direct in your relations with people. You recognize that you are exceptionally talented and highly creative. This awareness makes you feel good.

The feel good message is belied by the disconcerting voice repeating “listen to the radio” over and over concurrently. Given what we’ve already heard in the piece, the notion that listening to the radio should grant serenity isn’t to be taken seriously. In the last part of the short suite, a hypnotic voice appears on its own, slowly lulling the listener to sleep with elongated vowels: “With each sound that you hear, each sound around you carries you deeper, deeper and sounder in sleep.” The feel good message from the self-help recording, and the hypnotic spell that followed, mirrored the flattering and slumber-inducing operations of the “big broadcasts” on

⁶⁷² The Tape-beatles, “Listen to the Radio,” *PhonoStatic* 7.

major radio and television networks, which primed audiences to support the advertisers. Through this brief collage, the Tape-beatles hoped to shake listeners from the slumber of passive listening practices and awaken to a richer sonic life within.⁶⁷³

While the self-help recording might just have worked as quirky found sound to critique the media, its empowering messages could also be heard as an earnest endorsement of the audio networker's craft, which left important traces on the tape as a whole (figs. 5.4-5.5). On the outside fold of the accompanying j-card's liner notes was text laying out the tape network's philosophical underpinnings: "It is published on a not-for-profit basis, as the editor feels that this completely obviates the selection of works using marketability as a consideration. The chances are quite good that you'll never hear audio quite like this anywhere else, and herein lies a major part of its value as a publicated [sic] commodity."⁶⁷⁴ Visually speaking, the text was difficult to read; black text on dark charcoal gray background to reinforce the sense of experimentation, discomfort, and anxiety on the tape within. Yet the tape projected accessibility in other ways. The cassette itself was a simple 45-minute blank Sony tape adorned with a typewritten sticker. As a standardized mass-produced object that could be filled in with contents of one's choosing, it was more do-it-yourself artifact than fine artist print. Between the text introducing the tape's editorial philosophy on the liner notes and the form of the blank tape came an overarching message: to invite listeners to actively engage the sounds they heard on a daily basis. That they too could produce tapes like this with easy to access raw materials like cassette tapes and radios. The inner fold of the liner notes reinforced the message. Printed in black on a white background for the sake of legibility, the track listing came complete with contributors' addresses. As was

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ Lloyd Dunn, liner notes to *PhonoStatic 7 (Audio Anxiety)*, self-released, October 1987, audiocassette, audiocassette box 15, LD Collection. Also at PSRF.

typical at this stage of their artistic evolution, we can see that the Tape-beatles' network was in fact quite far-flung, and not at all centered in the world's best known cultural capitals: artists from Houston, Aberdeen, Washington, Des Moines, Iowa, Vancouver, Wichita all sent in pieces for inclusion. Again and again, by the sheer fact of listing addresses, objects like this invited further communication and connection from people like the intended recipients of the cassette.

The recording's emphasis on the good feelings that resulted from sharing and receiving, from making connections with others, from realizing that others recognize and value your creative contributions, was boilerplate feel-good advice, yes. And the uncomfortable sounds that formed the backdrop of this segment pointed towards the kinds of avant garde experimentalism that animated much of the audio that came out of the network, including elsewhere on this same cassette. This distancing gesture though, should not be accepted at face value either, since the recording also spoke to the genuine yearning for connection that animated many networkers' activities, and not in dissimilar language. The liner notes that invited further communication, as well as the self-recorded, self-edited, self-duplicated, and self-distributed cassette itself perfectly encapsulated the pleasurable labor that made these sounds possible to hear. And to replicate their listening and self-publishing practices on your own, if you so desired.

Ultimately, this appeal for communication through networking helped to mark a distinction that was increasingly important to the Tape-beatles' self-definition by the beginning of the 1990s: the distinction between "artists" and "cultural workers." The difference, say, between Oswald's plunderphonic art and the Tape-beatles' plagiarist networking had in part to do with their source materials, but also to their relationship to the art world. In an interview that appeared in networking magazine *ND* in 1991, Lloyd Dunn argued that his group was: "Making the ordinary seem strange. Trying to cut to the heart of the matter. Trying to make something

appealing and accessible without being too stupid.” If listeners already felt alienated from the sounds around them, estranging those sounds from their original context might make it easier for listeners to make sense of the nature of that alienation. Since they were as likely to use clips of miscellaneous advertisements, radio stingers, or self-help records as they were to use clips of Beatles or Benny Goodman songs, the Tape-beatles wanted listeners to be aware of all the mediated sounds around them, and to consider them all ripe for creative use and transformation.

Dunn hoped that the group’s practices might ultimately:

Encourage people to use creativity in all parts of their lives, and not feel obligated to interact with the ‘arts’ in some way, so that they feel creative or feel that they have benefited in some way from creativity. Art has nothing to do with it. Taking control has everything to do with it. It’s a good feeling making new things, even if you steal the parts from somewhere else. Thus, plagiarism ®.⁶⁷⁵

Drawing a line in the sand between art and cultural production to clarify his stance, Dunn explained to *ND*’s editor that “A cultural worker experiments and works with all possible cultural effects; whereas an ‘artist’ works only within the rarefied art world. Art is elitist and classicist, even sexist, and racist. Cultural work is not.”⁶⁷⁶ Leaving aside the important demographic fact that the culture workers in their network tended to be middle-class white men like themselves, however alienated, the Tape-beatles were attempting to align themselves with the more radical tendencies within the anti-copyright crowd by emphasizing their discomfort with art’s role in the production of capital.

⁶⁷⁵ Daniel Plunkett, “Interview with Lloyd Dunn,” *ND* 14 (February 1991), 21.

⁶⁷⁶ Daniel Plunkett, “Interview with Lloyd Dunn,” *ND* 14 (February 1991), 21. As Dunn continued to explain, he drew this language about culture workers from London-based mail artist Mark Pawson, who had been involved in the London Festival of Plagiarism and had described himself as a cultural worker for years as a means to distinguish his photocopy, sticker, and badge productions from art.

*** Plagiarism®: A Collective Vision ***

At the same time as the Tape-beatles came to their audio practice, a radical strain of thinking on plagiarism as an emancipatory cultural practice began bubbling up from throughout the mail art network. This strain owed much of its philosophy on a plagiarist-friendly reading of Situationism in many underground subcultures throughout the 1980s. Coming out of the post-World War II art movement known as Lettrism, the *Internationale Situationiste* emerged in Paris in 1957 as a small group of thinkers and activists who sought to theorize the nature of modern capitalist society and played a significant part in the collective actions of May 1968. Throughout their letter writing, journal publishing, and other cultural practices, the Situationists began developing a surrealist and unorthodox Marxist critique of capitalism through a theory of the spectacle. The spectacle, in this world, was not merely the mass mediated image, but the entire ensemble of social relations that alienated individuals from the experiential reality of their daily lives. As capitalist society absorbed lived experience and transformed it into a variety of commodities to be bought and sold, Guy Debord wrote in his iconic 1967 text, *La société du spectacle*, “everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”⁶⁷⁷ Debord saw the spectacle as “the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.”⁶⁷⁸ Faced with the totalizing imperial force by which the spectacle asserted its dominance over a passive society, Debord and other Situationists like Raoul Vaneigem sought alternative cultural practices that might generate active responses among those on the receiving end of the spectacle.

Situationists turned to *détournement*, best translated as diversion or subversion, as a means of repurposing the meaning of various texts or images to critical purposes. Or, in the

⁶⁷⁷ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), thesis 1.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, thesis 13.

words of McKenzie Wark, *détournement* could be thought of as “the integration of present or past artistic productions into a construction that surpasses them,” and typically without formal quotation.⁶⁷⁹ Most famously, the *Internationale Situationiste* journal published comic strips with altered speech bubbles to articulate Situationist political messages. Of particular theoretical interest to people in the Tape-beatles’ circles was Debord’s reuse of poet Lautréamont’s line, “Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It embraces an author’s phrase, makes use of his expressions, erases a false idea, and replaces it with the right idea.”⁶⁸⁰ Theorist Sadie Plant, sympathetic to the conversations the Tape-beatles participated in, explained in 1992, that *détournement* was “a way of putting the stasis of the spectacle in motion. It is plagiaristic, because its materials are those which already appear within the spectacle, and subversive, since its tactics are those of the ‘reversal of perspective.’”⁶⁸¹ Though the extent to which Situationists believed that *détournement* might fundamentally challenge the society of the spectacle is unclear, particularly because they believed capitalist society was particularly adept at recuperating all forms of critique, this understanding of *détournement* as plagiarism resonated widely within the Tape-beatles’ network (fig. 5.6).

