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Music, Politics and Liquid Modernity

How Rock-Stars became politicians and why Politicians became Rock-Stars

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in Politics and International Relations

The Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion

University of Lancaster

September 2010

Declaration

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Abstract

As popular music eclipsed Hollywood as the most powerful mode of seduction of Western youth, rock-stars erupted through the counter-culture as potent political figures. Following its sensational arrival, the politics of popular musical culture has however moved from the shared experience of protest movements and picket lines and to an individualised and celebrified consumerist experience. As a consequence what emerged, as a controversial and subversive phenomenon, has been de-fanged and transformed into a mechanism of establishment support.

Throughout this period, as rock-stars have morphed from ‘pariahs to paragons of virtue’, public confidence in the art of politics has declined to an all time low. Sharing similar challenges in terms of building cultural capital and maintaining a sense of credibility, rock-stars have therefore tended to succeed where politicians have largely failed. In order to arrest this decline Featherstone claims that liquid modern politics has gravitated towards the ease of ‘commodified consumer critique’ than using this shift as an opportunity for ‘serious political critique’¹.

Naively attempting to re-habilitate itself by constructing marketable identities to re-energise its popularity, potency and appeal, politicians have transformed themselves into media ‘personalities’. Stylistically re-engineered by adopting the entertainment protocols of the pop celebrity and the seductive language of consumerism, today’s politicians share more and more similarities with stars from the world of music.

More fundamentally, modernity’s meltdown and re-ordering of traditional meanings encourages everything including both politics and music to become increasingly liquid, unfixed and indefinite. As consumerism replaces politics as the society’s all-powerful meta-value, its underpinning logic seeks to ingratiate, please and entertain where politics once sought to challenge and question. As a result the symbiosis of rock-star-politics is increasingly normalised and soaks more deeply into the fabric of liquid modern life.

Seduced by the trappings of celebrity and carnival, the rock-star’s journey of transformation exemplifies many of the obstacles liquid modernity now places in the way of establishing moral responsibility and developing meaningful politics. Bauman’s sociological cement brings together many of these challenges and the burgeoning world of popular music culture now offers an interesting device to illuminate these ongoing difficulties.

In this complex and highly unpredictable world it is increasingly difficult to even imagine new forms of transgression let alone mount a serious political challenge to the its market driven ethos. By mixing Bauman’s strident critique with an analysis of popular music’s fast moving industry of stars, controversies and consumption practices, this thesis provides an alternative reading through music culture of the continuing search for politics.

¹ Mark Featherstone, ‘Event Horizon’ in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman’s Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.138

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Acknowledgements

With thanks to my supervisors Mark Lacy, Chris May and Cynthia Weber and everybody from Lancaster's Department of Politics and IR who have been extremely supportive during the last three years. A particular note of thanks to Mark, who as a result of having a strong interest in this area and has been extremely enthusiastic and informed on all matters relating to post-politics and liquid modernity.

The department's secretaries have been wonderful in making things happen, so my thanks are extended to Clare Coxhill, Susan Riches and Helen Caton.

Many people from both academia and popular music have spent time discussing ideas relating to this thesis so once again thanks goes to Mark Davies of the Bauman Institute, Ellis Cashmore, Scott Wilson, Steve Pickering, Stuart Diggle, Sean Gibbs, Roddy Hanson and particularly Sarah Taberner who has been both supportive and at times inspirational throughout what has been a drawn-out process.

Finally this thesis is dedicated to my mum, Beryl Higgins and my two sons Jack and Joe Higgins.

Introduction

‘Configurations, constellations, patterns of dependency and interaction are all thrown into the melting pot, to be subsequently re-cast and re-fashioned. The liquidizing powers have moved from system to society, from politics to life-policies – and have descended from the macro to the micro level of social cohabitation’².

Since the 1960s popular music has played a largely unexamined role in helping shape and soundtrack our lives to its many key ‘political moments’. Despite the many important ways in which music invades, constructs and constitutes the every-day it still however represents a lacuna in political theory. Its many roles in social and political movements, youth subcultures and in its conflicting relationships with censorship³ and commercialism remain largely under-explored⁴. Through its supporting cast of fans, festivals, products and controversies, a rich source of information is now available to help chart the political journey of the rock-celebrity.

By mapping the transformation from sixties counter-cultural outsider to modern celebrity insider, a narrative is constructed to assist our understanding of changes to the shape and form of modern politics. This untold journey of transformation from ‘pariah to paragon’⁵ speaks with a particular urgency through music culture and its

² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 7

³ Peter Blecha, *Taboo Tunes* (Backbeat Books 2004) p. 22

⁴ Jacques Attali, *Noise : The Political Economy of Music : Theory and History of Literature volume 16* : (University of Minnesota Press 1985) and M I Franklin, *Resounding International Relations On Music, Culture and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan 2005)

⁵ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, ‘Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation’ *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 282

ever-changing associations with consumerism, celebrity and its deep desire to recover a sense of authenticity. The unfolding story of rock-star politics mimics the endemic restlessness of liquid modernity offering a new lens to view the themes, which now delineate the shifting contours and moving currents of modern politics.

Music possesses an almost inherent ability to prowl the boundaries of what society deems to be acceptable and endows its creators with power to influence how we act. As the glue of the sixties counter-culture, as the force behind movements such as Rock Against Racism and as a key terrain within the 'culture wars', popular music time and again demonstrates an ability to engage in a dialogue with power.

Unlike incarnations such as Dylan, Lennon, Hendrix and Strummer, the music star's new-found role has become increasingly understood as more celebrity than populist, and as a figure of consensus rather than critique. From the often challenging and politicised world of popular music during the sixties, seventies and eighties the most visible manifestations of that angst and controversy are now establishment figures such as Bono and Bob Geldof. As hybrid political-musicians these stars are now associated with popular consumer campaigns and as a result increasingly distanced from any radical or movement based politics.

Rather than championing alternative viewpoints and exposing political antagonisms 'personalities' from the world of music culture now seek consensus rather than conflict. If, as Bauman suggests, 'politics' is the art of translating private troubles into public issues in order to drag mankind to a better place, the role of the rock-star now increasingly denies rather than encourages politics.

Geldof's comment that there is 'something seriously wrong when so many politicians pay court to a pop singer'⁶ indicates that misplaced faith in the unaccountability of celebrity signals a worrying trend. Influential 'rock stars' such as Paul Hewson (Bono) and Bob Geldof are now well positioned to influence political discourse through high profile music events and awareness campaigns. Their impact on the style and the substance of politics, amidst increasing concerns over the phenomenon of celebrity politics, provides a timely study of a new type of political actor with unusually significant cultural purchase.

Curiously transformed from entertainers to hybrid-politicians these valorised individuals now have the power to access and communicate with some of the world's most important political and religious leaders. Standing simultaneously as a spokesperson of the oppressed, successful businessman and mercurial orchestrator of Live 8, DATA and the Red Card, Bono attempts to straddle the traditional inconsistencies of being a 'musical outsider' and a 'political insider'.

As the planet's most successful rock-star, Bono's unique mixture of serious campaigner and charismatic celebrity connects with rich and poor, as his consensual message resonates simultaneously with the giants of Western business and the victims of African poverty. Through these curious juxtapositions, his charismatic appeal represents the latest incarnation of a socio-political process underway since politics and music first became fused in the public mind in the 1960s.

⁶ Bob Geldof, *Is This It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p. 403

Embarking on this uncharted journey of rock-star politics necessarily draws upon a rich variety of academic disciplines such as sociology, music studies, international relations, political science and cultural studies as well as resources from the music world such as interviews, documentaries, record sleeves, fanzines and rock biographies. Mixing the ideas and literature from these very different academic fields requires a framework which is inter-disciplinary, flexible and sees political significance in the evolution of consumerism, social attitudes and celebrity.

Studying this journey of transformation, in conjunction with Bauman's liquid modernity thesis, offers a unique insight into the role of the popular musician as cultural actor within modern politics. Many of the changes of our time, within the orthodox political domain, emanate from these new actors and non-traditional sources of authority. It is therefore, by teasing out and then refracting these themes and connections through the prism of the musical celebrity, that an understanding of the new ways in which we 'do politics' is to be achieved.

The synchronicity of Bauman's personal and intellectual journey also provides an ideal chronological backdrop against which this story can unfold. Within Bauman and amongst social theory more generally, music remains a largely under-explored phenomenon and one that is often unfairly dismissed as being too emotional, escapist or superficial and hence insufficiently academic. Apart from a few fleeting references within his work⁷ Bauman pays little attention to popular music, however I demonstrate that through its constant search for new consumer experiences and fashions music is actually an important component of the texture of liquid modernity.

⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p.13 re Corinne Bailey Rae and p.41 re vertical stacking of music fashions as novelties

The speed by which fashions change and genres re-mix speaks through music culture, revealing much about the endemic restlessness of consumer-capitalism. Bauman's work therefore provides open connections through his concerns with celebrity chatter, consumerism and carnivals of charity and their negative implications for politics through events such as Live Aid and Live 8. As a result his multi-disciplinary and unsystematic approach unwittingly provides an ideal framework to link the fascinating conjunctions between the spheres of politics and music and how they have been able to flourish under the conditions of liquid modernity.

Within this liquid modern setting, the cultural and presentational synergies of music within politics, and politics within music have deepened as new technologies provide ever more opportunities for their joint consumption. Ever since rock-stars emerged as cultural critics the merging of the two spheres has seen an aggregation of styles which has resulted in the hybrid rock-politician of today.

This merger has coincided with a demise of the structures, belief systems and behaviours, which underpinned the solid phase of modernity. Prompting feelings of uncertainty, the decline in the public's faith in the effectiveness of politics has spawned a search for new sources of legitimacy, understanding and security. This manifests in a search for answers from non-traditional sources of authority, with faith increasingly being placed in the wisdom and power of the rock-stars and other celebrity figures.

This behavioural sea change is also evident in how society and its politics, expects quick and easy solutions to complex problems, and within popular music culture this plays out in a growing appetite for large scale musico-political festivals. Post Live Aid, mainstream politics has increasingly turned to music on a global scale through events such as Mandela's 70th Birthday Tribute (1988), the 9-11 concert (2001), Live 8 (2005) and Obama's inauguration ceremony (2009). In all of these instances, music functioned in various ways as a source of validation, salvation, healing and redemption.

In an age that promotes and valorises separation and individualism, popular music has a special ability to allow liquid moderns to briefly synchronise their sorrow, joy, anxieties and compassion through what Bauman describes as 'dazzling flashes of togetherness'⁸. These outbursts of supra-national solidarity are however 'notoriously carnival-like, sporadic and short-lived'⁹ and as a source of legitimacy, popular music is therefore of more importance to the politics of liquid modernity than Bauman recognises.

It may be the case, as is indeed postulated by many commentators, that rock'n'roll has exhausted its repertoire of shocking gestures so all that is left are the superficial theatrics of plagiarism and parody. In a liquid modern setting, where style increasingly triumphs over substance and formula replaces attitude, music does still however offer some hope. As music is never totally co-optible and retains an elusive sense of autonomy, it provides a way of bypassing the de-familiarising effects of

⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Cambridge 1999) p.3

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.129

technology and reconnecting with a sense of intimacy, which is increasingly lost in the modern world.

With a chapter-by-chapter focus on the busy interactions between the musical icons, styles, events and controversies within each decade, a balanced and informed understanding of the transitions within rock-politics emerges. With our culture increasingly sound-tracked to the music and events of each period through retrospectives and ‘best of ...’ collections, a chronological approach allows the unique influence of each decade to be acknowledged, both individually and collectively.

This methodology also offers a useful longer-term historical perspective from which to compare and contrast the evolving discourses surrounding key events such as the counter-culture, Rock Against Racism (RAR), Live Aid and their incarnations across the decades. These conjunctions, both within and between decades, are not designed in advance so they require retrospectively re-examination before being patterned into a coherent narrative.

Chapter 1 provides a theoretical basis for this chronology by triangulating Bauman’s work on the transition from solid to liquid modernity with popular music culture and ‘post-politics’. Establishing key themes within Bauman’s work which connect with popular music, this chapter sets the tone for the ideas which flow throughout the thesis, such as celebrity fascination, the intensification of the search for authenticity, consumerism, carnival culture and the commodification of dissent.

His critique of societal transformation and the failure of its politics, when combined with the elusive nature of music, presents a powerful combination to challenge established discourses and address the absence of texts in the field of 'music and politics'. By assessing theorists such as McCutcheon who claims musical celebrities are worshipped more intensely than any other kinds of celebrities¹⁰ I underline the case for studying music culture as a formative part rather than merely as a footnote to the political process.

Chapter 2 introduces the chronology by exploring the explosion of popular music culture during the sixties. As musical celebrities eclipsed film celebrities, television documented their emergence during the volatility of the counter-culture, contributing to an indissoluble link between rock and politics. This is the period from when Jim Jarmusch claims icons such as Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Bob Marley and Joe Strummer all developed 'an awareness of this power, the over-riding sense that they had the potential to affect young people all over the planet'¹¹. Engaging with the public through issues of race, identity and civil rights, rock-stars combined music with critique on a popular level to bridge the gap between politics and society for the first time.

In Chapter 3 the contradictions and controversies of Britain's punk explosion are explored through the brief yet incendiary career of the Sex Pistols. Through characters such as Malcolm McLaren, Jamie Reid and John Lydon, the politics of the movement are linked variously to the oppositional critique of the counterculture and notions of racism, identity and situationism. From the mid 70s into the mid 80s the UK music

¹⁰ Lynn McCutcheon, 'Conceptualisation and Measurement of Celebrity Worship', *British Journal Of Psychology* vol. 93 no1 (2002) pp. 67-87

¹¹ Jim Jarmusch, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005)

press increasingly encouraged its readers to be political and through movements such as RAR and the Anti-Nazi League, punk actually did much to make racism unfashionable and thwart its rise in the UK. As a subculture, punk became increasingly self-obsessed as a master-discourse of authenticity and for many young people, punk suddenly made it possible to be political without being boring.

Chapter 4 looks at the pivotal decade of the eighties as a decade of transition and polarisation when politics, fashion and media all refracted vividly and colourfully through the increasingly commercialised prism of popular music. Central to this unfolding drama were Thatcherism, Reaganism, New Pop, The Miners' Strike, Red Wedge, MTV and the landmark Live Aid event, which contributed significantly to the credibility and legitimacy of new political actors such as Bob Geldof. In this increasingly secularised and liquid society, Chris Rojek believes these new figures began to assume a special kind of moral authority once associated with sages or charismatic leaders¹². Commenting on Geldof's Live Aid performance, Gary Kemp's effusive proclamation that 'he just has a huge charisma; he'd make a frightening politician'¹³ reflects the concerns over mixing pop and politics and its preference for style over substance. In addition to bestowing the mantle of 'post-God celebrity' on its celebrities, the eighties music was also significant in heralding the shift from movement to campaign politics.

Following the end of the Cold War and the muting of eighties' polarities, Chapter 5 concentrates on the West's relative period of calm and consensus during the nineties. The slick marketing and glossy presentational style which came to underpin the cult

¹² Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London 2001) p.58

¹³ Carl Wilkinson, 'Live Aid in their Own Words', *The Observer* (October 12 2004)

of celebrity and the politics of New Labour also accompanied rock-music in its journey away from a place of political significance towards one of celebrity and entertainment. With an appetite for glitzy award ceremonies Britpop and Cool Britannia were intimately linked with the emergence of the first prime minister to gleefully proclaim himself as a fully paid up member of the rock and roll generation. Blair's embodiment of the new breed of 'hip politician' coincides with the stellar rise of campaigning rock-star Paul Hewson (Bono) and as champions of presentation, their many stylistic similarities are traced through the Blair-Bono axis. As they both enjoyed their own personal versions of Stiglitz's 'roaring nineties'¹⁴ politics and music merged effortlessly under the banners of celebrity liberalism, infotainment and post-politics.

The final chronological chapter focuses on the increasingly fragmented roles of popular music and its celebrities in the anxious and censorial post-9-11 environment. Whilst rock-stars had previously found it easy to protest against hunger and campaign for world-peace, an examination of their attitudes during the War on Terror revealed a distinct reluctance to court controversy. Inevitable comparisons with the role of popular music during Vietnam prompted commentators to ask 'what has happened to protest music?' In a decade notorious for its mixing of genres and digitisation rather than definitive backing tracks and protest movements, this chapter investigates the end of the era of manufacture within music and the reinvention of the industry as one of copyright and IP.

¹⁴ Joseph Stiglitz, *The Roaring Nineties Why we are paying the price for the greediest decade in history* (Penguin 2004) p.61

Jacques Attali's suggestion that we should now judge society 'more by its festivals than by its statistics'¹⁵, directs attention towards the decade's landmark and increasingly global musico-political events. By examining the roles and responsibilities of the key players within the carnivalesque and 'hyper-consumerist' Live 8, I reassess its implications for politics. Scrutinising the form and style of participation invited by its organisers, these carnivals demonstrate the media's changing treatment of rock-celebrities and its misplaced belief in the efficacy of post-politics.

Through a decade-by-decade engagement with the factors that have built the cultural capital and post-God celebrity status of the rock-star, this thesis aims to demonstrate that rather than being an escapist diversion or a means of entertainment the evolution of the hybrid rock-star-politician is a phenomenon more deeply soaked into the fabric of each liquid modern decade than has been previously understood. Rather than being fleeting aberrations, 'hip' and charismatic figures such as Bono, Blair, Geldof and Obama are the culminations of a process of symbiosis that has been underway for half a century. Owing to the dissolution of markers of certainty, I will demonstrate how these curious hybrid aggregations are a distinct feature of liquid modernity and largely a result of the failure of politics in its desperate search for newer and sexier sources of legitimacy.

I also reveal how the merging of the styles of the rock-star and the politician has seen the language of politics gradually adopt the entertainment protocols of the pop celebrity, as political discourse has shifted away from politicians and towards these

¹⁵ Jacques Attali, *Noise : The Political Economy of Music*, Theory and History of Literature volume 16 (University of Minnesota Press 1985) p.3

non-traditional sources of authority. Society's liquefaction has encouraged the once 'erotic politician' to morph into the 'instantly pleasing' post-political celebrity. This non-challenging default orientation has however only been achieved at the expense of an engaged-citizenry and through an acceptance of the seductions of consumerism.

The argument throughout this thesis is that music has played a vital yet under-examined role in the development of consumer society, by shaping its fashions, ideas and attitudes. As music culture has been an integral part of both heavy and liquid modernity it provides a cultural interface through which to interrogate this period of transition. With the emergence of the global rock-star-politician on the cusp of this transition, it now performs even more important functions in relation to Bauman's ideas about life and politics in liquid modernity.

Insecure, uncertain and unclear how to respond to global events and distant suffering, liquid-moderns and politicians now increasingly turn to musicians for moral and political authority. In a secularised society these investments of intimacy and faith reflect how rock-politicians function as unlikely sources of existential security, however through their vast spectacles of redemption they inadvertently foreclose the political and neutralize Bauman's 'search for politics'.

Chapter 1

From Protest Music to Carnivals of Charity

*'All that is solid melts into PR'*¹

Music has always awakened human curiosity and by addressing its treatment in social and political discourse this chapter explains how the powerful symbiosis between the spheres of politics and popular music has become particularly evident during the transition from solid to liquid modernity. The first section offers an introduction to Bauman and distinguishes why his work provides useful and relevant critique to the consensual world of post-politics. The second section addresses humanity's ongoing fascination for music and focuses on why studying popular music culture can assist in the ongoing search for meaningful politics. By providing an overview of the treatment of popular music within political and social theory the final section of the chapter introduces concepts such as consumer politics, authenticity and hybrid political rock-stars, which are then examined throughout the following chapters.

Since the 1960s social and cultural theory has been increasingly marked by a drift away from the attraction of grand narratives and great unifying 'laws of history', towards an understanding that modern society is governed by smaller, more specific, unpredictable and complex events. This is reflected not only in the work of key figures within the discipline of social theory² but also in the post-marxism of Chantal Mouffe, the liberal political commentary of John Gray and the 'post-modern' critique

¹ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism – Is There No Alternative ?* (Zero Books 2009) p.39

² Manuel Castells, *Network Society* (1996), Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Blackwell 1999) Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge Polity 1990)

of Baudrillard. Whilst these theorists by no means constitute a coherent theoretical approach, their critique can be seen as a continuation of what has been witnessed throughout the twentieth century and ‘a progressive questioning of the dominant form of rationality and of the premises of the modes of thought characteristic of the enlightenment’³.