Even more so than Debord’s enigmatic text, this subcultural circulation of Situationist ideas created a critical mass for plagiarist practices within the Eternal Network and other communities.⁶⁸² Not only did *PhotoStatic* publish issues with the titles of *Plagiarism*, *Cultural*

⁶⁷⁹ McKenzie Wark, “*Détournement: An Abuser’s Guide*,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 14 (2009): 145-146.

⁶⁸⁰ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, thesis 207.

⁶⁸¹ Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 86. For her full discussion of *détournement* as plagiarism, see 85-89. For more on the issue, see Wark, “*Détournement*,” 145-153;

⁶⁸² Part of this had to do with newfound accessibility of Situationist works. While *Society of the Spectacle* was quickly translated into English by the new left journal *Radical America* in collaboration with Detroit publisher Black & Red in 1970, a new edition appeared in 1983, complete with a cover that proved as iconic as the text within. In 1979, Raoul Vaneigem’s 1967 *Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes generations* as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, while Ken Knabb translated and edited the 1981 *Situationist International Anthology*, published by

Property, and *Detournement* in 1988 and 1989, many others were beginning to employ the language of Situationism to level critiques of mass media organizations and tried to find ways of resisting their grasp. By the early 1990s, Lloyd Dunn's personal collection included the following pamphlets and zines: *Noospapers Seizing the Media*, a New Jersey-based mail art zine's call for the establishment of an "Immediast Underground," that would "stud[y] and exert tactics that direct the spectacle against *itself*."⁶⁸³ Multiple issues of the *Not Bored!* zine, a "situationist-inspired, low-budget, irregularly published, photocopied journal of cultural critique" published from Ann Arbor, MI, Buffalo, NY, then Providence, RI throughout the 1980s.⁶⁸⁴ The goal, its publisher explained, was "to smash commodity fetishism, militarism, socio-economic exploitation, and the integrated spectacle of late capitalism."⁶⁸⁵ A call for contributions to the *Cactus Network*, a bi-monthly non-profit assembly zine from South London that asked whether "exposing the methods of the media as commodity give us a chance of establishing a more democratic control of our lives."⁶⁸⁶ Issues of *Fatuous Times*, a publication from Stoke-on-Trent, England associated with "Anticopyright [...] an international distribution network for radical flyposters" that emerged out of the Decentralised World-Wide Networkers' Congress in 1992.⁶⁸⁷ Combining mail art networking, Situationism, and an anti-copyright stance, these various

the Bureau of Public Secrets. Greil Marcus' popular book *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, published in 1989, capped off this resurgence by arguing for the deep and lingering presence of Dadaist, surrealist, and Situationist noise on the punk rock scene and other radical aesthetic movements through the century. Beyond these texts, the ideas circulated throughout underground subcultures like American underground rock. See Neil Nehring, "The Situationist International in American Hardcore Punk, 1982-2002," *Popular Music and Society* 29 (2006): 519-530.

⁶⁸³ Immediast Underground, *Noospapers Seizing the Media* (Westfield, NJ: Noospapers, 1992), section IV. Pamphlet in Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection. Many of these materials found their way into *Retrofuturist* 16 (March 1992).

⁶⁸⁴ Bill Brown, *Not Bored!*, June 1996, 21, in Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

⁶⁸⁵ Bill Brown, *Not Bored!*, July 1990, in Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

⁶⁸⁶ *Cactus Brief 17*, Cactus Network, in Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

⁶⁸⁷ *Fatuous Times 2*, in Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

publications situated the Tape-beatles firmly within a radical leftist tendency that saw the subversion of cultural property as a necessary tactic in an offensive against the spectacle society.

One of the most prominent exponents of this tendency was Stewart Home, a London-based writer and provocateur who compiled pamphlets in favor of plagiarism prior to hosting Festivals of Plagiarism in London and Glasgow by the end of the 1980s. Home had identified at one time with “Neoism,” a Situationist-inflected international subculture that took root through the mail art network in the 1980s and emphasized praxis, plagiarism, and the denial of originality. Its most notable intervention was the “open pop star” concept “Monty Cantsin,” in which a variety of people took on the name in their writings, music, and mailings to deny the notion of an original author in any of their productions.⁶⁸⁸ While Home gradually diverged from Neoism, he continued to employ some of its ideas.

The opening essay in the 1987 pamphlet edited by Home, *Plagiarism: Art as Commodity and Strategies for its Negation*, for instance, was attributed to “Karen Eliot,” another multiple name. Claiming plagiarism as “the negative point of a culture that finds its ideological justification in the ‘unique,’” the essay distinguished it as a strategy from post-modernist appropriation. Karen Eliot here portrayed post-modernist art as a capitulation to dominant social structures of power, since “post-modern theory falsely asserts that there is no longer any basic reality,” whereas “the plagiarist [...] recognises the role the media plays in masking the

⁶⁸⁸ Others within the Tape-beatles’ network, like tENTATIVELY a. CONVENIENCE in Baltimore, MD, and Vittore Baroni (aka Lieutenant Murnau) in Forte de Marmi, Italy, were also devotees of Neoism and hosted many “apartment festivals” of experimental music. For more on Neoism, see Stewart Home, *Neoism, Plagiarism & Praxis* (Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press, 1995); C. Carr, “The Triumph of Neoism,” 105-111 in *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008 [1993]); Tatiana Bazzichelli, *Networking: The Net as Artwork* (Arhus: Digital Aesthetics Research Center, 2008), 43-57.

mechanisms of Power and actively seeks to disrupt this function.”⁶⁸⁹ Another essay elaborated on this point at length:

The plagiarist has no difficulty with meanings, reality, truth. The plagiarist sees no crisis of the sign - only the continual transformation of human relationships within a social context. When a post-modernist talks of plagiarism they call it ‘appropriation’ (transfer of ownership) in an attempt to maintain the ideological role of the artist. As Capitalism sinks further into crisis, it becomes increasingly difficult for any ‘individual’ artist to exude an appearance of ‘originality’. Reacting to this ‘impossible’ situation the post-modernist takes on a ‘corporate’ image and ‘copyrights’ an ill-digested assortment of fragments. This is in direct contrast to the plagiarist who, rather than accepting this stasis, seeks to speed up the process of decay, and opposes both modernism AND post-modernism (which are but two stages in the trajectory of Capital) with the totality of communist transformation.⁶⁹⁰

Provocatively polemical about post-modernism’s “crisis of the sign,” essays like these asserted the revolutionary potential for plagiarism to subvert artistic practices that, intentionally or not, upheld capital as ultimate arbiter of value in contemporary society. In another essay in his own name, Home used language later picked up by the Tape-beatles, asserting “Plagiarism saves time and effort, improves results, and shows considerable initiative on the part of the individual plagiarist. As a revolutionary tool it is ideally suited to the needs of the twentieth century [...] Let’s do away once and for all with the myth of ‘genius.’”⁶⁹¹ If art was the purview of individual genius, plagiarism could be the purview of a collective impulse to see through the society of the spectacle.

Home’s polemic collection of essays served to spur debate and help publicize the Festival of Plagiarism in London in January and February 1988. Among other events, such as a show for artists identifying as Karen Eliot, the festival included an installation called “Xerography And

⁶⁸⁹ Karen Eliot, “Plagiarism as Negation in Culture,” 5, in Stewart Home, ed., *Plagiarism: Art as Commodity and Strategies for its Negation* (London: Aporia Press, 1987).

⁶⁹⁰ Bob Jones, “Why Plagiarism?,” 8, in *Plagiarism*.

⁶⁹¹ Stewart Home, “Auto-Plagiarism,” 6, in *Plagiarism*.

Other Ephemera From The Eternal Network,” curated by the Tape-beatles’ good friends Miekal And and Liz Was from Madison, WI. It also included an event for “National Home Taping Day,” in which participants were invited to “help kill the music industry by making up a cassette of far out sounds for a friend.”⁶⁹² In another booklet printed after the fact, Home reported that this latter event was a crucial demonstration of a larger point for the Festivals of Plagiarism at large: “To turn music into a commodity, the record industry requires that the role of the musician (as ‘creator’) is foregrounded (and that - in terms of appearance - the listener is reduced to the status of a paying customer). In a very limited (but still positive and productive) way, home taping challenges this state of affairs.”⁶⁹³ This was plagiarism as a means to deny sounds a commodity status, to deny the equation of listener with consumer, and to deny the artist as sole producer.

Though they only partook in the first Festival of Plagiarism at a distance by sending their recordings and visual works through the mail, the Tape-beatles formed a crucial node in the development of a plagiarist philosophy. In July 1988, some four months after the initial festival in London, they published an issue of *PhotoStatic* devoted to plagiarism. As Tape-beatle Ralph Johnson wrote:

Plagiarism is convenient. It points to more issues than simply the theft of material. It asks if it is possible not to steal intellectual property. The only dishonesty it recognizes is the original. Plagiarism saves thought. It is an honest admission of an artificial condition of the 20th century. It is an attempt to regain control of the cultural and intellectual life that has been stolen from us. Our lives have become their property.⁶⁹⁴

It was not merely that original thought was no longer possible in a highly mediated world, but that broadcast media had turned consumers into products. If the audience’s eyes and ears could

⁶⁹² “The Festival of Plagiarism – Events” 4, in *Plagiarism*.

⁶⁹³ Stewart Home, *The Festival of Plagiarism* (London: Sabotage Editions, 1989), 14.

⁶⁹⁴ Ralph Johnson, “Plagiarism®,” *PhotoStatic* 31 (July 1988), 1088, PSRF.

be sold to advertisers, something needed to be done in order to reassert control over the sensory experiences of daily life.

One way to do so was to turn to the tape recorder. Stephen Perkins, who had been compiling a guidebook to self-published zines, was living in Iowa City in the early 1990s. Though Perkins was not a member of the Tape-beatles, he had been a longtime contributor to *PhotoStatic* while living in San Francisco before heading pursuing a PhD in Art History at the University of Iowa. In January 1992, Perkins submitted an essay entitled, “Plagiarism: The Bastard Child,” to *VITAL*, an English language “magazine for electronic and electroacoustic music” based in the Netherlands that had devoted five issues to an extended discussion of “anti-copyright” from 1991 to 1993. Pursuing an extended metaphor about the profit-driven “factory of sound” and its “jealous lover capital” giving “birth to a child called product,” Perkins argued that tape recorders and other reproducing technologies gave everyone “access to the assembly line.” “Plagiarism (despite the powers arraigned against it),” he hoped, “offers us the only hope for re-inserting back into the public domain what was rightfully ours in the first place. The tape recorder is the liberator of culture, not its suppressor.”⁶⁹⁵ In practice, how might the recorder do so?

In the first issue of *Retrofuturism*, the Tape-beatles explained their use of tape at length in an effort to demonstrate how one might turn a plagiarist philosophy into aesthetic practice:

How does one begin to extoll the wondrous virtues of tape? By tape I refer to possibilities, or; adhesive tape, recording tape, and the Tape-beatles. Because there exists adhesive and recording tape, there exist the Tape-beatles. The Tape-beatles rob Peter to pay Paul using the Tape like a magnet to attract the metallic filings of popular culture, rendering them down into a magnetic core sample which intersects and interacts with all forms of Sound [...] The idea that Sound is or can be simply another realm of surreal estate, to be acquired for the sake of acquiring it, and not with any real interest in the thing itself or the experience it is

⁶⁹⁵ Stephen Perkins, “Plagiarism: The Bastard Child,” *VITAL* 23 (March 1992), 7. The essay was also reproduced in *Retrofuturist* 16 (March 1992), 1747, PSRF.

capable of creating with (if you will bear with me) the proper aforethought, is something these noble and uncomfortable creatures abhor, as nature to a vacuum.⁶⁹⁶

Denying the property status of sounds audible to all, this early manifesto argued that rendering sound into physical manipulable artifact on tape paradoxically undermined its status as private property. If immaterial sounds could be owned, potential ownership needed to be denied by the unauthorized use of copyrighted sounds made material. The notion that “ideas could be the property of someone, treated like real estate, contradicts the drive towards intellectual and creative liberation, which the Tape-beatles hold as one of their primary reasons for existence.”⁶⁹⁷ Though they spoke of intellectual and creative liberation, they did not equate that liberty to individual autonomy, for plagiarism, they believed, was “a collective vision.”⁶⁹⁸ To make this clear, they needed to turn sound from a private commodity into a collective way of hearing, as they had already tried to do in their recordings. And if sound could lead to collective modes of listening, perhaps it could also lead to forms of collective action beyond their network.

*** Culture Working Outside the Network ***

The Tape-beatles took on an increasingly prominent space within these discussions of plagiarism in public print sources beyond the network, which had come to an inflection point by the early 1990s. As the network had become larger by the end of the 1980s, many within it, Dunn included, felt that it started to lose some of its critical value, that it had become too self-congratulatory and insular, and that the real work needed to come in building bridges to the world outside the network. In August 1989, Lloyd Dunn attended the second Festival of

⁶⁹⁶ *PhotoStatic 28 / Retrofuturist 1* (January 1988), 948-949, 950-951, PSRF.

⁶⁹⁷ *PhotoStatic 28 / Retrofuturist 1* (January 1988), 960, PSRF.

⁶⁹⁸ This slogan appeared often in the pages of *Retrofuturist*, for example, in *PhotoStatic 28 / Retrofuturist 1* (January 1988), 958, PSRF.

Plagiarism in Glasgow, Scotland and reported back on the proceedings in issue 38 of *PhotoStatic*. His report highlighted many of the successes for the network to date then raised important questions about its limitations in moving forward. Reasserting some of Stewart Home's talking points from the earlier pamphlet on plagiarism, Dunn wrote "Plagiarism is an honest appraisal of the facts: new forms, challenging to the establishment, are quickly absorbed by the culture. Open rebellion this year becomes style next year—so the rebellion is effectively quelled by its being absorbed."⁶⁹⁹ Retrenching into one's own subculture, however, could lead to wider irrelevance. One of the problems in his earlier activities, Dunn argued, was that "the 'network,' as it has been called, had come to seem insular and not directly engaged in culture as a whole, although it seems quite adept at creating its own 'culture.'"⁷⁰⁰ Plagiarism, he hoped, could reverse that state of affairs "by making use of pre-existing information, changing it, and then putting it back out to circulate again, a glitch in the video of constructed reality."⁷⁰¹ For all the value of Situationist thinking to the development of plagiarist philosophy, Dunn believed that the "writing, noted for its turgidity, effectively oversaw its own guarantee of impotence" because of its reliance on "bourgeois and intelligentsian language."⁷⁰² Since the kind of *détournement* he favored used the everyday forms and words of mass media against itself, Dunn thought there could still be value in a plagiarist aesthetic that could reach a wider audience than a writer like Guy Debord. Still, the festival struggled, in his eyes, with a lack of "public engagement," in part because other media sources did not care to report on the festival, and in part because organizers had not put enough work into publicizing the event.⁷⁰³ How could one achieve these potentially

⁶⁹⁹ Lloyd Dunn, "Report from the Festival of Plagiarism," *PhotoStatic* 38 (October 1989), 1421, PSRF.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1422.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1422.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 1424.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 1423.

contradictory goals? How could one combine the dedication to a critical aesthetic craft “practiced intelligently, with energy and diligence,” especially when its practice relied on the autonomy granted by networking activities, while also trying to expand the conversational circles to include a wider audience?⁷⁰⁴

Curious, then, that Dunn agreed to take part in an “Art Strike” from 1990-1993, since on its face, it would seem to limit opportunities for further dissemination of his views. Initially proposed by Stewart Home’s PRAXIS group, the Art Strike would have participants refuse to produce art for three years in order to begin a conversation about the link between capital and the art establishment. If art was a precious commodity, and artists understood themselves as collaborative culture workers, they could withdraw from the field of production altogether to deny capital the possibility of benefiting from art.⁷⁰⁵ Rather than using the collective power of art workers to reimagine relations of production, this was a call to withdraw from traditional fields of distribution (fig. 5.7).⁷⁰⁶ Brandishing slogans like “Demolish Serious Culture,” and “The Years Without Art,” the Art Strike hoped to “demonstrate that the socially imposed hierarchy of the arts can be aggressively challenged,” even when “the numbers involved will be so small that the strike is unlikely to force the closure of any galleries or art institutions.” While much of the rhetoric was directed in opposition to those institutions, the “Art Strike is principally focused on the role of the artist. On how the artist defines his or her identify, on how that identify affects the

⁷⁰⁴ All quotes from Lloyd Dunn, “Report from the Festival of Plagiarism,” *PhotoStatic* 38 (October 1989), 1420-1424, PSRF.