This trajectory of ‘progressive thinking’ continues with Zygmunt Bauman’s highly distinctive form of enquiry under his concept of liquid modernity. In his attempt to capture the essence of social and political change Bauman’s work co-habits an intellectual galaxy of hypotheses all of which suggest that modernity’s centre of gravity has shifted significantly during the late twentieth century. Indeed James Beniger’s study records Bauman’s liquidity project amongst as many as seventy-five distinct appellations, attempting to capture and articulate the definitive aspects of the period⁴.

Here Bauman posits that modern society now has less conveniently defined outlines and cannot be conceptualised from a single point of view be it economic, social or technological. His project, which now includes completed texts on liquid *fear*, *love* and *times* amounts to an ambitious attempt to continually catch early sight of the moral dilemmas, social pressures and political choices people encounter in facing up to their creative potential and moral responsibilities.

³ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (Verso 2005) p.74

⁴ James R. Beniger, *The Control Revolution* (Harvard University Press 1986) Other examples include John Urry and Scott Lash, *The End of Organised Capitalism* (Polity 1987) Edward Luttwark, *Turbo-Capitalism: Winners and Losers in the Global Economy* (Harper Collins 1999) Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage: American Negativity and Rap/metal in the Age of Supercapitalism* (Manchester University Press 2007).

Within this milieu a major concern for Bauman is how politics becomes less well defined and more fragmented as it is increasingly at the mercy of global forces, new actors, new technologies and framed by fast changing attitudes and expectations. Under these new conditions its vital mechanisms such as public debate and a vibrant sphere of contestation are increasingly challenged as the public spaces, both physical and cultural, are colonised by consumerism, celebrity and soft news.

As spin, P.R. and the power of marketing increasingly invade modern politics Bauman has become highly attuned to this process of trivialisation. Bemoaning the ‘triumph of aesthetics over ethics’⁵ and lamenting the transition of citizens to consumers his search for a more substantive form of politics is magnified as these deficiencies are refracted through the prisms of ‘post-politics’ and popular music.

Bauman therefore provides my intellectual apparatus not just because he is ‘one of the world’s foremost social theorists’⁶ engaging with the messy particulars of politics but because his work is insightful, relevant and speaks with a particular urgency regarding the transformation of the public sphere. Even though he does not address popular music specifically his valuable insights into the roles of celebrity and carnival moving to the centre of society provide a set of open connections through which music circulates within culture, society and politics.

Smith’s description of Bauman as ‘somebody worth listening to’⁷ also hints at a substantial back catalogue rich with sharp analysis and studious reflection. Sharing

⁵ Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001) p.21

⁶ Richard Kilminster and Ian Varcoe, ‘Culture Modernity and Revolution’ *Essays in Honour of Zygmunt Bauman* (Routledge 1996) p.3

⁷ Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Bauman Prophet of Postmodernity* (Polity 2004) p.16

chronological synchronicity with the five decades of this thesis Bauman's published work provides informed interpretations of life, liberty and the quest for meaning. Consistently addressing themes such as inequality and exclusion his theories offer a complex yet highly plausible understanding of the various trends underpinning societal transformation. He does this by working in broad strokes that defy easy categorisation and drawing on a variety of theoretical sources he effortlessly straddles barriers between traditions and schools of thought.

Mixing music with social theory requires imaginative translation and Bauman offers this in abundance. His use of metaphors, poetry and prosaic literary decoration allows him to use language in 'magical and enlivening ways'⁸. His ferocious intellect encourages his prose to jump off the page and connect with the reader in an immediate and visceral manner. Whilst it is ultimately the content of his work that distinguishes Bauman amongst his peers he does offer other distinct attractions such as the quality of his writing and his erudite yet accessible approach, which demarcates an unerring ability to 'turn the pedestrian into the fabulous'⁹.

What is also compelling about Bauman's work is his ability to identify the animating principles of modern society, and explain how its logic and principles have become the driving force of individual, social, economic and political life. His intellectual modesty ensures there are no unnecessary attempts to be highly original, as he works comfortably with familiar materials and concepts to awaken understanding of people's already existing reality. By taking Bauman and this mode of enquiry into the

⁸ Tony Blackshaw, 'Bauman's Challenge to Sociology' in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.72

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

uncharted waters of popular music I hope to map a new means of critiquing politics that will offer us a richer sense of knowing.

I focus primarily on Bauman is his body of work surrounding what he perceives to be the highly significant transition from solid to liquid modernity¹⁰ the cusp of which Featherstone equates to the end of communism in 1990, when the Soviet Union was removed from world maps and the economy increasingly colonised every aspect of human life¹¹.

For Bauman liquid modernity

*'may yet prove to be a departure more radical and seminal than even the advent of capitalism and modernity themselves previously seen as by far the most crucial milestones of human history'*¹².

His realisation that societal transformation can be understood equally well through the agency of individuals was first demonstrated in *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Here he concludes that genocide was not an irrational outbreak of animality but rather an example of mass murder taking place in a 'civilised way' through bureaucratic organisation and instrumental rationality.

Bauman explains how individuals make choices which although monstrous and unforgivable are largely the product of the dynamics and gaps between order-takers

¹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) pp.1-15

¹¹ Mark Featherstone, 'Event Horizon' in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.138

¹² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.126

and order-givers rather than any inbuilt proto-Nazi tendencies¹³. Confronting these realities by projecting the private worlds of individuals with all their fantasies, fears, anxieties and consequences onto the written page marked a conceptual shift, which in many respects pre-empted his evolving liquid modernity project.

For Bauman Marxism's 'solid modernist imagination' was disinterested in the individual and therefore too inflexible to accommodate the complex fluidity of social and cultural change. Shifting his conceptual gears he quickly transitioned from a 'cultural Marxist sociologist' to what that Blackshaw describes as the 'era's pre-eminent clocker of the Zeitgeist'¹⁴. Bauman's focus on the agency of the liquid modern at the expense of orthodox structuralist orientations¹⁵ allowed purposive agents, collateral casualties, flawed consumers, innovative personalities cultural critics and now rock-stars all to gravitate towards the centre of his field of vision.

Through what has since matured into an extraordinary insight into the public face and the private dilemmas of liquid moderns his style of interrogation amounts to a unique and significant scholarly engagement. Through the agency of the individual's engagements with the uncertain liquidities of love, fear and change Bauman's work converges towards a re-definition of the relationships of production, power and experience on which liquid times are now based. Despite these stylistic departures the fundamental concerns of Bauman's critical project have however remained basically the same for as Bauman suggests ...

¹³ Theodor Adorno in Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001) p.8

¹⁴ Tony Blackshaw, *Key Sociologists Zygmunt Bauman* (Routledge 2005) p.11

¹⁵ This is highlighted by both Dennis Smith in *Zygmunt Bauman Prophet of Postmodernity* : (Polity 2004) and Tony Blackshaw *Key Sociologists Zygmunt Bauman* (Routledge 2005)

*'In all my books I constantly enter the same room, only that I enter the room through different doors. So I see the same things, the same furniture but out from a different perspective'*¹⁶.

His spirit of enquiry maintains a progressive belief that the self is not a *prison* in which we are trapped but an *inner generator* waiting to be ignited. This sense that sociology should always strive to enhance understanding particularly when faced with adversity is central to his belief in the importance of 'sustained reflexivity'. Such self-awareness places Bauman in the tradition of C Wright Mills keeping alive the notion of the 'sociological imagination' in order to 'counter the drift towards conformity, homogenisation and instrumental rationality'¹⁷.

For Paul Taylor, Bauman and Mills are united in their criticism of sociology's 'failure to deliver on its intellectual duties'¹⁸. Only by twisting the prism to trace the complex inter-relationships between the micro and macro levels of society can sociology illuminate how modern life is marked by a disjuncture between an individual's subjective experience and the macro-level forces that inscribe it.

For Bauman ...

¹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman in Harald Welzer, *On the Rationality of Evil An Interview with Zygmunt Bauman* Thesis Eleven 70 (2002) p.109

¹⁷ C Wright Mills, reproduced in Andrew Jamison and Ron Eyerman, *Seeds of the Sixties* (University of California Press 1995) p.30

¹⁸ Paul Taylor, 'Totalitarian Bureaucracy and Bauman's Sociological Imagination' in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.153

'Ideology is no longer an articulated creed, a set of verbal statements to be learned and believed; it is rather incorporated in the way people live – 'soaked in' by the way people act and relate' ¹⁹.

By promoting individualisation, normalising consumerism and colonising public space through the market liquid modernity now allows power to work in softer and less obvious ways. It is against the backdrop of this unthinking and blandly consensual setting that Bauman sketches out the need for engaged and critical theoretical reflection.

The contemporary relevance of this position was demonstrated during the 1990s when New Labour's architects flirted with Bauman's ideas²⁰ however believing he was too downbeat for a time 'when things could only get better' Anthony Giddens was recruited as their sociological missionary²¹. This proved to be a wise move as his scathing treatment of 'Third Way' politics and its 'warmed-over policies of 'beyond left and right'²² revealed Bauman to be an acerbic critic rather than a generous sponsor.

As interest in Bauman's distinctive flavour of enquiry continues to increase he has acquired new labels such as storyteller, existentialist and poet-intellectual. His unique and prosaic approach has been variously described as 'conversational'²³ and one of

¹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualised Society* (Cambridge Polity 2001) p.56

²⁰ Nicholas Fearn, NS Profile Zygmunt Bauman, *New Statesman* (January 10 2006) p.43

²¹ Mark Davis, *Bauman's Compass : Towards a Sociology of Hope* (Compass Think Piece September 2010) p.1

²² Zygmunt Bauman, *Has The Future a Left Soundings* (2007)

<http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/articles/bauman07.html> accessed April 11 2010

²³ Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001) p.2

‘intellectual meanderings’²⁴ as he quickly jumps between themes, theorists and concepts. His thinking is always on the move and Blackshaw sees an affinity with Hegel as a theorist ‘always looking for new ways to capture his own time in thought’²⁵.

As Bauman says so little about methodology situating his work in relation to the broader currents within academia is not always straightforward. For Beilharz in many ways Bauman resembles a colossal 19th century figure of the social sciences and a ‘sage and professor of things and general’²⁶ and Blackshaw concurs that the originality of his form and content certainly places him ‘up there along side the founding fathers like Durkheim and Weber’²⁷. Tester reinforces this erudition suggesting he finds as much power in a line from Kundera or Borges as he does from Simmel, Gramsci and Marx²⁸. These and many other references plucked from the fields of sociology, philosophy and literature²⁹ provide an appreciation of his continuing and varied influences, however these are always sources of inspiration rather than dependency and their unpredictable selections are always based on ‘whatever sparks’³⁰ rather than any systematic methodology.

²⁴ Mark Davis, *Freedom and Consumerism A Critique of Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology* (Ashgate 2008) p.3

²⁵ Tony Blackshaw, Bauman's Challenge to Sociology in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.72

²⁶ Peter Beilharz, Bauman's Challenge to Sociology in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.63

²⁷ Tony Blackshaw, Bauman's Challenge to Sociology in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.72

²⁸ Keith Tester, *The Social Thought of Zygmunt Bauman* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan 2004) p.10

²⁹ Tony Blackshaw, Bauman's Challenge to Sociology in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.72

³⁰ Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001)) p.9

For Mark Davis 'liquid modernity' is particularly sympathetic to Adorno³¹ and Smith also detects commonality between Bauman's analysis of consumerism and the notion of 'choice as an illusion' with the Critical Theorists of The Frankfurt Institute³². Once describing himself as '*Adorno's disciple*'³³ Bauman's frequent moral condemnations of consumer society resonate with Adorno's 'melancholy echo'³⁴, particularly in relation to his work on popular music.

Wise to avoid reducing complicated interwoven webs of causality to a single driving force, or a 'single deductive line of reasoning'³⁵ there is always a delicate and complex interplay within Bauman's work. Rather than this being a methodological inconsistency it is recognition of the ebb and flow of culture and the non-linearity of liquid modern transformation. This fluency is compatible with how music is almost continuously 'mediated' between different contexts and understandings and as Bauman demonstrates 'it is always in connection and not data where sociological meaning lies'³⁶.

Bauman's work therefore thrives not on discovering hard empirical truths but in revealing possibilities and sketching out new ways of understanding. As a 'cultural intermediary' translating trends in human beliefs and behaviours amongst the changing social conditions that give rise to them, his task is better suited to a problem-

³¹ Mark Davis, *Freedom and Consumerism A Critique of Zygmunt Bauman's Sociology* (Ashgate 2008) p.67 – he cites Adorno's 'Culture Industry' as a significant influence

³² *Ibid.*, p.168

³³ Zygmunt Bauman's '*Adorno Prize Address*' July (1998) quoted in Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Bauman Prophet of Postmodernity* (Polity 2004) p. 171

³⁴ Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001) p.7

³⁵ Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *How Economics Forgot History* (Routledge 2001) – Here Hodgson illustrates the lure of general theory posited as 'one theory fits all' in how developments in the study of economics lost sight of real, socio-economic systems to become a deductivist exploration of 'individual choice' – losing what he refers to as 'historical specificity'

³⁶ Tony Blackshaw, *Bauman's Challenge to Sociology* in Mark Davis and Keith Tester (ed) *Bauman's Challenge Sociological Issues for the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) p.74

orientated than systematic approach. Acutely aware of his circuitous and idiosyncratic style Bauman readily admits that he should be 'filed among the least systematic thinkers on record'³⁷.

For Bauman ordinary human life is better defined by its *lack* of cohesion and absence of iron-clad logic. He believes that ambiguities, contradictions and incompatibilities of human thoughts and deeds should not be viewed as temporary deficiencies but as the crucial constitutive features of the human modality of being in the world.

Bauman's task is therefore an ongoing conversation with human experience in which he exposes and opens up the relativity and possibility of alternative social arrangements and ways of life.

Throughout his odyssey as translator of modernity³⁸ Bauman's political orientation has however never been in doubt. He has reaffirmed his leftist credentials claiming 'I am a socialist. I was left wing, I am left-wing and I will die left-wing'³⁹. Even during the demise of academic Marxism Bauman stood his intellectual ground critiquing communism as nothing more than 'socialism's impatient younger brother' which in its application equated to little more than a modernist version of state capitalism almost always guaranteeing 'a shortcut to the cemetery of liberties'⁴⁰.

³⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, 'Bauman on Bauman Pro Domo Sua' in Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Paul Poder (eds), *The Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman : Challenges and Critique* (Ashgate, 2008) p.235

³⁸ Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Paul Poder (eds), *The Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman : Challenges and Critique* (Ashgate, 2008) p.3

³⁹ Aida Edemariam, 'Professor with a past : an interview with Zygmunt Bauman' *The Guardian* (April 28 2007)

⁴⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Living on Borrowed Time* (Polity 2010) p.15

The poet and songwriter Steve Lake describes 'punk rock' not as a style of music but as 'an attitude and a state of mind'⁴¹ and this reminds me of how Bauman rationalises socialism, understanding it as a 'stance of permanent criticism' rather an idealised system or regime⁴². So when Bauman discusses and defends socialism he envisages it primarily as a tool of critique with which to challenge the prevailing order. By extending this critical approach to ask searching questions about community, identity, destiny, love and mortality his powerful prose offers us a more informed understanding of the vexing matters that really define liquid-modern life.

It was from within this flux, uncertainty and unpredictability that Bauman wrote of a paradigm crisis demanding a new metaphor to capture the restlessness, open-endedness and endemic under-determination of these cultural labours⁴³. In 'Post-modernity and Its Discontents' Bauman sought to explain a faster moving world in which diffuse activities came together and quickly condensed as local concentrations or structures, soon to part again and disperse. As power now flowed like liquid no longer solidifying but travelling along routes impossible to predict in advance 'liquid modernity' became the most fitting description for these new conditions of contemporary life.

Like all liquids this new kind of society cannot keep its shape for long, and force is required to keep things the same even for a short period. Under these conditions change cannot be resisted, is inevitable and expected to be so. For Bauman 'liquidity' demarcates how change is now discontinuous with earlier phases of modernity for

⁴¹ Steve Lake, *Can't Cheat Karma War Subvert EP*, cover notes (Crass Records 421984/3 1980)

⁴² Zygmunt Bauman, *Has The Future a Left Soundings* (2007) <http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/articles/bauman07.html> accessed April 11 2010

⁴³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge Polity 1997) p.134

whereas solids were once melted away *in order to design and build more perfect solids*⁴⁴, this is no longer the case.

For Bauman this liquid modern shift is therefore something far more fundamental than simple surface changes in the public mood such as ...

*'weakening attitudes towards political engagement, the declining interest in a just society, a lack of appetite for social reform and the rising tide of hedonistic and 'me first' sentiments*⁴⁵.

Instead he points to deeper social and political changes ...

*'rooted in the profound transformation of the public space' and in the 'fashion in which modern society works and perpetuates itself'*⁴⁶.

During its solid phase the same progress that created nation-states, bureaucratic planning and political institutions also carried a self-confidence that would continue to steer society in its chosen direction of freedom, affluence and security. Liquid modernity therefore represents a termination point for this self-belief thereby initiating a fundamental re-ordering of the modernist search for order as all its once solid markers of certainty are suddenly under threat.

⁴⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, 'Bauman on Bauman : Pro Domo Sua', Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Paul Poder (eds), *The Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman : Challenges and Critique* (Ashgate, 2008) p.239

⁴⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.25

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.38

So whereas the culture and history of the industrial age made politics and identities highly specific, the fragmentary forces of technology, globalisation and lifestyle change now work in the opposite direction. By encouraging ‘separation, solitude and aloneness’ Bauman claims people are gradually removed from a structured society and ‘the anchors that initially formed them’⁴⁷ to a decentred sociality where individuality dominates.

Preoccupied with ambivalence, uncertainty and even a suspicion of reason itself people are increasingly apprehensive about their lives and futures although the cunning aesthetic of liquid modernity makes life appear to be more fulfilling and one of constant reinvention, personal growth and potential. Beyond its strap lines promoting freedom of choice and new horizons of opportunity this fundamental re-ordering engenders a deepening sense of loss as humanity reflects on the disappointments of the big promises made by the grand narratives of the twentieth century.

Following the failures of socialism and fascism and with a growing realisation that democracy and affluence will not bring empowerment and happiness⁴⁸ people become corrosively dissatisfied at every level from the intimate to the global as faith in a better future is increasingly absent. The disappearance of these solid narratives allows for more insidious forms of social control, not identified with older more coherent and identifiable structures of domination, to gain traction. Under these new conditions it is now the spectre of *exclusion*⁴⁹ rather than *exploitation* that becomes

⁴⁷ Tony Blackshaw, *Key Sociologists Zygmunt Bauman* (Routledge 2005) 22

⁴⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) pp.2-5

⁴⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Cambridge : Polity Press 2004) pp.40-41

the watchword of repression as old class boundaries are re-drawn between the 'happy' and the 'flawed consumer'.

The complex interactions between these surface level changes and their deeper re-adjustments conspire within the eco-system of liquid modernity to diminish and increasingly deny opportunities for meaning to take hold. Faced with this gradual loss of faith Bauman seeks to explain how citizens re-fashioned as consumers still manage to construct meaningful lives for themselves. Whereas the challenges of solid modernity had once led citizens create mass political parties and trade unions the existential challenges faced by liquid moderns encourage them to think and live in different ways.

As a consequence new forms of legitimacy and purpose are sought from non-traditional sources both on the micro and macro levels. For Bauman the generalised and accelerating faith in consumerism as the meta-value of Western society⁵⁰ juxtaposed with this corresponding lack of faith in politics opens up new spaces for 'false prophets' and a mindset that demands instant gratification and expects to find quick solutions to any problem.