⁷⁰⁵ This was not the first attempt by an artist to organize an Art Strike. Home had been inspired by Fluxus associated artist Gustav Metzger’s 1974 call for an Art Strike from 1977-1980. The relative failure of Metzger’s strike led Home to publicize his call more widely through actions like the Festivals of Plagiarism. On Metzger’s Art Strike and its influence on Home, see Gustav Metzger, “Call For An Art Strike From 1977-1980,” *YAWN* 38 (March 1993), 1848, PSRF; and Stewart Home, “Assessing the Art Strike 1990-1993: Notes From a Talk Given by Stewart Home at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, England, 30 January 1993,” *YAWN* 38 (March 1993), 1847-1849, PSRF. For more on the Art Strike, see *The Art Strike Papers*, edited by Stewart Home and James Mannox (Stirling, Scotland: AK Press, 1991).

⁷⁰⁶ See Saper, *Networked Art*, 49.

artist's ability to engage with the surrounding culture."⁷⁰⁷ This was, in fact, a direct outgrowth of the conversations about plagiarism in the Eternal Network, both in terms of the arguments denying originality, and because the small number of participants emerged from its ranks. Art Strike Action Committees arose in San Francisco, Baltimore, London, Bordeaux, Montevideo, Uruguay, among people who had been active networkers in the years leading up to the strike.

For his part, Dunn ceased publication of *PhotoStatic* from 1990-1993. He may simply have grown weary of the extensive networking activities he had begun in 1983 and wanted to channel his energies elsewhere than *PhotoStatic*, even though his future efforts felt much the same as the temporarily suspended zine. He explained his decision by noting that "most networking and/or mail art amounts to a fetishization of the act of communication, with little or no attention paid to the content of that communication."⁷⁰⁸ Notably, this was the same frustration felt by Tony Schwartz when he began communicating with amateur radio enthusiasts in the 1930s. Coming full circle, Dunn had tried to move beyond communication itself as a virtue towards a new class-based analysis of culture work as a practice that could lead to collective action.

In the absence of *PhotoStatic*, Dunn published 45 short issues of a new endeavor called *YAWN: A Sporadic Critique of Culture*. A production of the "Art Strike Action Committee," and later, the "Aggressive School of Cultural Workers," the newsletter operated as an assembling magazine, collating altered comic strips, satirical advice columns, letters to the editor, literature reviews, and other irregular features that debated the merits of the Art Strike from supporters and detractors alike. Here, as elsewhere, the issue was contentious. "Face it," wrote one letter writer, "Art Strike is *specific* to our 'subculture,' and has no chance of reaching almost anyone outside

⁷⁰⁷ Stewart Home, "About the Art Strike," <https://www.stewarthomesociety.org/features/artstrik3.htm>

⁷⁰⁸ Lloyd Dunn, "PhotoStatic on Art Strike (1990-1993)," *PhotoStatic* 38 (October 1989), 1418, PSRF.

of it. It's intrinsically incomprehensible to anyone outside the subculture." Taking issue with the suggestion that stopping *PhotoStatic* would help broaden interest in the issues that motivated Dunn, he continued, "Martyrdom is nothing."⁷⁰⁹ Dunn took issue with this characterization: "the goal of the Art Strike is to get people (not just artists) away from the notion of subcultures through encouraging a more pervasive activism. Why squander the creative impulse on art when there's a world of problems to be solved?"⁷¹⁰ What those problems might be went unstated, but Dunn was trying to argue for an expansion of activities and conversations outside of the network subculture.

Exchanges within *YAWN* weren't the only place to discuss the merits of the Art Strike. One cassette in Dunn's collection, a compilation called *Identification* published by Christof Migone's See///.Saw tape label out of Montreal, featured a playful audio piece about the Art Strike. In it, an unidentified and unheard interviewer asked several people whether they were participating in the Art Strike. The most common response, "What Art Strike?," followed by laughter, spoke to the marginality of the action, even among people who might be sympathetic. One of the voices on the tape recited the Art Strike's justification before offering her own opinion: "Art is conceptually defined by a self-perpetuating elite and is marketed as an international commodity. The activity of its production has been mystified and coopted. Its practitioners have become manipulable and/or marginalized through self-identification with the term artist and all it implies. That's good, I like that. Art sucks." Later on, though, the same woman disagreed with the assertions, both because it put too much responsibility on the artist, and because it wouldn't be politically effective:

Now see I have to disagree with this. Yeah, you really do, and the reason why you do have to is because yet again, it assumes that the responsibility for these kinds

⁷⁰⁹ Anonymous letter writer from Wheaton, Illinois, *YAWN* 9 (1 January 1990), 2073, PSRF.

⁷¹⁰ *YAWN* answer to Wheaton, Illinois author, *YAWN* 9 (1 January 1990), 2073, PSRF.

of things, like falls back on an artist, in some kind of way, which is really grandiose and self-important. And if these people really meant to do anything about anything, what they would do is, lobby their governments, to actually create change, or you know, armed revolution, is what I'm into. You know, total overthrow of the capitalist state. Sure. You getting this all down? Am I raging or frothing at the mouth?

Art Strikers would likely respond that responsibility *should* fall on artists, particularly because their self-identification as artists was part of the process by which the hierarchies in the art world were established, and by which art became an international commodity. The next two voices laughed, "What kind of magazine is this *YAWN* thing anyway?" "Commies, obviously." She and the next person on the tape then traded jokes about the artworks that might be lost: "No more landscapes?" "No more ideas sold for \$26,000?" "No more one-of-a-kind art sales at the Chimo Inn? No more dogs playing poker? No more googly eyed kids with the big big big tear eyes?" "Aw man."⁷¹¹ Bringing up a variety of easily identifiable commercial styles, like landscapes, poker playing dogs, and Margaret Keane's waifs, these joking women were reformulating Dunn's point, that little of seeming artistic or cultural value would be lost as a result of the Art Strike. Even though many of the voices seemed skeptical about the Art Strike, these were precisely the conversations that Dunn wanted to elicit. His production of *YAWN* had given voice to his own views of the action, but the fact that he could get a tape from someone else in his network provided physical evidence for the conversations it could generate.

As should be clear by now, the call for an Art Strike was contentious within the network as a whole, in part because of the tensions in the positions taken by its advocates. To some extent, nobody could agree on the ultimate point of the strike. Was it to destabilize art galleries and other venues that wanted to purchase and display new artworks? Did it mean that nobody

⁷¹¹ Le paradis, "Art Strike," *Identification*, See///.Saw tapes, edited by Christof Migone, 1990, audiocassette, in audiocassette box 6, LD Collection.

who wanted to participate could produce any new works, whether for sale or not, whether classified as art or not, whether displayed in a gallery or sent through the mail? Was it to assert the common class status of culture workers along non-hierarchical lines? And if networkers had made a virtue of their hobbyist status, could they really turn around and claim to be going on strike when they weren't making a living on their culture work? Had the Festivals of Plagiarism not already raised the relevant issues regarding the privileged commodity status of art, and proposed aesthetic solutions to the impasse?

** *"I Hope You Can Hear Me, Because I Want You To Know"* **

None of these questions had satisfactorily been answered for the Tape-beatles, so they went ahead and continued their activities as before. Perhaps responding to Dunn's fears of network insularity, the Tape-beatles' activities became even more outward looking and international during the Art Strike. At this point, the lineup consisted of Dunn, Linda Morgan Brown (a fellow MFA student at the University of Iowa who had done some video production for the Tape-beatles, including a video for "Sing Sing Sing"), Paul Neff (formerly of Iowa City punk band Stiff Legged Sheep), Ralph Johnson (who returned after a brief sojourn in San Francisco), and John Heck. As a collective, they continued to make and release sound collages, including the full-length releases *Music With Sound* (1991) and *The Grand Delusion* (1993), published their own zine *Retrofuturist* (which, suspiciously, contained many of the same features as *PhotoStatic*, and contributed to the long print discussion of the Art Strike), aired *RadioStatic* (though it was now hosted by Paul Neff instead of Dunn), and established the Copyright Violation Squad. In this last instance, they not only refused to stop producing art, they reproduced artworks that had been withdrawn from public distribution for legal reasons.