Seeking reassurance and certainty from celebrities and placing their faith in the omniscience of the market-place sees people quickly descend into deeper forms of dependency as 'domination through disengagement'⁵¹ ensues. Surrendering larger sections of their life as legitimate terrain for life-style experts they willingly enter

⁵⁰ Mark Davis, *Bauman's Compass : Towards a Sociology of Hope* (Compass Think Piece September 2010) p.107

⁵¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Sociality* in Nicholas Gane, *The Future of Social Theory* (Continuum 2004) p.26

dependency relationships through avenues such as astrology, psychiatry and celebrity adulation. For Bauman this ongoing search for identity and meaning is at root an existential struggle against the power of liquid modernity as people attempt to slow down the flow and give form to the formless.

The danger of allowing celebrity and consumerism to clutter an increasingly congested public sphere sees them become subtle yet active conspirators in the subversion of politics. Understanding politics as the ‘engaged citizen’ working within the ‘openly contested and vibrant public sphere’⁵². Bauman is resolute in his belief that consumerism is ultimately bad for politics. This is because consumerism denies collective engagement, promotes separation and through the advancement of the market widens the chasm between expectations of the ‘just or good society’ and the really existing politics of the West.

His concerns can be traced through texts such as *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), *Freedom* (1988), *Post-modernity and Its Discontents* (1997), *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Society Under Siege* (2002). The growing need to reinvigorate the political develops an even more explicit salience in the polemical *In Search of Politics* (1998), where according to Davis, Bauman lays the true foundations for his critique of liquid modernity⁵³.

Bauman’s remedy to this gradual devaluation of politics is the emergence of a genuine civil society to foster critical discussion and to further the cause of *human*

⁵² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 70

⁵³ Mark Davis, *Freedom and Consumerism A Critique of Zygmunt Bauman’s Sociology* (Ashgate 2008) p.65

freedom, the ultimate goal from which ‘Bauman’s sociology never deviates’⁵⁴. The distance between Bauman’s vision of an engaged politics and his dismay at the indolence and apathy of consumer-citizens is at times refracted through the artefacts of popular culture. As a barometer of disengagement Bauman despairs at how 10 million of the 18-25 demographic voted during the Channel 4 TV show Big Brother compared to only 1.5 million voting in the British general election⁵⁵.

Under these new liquid conditions notions of the ‘political’ become de-prioritised as consumers are not exactly brainwashed but gradually lack the appetite for political struggle. With political beliefs relegated to the background this fluid world of post-politics is increasingly susceptible to the hegemonic embracement of capitalism, but rather than any ideology or political manifesto it is the liquid modern power of seduction that is now paramount. Society therefore starts to replicate itself by breeding citizen-consumers who are neither independent minded nor inter-dependent citizens, but well tutored consumers invariably far too busy to be bothered about the particulars of politics

The term ‘post-politics’ has been popularised by various commentators such as Žizek, Mouffe and Diken⁵⁶ and relates to a degeneration of the political, which forecloses debate and drains ideology, leaving politics as little more than a competition between

⁵⁴ Keith Tester : Bauman's Irony n A. Elliot (ed) *The Contemporary Bauman* (Abingdon Routledge 2007) p.81

⁵⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (Cambridge Polity 2002) p. 61

⁵⁶ Bulent Diken and Carsten Bagge Lausten - *7/11, 9/11 and Post-Politics* (June 2004) <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/diken-laustsen-7-11-9-11post-politics.pdf>

Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (New York:Verso 1999) pp.198-200

Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (Verso 2005) p.34

Yoolk Blog - Zizek on post-politics <http://yolkspot.blogspot.com/2009/07/zizek-on-post-politics.html> - accessed March 5 2010

enlightened technocrats and lifestyle managers. As the New Liberal Hegemony⁵⁷ attempts to occupy the horizons of the believable by suggesting there is no alternative to capitalism⁵⁸, Mouffe encourages a partisan view of politics based upon the necessity of antagonism in order to expose the false consensus of ‘post-politics’.

She defines this position in critical opposition to the neo-liberal belief that we have a new consensus within Western politics, whereby old forms of collective identity, antagonisms and ideologies have finally broken down. At the vanguard of this new ‘common sense’ are ‘advocates of a consensual form of democracy’⁵⁹ who claim a ‘second modernity’ has liberated individuals from collective ties and antiquated attachments so they can now dedicate themselves to a diversity of lifestyles.

The same liberal world-view also suggests the ‘free world’ has triumphed over communism ... and that a ‘world without enemies’ is now possible’⁶⁰. This Fukayaman style diagnosis provides an optimistic vision of a cosmopolitan future, which will almost naturally bring peace, prosperity and the implementation of human rights worldwide⁶¹. As a consequence politics loses any sense of purpose and retreats to a position that is played out in a moral register more concerned with the management of accepted notions rather than radical debate and innovative ideas. In the post-communist world as left and right are increasingly replaced by the struggle between ‘right and wrong’, the language of modern politics is populated with

⁵⁷ Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political* (Routledge 2006) p.2 – singles out particular criticism for Anthony Giddens

⁵⁸ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism : Is There No Alternative ?* (Zero Books 2010) p.8

⁵⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political* (Routledge 2006) p.3

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2

⁶¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (Free Press 1992) p xi

descriptions such as ‘the axis of evil’ ‘rogue states’ and with frequent moral condemnations of ‘scroungers’ ‘unfit parents’ and the ‘undeserving poor’.

Addressing the duplicity of post-politics Bauman claims

‘What is wrong with the society we live in is that it has stopped questioning itself. This is a kind of society, which no longer recognizes any alternative to itself and thereby feels absolved from the duty to examine, demonstrate, justify let alone prove the validity of its outspoken and tacit assumptions’⁶².

For Bauman post-politics is rooted in a misplaced belief in the efficacy of the globalising market and its many micro-practices and social behaviours. This encourages impotency⁶³ by ensuring citizen-consumers become increasingly devoid of ‘the art of translating private troubles into public issues and public interests into individual rights and duties’⁶⁴, which for Bauman is the ultimate ‘life-blood of all politics’⁶⁵. So although liquid moderns might appear to be busy and self-confident in reality they are uninspired and politically passive, which means that ‘in the rise of the consumer is the fall of the citizen’⁶⁶.

Another symptom of this surrender to the anonymous power of the market-place is a preference for ‘aesthetics over ethics’ as the chosen method to integrate consumers.

Evidence of how this liquid modern formula re-defines the politics of popular music

⁶² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 22-23

⁶³ Zygmunt Bauman in Daniel Leighton, ‘*Searching for Politics in an Uncertain world*’: An Interview with Zygmunt Bauman, *Renewal: A Journal of Labour Politics* (2002) (10) 1 Winter

⁶⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.120

⁶⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (Cambridge Polity 2002) p. 70

⁶⁶ Bauman and Tester, *Conversations* (Polity 2001) p.114

culture becomes evident through the advent of global events such as Live Aid and Live 8. Bauman's oblique commentary on these 'carnivals' and 'spectacles of sincerity'⁶⁷ is pivotal in the story of rock-star-politics and highlights critical points in time wherein movement politics gradually gives way to consumer politics⁶⁸. In the liquid-modern environment these glitzy consumer driven *campaigns* might look attractive and make financial sense however they are a poor substitute for *movement* politics and in Bauman's estimation unlikely to ever 'drag mankind as a whole to a radically better condition'⁶⁹.

For Bauman the tendency for outbursts of righteous anger to be channelled into 'the hyper-corporate Live 8'⁷⁰ devalues politics by turning serious global issues into trivialised forms of entertainment. Glamour and celebrification allow the private lives of media-personalities to become the scandals to preoccupy public discourse and as a consequence the pseudo-theatrics of rock-stars and citizen-consumers 'belong to the TV rather than the political platform or the polis'⁷¹.

Celebrity culture's role in the renegotiations of the notoriously mobile boundaries between the private and the public contributes to waning expectations of the political. By opening up and levelling out the playing-field of politics to 'new bidders for fame' Bauman suggests,

'Fame has been replaced by notoriety – an object of consumption rather than an oeuvre. In the race for notoriety, the once upon a time sole bidders for fame –

⁶⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.86

⁶⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge Polity 1997) p.140

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66

⁷⁰ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism – Is There No Alternative ?* (Zero Books 2010) p.14

⁷¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge Polity 2006) p.18

*the scientists, the artists, the inventors, the political leaders – have no advantage over pop stars and film stars, pulp-fiction writers, models, goal-scorers, serial killers or recidivist divorcees*⁷².

Bauman claims that the liquid modern insistence that politics must now subjugate itself via market forces as a consumer spectacle means ...

*All now need to compete on the same terms and the success of each is measured by the same criteria of the number of copies sold or TV time and ratings*⁷³.

This colonisation of public space with the *private problems of public figures*⁷⁴ reverses the vital political mechanism of translating private problems into public issues, so that any real ‘public issues’ now become ‘all but incomprehensible’⁷⁵.

As consumer-skills erode notions of ‘the public’ it is now primarily by courtesy of the chooser that any would-be authority becomes an authority. Consequently the old ‘law proffering authorities’⁷⁶ such as the state, the church and political parties no longer command respect and obedience but aim to stay relevant by tempting and seducing to ingratiate themselves with the consumer. Within this flow of changing actors and institutions, the redefinition of power dynamics means that without a properly engaged political community any attempts to anticipate or influence the moves of the

⁷² Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualised Society* (Cambridge Polity 2001) pp246 – 247

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp246 – 247

⁷⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.70

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.37

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.64

elusive powers-that-be are in Bauman's words as ineffective as forming a 'League to Prevent Weather Change'⁷⁷.

As politics becomes increasingly structured around the individual rather than the nation-state, the state is reduced to a vehicle to facilitate and promote the global economy rather than fulfil any humanist, social or political role. As it is increasingly unable to resist neo-liberalism's tendency to break down networks of human bonds and undermine social foundations, Bauman warns ominously of society plunging back into a Hobbesian state of nature⁷⁸. This rolling back of the state and its welfare provisions enables markets to become ever more divisive in deepening the polarisation of human conditions and life prospects. As states can neither stem the flow of global capital nor counter endemic deregulation an impotency is precipitated amongst public officials whose 'sole purpose is nothing more than to [simply] stay in office'⁷⁹.

If globalisation's most distinguishing macro-feature is the divorce⁸⁰ between power and politics, on a micro-level its direst human consequences are an increase in fear and the retreat into private safety. For Bauman fear becomes the 'most sinister of demons nesting in our open societies'⁸¹ and typical micro-social responses such as changing locks and installing security cameras represent a further departure from public life into one's own private castle. Once again Bauman suggests closer scrutiny reveals these phenomena are reducible to one powerful shared referent, 'a deepening

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.40

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.141

⁷⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Cambridge Polity 1999) p.4

⁸⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Has The Future a Left Soundings* (2007)

⁸¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Polity 2005) p.18

feeling of existential insecurity' and an inability to locate, much less stem, its sources

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For Bauman this newfound insecurity needs to be addressed by re-designing and re-populating the now largely vacant agora 'the site of meeting, debate and negotiation between the individual and the common, private and public good'⁸³. Only by re-collectivising the privatised utopias of life-politics does Bauman believe the public can once again acquire the vision of 'the good society', re-learn forgotten *citizen skills* and re-find *lost citizen tools*.

Using the theme of rock-star politics to examine of Bauman's notions of public space, consumerism, celebrity and carnival, reveals that popular music can be detected right throughout the fragmentation of the political. Through the agency of the hybrid rock-star politician popular music provides many useful entry points to interrogate the political however music's relegation to the background means this avenue has so far been ignored. Within politics with a big P music has traditionally been condemned to exist primarily as a footnote to history and as little more than a cultural subtext to the important affairs of the day. Before exploring its presence in greater detail I will firstly ground the second key constituent of the thesis by positioning my understanding of music and music culture in relation to social theory and politics.

Elvis Costello's statement 'writing about music is like dancing about architecture ... a really stupid thing to want to do'⁸⁴ acknowledges that people rarely speak, write or

⁸² Zygmunt Bauman, *Has The Future a Left Soundings* (2007)

<http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/articles/bauman07.html> accessed April 11 2010

⁸³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.41

⁸⁴ Elvis Costello interview with Timothy White 'A Man out of Time Beats the Clock', *Musician Magazine* No. 60 (October 1983) p. 52

think about *music* itself only their subjective reaction to it. Furthermore this reaction is also more complex than simply a process of ‘listening’ as music always represents more than just the sounds that constitute its presence. In addition to being bound by its social context the attentive listener is caught up in a process of simultaneously perceiving, interpreting, judging, and feeling personal reactions to the music.

Deeply subjective experiences based on many factors and personal prejudices underscore how music, and its surrounding culture, are human constructs and not things that exist independently in the world. For Thomas Clifton music always equates to ‘meanings constituted by human beings’⁸⁵ despite the webs of understanding weaved around music which often propel us to describe it as ‘magical’ or ‘other worldly’.

Richard Dawkins, who readily admits to crying whilst listening to Schubert, believes the ‘inexplicably deep emotional feelings’ aroused by music only remain so owing to the limits of language. As these emotions are complex combinations of neuronic impulses he is confident science will one day provide clarification so we no longer rely on ‘super-natural words such as spiritual and transcendent’⁸⁶.

Appreciating music is an intimate and highly subjective endeavour and judging by the painstaking investigations of Ball et al even attempting to comprehend music in all its elusive nuances of pitch and purpose is a step beyond human capability let alone the remit of this thesis⁸⁷. Popular descriptions such as Busoni’s ‘sonorous air’⁸⁸ or

⁸⁵ Thomas Clifton, *Music as Heard : A Study in Applied Phenomenology* (Yale University Press 1983) pp.5-6

⁸⁶ Richard Dawkins, In Conversation *Sky Arts 1* (May 30 2010) 9.00pm

⁸⁷ Philip Ball, *The Music Instinct* (Bodley Head 2010) pp.1-15

Varese's 'sound organised in time'⁸⁹ are found wanting when measured against Cage's 4' 33' of silence, revealing an inability to ever really capture what music is or can be⁹⁰.

Cage's 4' 33' instructs the musician not to play for the entire duration of the piece but to listen to the sounds that the listeners can hear from the environment whilst it is performed. Cage believes that any combination of sounds constitute or may constitute music, and this piece therefore introduces concepts such as incidental music and familiar man-made demarcations between notions of desirable sound, ambient sound and noise.

For Daniel Barenboim listening attentively to almost any kind of music can be an almost quasi-religious event, 'a form of spiritual attendance for an essentially secular age'⁹¹. As soon as we try and communicate and share our experiences we are however caught up in language, which restricts our ability to formulate and convey meaning. As a passionate advocate of the power of music Barenboim writes of the 'impossibility of separating music from other intellectual pursuits'⁹² believing music should be used to instruct us about life, rather than in an escapist way to simply distract us from it.

Rogan Taylor who equates the rock performer and rock stardom to shamanism extends the religious theme claiming it provides a vision of the mystical powers of heaven and hell, in a world where science and technology seem to deny the existence

⁸⁸ Ferruccio Busoni quoted in Daniel Barenboim, *New York Review of Books* (March 29 2001) and also available on <http://www.danielbarenboim.com/index.php?id=59> accessed June 16 2010

⁸⁹ Edgar Varese quoted in Richard Goldman, *Music Quarterly* 47 #1 (Goldman 1961) p.133

⁹⁰ Peter Gutmann, *John Cage and the Avant-Garde*, *The Sounds of Silence* (1999) accessed on <http://www.classicalnotes.net/columns/silence.html> April 21 2010

⁹¹ Thomas Sutcliffe, Barenboim as much guru as maestro *The Independent* (4 April 2006) p.

8

⁹² Daniel Barenboim, *Everything is Connected* (Wiedenfeld and Nicholson 2008) p.31

of both⁹³. Drawing our attention once again to this almost ‘religious’ quality of the links between fans and performers Street points out that ‘contained within this bond are the ingredients of rock’s political uses’⁹⁴.

Although music is universal and requires no prior skills or knowledge to be experienced, it still defies analysts to identify universals within it. Music from different cultures tends to follow different rules, which are defined more by their social contexts, historical eras and cultural backgrounds than anything inherent in music itself. As Jean Jacques Nattiez suggests there is ‘no *single* and *intercultural* universal concept defining what music might be’⁹⁵ and given all its complexity Molino states ‘there is no limit to the number or the genre of variables that might intervene in a definition of the musical’⁹⁶.

This continuing failure to capture, define or fully understand music dictates that it remains ambiguous and continues to awaken our human curiosity. For Bauman the concept of uncertainty is significant because in an age when the very substance of modern life ‘is an effort to exterminate uncertainty’⁹⁷ anything that can ‘elude definition [such as music] is subversive’⁹⁸. Music’s natural elusiveness allows its deployment as a method of speaking to power and as Attali suggests power has always been fascinated by music⁹⁹.

⁹³ Rogan Taylor, *The Death and Resurrection Show* (Blond London 1985) pp. 88-96

⁹⁴ John Street, *Rebel Rock : The Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford Blackwell 1986) p.73

⁹⁵ Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse : Toward a Semiology of Music* (Princeton University Press 1990) p.47

⁹⁶ Jean Molino, 42 Editions de Minuit ‘Fait musical et sémiologue de la musique’ *Musique en Jeu* (no. 17 1989) pp. 37–62

⁹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Polity 1991) p. 8

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9

⁹⁹ Jacques Attali, *Noise : The Political Economy of Music* (Theory and History of Literature volume 16 University of Minnesota Press 1985) p.9 – Attali actually lifts these words from Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* trans. (Mitchell and Blomster New York : Seabury 1973) p.66 and uses them in a different context

In attempting to illuminate the vortex of uncertainties and possibilities surrounding how music interacts with ‘the political’ the chronology focuses therefore not on *the music itself* but rather on the bands, the songs, the products, the movements, styles, ideas and the personalities, which constitute popular music culture.

In so doing this investigation goes some way to address what Attali and others such as Franklin¹⁰⁰ have described as the ‘remarkable absence of texts on music’¹⁰¹. As research into the political roles of rock-stars and popular music in liquid modernity is as yet unexamined, by building a trajectory of connections I hope to establish some originality and prompt further consideration into the links between music and politics.

There is a general and persistent obliviousness to the ways in which music culture links to power as music does not share any obvious relationship with the dry discursive world of politics. Applying Bauman to popular music for the first time now enables a closer examination of how music coincides with the increasingly fragmented nature of the political. His ideas and concepts help to explain how the symbiosis of music and politics continues to transform public discourse and influence society’s vital political mechanisms¹⁰².

Appreciations of music’s importance and ubiquity can be solicited from how it functions in leisure, business, work and politics and Susan McClary maintains that as music is at the centre of people’s lives more should be done to shed light on how it

¹⁰⁰ M I Franklin, *Resounding International Relations On Music, Culture and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan 2005) pp.11-13

¹⁰¹ Jacques Attali, *Noise : The Political Economy of Music* (Theory and History of Literature volume 16 University of Minnesota Press 1985) p.9 – Attali actually lifts these words from Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* trans. (Mitchell and Blomster New York : Seabury 1973) p.66 and uses them in a different context

¹⁰² Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.70

affects us and why it is so influential¹⁰³. Forming an increasingly important part of the everyday the amount of music we absorb during our daily schedules from exposure to radio, television, internet and film is burgeoning¹⁰⁴.

Music now accompanies advertising in most of the 1600 commercial messages the average Westerner is exposed to in each 24-hour period, and UK adolescents are estimated to listen on average to over 30 hours of popular music each week¹⁰⁵. In Laski's survey into what caused 'sensations of transcendent ecstasy' music was ranked a close third only after 'sex' and 'natural scenery', ahead of both art and literature¹⁰⁶.

Business increasingly makes good use of music and as Bob Stringer has noted brands 'undoubtedly like getting close to music – it's something people find exciting, vibrant and sexy'¹⁰⁷. The consumer connection is reinforced by John Loken's survey into buying behaviours which reveals 75% of consumers are 'passionate' about music and 96% say they are more likely to remember a brand if it is paired with music that fits the brand identity¹⁰⁸.

Music's ability to influence our behaviour in ways that are beyond our conscious awareness means it is often played in supermarkets at a particular pace and tempo to

¹⁰³ Susan McLary, *Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert's Music Queering the Pitch The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (1994) p.8

¹⁰⁴ RIAA and BPI estimates : <http://www.riaa.com/> <http://www.bpi.co.uk/> accessed May 2010

¹⁰⁵ North, Hargreaves and O'Neill, The importance of music to Adolescents, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology* 70 (2000) pp. 255-272

¹⁰⁶ Margarita Laski, *Ecstasy A Study of some Secular and Religious Experiences* (New York : Greenwood Press 1968) p.12

¹⁰⁷ Ian Burrell, *Its More than Rock and Roll* interview with Bob Stringer (Sony-BMG) *The Independent Media Weekly* (6 March 2006) p. 5

¹⁰⁸ John Loken, *Brand Plus Music Survey* (December 2006) available on website <http://www.brandplusmusic.com/> accessed November 2008

quicken the rate of purchasing activity¹⁰⁹. This also explains why it has been experimented with in the workplace to arouse and stimulate minds or to reduce stress and improve job satisfaction¹¹⁰ and why it has been tested within the banking industry to improve productivity¹¹¹.

Throughout history Susan Hallam claims that ‘no human culture appears to have ever been without music’¹¹² forming part of all major occasions and celebrations, including weddings, funerals, pageants, rites of passage, nation-building and festivals. Being such an ancient and universal feature across all societies scientists suspect music might even have genetic roots in promoting cohesion and social unity¹¹³. In his work on the ‘sonic gene’ Marek Kohn claims that ‘humans cannot do without music’¹¹⁴ and as a creative representation of humankind music samples are even on their way to the stars aboard the Voyager probes as ‘a sample of human culture’¹¹⁵.

Transfixing some of the greatest human minds throughout history Schopenhauer was moved to say that ‘music is the answer to the mystery of life [and as] the most profound of all the arts, it expresses the deepest thoughts of life’¹¹⁶ and similarly Einstein, a talented and gifted musician, claimed ‘to see his life in terms of music’ and

¹⁰⁹ Ronald E Milliman, Using background music to affect the behaviour of supermarket shoppers *Journal of Marketing* 46 (1982) pp 86-91

¹¹⁰ Adrian North and DJ Hargreaves, *The Effects of Music in the Workplace* available on www.prsformusic.com/ (London : PRS 1999) p.23

¹¹¹ Adrian North and LC MacKenzie, Musical Tempo, productivity and morale : *Report for the Performing Right Society* (London : PRS 1999)

¹¹² Susan Hallam, *Power of Music* : Performing Rights Society available on the www.thepowerofmusic.co.uk – accessed June 1 2009

¹¹³ Kristiina Pulli, Musical Genes May be Coming to Light *World Science Magazine* (30 April 2008) available on www.world-science.net/exclusives/080429_music-genes.htm - accessed on 24 April 2010

¹¹⁴ Marek Kohn, The Sonic Gene Review *The Independent* (12 February 2010) p. 27

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27

¹¹⁶ Schopenhauer, <http://www.gmalivuk.com/music> accessed May 1 2009

imagined ‘life without playing music would be inconceivable’¹¹⁷. L.S. Lowry believed ‘Bellini’s music made life worthwhile’ and Dr. Arthur C. Clarke claimed *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* by J.S. Bach was the greatest man-made creation of all time.

In addition to being integral to human life Professor Lawrence Parsons’ maintains that cosmic harmonies from the ‘big bang’ still resonate through low frequency vibrations so ‘music is truly at the centre of the world’¹¹⁸. His ‘music meets science’ lectures claim ‘music lies at the core of life’ and further genetic studies hope to reveal what purpose and reason music serves. Parsons believes music is somehow hard-wired into our DNA for reasons associated with group cohesion and the synchronising of brain states. His search for the elusive ‘music gene’ hopes to uncover the timeless mysteries of ‘infant prodigies’ and what is responsible for ‘musical genius’¹¹⁹.

This human fascination and love of music seems to be at least partly driven by our inability to turn off our brains to music. Always prompting some emotional response whenever the brain hears a piece music neuroscience reveals it is frantically engaged in an ongoing attempt to work out its various patterns and sounds. The brain has learned to tackle the nuances of music in some very sophisticated ways by collapsing extremely complex combinations of chords and frequencies into single notes by creating hierarchies of patterns of sound.

¹¹⁷ Brian Foster, Albert Einstein and his Love of Music *Physics World* (2005) available on physicsweb.org (accessed April 20 2010) p.1

¹¹⁸ Lawrence Parsons, *Music Meets Science* (University of Sheffield 2008) available on <http://www.iplevents.org/mms/parsons> and also on www.shef.ac.uk/psychology/staff/academic/lawrence-parsons.html (accessed on 24 April 2010)

¹¹⁹ Study of music gene and musical geniuses <http://www.musicagenetica.it/> (2007) accessed on April 24 2010 – not referenced or attributed to an individual

Why we make sense of our sonic world in such a way is unclear however Charles Darwin suggested evolution might explain the psychological, biological and anthropological drivers behind why music *means* something. In '*The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*' he postulated that musical ability is sexually selected and serves an evolutionary purpose as a signal from the musician to potential mates and same sex competitors. Possible support for Darwin's theory is found in the evolution of song in the process of sexual selection in species such as birds and whales.

Experimental psychologist and cognitive scientist Steven Pinker takes issue with Darwin and explains music by dubbing it as a form of 'auditory cheesecake'. Pinker believes our love of music is little more than a cunning human technology for generating pleasure from neural systems that have evolved to respond to other kinds of stimuli¹²⁰. Whatever its neurological or evolutionary drivers the mysteries of the human fascination with music are likely to remain a matter of ongoing debate.

This indispensability of music to the human condition also helps explain how modern technology through its songs, bands and celebrities, has developed into a massive global culture industry estimated in excess \$10bn per annum¹²¹. The BPI describes the music business, as one of the largest components of the UK's creative industries and an essential part of the UK's culture and economy¹²². Since going global in the 1960s the music industry with its notoriously fast-changing cults and fashions is in many ways a reflection of the endemic restlessness of liquid modernity. This also

¹²⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (Penguin 2003) p.33

¹²¹ Forrester Research Quoted in 'Digital Sales Surpass CDs at Atlantic' *The New York Times* (November 25 2008) <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/26/business/media/26music.html> Retrieved July 6, 2009.

¹²² The British Phonographic Industry, (BPI) <http://www.bpi.co.uk/category/music-business.aspx> accessed April 21 2010

applies to the amorphous organisations now responsible for producing and circulating its products such as Warner Brothers, News International and EMI which 'are amongst the most highly valued and discussed businesses in the world'¹²³.

Control of the recording portion of the popular music industry resides in the hands of a small number of companies¹²⁴ which have now moved towards models of greater inter-media consolidation. This trend has seen the music industry integrate with film, television and media companies to facilitate cross-marketing and promotional opportunities so a recording company now promotes its music stars by its television, radio and magazine arms¹²⁵. Along with the transformations in the styles and the formats of recorded music these corporations have shape-shifted in order to suit changing tastes and consumption patterns. For instance Warner, historically a movie company, is now the third largest player in the music industry with the largest family of record labels including Sire, Reprise, Atlantic, Elektra, Rhino and Ryko-disk¹²⁶.

In response to its increasing professionalisation and consumer orientation Van Morrison quipped 'music might be spiritual *however* the business is not'¹²⁷, nevertheless our fascination ensures its vast output continues to be reviewed, critiqued, admired and abhorred in countless conversations, blogs, magazines and websites. As one topic, which motivates liquid moderns to form strong opinions,

¹²³ David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Sage 2007) p.2

¹²⁴ In the 1970's the industry was controlled by 5 large companies (WEA, RCA, CBS EMI, Polygram) increasing to 6 in the 1990's reducing through mergers to four in 2008. Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and EMI - "Perspective: Recording industry should brace for more bad news". net. http://news.cnet.com/Recording-industry-should-brace-for-more-bad-news/2010-1027_3-6226487.html. (January 2009). Retrieved April 21 2010

¹²⁵ Robert Allen, *Popular music* (Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage 2004) p.12

¹²⁶ www.wmg.com accessed Jan 5th 2010

¹²⁷ Van Morrison, *The Times* (1990) quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.107

musics use for relaxation, seduction, contemplation and even modern forms of torture¹²⁸ suggests there is value in understanding in more detail what role it plays in politics.

As a communicative activity music is a powerful force generating an immediate and spontaneous response and as the most visceral of all art forms Friedrich Nietzsche claims it is something that we cannot ignore. Music's power rests in its ability to convey moods, emotions, thoughts and impressions ; and since its popular explosion the majority of public communication be it advertising, Hollywood movies or political campaigns now carefully attach themselves to music as a form of branding. From the world of advertising Bull and Linsell have examined the recent profusion of 'corporate sonics' from organisations such as Intel, McDonalds and Danone and as 'the sounds that make us buy' these short bursts of music now constitute the world's most recognised 'sonic identities',¹²⁹.

For Eyerman and Jamison music is particularly well suited to political action as making music and sharing its meanings within a culture or environment exemplifies solidarity for those challenging societal norms and practices¹³⁰. On a personal and collective level Christy Moore claims 'songs do have the power to change things, music has changed my life it has changed your life, it has changed everyone's lives'¹³¹. This power translates in different ways helping bring communities together,

¹²⁸ Suzanne G. Cusick, *Music as Torture / Music as Weapon Transcultural Music Review #10* (2006) – accessed on http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans10/cusick_eng.htm - April 11 2010

¹²⁹ James Bull and Geoff Linsell, *Moving Brands The Independent* (27 March 2006) p.12

¹³⁰ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) pp.1-13

¹³¹ Christy Moore (2006) quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.107

as with Barenboim's East-West Divan project ¹³², or forcing them further apart and even dividing nations as with the treatment of German composer Richard Wagner.

The curious treatment of Wagner's music highlights how human sensitivities are deeply interwoven into the politics of music and its stars. Wagner's music and politics although heavily influenced by Marx and Schopenhauer are haunted by Hitler's often-quoted claim that Wagner was the only legitimate predecessor to National Socialism. The playing of his music not only at Nazi rallies but also by concentration camp orchestras has given rise to Wagner's unofficial ban in Israel. Jessica Duchén reports how 'some audience members applauded, some walked out and heated discussions ensued'¹³³ as Barenboim attempted to break this taboo when he conducted the Prelude from *Tristan and Isolde* as an encore in Jerusalem in 2001.

Music's ability to inspire, unite and divide helps liquid moderns to 'negotiate the every day'¹³⁴ by influencing behaviour and creating a sense of personal identity. By offering us 'a sense of who we are'¹³⁵ music allows us to soundtrack our lives by expressing common experiences and solidifying shared memories. So whilst subjectivity dictates the meaning and importance we assign to different kinds of music, our vivid sense of its particularities means it continues to shape our sense of the world and our response to it.

¹³² Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, *Parallels and Paradoxes* (Bloomsbury 2004) p.31

¹³³ Jessica Duchén, Why Is Wagner's Legacy proving so bitter both to music and to his family? *The Independent* (9 April 2010) and also on www.jessicaduchen.com

¹³⁴ Tia DeNora, *Music in Every Day Life* (Cambridge University Press 2000) p.46

¹³⁵ Mark Mattern, *Acting in Concert Music Community and Political Action* (Rutgers University Press 1998) p.19

Music's place in political and social life has deep historical roots¹³⁶ and with a strong sense of its power The Greeks believed it to be a positive and ennobling force whilst also warning that society must be vigilant against its potentially harmful effects.

Thinkers since Plato have sought to understand music's relationship to power, society and human emotions¹³⁷. Making sense of music's complexities and its roles in social and political life reveals that many unanswered questions still persist since the Greeks first wrote on the subject.

Running throughout the ancient texts is a strong differentiation between high and low music and how this links to the wider political order. For Aristotle this was evident not only in 'noble melodies and rhythms' versus 'the common part of music', but also in the spectators who may be 'free and educated' or a 'second class ... a vulgar crowd composed of mechanics, labourers and the like'¹³⁸. Street sees distinct modernist political implications in Aristotle's suggestion that although music appeals to almost any living thing including 'slaves, children and even some animals', this low culture somehow needs to be elevated and refined¹³⁹.

This continuing division of music through notions of debasement and vulgarity is most clearly articulated by Adorno who connects music to politics via its roles as a commercial product and as a potential artistic challenge to the dominant system of production. His '*Dialectic of Enlightenment*'¹⁴⁰ was a starting point for numerous publications focusing on the potential within art and music to be a counter-posing force to what he perceived as the empty and superficial popular culture of the post-

¹³⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* translated by Benjamin Jowett (Biblio Bazaar 2009) p.101

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Book viii.pp.453-467

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69

¹³⁹ John Street, *Breaking the silence : music's role in political thought and action* (Politics, Harmondsworth 2006) based on his reading of Aristotle, *Politics* Bk 8, Ch 6 (Penguin 1962)

¹⁴⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso 1997)

war West. Sharing a belief that art could provide a utopian vision of a better life this critique postulated that instead of becoming a source of inspiration as it had been for the ancients, popular music had become a vulgarised representation of music's inability to function.

Described by De Nora as 'the father of the sociology of music'¹⁴¹ Adorno casts a long shadow as the most referenced theorist on the subject. His '*Culture Industry*' '*Introduction to the Sociology of Music*' and '*Aesthetic Theory*' have all contributed to our understanding of politics and art positioning Adorno as 'a figure with whom to reckon'¹⁴². For somebody who cared so deeply about music Adorno despised the debasement of popular music within modern culture, lamenting how under different conditions it could possibly have represented 'the final resistance to the acculturation and commodification of everything'¹⁴³. Understanding popular music as an artefact of mass production Adorno claimed popular music had become a standardized commodity with the same verse-chorus structure formulaically manufactured to *appear* different but always sharing 'an eternal sameness'¹⁴⁴.

As a mechanism of ideological control he also claimed popular songs were encoded with instructions about how to live and what to expect from life, all directed towards compliance and acceptance. In the essay '*On the Fetish Character in Music*', Adorno states that music 'inhabits the pockets of silence that develop between people moulded by anxiety, work and undemanding docility'¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴¹ Tia De Nora, *After Adorno Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge University 2003) p.9

¹⁴² Tia De Nora, *Music in Every Day Life* (Cambridge University Press 2000) p.46

¹⁴³ Theodor Adorno, 'On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music' *Essays on Music* edited by R. Leppert (Berekeley University of California Press 2002) p.77

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.135

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.289

Believing that manufactured culture had created conditions under which true new music could no longer be created Adorno derided popular music as an indictment of a society that no longer understood itself, a vulgar sociality obsessed with consumerism and gross inhumanity. The role of popular music was therefore designed to make the public 'rhythmically obedient' and by 'lulling [the listener] towards inattention' was guilty of promoting 'thoughtlessness amongst the masses'¹⁴⁶.

For basing his arguments on nostalgic attachments to pre-industrial forms of cultural production Adorno attracted criticism from his Frankfurt School contemporary Walter Benjamin. Benjamin contested Adorno's insistence on the negative aspects of commodification viewing it instead as a far more ambivalent and contested activity potentially offering new direction by presenting new opportunities for innovation and critique¹⁴⁷.

Adorno's insistence on the vulgar superficiality of popular music and the implication that he was somehow immune to its deceptions is for Corrigan and Frith an example of a 'distinct thread' of academic double standards running through the 'literature of sociology'¹⁴⁸. Challenging the notion that popular culture is always vacuous and automatically corrupts teenagers they suggest Adorno would reassess his stance if he ever had the good fortune to experienced 'West Ham's 'North End' or a Slade concert'¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁶ Theodor Adorno quoted in Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse Towards a Critical Theory of Sociology* (Routledge 2001) p.199

¹⁴⁷ David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Sage 2007) p.16

¹⁴⁸ Paul Corrigan and Simon Frith, *The Politics of Youth Culture* quoted in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson edited : *Resistance Through Rituals Youth Cultures in Post War Britain* : (Routledge 1989) p.231

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.237

This divide between ‘high’ and ‘low’ musical genres, although its proponents might claim otherwise, is rarely based on the quality of different styles of music and often on the social status of its performers and audience. This sense of elitism and differentiation contributes to fixations of contempt towards meaningless as opposed to meaningful culture, often translating as a disregard for the consumers of illegitimate culture and even towards their lives and meanings.

Hesmondhalgh recognises Adorno’s contribution in a negative way¹⁵⁰ suggesting he promotes a mode of thinking about culture that is still common amongst academics today. He detects an ongoing tendency to lapse into the pessimism that on the one hand even though we may enjoy cultural products and use them to enrich our lives, there is a nagging belief that industrialised culture is always somehow debased. Furthermore Adorno’s widespread valorisation within academia means that anything short of embracing his cultural pessimism is in some way a complacent celebration of the culture industry¹⁵¹.

Musicologically Adorno used the structure, style and melody of music ‘*to think with*’ devoting much of his thinking to support his broader project, namely the transformation of consciousness. As an accomplished musician Adorno developed a detailed practitioner’s critique offering considerable insight into matters related to the dynamics of popular music.

Rather than using music ‘*to think with*’ Attali’s choice to use music ‘*to theorise through*’ offers a more useful approach to understanding the liquid modern merger

¹⁵⁰ David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Sage 2007) p.16

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.16

between the spheres of music and politics. Attali sees music as ‘the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up every society’¹⁵² and through his study of its social and political dimensions McLary suggests he reveals music offers ‘a way of grasping social practices of the present and future’¹⁵³.

His chief contribution to the field is a detailed historical treatise on the political economy of music, which traces amongst other things the commodification of music and its role as a predictor of social change.

In what he describes as his own deliberate ‘call to theoretical indiscipline’¹⁵⁴ Attali suggests....

‘Music is a herald, for change is inscribed in noise faster than it transforms society. ... Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power that is essentially political’¹⁵⁵.

Attali demonstrates value in studying music from a non-musicological perspective as a basis to promote understanding within other fields. His concise yet ambitious study examines many relationships such as music as a sacrificial code, as an affirmation of existence and even for stockpiling personal collections as nations once stockpiled nuclear weapons.

¹⁵² Jacques Attali, *Noise : The Political Economy of Music : Theory and History of Literature* volume 16 (University of Minnesota Press 1985) p.4

¹⁵³ Susan McLary, Afterword in Attali, *Noise The Political Economy of Music : Theory and History of Literature* volume 16 (University of Minnesota Press 1985) p.153

¹⁵⁴ Jacques Attali, *Noise : The Political Economy of Music : Theory and History of Literature* volume 16 (University of Minnesota Press 1985) p.5

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1

In studying the evolution of these connections Attali claims it is ‘impossible to separate the history of music from that of repression and surveillance’¹⁵⁶ claiming

... ‘*since noise is the source of power, power has always listened to it with fascination*’¹⁵⁷.

Attali’s historical reading of music as a tool of power¹⁵⁸ to either *silence* people, make them *believe* or to make them *forget*, highlights music’s infusion with the political.

Popular music’s ability to fascinate power works in subtle ways and it is often the establishment’s fear and fascination that empowers music. The ability of the censor to outlaw songs, bands or musical styles is one manifestation however more nuanced reactions from corporate and state interests can be seen particularly in times of war. The response of Clear-Channel to ‘un-patriotic voices’ in the aftermath of 9-11 demonstrates how certain kinds of ‘noise’ can be filtered and excluded from the commercial worlds of TV and radio.

In terms of a political reading Attali’s project attempts to makes visible the historical appropriation of music and the musician as a mechanism of establishment support. This thesis, through a process of linking the aspects and conjunctions of popular music and politics within liquid modernity, performs a broadly similar exercise although admittedly over a far shorter period. In some ways therefore this is an

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.11

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.11

extension of Attali's enquiry and as the chapters of this thesis unfold an interesting musical narrative on the style and substance of liquid-modern politics continues to emerge.

Describing Adorno as an 'aristocratic pessimist'¹⁵⁹ Attali's work exudes optimism and shares Bauman's ability to work with familiar tools to illuminate matters in different ways in order to reveal unseen but already existing realities. Both writers help the reader to see the current situation 'not simply as a bundle of static and agonizing contradictions, but also as the place for the emergence of new realities of which we are only dimly aware'¹⁶⁰.