Networking continued to be important to their activities, and during the years of the Art Strike, the print run for *Retrofuturist* actually exceeded that of *PhotoStatic*. While *PhotoStatic*'s circulation had grown from the low 200s in early 1988 to the high 300s at the end of 1989, the independent issues of *Retrofuturist* jumped from 385 for issue 12 in January 1990 to 795 for issue 16 in March 1992. In general terms, these runs were still quite limited, but they had found ways to expand their readership. For issue 13, they teamed up with RRR Records from Lowell, MA, who had put out many experimental cassettes throughout the 1980s, to include a 7" extended play single that included music from Mystery Tape labs and the Tape-beatles, among others, which helped the circulation grow to 732.⁷¹²

In addition to occasionally releasing the zine with help from others, they were also searching for a record label to take on the work of releasing and distributing their future full-length collages commercially, in part to reach a wider audience than they could on their own. These decisions weren't without tension, and not only because self-distribution had been important to their activities from the beginning. When announcing their 1991 album *Music With Sound*, for instance, they joked in the pages of *Retrofuturist* about the implications of putting their work out on compact disc through electronic musician Gerald Belanger's DOVe (Death of Vinyl Entertainment) label out of Toronto: "What happens when American's year-after-year favorite tape band, after countless bushels of excess verbiage have served to illuminate a whole generation as to the wonders of analog tape recording above and beyond mere 'sampling,' finally screws the pooch and goes digital? Nothing good, say the Tape-beatles' most ardent fans."⁷¹³ Even so, an ad for the album in the same issue proclaimed the value of the recording for all listeners, with verbose tongue firmly in cheek. "Here's your chance to share our conviction that

⁷¹² Again, all references to the print runs come from the PSRF online archive listings for individual issues.

⁷¹³ *Retrofuturist* 15 (August 1991), 1730, PSRF.

obtaining the best quality recycled culture is a critical advantage in meeting your goals and objectives, plus a refined sense of security knowing that your needs are being met by people whose level of honesty and seriousness is unmatched.”⁷¹⁴ The Tape-beatles’ tone, at once earnest and joking, tried to pull people into serious discussions of their work without always taking themselves too seriously.

The album itself marked somewhat of a departure from *A Subtle Buoyancy of Pulse*. If that first album had demonstrated the means by which the group was learning how to use tape recorders in order to respond to their media landscape, *Music With Sound* betrayed a greater technical sophistication and a broader sonic palette. Taking its name and many of its source sounds from a hi-fi demonstration record, that is, a record meant to test the sonic qualities of one’s sound system in the 1950s and 1960s, it reveled in the detritus of popular culture.⁷¹⁵ Not only radio and television broadcasts, but kitschy mass-produced records found in thrift stores, educational materials, workplace training videos, even the network produced and distributed tapes received by the Tape-beatles. Aside from a few snippets of popular songs, the source materials here were less easily recognizable, the meanings less obvious, the targets more diffuse, the pieces less distinct. That was part of the point. One writer described the 31 tracks over 45 minutes as “a trawl through the info-swamp, an attempt to invoke meaning from apparently random data.”⁷¹⁶ Even more than the previous album, *Music With Sound* was a continuous statement on ever-present nature of sound in late twentieth century society.

⁷¹⁴ *Retrofuturist* 15 (August 1991), 1741, PSRF.

⁷¹⁵ The original hi-fi demonstration record is Various artists, *Music With Sound*, Time Records Series 2000, no date, TSD-3, LP Record.

⁷¹⁶ Brian Duguid, “The Unacceptable Face of Plagiarism?,” *Electric Shock Treatment* 3 (Summer 1992), 22. In Zines and Periodicals, Box 1, LD Collection.

More than simply comment on the commodity status of broadcasting, as with the earlier pieces discussed, the pieces here treated the physiological and psychological effects of sound upon listeners, not only at home, but in the workplace as well. Modeling the frantic pace of the contemporary work, “I Can’t Help You At All, Sorry” brings listeners a day in the life of the corporate office environment. It begins with a brief fanfare from the Beatles’ “Good Morning, Good Morning,” quickly shifts to punchy music similar to the production music used in the “Listen to the Radio” piece, then the sound of swinging golf clubs, a man saying, “not again,” the golf clubs again, a tiny bit of the production music, and again the golf clubs, all in the first fourteen seconds. “I thought that’d be done by now,” a male office worker says, above the sound of clacking keyboards, while a woman replies, “I can’t talk about that right now, I’m rushing to finish the Peterson proposal,” “I thought that’d be done by now,” and more golf clubs. The rush of the day comes to a head when an authority figure asks when the work will be done, then demands, “no excuses, no delays” over the protests of the female worker who reminds him “I can’t stay late tonight.” Another man’s voice, “the work is really piling up today. I can’t win,” before the woman returns to assure that she can’t help him today.⁷¹⁷ From an early morning wakeup call care of the Beatles through a pressure-filled day at the office in less than a minute, the track analogizes the frenetic pace and tedium demanded of the workers through its quick cuts and frequently repeated sounds. The following piece is a mild protest, beginning with a man who speaks its title, “I Can’t Do It.” “Why not?,” he’s asked. “I don’t know, I just can’t.” Unable to articulate his dissatisfaction while even punchier production music swirls around him, he is left stammering, “I simply can’t [splice] I cannot say [splice] no. I simply could not do it.”⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁷ The Tape-beatles, “I Can’t Help You, Sorry,” *Music With Sound*, DOVentertainment Inc., DOVe CD44, 1991, compact disc.

⁷¹⁸ The Tape-beatles, “I Can’t Do It,” *Music With Sound*.

Brought to the brink by the day that preceded, the only possible response is inchoate refusal from a modern day Bartleby.

A few minutes later, another suite of short pieces in the middle of the album, some six and a half minutes long, returned to the psychological qualities of sound writ large. “Waves of Waves” opens with a man with a compressed voice, likely speaking into a telephone, “Everything, light, sound, air, is all really translated into waves [splice] waves of [splice] waves.” With the line “waves of waves” bouncing across the left and right audio channels repeatedly, orchestral strings begin to fade up in the mix, holding a note of tension. Continuing to describe the “wave theory of involvement” even as his voice becomes choppy and harder to hear through sonic manipulation, “we shake our message out of ourselves and shake our message into someone else.” Among receivers, “each can acknowledge the other message” as it comes “waving, undulating, staking, vibrating” from someone else. It’s unclear from the recording whether the words were spoken in this order, or whether they were rearranged by the Tape-beatles. Regardless, it requires the listener’s full attention to make out the disintegrating words and try to acknowledge the message of the recording’s sound waves. The orchestra from earlier in the piece rises in volume to a crescendo once the voice is done speaking before the next piece begins.⁷¹⁹

“Earlids” fades in with a continuous and regular beeping sound reminiscent of a life support system in a hospital, along with an eerie synthesizer playing a single note. “You as a twentieth century American have developed earlids. So many messages come to your ears that you have learned to screen out most of what you hear. You have to do this to preserve your sanity.” Cats’ meows replace the voice, then are joined by ringing telephones, crying babies, and

⁷¹⁹ The Tape-beatles, “Waves of Waves,” *Music With Sound*.

drills, all building louder and vying for attention.⁷²⁰ The layering of sounds points to the difficulty of searching for any kind of meaning, no matter how waves travel through the air into one's body, when sounds come from all corners and ears need to decide what is even worth hearing. As with R. Murray Schafer's writing, the implication is that there is simply too much sound around, and that sanity depends on one's ability to screen it out. Rather than pointing the way towards doing so, this piece alerts listeners to the problem, and the next track, "Stress," bears out the consequences of a listener's failure to properly develop earlids. A playful tango pulled from the demonstration record *Music With Sound* opens the piece, even as a forlorn woman's echoing voice asserts, "it feels like you're in the middle of a fog and you can't see more than one or two feet in any direction." As doctors and patients describe the effects of stress on the human body, the tango marches on. After the tango reaches its final flourish, a woman stammers: "I didn't wanna, I didn't feel that, I wanted to go on living."⁷²¹ Immediately, we hear another regular beep, likely from a soap opera scene set in a hospital. "[sigh] Emilio, they say that um, sometimes people can hear you when they're in a coma. I hope you can hear me, because I want you to know." Even that most common soap opera cliché of all, the comatose lover, cannot escape the twentieth century American condition of assault by sound.⁷²² Taken together, the tracks on the album all build on one another without clear starting and ending points. In this particular sequence, sounds as a physical presence travel through bodies, through the air, through television speakers, through turntable styli, build stress levels and make life unlivable. But as with the earlier album, this was not about instilling a sense of despair among listeners, or letting them learn which sounds to filter out in the development of their earlids. It

⁷²⁰ The Tape-beatles, "Earlids," *Music With Sound*.