One theorist who has re-examined and consequently re-appraised his approach through music is Theodore Roszak the prominent political commentator and chronicler of the counter-culture. In the updated introduction to his landmark study 'The making of a Counter Culture' Roszak provides a testimony to the lacuna of popular music's role in politics when he claims 'if there was one aspect of the period that I now wish had enjoyed more attention in these pages, it is the music'¹⁶¹.

Rozzak now claims music more than anything 'inspired and carried the best insights of the counter-culture'. From the folk protest ballads and songs of social significance at the outset up to acid rock music became the 'only way to reflect the surrealistic turn that America was to take at the climax of the Vietnam War'¹⁶². He admits that by neglecting to dedicate a chapter to the 'minstrels of the movement, such as Dylan,

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.30

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.33

¹⁶¹ Theodor Roszak, *The making of a Counter Culture* (University of California Press 1995)

p. xxxiv

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv

Lennon, Baez and Hendrix’¹⁶³ a gap in his own analysis has now become evident. As a result he acknowledges his study, like any other period-based historical commentary, loses impact and fails to fully convey the true spirit of the time.

Roszak’s revelation about the special significance of popular music resonates with both Bauman’s shift from solid to liquid modernity and with Habermas’ re-worked understanding of political engagement within the public sphere¹⁶⁴. For Habermas art and culture have become increasingly separated from dominant religious and political structures so products made available through the market can assume meanings that are not confined to their place in some pre-designated order. In Bauman’s liquid-modern world this separation and fragmentation of meaning accelerates and is increasingly accompanied by the emergence of cultural critics, such as rock-stars who give special voice to these meanings.

The roles music has assumed in political participation are investigated by Street who broadens the field of enquiry by focusing on the importance of organisation, performance and legitimacy as a ‘concatenation of specific processes’¹⁶⁵. For Street certain conditions need to be met in order for music and musicians to play a significant role in political action and central to these are changing infra-structural conditions such as a variety of forms of capital, not least financial, but also social and cultural.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv

¹⁶⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge Polity 1992) pp.36-43

¹⁶⁵ John Street Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 275

Roszak's retrospective realisation of music as a tool of social critique and Eyerman and Jamison's account of the musician as credible 'truth bearer'¹⁶⁶, intersect with Street's work to reveal why musicians have become authoritative sources on political issues. Deploying popular music as a technique of interrogation not only breathes insight into its roles in politics but to also fills some of the gaps that Roszak and other political commentators have carelessly overlooked.

Despite academia's tendency to neglect the place of music in politics Street suggests writers do subtly yet inadvertently acknowledge how music is 'intimately linked, via its aesthetics, to ethical judgements and to social order'¹⁶⁷. He sustains this argument by detailed considerations of the movement politics of 'Rock Against Racism' and the consumer-oriented politics of Live Aid and Live 8. With the application of Bauman's sociological cement Street's case studies provide important ingredients in connecting together these conjunctions of rock-star-politics.

In each of the last five decades popular music culture has thrown up its own unique mixture of events and movements that capture the era and its public mood. A decade such as the eighties with the advent of Thatcherism and The Miners Strike along with significant events such as Live Aid, Red Wedge and the collapse of the Berlin Wall is particularly significant, however every decade has its own selection of music-infused events that are high profile, often controversial and invariably self-consciously political.

¹⁶⁶ Jameson and Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.123

¹⁶⁷ John Street : *Breaking the silence: music's role in political thought and action* (2006) based on his reading of Aristotle (1962 Bk 8, Ch 6) *Politics*, (Harmondsworth : Penguin) p.1

Examining the pop and politics of each decade creates an awareness of its continuity and circularity. As Costello suggests rock'n'roll is always on the move and the rebellion of one generation has tended to become domesticated as the pop of the next¹⁶⁸. Unlike certain social theorists who delineate independent 'realms' such as politics, economics and the social¹⁶⁹, Bauman prefers to stress their habitual and unavoidable connectedness through complex prisms of culture. Beilharz believes the continuing significance of Bauman's early work such as *Culture as Praxis*¹⁷⁰ can be traced to the development of cultural studies in England and the impact of the work of Stuart Hall. Culture is therefore the major co-ordinate linking Bauman's inter-disciplinary approach¹⁷¹ and through this he articulates how change manifests simultaneously in many areas such as identity and social behaviour stating ...

*'cultural activity never starts in any generation, in any particular place, from scratch. It always has to reckon with what has already been accomplished by previous generations'*¹⁷².

These temporary sedimentations of culture bridge the decades to unite every generation in an endless cycle of production and reproduction. Bauman's notion of inter-generational cross-pollination resonates with Street's claim that without John Lennon there would be no template for Rock Against Racism¹⁷³ and without the tradition of Woody Guthrie both Bob Dylan and Billy Bragg would be denied their most influential role model.

¹⁶⁸ Elvis Costello, *The History Of Rock'n'Roll* (Warner Brothers 2005) Sky Arts Feb 22 2009

¹⁶⁹ Daniel Bell, *Sociological Journeys 1960-1980* (Heinemann 1980) p.329

¹⁷⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture as Praxis* (Sage 1973)

¹⁷¹ Peter Beilharz, *Zygmunt Bauman : Dialectic of Modernity* (London Sage 2000) p.44

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.210

¹⁷³ John Street, *Rebel Rock : The Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford Blackwell 1986) p.223

As it is unrealistic to capture all of the conjunctions of politics and music over a fifty-year period there are unfortunately some casualties. Foremost amongst these, with the exception of the following few paragraphs, is the rich pre-history of protest music before rock's explosion.

Stars of the 1950s such as Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis although not political with a big 'P' were however rebellious as they transgressed social norms and challenged the straight laced morality of the fifties 'good-life'. Altogether younger, dangerous and more liberated than pre-rock pop singers such as Perry Como and Doris Day these new icons breathed life into a new self-aware demographic opening up inter-generational battle-lines on matters of sex, race, drugs and promiscuity.

Earlier twentieth century figures of reference include singer-songwriters who laid the foundations for 1960s protest music such as Guthrie and IWW member Joe Hill, the folk singers Pete Seeger and Ewan MacColl, and from African-American blues tradition artists such as Louis Armstrong and Leadbelly. Their political and cultural legacies stretch far into their futures through songs such as 'There Is Power in a Union' and its subsequent versions by Dylan, Ochs, Bragg and RATM¹⁷⁴.

These figures connect to even earlier traditions of European and American radicalism in popular music. In 1735 the New York newspaperman John Zenger was arrested for printing song lyrics lampooning the British colonial governor¹⁷⁵ and a century later

The Hutchinson Family Singers' ballads on abolition, suffrage, war, civil rights and

¹⁷⁴ www.joehill.org *The Joe Hill Project* (accessed January 10th 2009)

¹⁷⁵ Paul D. Fischer : *What if they Gave a Culture War and Nobody Came ?* : Freemuse.org : available on <http://www.freemuse.dk/sw3753.asp> 28 January (2003)

feminism earned them an audience with President Tyler¹⁷⁶ and the accolade of being described as the world's first 'political band'¹⁷⁷. A.L. Lloyd links music and politics back to early European protest songs such as 'The Cutty Wren' dating from the English peasants' revolt of 1381¹⁷⁸. This song is traceable across the centuries via celebrations of popular bandits such as Robin Hood, social movements such as the Diggers to a contemporary collection of 'Rebel Songs' by Chumbawamba¹⁷⁹.

The flow of these political affinities into popular music culture was epitomised by Dylan's statement 'Voltaire, Rousseau, John Locke, Montesquieu, Martin Luther ... it was like I knew those guys, like they'd been living in my backyard'¹⁸⁰. This sense of connection was strengthened by the cultural identifications that existed between musicians and early pro-active counter-cultural social movements and Craig Werner claims that even before the anti-Vietnam War Movement popular music ensured that a ready made movement was already in place¹⁸¹.

The conjunctions of new media, new money and rock-star hysteria created a starting point from which the liquid modern symbiosis between popular music and politics could emerge. The commercialisation of sex, pop and the teenager defined the rock-star as a potent symbol whose cultural capital was reflected in cultish fandom, music sales and merchandising opportunities. The following chapter examines how popular

¹⁷⁶ University of Virginia Library, *Protest Songs : Solidarity Forever*
<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/music/protest.html> accessed July 1 2008

¹⁷⁷ University of Virginia Library, *Protest Songs : Solidarity Forever*
<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/music/protest.html> accessed July 1 2008

¹⁷⁸ A. L. Lloyd, *The Singing Englishman An Introduction to Folk Song*
<http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/tse1.htm> - retrieved April 16 2010

¹⁷⁹ Chumbawamba, *English Rebel Songs* CD (1381 – 1984) (Mutt 2003)

¹⁸⁰ Bob Dylan, *The Bob Dylan Chronicles : Volume One*, (New York & London: Simon & Schuster 2004) p. 30

¹⁸¹ Craig Werner, *A Change is Gonna Come Music, Race and the Soul of America* (G Putnam's Sons 2000) p.81

music culture took on greater social significance ‘as a new and exciting form of cultural expression’¹⁸² as its ideas, images and attitudes were communicated through dedicated television shows¹⁸³ and a vibrant popular music press.

As public fascination with pop stars reached an all time high symbiosis became foregrounded through the arrival of icons such as Dylan and Lennon who used their newfound status to connect rock-star politics with its audience. From this point onwards the potential within rock-stars to become political figures became self-evident although it should be noted that in the UK rock musicians were of no great interest to the establishment, if anything they were no more than minor irritants. For Sir William Rees Mogg these new celebrities were merely butterflies on a wheel whose ‘bright existence would be brief and insignificant’¹⁸⁴.

A definite aesthetic symmetry also became ingrained in the public mind between early social movements and the visual imagery of its musicians. The enduring images of Woody Guthrie with the slogan ‘this machine kills fascists’ scrawled on his guitar, or Bob Dylan playing live by the side of Martin Luther King or Billy Bragg campaigning during the miners strike or addressing the crowd at Live 8 are all now quite iconic. John Lennon is remembered as much for his well publicised bed-ins and naked album covers with Yoko Ono as his association with ‘Give Peace a Chance’ being sung by over half a million protestors at the Washington Memorial in 1969¹⁸⁵.

¹⁸² David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Sage 2007) p.15

¹⁸³ Top of the Pops, *We Popped Until We Dropped* : BBC chart TV show running from January 1964 to July 2006 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/top/> - accessed May 1 2009

¹⁸⁴ John Street, *Rebel Rock : The Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford Blackwell 1986) p.14

¹⁸⁵ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.152

The role of music amongst the young at protest rallies, counter-cultural gatherings and festivals such as Woodstock and Altamont continued through new social movements such as The Greens, Friends of the Earth, Rock Against Racism and Anti-Globalisation Movements. From humble beginnings as The Bath Blues Festival the Glastonbury festival would grow from under 2,000 visitors in 1970 to the largest open air rock festival in the world boasting 180,000 visitors in 2009¹⁸⁶. Whilst liquid modernity has transformed 'Glasto' into a commercialised global spectacle its organisers have faced these challenges by struggling to retain an ethical comportment via associations with groups such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International.

When refracted through the prism of popular music the social and political issues associated with the flowering of dissent in the sixties have consistently affixed themselves to the contours of each decade. During the Cold War the authorities of both East and West exploited fears over the worrying propensities of music for political purposes. In the USA Reverend David Noebel's *Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles : An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music*¹⁸⁷ and the 'Movement to Restore Democracy' accused bands such as The Doors and Jefferson Airplane of being part of a conspiracy to destroy American values. This paralleled the fears of the Soviet authorities that exposure to Western pop music might weaken the resolve of 'our young people' by introducing them to the excesses of drink, drugs and sexual promiscuity¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁶ John Harris, *Hail Hail Rock'n'Roll* (Sphere 2009) pp.38-39

¹⁸⁷ Reverend David Noebel : *Communism, Hypnotism and the Beatles : An Analysis of the Communist Use of Music* quoted in Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America : Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (University of North Carolina Press 2006) p.45

¹⁸⁸ H.R. Steigler quoted in Peter Blecha, *Taboo Tunes* (Backbeat Books 2004) p.172

Like its earlier totalitarian adversary Nazi Germany the Soviet Union avidly censored music in the name of political ideology and engaged in elaborate procedures to establish mechanisms for producing music deemed ‘appropriate’¹⁸⁹. Throughout Eastern Europe popular music assumed an important social role as a method to critique the political structure and for the Czech authorities rock performers seemed to pose an almost constant threat to the established order¹⁹⁰. Significant amounts of musical *samizdat* came to public attention when many records and magazines from prior to the Prague Springs once again began to be openly circulated in 1989¹⁹¹. Authority’s gaze provides interesting parallels as the same music hidden from the Communist authorities had simultaneously ‘assumed the call for freedom’¹⁹² by accompanying U.S. civil rights marchers.

After the end of the Cold War as the West gradually migrated its concerns with popular music into areas such as copyright infringement and branding strategies, nervousness still persisted. In Khomeini’s Iran popular music was targeted and banned on the grounds that ‘it stimulated the brain in undesirable ways’¹⁹³ and one of the first edicts issued by the Taliban on their accession to power in Afghanistan was to end the playing of music. Changing Radio Kabul to *Radio Sharia* Asian pop music was quickly replaced with bulletins of Taliban victories, religious homilies and ‘fresh directives on how citizens should comport themselves’¹⁹⁴. When the Taliban were

¹⁸⁹ M. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and the Music in the Third Reich* (Oxford University Press 1997) and F. Starr, *Red and Hot The fate of jazz in the Soviet Union* (Oxford : Oxford University Press 1983) quoted in John Street Seth Hague and Heather Savigny : ‘Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation : British Journal of Politics and International Relations’ www.bjpir.org 2008 Volume 10 (2008) p. 281

¹⁹⁰ John Street, *Rebel Rock : The Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford Blackwell 1986) p.14

¹⁹¹ The East Remembers, *Radio 4* 3.00 pm October 29 (2009)

¹⁹² Daniel Bahrenboim and Edward Said, *Parallels and Paradoxes* (Bloomsbury 2004) p.44

¹⁹³ Dead Kennedys, *Bedtime for Democracy* (Alternative Tentacles 1986) track 8

¹⁹⁴ M. Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, (London, Pluto Press 2001) p.6

removed from power one of the most vivid images used to illustrate this was a picture of Afghan citizens joyously waving their radios and cassette players.

As it quickly transitioned to the commercial and technological logic of liquid modernity popular music culture would soon be followed and often mimicked by politics in adapting to the medium of television on which it soon came to rely. Subsequently politics has become increasingly tailored to fit newer media formats, which also create certain rules and set agendas for their own style of coverage. As a consequence communication is geared towards seducing the ever-shortening attention span of the consumer so the language of politics gradually adopts the entertainment protocols of the pop celebrity.

Politicians have also copied rock-culture's intimate connection with charismatic individuality as they became transformed from representatives of an ideology or party, to 'personalities' with coverage better suited to soundbites and photo opportunities. These stylistic changes have seen the solid conventions of politics increasingly giving way to the fluid dynamics of the pop videos, TV commercials and chat shows.

As the 'age of mutual engagement' melted away politics sought to retain some sense of certainty by incorporating rather than challenging the effects of liquid modernity's ruthless commercialising ethos. Examples of slick commercial recuperation date back to the 1960s however the melting of inhibitions and draining of ideology moved

Annie Lennox to remark that ‘there are only two kinds of artists left ... those who will endorse Pepsi and those who simply won’t’¹⁹⁵.

From the branding of Gap Jeans and Nike footwear through counter-cultural icons such as such as William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac marketing synergies intensified into ‘full brand-culture integration’ as consumerism triumphed as the era’s ‘all powerful meta-value’¹⁹⁶. In what Frank terms as the ‘conquest of cool’ lucrative sponsorship deals between The Rolling Stones and Tommy Hilfiger Clothing suddenly seemed to be an almost natural alliance.

With politics suffering from a widening trust deficit, by attaching itself to catchy electoral campaign tunes and indulging in celebrity association, it increasingly turned to superficial rather than substantive means of rehabilitation. In its desperate search for new sources of legitimacy the seductive consumerist environment offered politics new opportunities for salvation and amongst these was popular music. With politics automatically magnetised towards power it couldn’t fail to notice the impressive levels of public mobilisation generated by the unlikely figure of Bob Geldof, who became a forerunner of the curious hybrid aggregation of the rock-star-politician.

Live Aid was iconic in putting down a marker as the first in a series of vast redemptive carnivals, which in retrospect did more to alleviate a troubled Western conscience than provide, let alone debate, solutions for complex global issues.

¹⁹⁵ Annie Lennox quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.107

¹⁹⁶ Mark Davis, *Bauman’s Compass : Towards a Sociology of Hope* (Compass Think Piece September 2010) p.107

Occurring in the middle of what Naomi Klein described as ‘music’s decade of the straight up shill’¹⁹⁷ Live Aid heralded politics use of music as a source of redemption, and business’ increased exploitation of the symbols of rebellion through the mystique of brand marketing.

Invoking Bakhtin’s analysis of ‘carnival’ Bauman derides these post-political carnivals as fraudulent ‘picture of publicly produced in-authenticity’¹⁹⁸. They allow inescapable moral impulses aroused by the sight of human misery to be channelled into sporadic outbursts of charity rather than subsumed within a more purposeful debate. In liquid modernity ‘carnival culture’ moves from the margins to the centre of contemporary life and turns justice into a festive, holiday event aimed at placating the West’s moral conscience rather than being a matter of serious moral consideration.

For Bauman syncopating their joy through these ‘dazzling flashes of togetherness’¹⁹⁹ fulfils similar roles for liquid-moderns, as do celebrations such as Christmas and summer holidays²⁰⁰. These easy to access, superfluous leisure engagements, which invariably involve minimum personal sacrifice never mind the renunciation of indulgent Western lifestyles, foster an expectation of ‘the absence of justice during working days’²⁰¹. As such the empowerment once felt by RAR activists is replaced by flimsier attachments to celebrity endorsements and fashionable wristbands as engagement and involvement is replaced with a detached spectatorialism.

¹⁹⁷ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (Fourth Estate 2001) p.46

¹⁹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 87

¹⁹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Cambridge 1999) p.3

²⁰⁰ Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001) p.29

²⁰¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 89

Just as the infinite plasticity of liquid modernity absorbs the symbols of the counter-culture and subverts them into a narrative of consumerism, the righteous anger of Live Aid succumbed to the forces of neo-liberalism. Trivialising politics in the interests of entertainment it set the unusual template for a strange type of protest ‘a protest that everyone could agree with’²⁰². For Fisher its post-political notion of a fake consensus amounts to ‘ideological blackmail’ and this has haunted politics ever since Live Aid ‘insisted that caring individuals could end famine directly without any political solution or systematic reorganisation’²⁰³. The roles celebrity and consumerism reached a seductive crescendo in the case of Live 8 twenty years later soon after it was courted and welcomed into the arena of the ‘political’ during the phenomenon of Cool Britannia.

By mistakenly equating freedom with consumerism people are not only diverted away from politics but are lured into an incomplete life based upon a series of misunderstandings, and this fraudulence is arguably the closest Bauman offers to a grand narrative of liquid modernity. For instance he claims media-stars increasingly give false hope to ordinary people longing to reinvent themselves creating an unhealthy obsession with the practice of self-reconstruction²⁰⁴. From a distance celebrity might possess a coherence and unity of perfection, however as this can be desired but never attained, in true liquid-modern fashion dependency through seduction ensues.

On the one hand therefore consumers seek liberation by choosing a new style or form of identity and fool themselves that by indulging in the latest fashionable wave of

²⁰² Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism – Is There No Alternative ?* (Zero Books 2010) p.6

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.15

²⁰⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) pp. 63-90

consumer driven protest some kind of meaningful political change will occur. These are some of the cultural symptoms of the liquid-modern mindset and they are examined in a growing body of literature, which suggests older notions of participation and engagement are being actively supplanted by a newer style of 'consumer politics'²⁰⁵.

For Bauman consumerism and politics face in different directions ...

*'Consumption is a supremely solitary activity, even when it happens to be conducted in company. No lasting bonds emerge in the activity of consumption. Those bonds that manage to be tied in the act of consumption may, but may not, outlast the act; they may hold swarms together for the duration of their flight, but they are occasion-bound and otherwise thin and flimsy'*²⁰⁶.

Margaret Scammell illustrates how the idea of an active 'consumerised republic' gained traction in political discourse as its vocabulary came to hold sway in the realm of formal politics. In 1993 the Clinton-Gore election proposals listed 'putting customers first' as a top goal, and citizens were 'increasingly encouraged to bring a consumer mentality to their relations with government, judging state services like any other purchased good'²⁰⁷. A similar pattern became evident in the UK as the Blair government redefined citizenship to 'place consumers at the heart of policy making'

²⁰⁵ Lance Bennett, 'Lifestyle Politics and Citizen Consumers' in John Corner and Dick Pels, *The Restyling of Politics* (Sage Publications 2003)

²⁰⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p. 78

²⁰⁷ L.Cohen, 'Citizen Consumers in the USA', M.Daunton and M. Hilton (eds) *The Politics of Consumption* (Oxford Berg 2001) p. 220

culminating with Labour's 1999 White Paper 'Modern Markets : Confident Consumers'²⁰⁸.

These examples are symptomatic of the transition to 'citizen-consumers'²⁰⁹ and the emergence of the 'Washington consensus' which were all delivered and legitimised through a language championing 'choice' and 'consumer rights'. Notice how Bauman's notion of the citizen-consumer grammatically places the *liquid-modern* notion of a consumer's ability to purchase over the *historical* propensity of a citizen's towards debate and political rights.

Harnessing a consumer's social conscience as a means to effect change births the perception that change is more likely to be achieved through cultural events and consumer acts than avenues such as resistance, protest and political organizations²¹⁰. Consumer activism therefore becomes evident in the currency of product boycotts and socially responsible investment choices, which are increasingly anchored in the vocabulary of consumer choice²¹¹. Gradually consumerism is able to influence political discourse to suit multiple social contexts in order to become ever more embedded as an acceptable societal relation.

In an interview in 'Start Your Own Business Magazine' which described her as a businessperson who 'reeks of entrepreneurial spirit ... who doesn't care much for

²⁰⁸ Modern Markets Confident Consumers, A Local Government Response from the Local Authority Associations and LACOTS available on-line at web resource www.lga.gov.uk/lga/publicprotection/confidentconsumers.pdf accessed February 2008

²⁰⁹ M. Scammell, 'Citizen Consumers' John Corner and Dick Pels, *The Restyling of Politics* (Sage 2003)

²¹⁰ John Street, The Celebrity Politician in John Corner and Dick Pels, *The Restyling of Politics* (Sage 2003) p.91

²¹¹ W. Lance Bennett, 'Branded Political Communication :The Politics Behind Product', Michelle Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal and Dietlind Stolle, *Politics, Products and Markets exploring political consumerism past and present* (New Brunswick 2006)

courting the media', Ali Hewson stated 'shopping has become [the new] politics' and people should realise they also have an economic vote. Reflecting the 'power in people's pockets' she imagines solutions to some of the world's ills may now reside in sophisticated product placement, claiming EDUN responds to these demands by 'developing desirable clothes whilst also applying pressure through consumerism'²¹².

For Scammell scoring direct hits against Shell, Monsanto and Nike shows how consumer-society offers new opportunities to 'squeeze orthodox avenues for politics' yet at the same time allows for 'new ones to be prised open'²¹³. This approach is flawed from the outset as it denies consumerism's complicity in producing and sustaining these unfair relations. By only engaging a small percentage of the electorate and 'thriving on the condition of apathy and social disengagement'²¹⁴

Bauman equates faith in the citizen-consumer with a 'retreat from the extant political battlefields' creating a void which is filled by 'ostentatiously non-partisan and ruggedly a-political consumer activism'²¹⁵.

By appealing to a consensual narrative that magically unites the well being of consumers, big business and the world poor, projects such as Bono's 'Red Card' and EDUN suggest this can all be done in one simple transaction. These are 'post-political' gestures as they deny consumerism's role in creating the antagonistic economic relations between North and South. Bono means well but he is

²¹² Ali Hewson in an interview with Bono, 'Business Rocks' *Start Your Own Business Magazine* (Dec 2008) available on http://www.sybmagazine.com/features_bono.html - accessed May 9 2009

²¹³ Margaret Scammell, *The Internet and Civic Engagement : The Age of the Citizen Consumer* *Political Communication* 17 (2000) pp 351-55

²¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p.146

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.146

fundamentally misconceived in practice, inadvertently promoting the consumerism that seeks to undermine his socially progressive intent.

In the transition to liquid modernity Karl Deutsch's claim that 'politics is nothing but communication'²¹⁶ becomes increasingly relevant as the best and most perceptive communicators are now equipped to become the era's best politicians or prophets. Bono's 'realistic' acceptance that capitalism is the only game in town according to Fisher supports the neo-liberal fantasy that 'western consumerism, far from being implicated in systemic global inequalities, can actually solve them'²¹⁷.

Aspects of carnival culture also take hold within electoral politics as D-reams' uplifting 'Things Can Only Get Better' is the emotional theme tune that sweeps Blair's New Labour to power after 20 years in the political wilderness. A decade earlier the slightly more amusing choice of Bruce Springsteen's largely anti-republican 'Born in the USA' is still synonymous with Reagan's second electoral campaign. Springsteen later revealed the song was a lament for a Vietnam veteran 'who wants to strip away Reagan's view of a mythic America and find something real and connecting ... a home in his country'²¹⁸.

It was of no particular consequence that the Reagan camp misunderstood the sentiment of Springsteen's song as long as the rousing chorus connected to notions of patriotism and nationhood. As music leaves its points of origin it inevitably connects with different social contexts and cultural understandings so its *meaning* has to be understood as a variable process of re-invention and re-interpretation. As I

²¹⁶ Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, *Nationalism and Its Alternatives* (Alfred Knopf 1969) p. 11

²¹⁷ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism – Is There No Alternative ?* (Zero Books 2010) p.15

²¹⁸ Bruce Springsteen quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.245

demonstrate through Lennon's *Imagine*²¹⁹ and Obama's use of Guthrie the radical uncertainty of liquid modern culture allows music to connect with meanings and operate with political agendas in increasingly curious ways.

Reducing electoral turnouts²²⁰ and the 'trust-deficit'²²¹ foregrounds notions of a 'crisis in politics' prompting calls for a new politics from spokespeople of both left and right²²². A worldwide opinion survey covering more than 50,000 people in sixty-eight countries revealed that most people believed governments did not act according to its people's wishes²²³ and accorded politicians the dubious accolade of representing the least-trusted of all occupations.

As the popular press delights in exposing the abuses and private misdemeanours of politicians it prompts people to seek out meaningful politics from sources beyond the perimeter of mainstream politics. This creates a vacuum opening up new spaces for articulating political discourse and this is increasingly filled with figures such as musicians and actors who have transitioned across from the world of celebrity. These new actors are perceived to be more ethical and virtuous precisely because of their distance from the flawed practice of politics. Having enhanced political purchase as a result of being a-political is a curious paradox central to the emergence of celebrity politics.

²¹⁹ See both Robin Denselow, *When The Music's Over: The Story of Political Pop* (London Faber and Faber 1989) p.106 and R Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes 1990) p.16

²²⁰ Ben Schott's Almanac www.benschott.com quoted in *The Independent* (24 April 2010)

²²¹ Brian Whitaker, 'Politicians are voted the world's least trusted people' *The Guardian* (Thursday 15th September 2005)

²²² The New Politics, *The Times Newspaper* (May 12 2010) accessed May 20 2010 www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading_article/article7123449.ece

²²³ Brian Whitaker, 'Politicians are voted the world's least trusted people' *The Guardian* (Thursday 15th September 2005)

In his work on the 'Hollywood-isation of politics'²²⁴ regarding the speed and ease by which celebrities and politicians seamlessly morph, Marshal makes some prescient observations surrounding how different kinds of celebrity are constructed. Whereas film stars are structured through discourses of individualism and T.V. personalities through 'conceptions of familiarity', he believes that music stars articulate their meanings through 'discourses of authenticity'²²⁵. By singling out rock-stars Marshal identifies a particular type of potency that magnetises as well as energises.

Mounting concerns over this increasingly synthetic and inauthentic lifestyle resulting from the colonisation of social and political life²²⁶, serve only to make the allure of the authentic more intense. To talk of authenticity in relation to popular music and its performers inevitably invokes a plethora of theories and opens up one of the most universally contested areas of popular culture. Mark Willhardt suggests that authenticity has become such a fabulous creature that even 'a casual glance in its direction might freeze us in our path'²²⁷. As a genre it is always cast in its own special history and the longing in relation to music is an attempt recapture an absent past or what Auslander describes as that 'purer' moment in the mythic history of music'²²⁸.

²²⁴ P.D. Marshal, *Celebrity and Power : fame in contemporary culture* (University of Minneapolis Press 1997) p. x

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xii

²²⁶ Numerous writings from politics, philosophy and social theory support this. Emblematic are books such as Jean Baudrillard's 'Simulacra and Simulacrum' and Guy Debord's 'Society of the Spectacle' and work of Sartre such as 'Being and Nothingness' particularly 'Dirty Hands' (1948) in which he addresses the tensions and impossibilities of living an 'authentic' life.

²²⁷ Philip Auslander, 'Seeing is Believing : Live Performance and the Discourse of Authenticity in Rock Culture' *Literature and Psychology* 44(4) 26 January (1998) pp.1-18

²²⁸ Mark Willhardt, 'Available Rebels and Folk Authenticities : Michelle Shocked and Billy Bragg in Rock Protest Songs : So Many and So Few in *The Resisting Muse : Popular Music and Social Protest* edited by Ian Peddie (Ashgate 2007) p.30

Under conditions of solid modernity this sense of longing would be understood as a utopian impulse of an essentially conservative agenda. In liquid times however this impulse is reversed as a form of progressive resistance against the speed and uncertainty of change. The desire for a music more wholesome and meaningful than the 'here and now' undoubtedly has historical reference points but within the reproductive cycles of liquid modernity also unwritten potentialities of things yet to be discovered.

As threads of authenticity of varying strength link voters to politicians, consumers to products and fans to musicians an underlying connection already pre-figures the synergies that exists between musicians and politicians. If as McCutcheon believes from her 'index of celebrity worship' the threads linking music fans to performers are the strongest and most enduring²²⁹ this magnetism explains why politicians are increasingly tempted to mimic the style and approach of the rock-star.

Fisher's reworking of Marx's maxim 'all that is solid melts into P.R' reflects the denunciations of decline attributed to both modern music and modern politics. The adverse publicity foisted on the deployment of spin and slick marketing since Blairism resonates with long-standing concerns over the evils of commodification or 'selling out' within popular music. Consequently both politics and music are readily attached to narratives of trivialisation, supported by a belief that these respective disciplines are being devalued by exposure to increasing commercial pressures.

²²⁹ Lynn McCutcheon, 'Conceptualisation and Measurement of celebrity worship' *British Journal Of Psychology* vol. 93 no1 (2002) pp 67-87

By making little attempt to resist the ‘interconnected departures’²³⁰ of liquid modernity its politicians willingly jettison many of the positive qualities associated with the politics of solid modernity. By avoiding the difficulties of a politics based on notions of self-reflection, debate and antagonism they gravitate towards its preference for the ease of acceptance, popularity and show business. The logic of post-politics with its supporting repertoire of celebrity adulation and rituals of redemption runs in an opposite direction to factors which could help to create an engaged citizenry. The increasing distance between the mind-sets of the motivated citizen and the picky consumer grows as the self-sufficiency of each tends to benefit from the absence of the other’s company.

This thesis now turns to focus on the journeys of rock-stars as both cultural critics and as the main carriers of the potent rock virus across the decades. In his biography of John Lennon Albert Goldman contextualises this by offering some interesting advice on how rock music and its rock-stars should be interrogated ...

‘Rock and roll isn’t a form of entertainment. It’s a culture, a civilisation. It has taken over the past half century and there’s never been anything like it. Aren’t we going to learn something about this whole civilisation if we look at its leaders ?’²³¹

²³⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Polity 2005) p.4

²³¹ Albert Goldman, *The Lives of John Lennon* (William Morrow and Co 1988) p.22

To trace the evolution of the rock-star politician on a decade by decade basis there is no better place to start than in what Deena Weinstein describes as ‘rock’s first decade’²³² - the sixties ?

²³² Deena Weinstein, *Rock Protest Songs : So Many and So Few in The Resisting Muse : Popular Music and Social Protest* edited by Ian Peddie (Ashgate 2007) p.5

Chapter 2

The 1960s – The beginning of the END of heavy modernity !

*'The soporific or distracting effects of a spectacle-and-entertainment society'*¹.

The sixties is a fitting starting point of this chronology, as its music heralded and exposed many of the cultural and ideological battles which have dominated the Cold War and beyond. For the first time the shared language of rock music acted as an international cultural interface through which disparate struggles and battles could coalesce. Through rock music it suddenly became possible for a student in England to feel acute solidarity with guerrillas in Vietnam, student rioters in Mexico City, anti-government rebels in Czechoslovakia, the Black Panther Party in California and liberation forces in South Africa or Rhodesia². This decade, and particularly the period of tumultuous events between 1965 and 1972, was one in which fears or hopes of an assault on the established order linked young and old, socialist and conservative, rich and poor. It is an era when the word 'revolution' entered the rock lexicon as a catch all refrain symbolising a generation's quest to overturn the old order and replace it with 'a climate of liberation'³.

For the purposes of this thesis the 'sixties' should therefore be understood as more than a term to describe a series of time bounded ephemera, such as Vietnam, Black Power, JFK, the student riots of 1968 and The Beatles. It represents a cultural and economic watershed in which revolutionary idealism, pop hysteria and a new youth

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity (Polity 2000)* p.167

² Peter Doggett, *There's A Riot Going On Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60's Counterculture* (Canongate 2007) p.4

³ *Ibid.*, p.4

demographic produced its own political icons such as Che Guevara, John Lennon, Bob Dylan and Jerry Rubin. This new breed of political figure emerged as the product of a unique backing track which for the first time openly rejected the inevitabilities of capitalism, technology, affluence, consumerism, inequality and war.

As the first generation to mix political notions of emancipation with various forms of structural oppression the 60s is remembered as a decade of lost political idealism.

Steve Van Zandt believes that history should be divided into the pre and post-60s because it was ‘the birth of consciousness when everything changed ... when for a moment our generation was very much as one’⁴. As a result of its unique counter-cultural contours, the decade still continues to experience more than its fair share of historical re-interpretation and this invariably focuses on its social, racial and political tumult.

Winder rightly suggests ‘history is not the past but what we choose to tell ourselves about the past’⁵ so like any period the sixties will continue to be viewed and reconstructed from multiple perspectives. The period is therefore used nostalgically by those who participated in its counter-culture, social revolution and music and pejoratively by those who perceive the era as one of irresponsible excess or ‘crassly simplistic politics’⁶. As interpretations change and meaning is re-structured, the era continues to speak to the present through the visibility of its icons, the images of its war, and most potently through the sounds and messages of its music.

⁴ Stephen Van Zandt interview in *Rock and Rap Confidential* www.rockrap.com edited by Dave Marsh, taken from Van Zandt’s induction speech for The Hollies at the Rock’n’Roll Hall of Fame March 15 2010 accessed April 11th 2010

⁵ Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners* (Abacus 2005) p.104

⁶ Peter Doggett, *There’s A Riot Going On Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60’s Counterculture* (Canongate 2007) p.2

The sixties was the first era in which music shaped and politicised a generation and was the age in which the ‘personal became political’. Future generations would attract prefixes such as *X*, *Baby-boomer* or *Jam* generations⁷ but the *sixties*-generation marks a self-awareness grounded in the music and politics of its day. Frank Zappa captures a sense of this sea change commenting that youths were no longer loyal to ‘flag, country nor doctrine but only music’⁸.

Years later the ‘hip imagery’ of Clinton playing his saxophone or Blair wistfully strumming his Stratocaster became throwbacks to their lives during the sixties as the enduring appeal of music was used as a positive factor to market the image of the politician to the electorate. Their images in unfamiliar yet creative musical settings re-connects with a sense of youthful idealism and a long-standing commitment to progressive politics.

Interestingly this was also the first generation of young people who continued to listen to the music of their youth long after that youth had gone⁹. From here onwards sound-tracked memories have accompanied liquid-moderns as they listen to their old vinyl albums, re-purchase their collections on CD, invest in the classic box sets and attend the re-formation concerts of the original recording artists. They are the first generation for whom the memories, the emotions and the politics of rock-music are part of their DNA.

⁷ Anne McElvoy, The Jam Generation ‘Britain just got Weller’ *The Spectator* (February 2008)

⁸ Quoted in Frank Kofsky, Frank Zappa an interview’ in Jonathan Eisen, *The Age of Rock* New York Random House (1969) p.256

⁹ Deena Weinstein, ‘Rock Protest Songs : So Many and So Few’, *The Resisting Muse : Popular Music and Social Protest* edited by Ian Peddle (Ashgate 2007) p.5

In addition to nourishing future political rock celebrities, the 1960s also represents a series of historical steps in the global transmission of music culture, most notably through the marketing of its products, stars and live global satellite broadcasts such as 'All You Need is Love' event of June 25th 1967. Accelerating technology and communications networks saw TV come of age and in Kurlansky's words 'for the first time in human experience the important, distant events of the day were immediate'¹⁰.

The significant political events of this period offer us an insight into this emerging global network of popular culture. The impact of Vietnam, the Civil Rights movement and the counter-culture marked an international revolution in socially progressive thought. Youth and idealism provided the rich backing track and by probing the boundaries of tolerance and acceptability, the music echoed its politics and its controversies. The new musical styles of Hendrix, Joplin and Dylan had the power to magnify issues, intensify debate, politicise audiences and still provide visceral links back to the 'meaning' of the decade.

For those who experienced the sixties first hand it is likely to always remain a subject for love or loathing as people tend to pick and choose their particular version of the sixties to either savage or defend. As time of tumult, expectation and change the particular mix of technology, ideas and activism created conditions ideal for the emergence of the phenomenon of 'the global music celebrity'. The longer-term importance of this rock-politics cross-over, although muted at the time is now available by tuning into the spectrum of opinions the sixties continues to generate.

¹⁰ Mark Kurlansky, 1968 *The Year that rocked the World* (Vintage 2005) p.77

References to drugs, promiscuity and family breakdown and their supposed connections to what Samuel Huntington dubbed as the ‘democratic distemper’¹¹ of the counter-culture will always ring loud in the minds of conservative America. The reflections of numerous notable commentators including Presidential hopefuls to self-styled culture warriors reveal the ongoing resonance of the sixties. Patrick J Buchanan the prominent conservative political commentator and senior adviser to three Republican Presidents claims America is still in a period of inexorable national decline as a result.

Buchanan refers here not only to the electoral drift to the left which saw democrats in the Whitehouse from 1961 until Nixon’s victory in 1968, but also to civil rights legislation and the cultural upheavals of the counter-culture. Sidney Blumenthal reported in 1974 that frustrated by the sixties and the embarrassment of the Watergate hearings Buchanan commented that America desperately needed a principled and dedicated man of the Right ‘to effect a political counter-revolution in the capital’¹².

In 1989 the Washington Times claimed that Buchanan the now syndicated columnist, declared a ‘culture war’ in the USA with provocative editorials such as ‘Losing the War For America’s Culture’¹³. He went on to make what is referred to as his ‘culture war speech’ in a keynote address to the Republican National Convention in 1992 in which he claimed the sixties counter-culture was instrumental in creating ‘a religious war in our country for the soul of America’.

¹¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations* (Free Press 2002) p.278

¹² Sidney Blumenthal, Pat Buchanan and the Great Right Hope *The Washington Post* (8 January 2008) p.11 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A41745-2004Sep22> - accessed April 11 2010

¹³ Patrick J Buchanan, Losing the War For America’s Culture *The Washington Post* May 22 (1989)

Never shy in voicing his opposition to multiculturalism, gay rights and abortion¹⁴ or endorsing his support for intelligent design¹⁵ in *The Death of The West* Buchanan argues that that this revolution in ideas had been waged and won by ‘cultural Marxists’ ...