⁷²¹ The Tape-beatles, "Stress," *Music With Sound*.

⁷²² The Tape-beatles, "Coma," *Music With Sound*.

was another attempt to model an active response to an oversaturated media soundscape, even as it began to bring in more sounds of corporate capitalism.

When they released *Music With Sound*, even through another label, the Tape-beatles insisted on putting it in the public domain and refusing copyrights of their own. Describing themselves in the liner notes as “renowned cultural embezzlers” whose work “represents the time consuming and painstaking recuperation of a moment in our estranged lives,” they wanted to make sure that anyone could interact with the sounds they had compiled out of the sounds surrounding them.⁷²³ Despite their common aesthetic practices, the Tape-beatles were never subject to threats of litigation for their use of copyrighted sounds, unlike John Oswald and Negativland. In part, this had to do with the kinds of sources the Iowa City collective used, which were less easily recognizable. Asked about this by a later interviewer, Dunn explained, “our purpose is not to get sued. What we want to do is make good work.”⁷²⁴ While this saved them from potential legal fees or the suppression of their work, it did prevent their works from gaining the same levels of publicity and notoriety as the cases that went through the courts. Even so, the fact of those cases meant that the Tape-beatles could participate in larger conversations happening around copyright and their other philosophical and aesthetic interests. *PhotoStatic*, *YAWN*, and *Retrofuturist* had offered a direct line of communication for their ideas, and its editors certainly took up plagiarism, originality, and the Art Strike as key themes.⁷²⁵ Through releases like *Music With Sound*, live performances around North America and Europe, and their

⁷²³ Ralph Johnson, “What Value Can You Attribute to the Tape-beatles?,” in liner notes to *Music With Sound*, DOVentertainment Inc., DOVe CD44, 1991, compact disc.

⁷²⁴ Steev Hise, “Interview with Lloyd Dunn,” *Synergy* 4 (Winter 1995), 43. In Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

⁷²⁵ Aside from occasional local features in Iowa City, most of the existing press about the Tape-beatles, though not extensive, comes from the time after the release of *Music With Sound* and *The Grand Delusion*. See, for example, Anton Viergever, “The Tape-beatles,” *VITAL* 24 (June 1992), 1-5; Godfrey Daniels, “Conversation with a Tape-beatle,” *X Magazine* 13 (May 1995), 5-8. As we have seen, they made up for a lack of outside publicity by publishing dozens of pages about themselves and the issues they cared about on their own through *Retrofuturist*.

continued writing, they also had wider venues for their views. Reviews of their work and interviews about recordings and upcoming performances thus created an opportunity for the Tape-beatles to proselytize in other venues and to insert themselves into the copyright conversations.

Soon after they released *Music With Sound*, Dutch music magazine *VITAL* published a lengthy interview with the group as part of a multi-part series on anti-copyright issues. Hearing the Tape-beatles as “concrete music that really made a relevant statement, especially because it went a lot further than just sound exploration,” interviewer Anton Viergever asked the group to explain their political and artistic stance for readers.⁷²⁶ The group agreed that they have “consciously adopted the Situationist technique of detournement” in their productions, then went on to reiterate the uneasy distinction Dunn had previously made in the pages of *N D*. “My use of the term ‘cultural worker’ comes from my own disdain for what usually passes for ‘art’ and is a conscious attempt to distance myself from all that – or at least question the role of the creative person with something to say in capitalist society.”⁷²⁷ Despite that anxiety, they clearly believed they had something to say, in as many venues as they could find.

In 1991, they went on their “Copyright Infringement Tour” and played shows across North America. When they played at the Rivoli Theater in Toronto as part of the tour in August, they went in for a wide-ranging radio interview and live performance on community radio station CKLN.⁷²⁸ Introducing the group after a set of songs from John Oswald, host Myke Dyer asked Dunn to elaborate on the group’s politics and its decision to release a CD rather than a cassette at

⁷²⁶ Anton Viergever, “The Tape-beatles,” *VITAL* 24 (June 1992), 1-2.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷²⁸ Myke Dyer, “Interview with the Tape-beatles,” program unknown, Toronto, ON, CKLN 88.1 FM, 16 August 1991. This interview was recorded on cassette tape and appears as *Mike Dyer interviews the Tape-beatles*, audiocassette, audiocassette box 8, LD Collection. Dyer had an interesting history in his own right, co-hosting a radio show on CKLN with Bob Dean, a devotee of Marshall McLuhan and a participant of the parody religion The Church of the SubGenius.

this point. Noting the importance of self-production to their politics, they nevertheless agreed that it was critical to make sure that their work could be heard by as many people as possible by this point, and that they would be self-limiting to insist on remaining on cassette. For over an hour in the radio studio, they played some of their prerecorded material, added live mixes, and talked about plagiarism, Oswald's plunderphonics, the challenges of performing recorded material live, the benefits of living in a place like Iowa City, and finally, the Art Strike. Interviews like this were evidence of the value of releasing their material more widely and moving beyond the Eternal Network to speak to a wider audience.

By the time the Art Strike had come to an end at the start of 1993, the Tape-beatles' activities were beginning to slow down somewhat. *PhotoStatic* had come back for one more issue in a symbolic gesture to mark the end of the strike, but *Retrofuturist* did not continue on. They also produced their final collage from this period, *The Grand Delusion*, which was a more explicit critique of U.S. politics and military intervention in the aftermath of the Gulf War.⁷²⁹ One particularly affecting track, "Flowers for Dead Heroes," featured loops of Lebanese singer Fairuz's mournful singing astride Vice President Dan Quayle orating, "the United States of America is a peace-loving nation," while bombs explode in the background and a newscaster reports a death toll from a Baghdad morgue.⁷³⁰ In the meantime, Ralph Johnson left Iowa City for Oakland, California to pursue a degree in electronic music composition from Mills College, while John Heck had moved to Prague, and Paul Neff and Linda Morgan Brown moved on from their association with the Tape-beatles.

⁷²⁹ The Tape-beatles, *The Grand Delusion*, Plagiarism, 1992, audiocassette; released on CD through Staalplaat, STCD 065, 1993, compact disc. After the group went on hiatus, Lloyd Dunn and Ralph Johnson combined to produce a new album the name Public Works, *Matter*, Staalplaat, STCD 113, 1996, compact disc, before the group returned a few years later for The Tape-beatles, *Good Times*, Staalplaat, STCD 136, 1999, compact disc.

⁷³⁰ The Tape-beatles, "Flowers for Dead Heroes," *The Grand Delusion*.

** Conclusion: Scratching at the Base **

Soon before Dunn left Iowa City for France then Prague in 1995 (“to engage my ongoing sub-project of living an interesting life,” he told an interviewer), the Tape-beatles appeared in Craig Baldwin’s film *Sonic Outlaws*.⁷³¹ Beginning with the story of Negativland’s run-in with U2’s lawyers over “The Letter U and the Numeral 2,” the film explored the history and practice of anti-copyright movements taking shape in North America and Europe near the start of the 1990s. As much anarchic film collage as documentary, it attempted to demonstrate how a group of artists—Negativland, John Oswald, the Tape-beatles, the Barbie Liberation Organization,⁷³² the Emergency Broadcast Network,⁷³³ and through his own montage editing, the filmmaker himself—appropriated and transformed popular culture artifacts into something new. In a brief segment, the Tape-beatles summed up their work thus far. As some of her video work for the Tape-beatles appeared on the screen, group member Linda Morgan Brown explained: “American popular culture is basically what we’re satirizing, the fact that everything we see today and that we do today has been marketed to us and overmarketed to us.”⁷³⁴ Brown’s video work, here depicting office workers at typewriters and telephones to accompany *Music From Sound*’s “I Can’t Help You At All, Sorry,” continued to form the visual backdrop as Lloyd Dunn likely spoke to his biggest audience yet (fig. 5.8). Here, he described the entirety of the Tape-beatles’ project in terms quite intelligible to people far removed from their particular niche of the audio networking community:

⁷³¹ *Sonic Outlaws*, directed by Craig Baldwin (1995; Chicago, IL: Other Cinema, 2005), DVD.