“In a third of a century, what was denounced as the counterculture has become the dominant culture, and what was the dominant culture has become in Gertrude Himmelfarb’s phrase ‘a dissident culture’. America has become an ideological state. A ‘soft tyranny’ where the new orthodoxy is enforced, not by police agents, but by inquisitors of the popular culture’¹⁶

Buchanan laments how these *inquisitors* such as John Lennon gained sufficient cultural capital to become ‘the poet laureates of a generation’¹⁷ underlining for Paul D Fischer’s how songwriters ‘replaced poets in the consciousness of the young’¹⁸.

For Fischer sixties music played such a pivotal role in exposing fundamental tensions within mainstream America’s self image that it has remained ‘a frequent battleground in Buchanan’s ‘culture wars’¹⁹. Reflected in terminology reminiscent of the Cold War’s moralistic delineations of right and wrong Buchanan continues

¹⁴ Patrick J Buchanan, *Right From the Beginning* (Regenery Publishing 1990) p.46

¹⁵ Patrick J Buchanan, What are the Darwinists afraid of? *American Cause* (8th August 2005) available on <http://www.theamericancause.org/a-pjb-050808-darwin.htm> - retrieved April 20 2010

¹⁶ Pat Buchanan, *The Death of the West* (St Martins Press 2002) p.89

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.89

¹⁸ Paul D. Fischer, *What if They Gave a Culture War and Nobody Came ?* (Free Muse 2006) p.91

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.66

*'since the 1960s the radical young have pleaded for a world free of the strictures of the old Christian morality' and it is the 'sixties generation' that have created today's social malaise*²⁰.

Contempt not only for the youth and the music stars of the decade but for also for any consideration that some progressive change might have resulted from 'sixties politics' is also evident when he writes ...

*'It was not the feminist noise-makers but the automobile, the supermarket, the shopping center, the dishwasher, the washer-dryer, the freezer that were the real liberators of American women'*²¹.

Fellow Republicans such as the House Majority Leader Dick Armev have claimed 'all the problems began in the sixties' and Todd Gitlin's essay on 'what the Conservatives owe to the decade they loathe' includes Speaker Newt Gingrich's assessment that

*'... the counterculture is a momentary aberration in American history that will be looked back upon as a quaint period of Bohemianism' — the notorious counterculture McGoverniks, an elite who taught self-indulgent, aristocratic values without realizing that if an entire society engaged in the indulgences of an elite few, you could tear the society to shreds.'*²²

In 1993 Irving Kristol, described by the Irwin Stelzer as the 'founding father of neo-conservatism and the most important public intellectual of the late twentieth

²⁰ Pat Buchanan, *The Death of the West* (St Martins Press 2002) p.89

²¹ Pat Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning* (Regenery Publishing 1990) p.136

²² Todd Gitlin, *Straight from the sixties : What Conservatives Owe to the Decade they Hate* published in the *The American Prospect Magazine* (1996) available on http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=straight_from_the_sixties accessed January 2009

century'²³ believed the right's failure to recover from the political meltdown that was 'the sixties' allowed its pernicious influence to become an effective weapon in Republicanism's political arsenal....

*'There is no 'after the Cold War' for me. So far from having ended, my Cold War has increased in intensity, as sector after sector has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. . . . If anything, the countercultural spirit has spawned a reaction at least as intense and consequential as the original'*²⁴.

Resentment towards the influence of the 'sixties' being used to attack the left was clearly in evidence during a live broadcast of the 'Presidential Debate'²⁵ at the 2007 Republican primaries.

When asked their views on Democratic nominee Hilary Clinton's support for a Woodstock Memorial Museum the delegates' reaction revealed the raw intensity of political sensibilities towards 'the sixties'. When quizzed on the topic GOP presidential candidate, Senator John McCain, who had been held as a P.O.W. in Vietnam deadpanned, 'now, my friends, I wasn't there. I'm sure it was a cultural and pharmaceutical event. I was tied up at the time'. That McCain's carefully chosen words were greeted with excessive jubilation and the most vociferous applause of the whole event suggests he was appealing to deep-seated feelings of Republican angst.

For Marsha Mercer such reactions are evidence that 'many of today's voters who can't remember or weren't even born during Woodstock, are thrilled to have an issue

²³ Irwin Stelzer, Irving Kristol is Gone We will miss his Clear Vision *Daily Telegraph* 22 Sept 2009 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/6219496/Irving-Kristols-gone-well-miss-his-clear-vision.html>

²⁴ Todd Gitlin, Straight from the sixties : What Conservatives Owe to the Decade they Hate published in the *The American Prospect Magazine* (1996) – available from [http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=straight from the sixties](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=straight%20from%20the%20sixties)

²⁵ Republican Party, Orlando Live Presidential Debate *Fox News TV* (October 2007)

evoking the old culture wars'²⁶. McCain's inference highlights how the right is still coming to terms with the social, political and philosophical questions first raised during this period of discord and questioning. Indeed the key terrains on which global politics now engages such as climate change, globalisation, racial and gender equality and human rights came out of the Pandora's Box opened in the 'sixties'.

In America's modern political imagination its endurance largely through the experience of Vietnam, becomes evident with almost every successive presidential campaign. With the exception of McCain any politician unfortunate enough to be identified with these years devotes considerable energy to wriggle away from its reputation. Examples include Bill Clinton's race for presidency in 1992 dogged by accusations of draft evasion and drug abuse and in 2004 the decorated Vietnam War veteran John Kerry was pilloried for his subsequent anti-war sentiment²⁷. The returning Republican President George W Bush was also never far from criticism regarding accounts of his supposed evasion of the Vietnam draft.

Through these various exchanges the sixties beat goes on and for commentators and political figures such as McCain, Buchanan and Bush any positive notions of 'the sixties' are certainly not in concert with *their* America. If the Republican Right perceives the era as one of irresponsible excess, there are other voices which portray the 'sixties' very differently. In principle these more socially progressive voices tend to support the counter-culture and social revolution as a positive occasion of critical questioning and radical awakening.

²⁶ Marsha Mercer, *The Cincinnati Post* (Wednesday October 31 2007)

²⁷ Marsha Mercer, *The Cincinnati Post* (Wednesday October 31 2007)

One such voice with the added benefit of first hand experience is Theodor Roszak for whom the 'sixties' is remembered as a period when the world's most advanced industrial society became 'an arena of raucous and challenging moral enquiry the likes of which we may never see again'²⁸. Understood as an earthquake with an American epicentre Roszak brackets the 'sixties' as a longer-term period of volatile political manifestations. Starting as a result of 'the new Age of Affluence' emerging from the end of the Great Depression in the 1940s and ending with the global financial crisis following the OPEC induced oil shortages of 1972.

For Roszak the sixties represents a turning point, as it offered the first sighting by the general public of any advanced industrial society of a serious ecological constraint²⁹. He focuses positively on the intellectual currents and social movements, which for the first time enjoyed the oxygen of publicity and widespread sympathy particularly amongst the young. As the US public sphere became politicised with a welter of youthful dissidence, debates opened up and flourished encompassing a panoply of counter-cultural voices. For Roszak these voices sung in support of civil rights, anti-war sentiment, world peace, sexual liberation and human rights.

Another great shock of the 1960s was that rebellion broke out from where it was least expected, amidst 'the Pleasant Valley Children'³⁰ of America's bourgeois elite whose interests this age of affluence was purported to serve. Rather than thanking their benefactors for their good fortune they were mocked through songs and poems questioning the rationality of urban industrial society. Of all the elements which

²⁸ Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (University of California Press 1965) p.xii

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xii

³⁰ Carole King : 'Pleasant Valley Sunday' based on disaffected kids from wealthy backgrounds : Colgems/RCA released July 1967

contributed to the kaleidoscopic nature of the counter-culture, Roszak claims that *music* remains the least investigated yet the most important cultural element³¹. By ‘inspiring and carrying the best insights of the counter-culture’³² the music is still synonymous with the televised pictures of My Lai, Kent State and the Civil Rights marches and its role in the creation of the new social movements.

Jann Wenner, editor and founder of Rolling Stone magazine broadly claimed in 1967 that ‘it was not just about the music but also about the things and attitudes that the music embraced’³³. Wenner claims music was the glue that held the generation together and through music ‘ideas were communicated about personal relationships, social values, political ethics and the way we want to conduct our lives’³⁴.

Without the counter-culture stimulating debates about the ethical limits of industrial society Roszak believes ‘the environmental movement would not have gone beyond its conservationist orientation’³⁵. Without giving women the ability to question the patriarchy and the chauvinism of their husbands and lovers ‘there would be no women’s movement as we now know it’³⁶. Similarly there would be no gay liberation or the deconstruction of whiteness which accompanied the struggles of the US civil rights movement and anti-colonial colonial pressures for African independence. A defining feature of the transition from solid to liquid modernity is the intellectual

³¹ Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture* Updated Introduction (University of California Press 1975) p.xii

³² *Ibid.*, p.xxxiv

³³ Robert Love, *The Best of Rolling Stone* (Virgin Books 2006) p.66

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.93

³⁵ Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (University of California Press 1975) p.xxvii

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.xxviii

realignment that has hastened the demise of Grand Narratives and the flowering of questioning during the 60s was a key factor in this process.

Whilst it is easy to historicise key events it is notoriously difficult to cage the sentiments and feelings that surrounded them. In what has been referred to as ‘the death of the counter-culture’ Doggett traces its demise to the point when the Western world voted for a return to the status quo primarily with the re-election of Nixon³⁷. As the high profile political events and protest marches abated, the arguments of the counter-culture did not suddenly vanish so it is premature to simply draw a line under the phenomenon in 1972.

Instead it fractured into different strands, some emphasising the ‘revolution in life style’ as an alternative culture and others via community action into activist politics³⁸. Whatever the prognosis of its demise, the ideas of the sixties counter-culture still permeate society and a trajectory of controversy and activism links many of the musicians and key players to the punk revolution of the 1970s. By nurturing the subversive seeds of the 70s punk backlash the early seventies can therefore be understood through a musical lens more as a temporary retreat rather than a case of absolute defeat.

As the sixties continue to inform politics through literature, film and music its cultural legacies are increasingly coming under fire from new attempts to foreclose their significance. The emergence of debates over the efficacy over the political of the

³⁷ Peter Doggett, *There's A Riot Going On Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60's Counterculture* (Canongate 2007) p.26

³⁸ Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals Youth Cultures in Post War Britain* (Routledge 1989) p.61

counter-culture and have come not just from conservative critics but also from progressive and liberal positions. A strong desire to test, measure and evaluate underpins these critical re-evaluations such as Peter Doggett's '*There's a Riot Going On – revolutionaries, rock-stars and the rise and fall of 60s counter-culture*'. As a noted rock historian and a one time disciple of the 'trumpet call for revolution'³⁹ Doggett's sanguine appraisal of the consequences of sixties politics is almost overwhelmingly negative.

Exposure to its protest music allowed Doggett to 'inhale the revolutionary spirit' of the time and radicalised by records such as *Some Time in New York City* he willingly shared Lennon's glorious faith in 'the inevitability of revolution'⁴⁰. The slogans and propaganda of sixties' protest music introduced personal revelations of feminism as 'a shocking and blindingly obvious concept', a different history of English colonialism and an unthinking certainty that the people were ready to rise against their oppressors. Although he maintains that music opened his eyes he believes its radical fervour clouded his judgement, and as such Doggett is far less complimentary about the value of the era's politics than he is of its music.

What at the time appeared to him as 'unthinking certainties', are now described as 'crassly simplistic view(s) of political reality'⁴¹. The radical energy and belief in revolution 'proved to be a chimera which bewitched and then betrayed a generation'⁴² and for someone caught up in its ferment these words convey the disappointment at how the radical impulse suddenly withered and died. Tinged with an admission of his

³⁹ Peter Doggett, *There's A Riot Going On Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60's Counterculture* (Canongate 2007) p. 1

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 2

own naïveté at being carried along by the tide of events, he remembers ‘the collective embarrassment that seized the left’⁴³ when society made a sharp right turn back towards the reality of everyday life.

This received wisdom of a return to the status quo amidst a feeling that the ‘sixties’ zeitgeist had finally run its course is however partially premature. A change in political direction does not necessarily mean a return to a former age or that society is untouched by its intervening experiences. The withdrawal from Vietnam and return of right wing parties enframes politics as being solely synonymous with a change in political leadership. As Eyerman and Jamison suggest consciousness is difficult to transform into political results however the real impact of the counterculture should be understood as ‘changing the mores and values of popular culture’⁴⁴.

More than just simply equating Nixon’s election as the final word on the period, Doggett’s work is also representative of an emerging body of literature which has already decided ‘the sixties’ was a defeat for radical politics. Despite the notorious difficulty in evaluating the impact of new ideas, Doggett and others are not deterred from singling out the counter-culture for some particularly negative attention. From the less partisan and the supposedly ideologically bereft twenty first century, neo-liberalist ‘common sense’ may suggest the unrelenting spread of modern capitalism is ample evidence of the retrospective failure of political protest. Fostering an acceptance that the counter-culture warrants little more than playful denunciations as it succumbed to merchandising and real-politik Doggett’s work is emblematic of a

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 5

⁴⁴ Jameson and Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.123

general theme within Heath and Potter's 'Rebel Sell' and Thomas Frank's 'Conquest of Cool'.

Both of these works attempt to debunk the nostalgic romanticism of Roszak's 'sixties' as one of misinterpreted political activism by understanding the era as a time of accelerating rather than braking capitalism. Whilst acknowledging that the 'sixties' spawned new styles of politics, movements, ideas and music Heath and Potter describe Roszak's notion of the counter-culture as 'pseudo rebellion' dismissing it as 'a set of dramatic gestures devoid of any progressive political or economic consequences that (actually) detract from the task of building a more just society'⁴⁵.

Heath and Potter do offer a convincing assessment of the counter-culture and its ultimate ineffectuality in reversing modern capitalism. Maintaining that modern consumerism has always been based far more on distinction than conformity they delight in debunking what they see as the wrong-headedness of the mass society thesis, which mistakenly equated capitalism with repressive conformity.

How the system effortlessly assimilates political resistance by appropriating its symbols (such as the images of John Lennon and Che Guevara), evacuating their revolutionary content and then selling them back to the masses as commodities, is shown as evidence of the success and dynamism of commercial capitalism. Within its ontological framework the counter-culture inevitably made accommodations with the system so whilst its everyday acts of symbolic resistance were culturally significant they were hardly disruptive to the underlying operation of the system.

⁴⁵ Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell : How Counter Culture Became Consumer Culture* (Capstone 2006) p.69

Heath and Potter thus prescribe a complete re-evaluation to disentangle goals of social justice from old and naïve forms of counter-cultural critique. The modern fashion to embrace and even valorise capitalism is given added traction as they follow in the tradition of Daniel Bell by exposing the weaknesses of the mass society thesis. In his 1962 essay ‘America As a Mass Society : a Critique’⁴⁶ Bell suggested that although *mass society* was in many ways ‘an accurate reflection of the *quality* and *feeling* of modern life’⁴⁷ he concluded it had very little if any academic merit.

Bell chooses his italics wisely, for attempts to apply the concept of mass society to subjectivities such as *feelings* or the *quality of life*, mean it becomes ‘very slippery’⁴⁸ and unwieldy. Rather like the shadows in Plato’s cave such notions offer little more than a silhouette so Bell concluded it was little more than ‘an ideology of romantic protest against contemporary life’⁴⁹.

Thomas Frank develops this debate further by explaining how sixties’ anti-consumerism was re-invented into ‘the new consumerism’⁵⁰ by linking notions of authenticity and the commodification of rebellion. As these academic studies challenge the worth of the ‘sixties’ they also ensure it remains the most written about post-war decade. Politically the era is firmly positioned as one of excess and failure with little worth salvaging from besides its music and fashion.

⁴⁶ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (Harvard University Press 2000) pp. 22-38

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38

⁵⁰ Thomas Frank, *Conquest of Cool Business Culture, Counterculture and the rise of hip consumerism* (Chicago University Press 1998) p.24

There is also little sympathy in evidence from UK commentators such as Michael Burleigh who claims ‘the Left-leaning universities, the arts, the BBC and many more institutions are still dominated by survivors of an era whose ideologies permeate every facet of our lives forty years on’⁵¹. For Burleigh the ideologies of ‘sixties’ counter-culture have fostered ‘a disrespect for authority and an emphasis on rights not responsibilities’⁵².

Such contributions unwittingly arouse suspicion with their eagerness to bury the protest movement, indicating that if little else the ‘counter-culture’ retains the capacity to touch a raw nerve. Commentators more sympathetic to the counter-culture and its positive qualities such as Jameson and Eyerman believe the music of the era ensured ‘popular culture was permanently changed’⁵³. In order to better understand sixties politics through the interface of popular music attention is inevitably drawn in the direction of the decade’s key musical celebrities.

Music becomes a useful analytical tool as it suddenly began to play very different roles to what it had done in previous decades. It was for instance the first occasion on which protest songs were played to mass audiences with Pete Seeger’s ‘If I had a Hammer’ (1962) and Bob Dylan’s ‘Blowin in the Wind’ (1963) being two of the best and earliest examples. These songs invited participation by using simple repetitive choruses and by mixing in political content Eyerman and Jameson believe they created ‘a new kind of populist insight’⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Michael Burleigh, *The Clowns of Terror* *Daily Mail* (March 8, 2008) pp. 62-63

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 63

⁵³ Jameson and Eyerman, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) (p.120)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.126

As a result artists such as Dylan, Ochs and Baez provided a ‘musical variant of critical social theory’⁵⁵ and the new style of popular protest spread to emerging rock groups such as Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, the Doors and The Fugs⁵⁶. Through radio-play and touring the burgeoning college circuit these bands reached a new audience offering an intoxicating new cocktail of style, entertainment and protest. Tamarkin believes the records released by these new artists provided for many ‘the initial exposure to alternative lifestyles, alternative consciousness and alternative music’⁵⁷ and their dual function as a means of entertainment and as an interface to the politics of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War was exciting and different.

Dramatic televised events which brought the civil rights movement to public attention, from the demonstrations in Little Rock to the freedom rides and mass jailings, started to include a vast array of music in their footage. This quickly formed an association between contemporary music and political protest which permeated public consciousness. As the music and the movement grew together many key players such as Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton and Judy Collins found a ready audience on the front lines of these mass demonstrations. Singers were so integral to the whole process of forming the identity of the counter-culture that Eyerman and Jamison claim ‘it is difficult to think of one without the other’⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.126

⁵⁶ Mark Kurlansky, *1968 The Year that rocked the World* (Vintage 2005) p.180 The Fugs were named after a word used by Norman Mailer in his novel *The Naked and The Dead* because he could not use the F-word for his choice. In

⁵⁷ Jeff Tamarkin, *Got A Revolution ! The Turbulent Flight of Jefferson Airplane* (Atria Books 1999) p.41

⁵⁸ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.118

Within every different awakening protestors, activists and on-lookers began to use music as a means to identify with the political turmoil of the day and as a tool to express their dissatisfaction. From college sit-ins to student protests music and song was almost always at the vanguard playing a critical, playful, joyful and largely uncontrolled role. In spontaneous and unrehearsed ways music came to almost naturally symbolise the growth of the counter-culture and the famous civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome', still remains one of the most recognised songs of recent history ... without ever becoming a commercial hit.

Popular music's associations with youth, style and rebellion enabled 'rock music' to develop the radical potency of a new religion. This was spotted early by Jefferson Airplane's Paul Kantner who claimed both prophetically and rather ominously that 'they all treated us like we were great philosopher gods ... that knew all the answers'⁵⁹.

As the political atmosphere intensified so did its music and as attention shifted to the international sphere American politics and music was increasingly dominated by the war in Vietnam. The harder edge sounds of Joplin, Hendrix and Airplane provided a more emotive soundtrack for the protest movement increasingly disillusioned with the ineffectiveness of 'flower power' and the pacifist nature of 'folk music'.