⁷³² In 1993, the Barbie Liberation Organization surreptitiously swapped out the voice boxes in talking Barbie and GI Joe dolls and placed them in stores as a means to subvert the gender norms associated with each doll.

⁷³³ Another multimedia performance group specializing in audiovisual collages, often pulled from newscasts. One notable piece from 1991, “We Will Rock You,” edited President George H. W. Bush’s opening statement to the first Gulf War to have him say “we will rock you” repeatedly over the beat to the Queen song. Ironically, given the story of Negativland and U2, the Irish rock band hired the Emergency Broadcast Network to design visuals for their Zoo TV tour in 1992 and 1993.

⁷³⁴ Linda Morgan Brown, speaking in *Sonic Outlaws*, DVD.

We live in a capitalist society in that ideas are commodities to be consumed in much the same way that one would consume frozen string beans, for example. This is sort of an empowering act, as far as I'm concerned, to take this stuff, that sort of comes, you know, out of the pipes, like running water, you know, hot and cold running culture, and using it as an ingredient in a recipe that we've come up with on our own. Looking at the kind of vacuousness of the culture and taking what we consider to be meaningful, telling bits, putting them in a new context, makes them strange. It estranges the listener from those bits that they're very familiar with, puts it under a microscope so that it can be examined in a kind of weird mixture of objectivity and subjectivity. [...] I sort of fancy us as being kind of like a virus, you know, where we have these ideas that don't have broad appeal, but yet, we have managed to get them out there. Inoculate culture with little bits of it.⁷³⁵

Over the course of a decade standing in front of photocopiers; penning missives at typewriters and word processors; stuffing envelopes, licking stamps, and checking post office boxes; trawling through LPs in thrift shops and hours of radio and television broadcasts for “telling bits” of popular culture; recording, cutting, and splicing reels of audiotape; duplicating recordings onto cassettes; cueing tapes to play at the campus radio station; traveling to festivals and performing at bars, church basements, and other venues around North America and Europe; Dunn and the rest of the Tape-beatles had used whatever machines and mechanisms at their disposal to try to empower their audience to do the same kind of self-inoculating work.

As the group slowed down, Dunn began to reflect on and consolidate the work he had done thus far in different venues than his own publications. With fellow mail artist Stephen Perkins, he guest edited a volume of art magazine *New Observations* (“The Magazine That Lets the Artists Speak for Themselves,” it said above the masthead) which they called “Copy Culture.”⁷³⁶ Featuring essays on Chester Carlson, the inventor of xerography, theories of cultural subversion, an article on queer zine culture (a culture largely absent from Dunn's own collection and network), a reproduction of Dunn's report from the Festival of Plagiarism, art from Vittore

⁷³⁵ Lloyd Dunn, speaking in *Sonic Outlaws*, DVD.

⁷³⁶ *New Observations* 101 (May/June 1994).

Baroni, and more, it again tried to relate the activities of the plagiarist subculture to a group previously unfamiliar with it. The introductory essay, “Copy Culture: Barbarians in the Copy Shop,” argued that xerography had allowed “low-end cultural operators” like Perkins and Dunn to “transmit information nationally and internationally” and to foster and link “together the many diverse communities that make up an oppositional culture.”⁷³⁷ On the one hand, comments like this pointed to the fact that networking activities had made it possible for people like Perkins and Dunn to find one another and to build new ways of thinking about the highly mediated world in which they lived. In their ability to coalesce and sustain subcultures, the copying and distributing practices at the core of mail art networking were highly effective. But this quote also pointed to a larger set of problems for people interested in wide scale cultural change. How could the various nodes of all oppositional cultures come together in an effort to alter the uneven power dynamics at the core of North American and European societies by the end of the twentieth century? Having spent years consolidating one particular oppositional culture through his plagiarist network, Dunn was prepared to leave that difficult work to others.

The countless hours of unpaid labor over the previous decade sustained a set of cultural practices intended not merely to convince viewers and listeners that the Tape-beatles were interesting artists, but to model a set of holistic practices that could guide collective popular responses to a mediated world where, in John Oswald’s words, “fewer people are making more of the total noise.” During the time in which the Tape-beatles were most active, a wave of mergers meant that media companies were indeed held in fewer and fewer corporate hands. Faced with the growing centralization of media ownership through this merger wave in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political efficacy of calls for the decentralization of media through

⁷³⁷ Stephen Perkins and Lloyd Dunn, “Introduction, Copy Culture: Barbarians in the Copy Shop,” *New Observations* 101 (May/June 1994), 3.

new technologies of production, reproduction, and distribution likely felt like an uphill battle.⁷³⁸

The plagiarism they had practiced, Dunn reflected in another zine interview soon before he left for Prague, “goes further towards ‘suggesting’ radicalism than it does at actually achieving it.”⁷³⁹

And to be sure, given the tectonic scale of the macroeconomic shifts in the structure of the entertainment industry, the starting point for the Tape-beatles and their compatriots in the Eternal Network was at the base of a very large hill indeed.

But the practices they alluded to, such as the mass reproduction of copyrighted works onto audio cassettes, even if not done with *détournement* or plagiarism in mind, did in fact have the potential to eat away at the power of the recording industry as it stood in the early 1990s. Dunn continued to look back on his activities thus far, and believed that anyone making tapes from LPs, CDs, or the radio “scratches at the base of the embankments and bastions of copyright, gradually eroding our society’s respect for the principles it espouses.”⁷⁴⁰ Whether or not the Tape-beatles could succeed in turning such widespread cultural practices into a functional alternative political program is almost beside the point. They recognized that there were limits to their radicalism, that “we participate in the galaxy of notions we most stridently criticize,” and that “it can be no other way [...] Five Iowans are not, by themselves going to destroy this edifice.”⁷⁴¹ From their starting point in Iowa City, the Tape-beatles had nevertheless provided a blueprint for thinking through the consequences of activities directed towards this front, for trying to imagine what kinds of structures might be put in place to replace the potentially

⁷³⁸ For example, Japan’s Sony corporation purchased CBS Records in 1987, the Matsushita corporation bought MCA’s holdings in 1990, the German Bertelsman Music Group purchased RCA Records, and Polygram bought the biggest remaining independent record labels, A&M and Island, see Robert Burnett, *Global Jukebox: The International Music Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 50-61, for an account of these mergers.

⁷³⁹ Steev Hise, “Interview with Lloyd Dunn,” *Synergy* 4 (Winter 1995), 45. In Zines and Periodicals Box 1, LD Collection.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

crumbling infrastructure of an industry directed towards the sale of sounds. If there was no destroying the edifice, it was at least worth trying to build a new one out of the raw materials of the old.

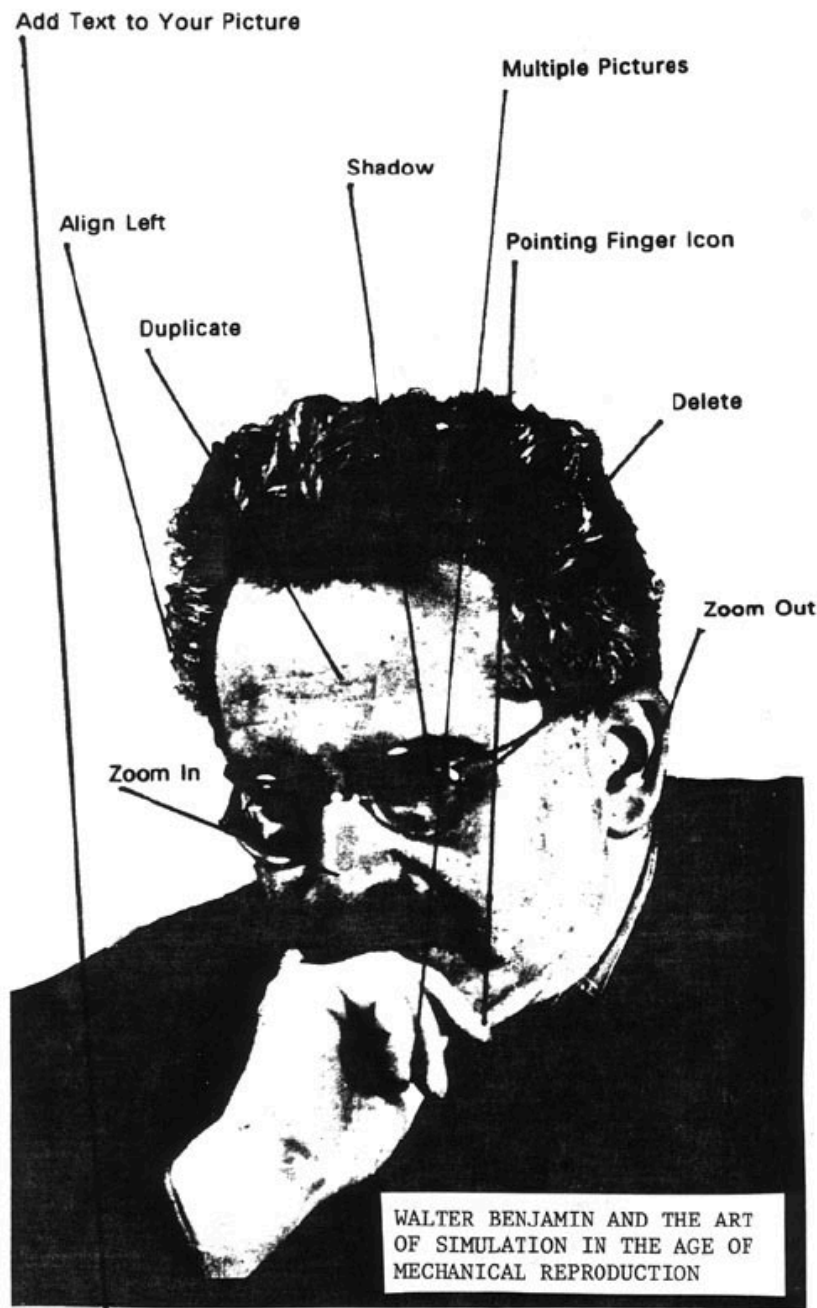


Figure 5.1 – Stephen Perkins, “Walter Benjamin and the Art of Simulation in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1986)

Playing with the image of a key thinker in the politics of mechanical reproduction, mail artist Stephen Perkins demonstrated the operations one could use on a photocopier to alter any source image placed on the glass plate.

PhotoStatic 19 (July 1986), 549. PSRF.



Figure 5.3 – Mystery Tape Laboratory, *Mystery Tape X1 Version 2/X2 Version 3*

As artifacts, the tapes that emerged from John Oswald’s Mystery Tape Laboratory revealed in the pleasures of that which could not be known through listening only. The tape, Oswald explained, “exists entirely in its aural manifestation.”

Mystery Tape Laboratory, liner notes and cassette to *Mystery Tape X1 version 2/X2 version 3*, year unknown, Lloyd Dunn Collection, MsC 520, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.



Figure 5.4 – Front cover and cassette, *PhonoStatic 7: Audio Anxiety* (October 1987)

Photograph by author. Lloyd Dunn Collection, MsC 520, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.



Figure 5.5 – Back cover and cassette, *PhonoStatic 7: Audio Anxiety* (October 1987)

While the front cover telegraphed discomfort and anxiety through its difficult to read text, the addresses on the inside of the j-card and the fact that this was a simple 45-minute blank Sony tape adorned with a typewritten sticker made the point that this was a standardized mass-produced object that could be filled in with the contents of one's choosing.

Photograph by author. Lloyd Dunn Collection, MsC 520, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.



Figure 5.6 – Lang Thompson, “Funnies – Detournement” (1989)

Borrowing a page from the Situationist playbook for *détournement*, *PhotoStatic* contributor Lang Thompson altered popular U.S. comic strips to discuss the uncertain politics of using pre-existing content to new ends.

PhotoStatic 34 (February 1989), 1221. PSRF.

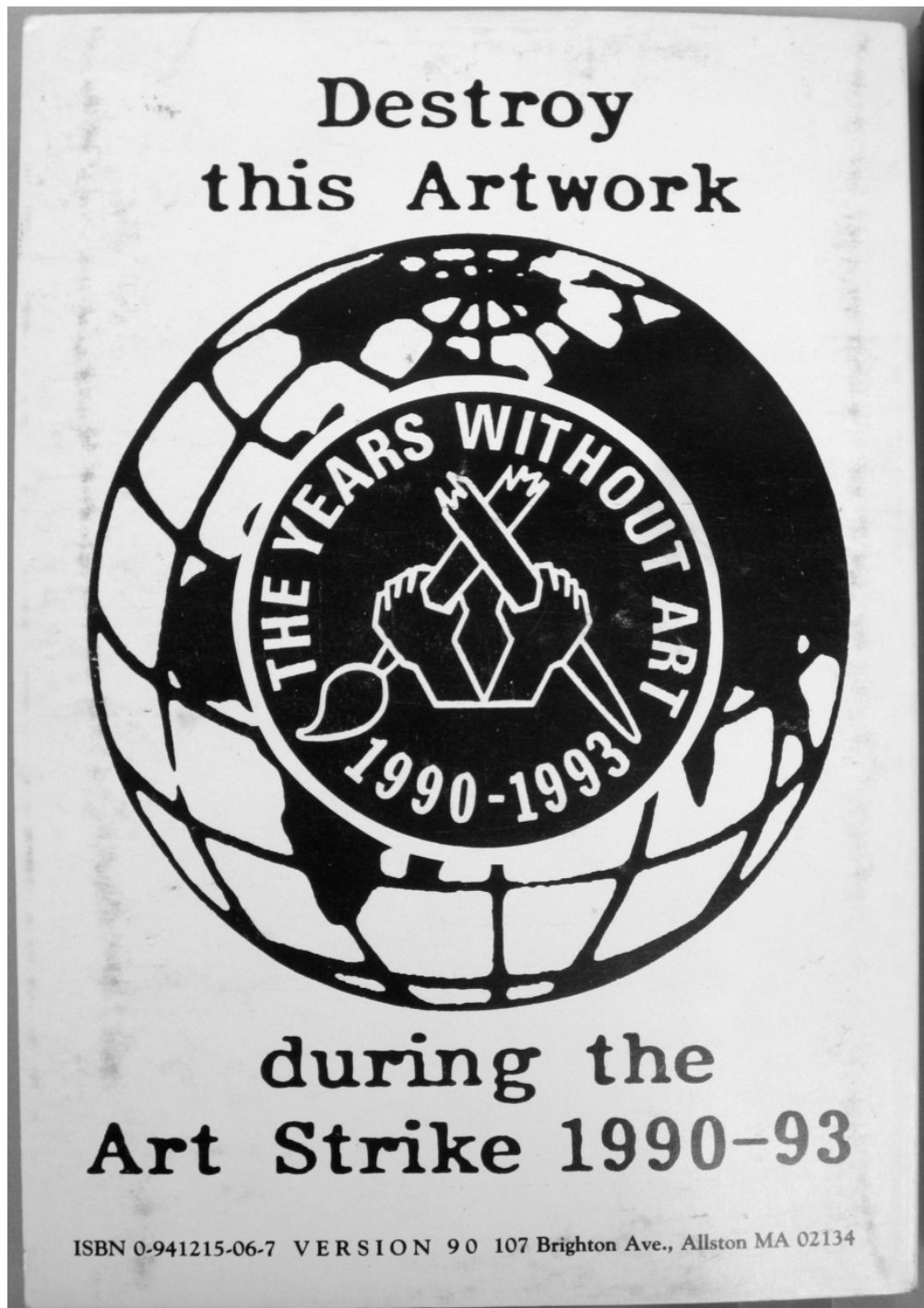


Figure 5.7 – Destroy this Artwork during the Art Strike, 1990-93 (1990)

Gracing the back of a Situationist inspired zine *Version 90*, mail artist Mark Pawson's logo depicting a broken paintbrush imagined the Art Strike as a form of radical collective action.

Back cover of *Version 90*, in Lloyd Dunn Collection, MsC 520, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.



Figure 5.8 – “I Can’t Help You At All, Sorry,” Linda Morgan Brown (1991)

Tape-beatles member Linda Morgan Brown represented the contemporary corporate office environment as a realm of work, overstimulation, and direct aural engagement (as represented by the proliferating telephones) in a music video that accompanied *Music With Sound*'s “I Can’t Help You At All, Sorry.” A short segment of this video appears in Craig Baldwin’s 1995 documentary about anti-copyright actions, *Sonic Outlaws*.

Still from *Sonic Outlaws*, directed by Craig Baldwin (1995; Chicago, IL: Other Cinema, 2005), DVD.

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Commentary

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