As a measure to quell any violent protests Mayor Richard Daley requested that radio stations stop playing the Rolling Stones' 'Street Fightin' Man' in the run up to the

⁵⁹ Paul Kantner was a member of Jefferson Airplane quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.33

Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968⁶⁰. Censorship often provokes unwanted consequences and on its opening day police tear-gassed several large outdoor concerts resulting in 198 demonstrators being injured and 641 arrested. Eric Nuzum maintains that the Chicago riots with its Rolling Stones' backing track marked a break in the style of youth protest, from one of social love and understanding towards one of revolutionary thought and action⁶¹.

As campus violence spread throughout the US it reached another peak in May 1970, when National Guardsmen opened fire killing four students during a protest at Kent State University in Cleveland Ohio. To commemorate the killings Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young released the record 'Ohio' just ten days after the tragedy. Owing to the vehemence of the conservative reaction which expressed 'overwhelming support for the actions of the Guardsmen'⁶² many radio stations refused to play the song.

The arrival of large outdoor rock festivals such as Woodstock and Altamont provided another focal point around which political activists and musicians could freely circulate. These clusters of activity provided ideal opportunities and meeting places for protest, propaganda, campaigning and political mobilisation. Cantwell describes these as 'new social spaces for experiencing a sense of community and collective identity' providing 'opportunities for social learning and the lifestyle and philosophy that came with it'⁶³. Colourful players from the counter-culture such as Abbie

⁶⁰ This song was written by the Rolling Stones in response to the Grosvenor Square sit-ins in London in 1969. It is one of the earliest occasions whereby music made by a British band courted political controversy abroad

⁶¹ Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory Music Censorship in the USA* (Perennial 2001) p.169

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.170

⁶³ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good : The Folk Revival* (Harvard University Press 1996) pp.10-11

Hoffman and Jerry Rubin used these events to preach political awareness and mobilise protest.

In 1969 Rubin was responsible for organising a rock concert in aid of the White Panther founder and MC5 rock band manager John Sinclair who had been jailed for the possession of marijuana. Sinclair had worked with Wayne Kramer and the MC5 who had modelled themselves on the politics of Black Panther Movement adopting the strap-line 'cultural revolution by any means necessary'⁶⁴. Headlined by John Lennon and Yoko Ono the line-up included Stevie Wonder, Bob Seger, Phil Ochs, poet Allen Ginsburg and convicted Chicago Eight members David Dellinger, Rennie Davis and Bobby Seale⁶⁵.

As a publicity vehicle for both the artists and their politics the event witnessed the re-emergence of a more radicalised John Lennon to the global stage. On his most political album 'Some Time in New York City' Lennon courted controversy by addressing topical issues such as Northern Ireland, racism, drugs, and sexism. With provocative titles such as 'Woman is the Nigger of the World' almost forty years on Doggett still finds 'the audacity of Lennon's project quite breathtaking'⁶⁶.

Politicisation and youthful activism also spawned attempts to create workable alternatives to commercial culture. In San Francisco the Diggers opened a 'free' store

⁶⁴ Wayne Kramer, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005)

⁶⁵ This concert was John Lennon's first live US performance since 1966. The Chicago 8 were eight defendants - Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, John Froines, Lee Weiner and Bobby Seale who were charged with conspiracy, inciting to riot, and other charges related to protests that took place Democratic National Convention in Chicago 1968. Seale actually had his trial severed during the proceedings, lowering the number from eight to seven. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Seven - accessed April 5th 2010

⁶⁶ Peter Doggett, *There's A Riot Going On Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60's Counterculture* (Canongate 2007) p.1

where only goods could be exchanged and in New York rock groups like Country Joe and the Fish and The Fugs worked closely with communes, alternative newspapers, concerts and book-shops. This was also the period when the term 'underground'⁶⁷ was first used to denote a concept of a popular yet non-commercial alternative to the mainstream.

The search for alternatives to the nuclear family and consumer capitalism became a central theme of the decade, especially among young disaffected people of middle class origin. By 1970 there was an estimated 2,000 rural communities along with several thousand urban groups in the U.S.A. and approximately 50 serious communal ventures of differing types in Britain⁶⁸. The political volatility of 1960s America provided artists with a sense of mission and popular music became an important mediating force between the movement's more obvious expressions in demonstrations, books and journals and the wider population⁶⁹.

The changing shape of the population and the emergence of affluent self consciously political teenagers is a further defining factor of the era. As rebellious adolescence became a staple of mainstream society Reich saw in popular music 'a new medium that expressed the whole range of the new generation's feelings and experiences'⁷⁰. Although it created and operated through an industry organised and run along capitalist lines the music business was also an ideal medium for expressing subversive ideas and transgressing establishment norms. Inadvertently therefore the burgeoning

⁶⁷ Kenneth Leech, *Youthquake* (Sheldon Press 1977) p.118

⁶⁸ Rigby and Melville (1972) in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals Youth Cultures in Post War Britain* (Routledge 1989) p.133

⁶⁹ Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.119

⁷⁰ Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (A. Lane 1971) p.183

music industry fostered ‘a mass produced form of social criticism’⁷¹ and Leech suggests that from the ‘sixties’ we should look towards ‘pop music, rather than political or religious literature, for the expression of the values of youth culture’⁷².

This newly affluent socio-demographic group searched for a new sense of identity and found it in a new word - Teenager. *Teenager* came from the slogan ‘we are living in the teen age’ dreamt up by an American advertising agency in the early fifties. The arrival of the ‘teenage consumer’ defined new patterns of ‘distinctive teenage spending for distinctive teenage ends’⁷³ amounting to an inter-generational fault line. Through songs such as The Who’s *My Generation* the new demographic developed an increasing sense of adolescent self-awareness as *youth* quickly became the model for setting standards for the rest of society in many spheres of culture.

From fashion statements to social interactions, being young offered the opportunity to transcend the barriers of race, religion, class and ethnicity. As the first music that appealed almost exclusively to youth culture’⁷⁴ rock’n’roll widened the generational gap helping ‘youth’ become the ‘most striking and visible manifestation of social change’⁷⁵. By providing the focus for official reports, pieces of legislation and official interventions youth was also signified by society’s moral guardians as a social

⁷¹ Eyerman and Jameson, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.122

⁷² Kenneth Leech, *Youthquake* (Sheldon Press 1977) p.8

⁷³ M Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer* (London Press Exchange Ltd 1959) p.9 quoted in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds) *Resistance Through Rituals Youth Cultures in Post War Britain* (Routledge 1989) p.18 the term *sub-teen* also appeared as a front page headline on the cover of Life Magazine (April 12 1954) referenced in Jim Dawson, *Rock Around the Clock – the music that started rock and roll* (Backbeat 2006) p.8

⁷⁴ Kenneth Keniston, *Social Change and Youth in America* (1965) p.210 taken from Erik H. Erikson (ed) *The Challenge of Youth* (reprint of *Daedalus* issue New York Doubleday) quoted in Eyerman and Jameson, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p 110

⁷⁵ Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds) *Resistance Through Rituals Youth Cultures in Post War Britain* (Routledge 1989) p.9

problem and something we ought to do something about. Youth therefore played a prominent role in the construction of understandings and interpretations about the period and ever since has remained 'a powerful metaphor for social change'⁷⁶.

Roszak believes the counter-culture took root in the USA because of the absence of a long-established left-wing tradition and a weakness of conventional ideological politics⁷⁷. The arrival of this new generational self-awareness and the characteristics of American culture provided the rebellious essence from which the 'sixties' was formed. America's unique experience created the epicentre from which the sixties' explosion would resonate throughout the West. Conditions of relative affluence certainly afforded the protest movement a unique quality of radical disaffiliation whereby rising numbers of middle class students saw 'dropping out' as a viable option⁷⁸.

This heady new mixture of youth, politics, music and freedom represented a different and unlikely constituency of rebellion. With both left and right committed to industrialism as an inevitable historical stage a new form of counter-cultural critique stemmed not from familiar ideologies but from a desire to envisage and build a radically alternative route towards emancipation. From these intellectual currents Roszak maintains this period of dissent represents 'the most ambitious agenda for the reappraisal of cultural values that any society has ever produced'⁷⁹.

⁷⁶ Rowntree Study of Popular Press and Social Change quoted in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds) *Resistance Through Rituals Youth Cultures in Post War Britain* (Routledge 1989) p.9

⁷⁷ Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (University of California Press 1975) p.xiii

⁷⁸ Timothy Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy* (Ronin 1998) Dropping out was encouraged by Leary's instruction to 'Turn on, tune in, drop out'

⁷⁹ Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (University of California Press 1975) p.xxvi

Youth was suddenly represented in magazines and newspapers, which reflected some puzzlement and frustration with the 'new generation' as reporters could not understand whose or what side it was really on. On April 27 1968, an editorial in the fashionable *Paris Match* magazine complained 'they condemn Soviet society just like bourgeois society : industrial organisation, social discipline and the aspiration for material wealth. In other words they reject Western society'⁸⁰.

Unable to comprehend the motivations of the counter-culturalists these frustrations became associated with now familiar generational discourses on drugs, inter-racial mixing and promiscuity. Popular music's powerful method of articulation made it an easy target for establishment opprobrium which Fischer believes partly explains why it remains a major source of irritation for conservatives today.

These miscomprehensions and apprehensions that marked 60s inter-generational discourse are highlighted by Bauman as the clash between 'the fear that newcomers would spoil and destroy what the elders had preserved and the newcomers' urge to put right what the veterans had botched'⁸¹. For Bauman experience-shaped viewpoints can never be objectively resolved and to demonstrate he juxtaposed a Guardian columnist's claim that 'young people ... are bovine, lazy-arsed, Chlamydia stuffed and good for nothing' and the reader's response that the allegedly slothful youngsters were in reality 'academically high-achieving' and simply 'concerned about the mess that adults had created'⁸².

⁸⁰ Mark Kurlansky, *1968 The Year that rocked the World* (Vintage 2005) p.184

⁸¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) p.65

⁸² *The Guardian Weekend* 4 and 11 August 2007, quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) p.65

As highlighted previously pre-60s stars such as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Little Richard were not understood as 'political', but rather as attackers of sexual decency and straight-laced morality. By challenging standards of decency these performers were controversial and although not political in a traditional sense, they nourished the attitudes and behaviours of the socially progressive ideas that would define the sixties.

In the transition from solid to liquid modernity the uncompromising style of rock'n'roll created a new divide, which further distanced young people from established institutions such as church, state and the family. For Chapple and Garofalo this new divide 'provided a wedge from which inchoate rebellion could be expressed, if not yet directed at the establishment'⁸³.

Of all the elements that constituted the 'sixties' as a period of transition Eyerman and Jameson believe popular music acted as 'perhaps the most important site .. of a remarkable process of experimentation and innovation, which lead to major transformations in American and global culture'⁸⁴. The collective identity of the counter-culture, although initially articulated through organisations and demonstrations, achieved its greatest cultural resonance through popular music. Rock'n'roll equated to a rebellion embracing revolutionary symbols and charismatic figures such as Che Guevara whose good looks, style and attitude as much as his role in the Cuban revolution, connected with the period's youthful idealism.

⁸³ Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock and Roll is Here To Pay* (Nelson Hall Publishers 1974) p. 298

⁸⁴ Eyerman and Jameson, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.106

Richard Flacks sees the 'sixties' as the pinnacle for radical politics and music claiming that the potency of youth, revolution and outrage ensured 'music and protest were more deeply intertwined than at any other time'⁸⁵. Flacks also believes that although the traditional folk singers of the civil rights movement pioneered and projected these new themes and ideas into popular culture, significant change only took place when this culture was invaded by popular songs expressing 'strong hostility to industrial society, explicit paranoia about official authority [and] deep antagonism to conventional morality'⁸⁶.

As a beacon of radical and popular protest, sixties' music was therefore different to any previous age in both context and reach. From within the safe zone of Galbraith's Affluent Society music became a global interface of revolutionary disaffection with guitars as guns and words as weapons. The pen of the censor always stands as testimony to any period's music and the sixties was punctuated by numerous high profile attempts to ban concerts, censor lyrics, amend record sleeves and even 'excommunicate church members who dared to listen to the Beatles'⁸⁷.

The unofficial censor was also at work with Barry McGuire's surprise number one hit single 'Eve of Destruction', which was pulled from stores and radio stations across the country owing to its controversial lyrics. The Curtis Knight / Jimi Hendrix collaboration '*How Would You Feel*' was refused airplay as it dealt with the plight of

⁸⁵ Richard Flacks, *Youth and Social Change* (Chicago Markham 1971) p.133

⁸⁶ Richard Flacks, *Making History* (New York University Press 1988) p.183

⁸⁷ Thurman H Babbs quoted in Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory Music Censorship in the USA* (Perennial 2001) pp 222 –225 : This was the baptist minister Babbs' response to his congregation in Cleveland Ohio following Lennon's 'more famous than Jesus' statement in 1966. The comment inflamed passions resulting in ritual record burning and 'anti-Beatles' KKK rallies.

blacks and the injustices they suffered in America, and in 1968 TV sponsors went into uproar after a program showed 'interracial touching' during a duet between Petula Clark and Harry Belafonte⁸⁸.

Outspoken Indiana Governor Matthew Welsh publicly proclaimed that the Kingsmen's hit 'Louie Louie' was pornographic and should be banned. As music became the new focus of public controversy the sense of outrage was captured by the Seattle Post's encouragement for criminal prosecutions against rock musicians and 'rock festivals' owing to their 'drug-sex-rock-squalor culture'⁸⁹.

As traditional concerns over sex, race and religion emerged alongside new themes such as of drugs, music and rock-festivals a greater understanding of power and therefore its politics began to develop⁹⁰. Politics could suddenly be seen to be operating everywhere in both micro and macro practices resulting in heightened awareness to structural forms of oppression be it racial, sexual, psychological or social. As a powerful interface of communication popular music also became an easy scapegoat for social, moral and political ills.

Echoing 50s style McCarthyism FBI chief J Edgar Hoover claimed Phil Ochs conduct and statements showed 'antipathy towards good order and government'⁹¹ labelling Ochs as a subversive Communist sympathiser who may be a danger to the life of the president. Hoover also objected to the messages contained in The Doors albums

⁸⁸ Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory Music Censorship in the USA* (Perennial 2001) p.227

⁸⁹ Fred Bronson, *A Selected Chronology of Musical Controversy* (Billboard March 26 1994) p.42

⁹⁰ Controversies surround records such as The Byrds 'Eight Miles High' and Steppenwolf's anti-drugs song 'The Pusher' which was scape-goated as being pro-drug.

⁹¹ Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory Music Censorship in the USA* (Perennial 2001) p.224

saying 'it is repulsive to right-thinking people and can have serious affects on our young people'⁹².

The same year troubled by the overtly anti-war and revolutionary themes on Jefferson Airplane's *Volunteers* album the 'Movement to Restore Democracy' called for the banning of rock music to end the spread of socialism in America whilst Joseph R. Crow preached that rock musicians were 'part of a Communist movement to incite revolution throughout the world'⁹³.

The sixties also witnessed music stars eclipse movie stars for the first time as the key focus of public attention⁹⁴ in what Bell describes as 'an alteration in the constellation of actors'⁹⁵. This conjunction of the spheres of politics and music allowed the political-rock celebrity to occupy centre stage for the first time. It was against this background of anti-war and civil rights protests that the social and political contexts of the time conspired to kick-start the journey of the modern political celebrity.

Scott Wilson states that 'American popular music has had a leading role in not just transforming American social life, but also that of much of the world'⁹⁶ and this has been achieved as much through the iconic status of the performer as through the music. Chapple and Garofalo claim artists such as Dylan, Lennon and Jagger differed significantly from classical artists of the past as fan hysteria, new broadcast

⁹² Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory Music Censorship in the USA* (Perennial 2001) p.232

⁹³ Steven Dougherty, *From 'Race Music' to Heavy Metal a Fiery History of Protests* (Sept 16 1985) – accessed January 11 2008

⁹⁴ Ellis Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture* (Routledge 2006) p.26

⁹⁵ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (Harvard University Press 2000) p. xviii

⁹⁶ Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage : American Negativity and Rap/metal in the Age of Supercapitalism* (Manchester University Press 2007) p.10

technologies and the subject matter of the songs gave the sense that these new stars were more closely connected with society and its culture⁹⁷.

These new musical icons drew their images and forms of expression from their surroundings and coming from ordinary backgrounds their struggles were common to their communities. It was from this basis that rock and its musicians became part of a broader movement for political and cultural change that had recent roots in the stable repression of the fifties, 'coming to life as a disruptive force to the status quo during the sixties'⁹⁸.

In the less politically charged atmosphere of the UK Napier-Bell cites the Beatles as a defining factor in the social change of the era. Unlike the USA, the UK is remembered as a time of social liberalisation in which class and empire were fading, and there was a general relaxation in attitudes towards sex. With national service ending in 1962 Wilson's new Labour Government abolished capital punishment and made substantial legal changes to social areas such as censorship, homosexuality, immigration, divorce and abortion.

These changes moved Andrew Marr to describe the era as 'a radically different place to the Britain of the 50s' as the austerity of thirteen years of Tory rule finally came to an end⁹⁹. In this more relaxed atmosphere Napier-Bell claims 'bars stayed open, drugs were sold openly and prostitutes operated on the streets' however although

⁹⁷ Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock and Roll is Here To Pay* (Nelson Hall Publishers 1974) p.viii

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xi

⁹⁹ Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008)

these factors allowed London to start swinging he believes ‘it was the influence of the Beatles that really triggered it’¹⁰⁰.

The cultural impact of ‘Beatlemania’¹⁰¹ was massive, their music was played on every TV programme, at every party and in every shop and was unlike anything that had occurred before or might ever happen again. In the USA The Beatles spearheaded the ‘British Invasion’ and in March 1964 occupied the top five chart positions in American popular music charts¹⁰² accounting for over half of all US record sales that year. Stylistically young people copied their clothes, their haircuts and their accents whilst fashion, films and restaurants started to boom amidst a sense that ‘all around things were changing’¹⁰³.

In previous decades the major labels had taken great pains to groom young singers and then transform them into stars by matching them with songs, arrangers and orchestras as they saw fit. At a corporate level there was an inbuilt reluctance to embrace rock’n’roll as ‘anything more than a faddish diversion’¹⁰⁴ and the established labels would try and ‘clone’ breakout hits from independent artists such as Fats Domino and Little Richard with artists like Pat Boone. Until 1961 the BBC allowed only ten hours a week of pop records to be played on the radio and it was primarily the *songs* rather than the singers¹⁰⁵ that became popular. In 1964 the station responded to Britain’s awakened appetite for pop with a new television show entitled

¹⁰⁰ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.23

¹⁰¹ ‘Beatlemania’ was a term coined by Ray Coleman editor of Melody Maker reported by Chris Welch, *The Independent* Jack Hutton obituary (28 August 2008) p.38

¹⁰² Sean O’Hagan, The 50 moments that shaped pop history *The Observer* (10th July 2007)

¹⁰³ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.23

¹⁰⁴ Alex Ogg, *Independence Days* (Cherry Red Books 2009) p.13

¹⁰⁵ Hit songs or popular songs would be recorded by several singers and the record company’s A&R departments would chose the right vocalist from their roster of singers that would most suit the song. This continued until the 1960’s.

Top of the Pops and dominated by guitar playing boy-groups it was destined to be the longest running and most successful music show of all time¹⁰⁶.

Pontiac highlights that the established music industry was quite unprepared for what he terms as 'the boomer's explosion of romantic art from London to San Francisco flared up'¹⁰⁷. The industry showed little interest and was quite contemptuous of the new styles as it failed to see the commercial opportunities until the rock revolution was well underway. As a result there became a 'gold rush for hustlers, young lawyers, agents and accountants'¹⁰⁸ and this new infrastructural layer of managers and producers allowed greater artistic freedom so the music and its musicians could develop.

Napier-Bell states 'in no other country were people as fascinated by pop stars' and the British public were 'far more interested with who was top of the charts than running the country'¹⁰⁹. Pop imagery overwhelmed the media as The Beatles and the Rolling Stones featured on the tabloid's front pages day after day and Keith Altham editor of the NME explained how his new job role made him feel like he was 'at the centre of the world, pop suddenly seemed to be the most important thing in Britain'¹¹⁰.

Some of the UK's most controversial and revered rock bands that participated in the US invasion were however subsequently embarrassed by their lack of politicisation.

¹⁰⁶ Top of The Pops ran from January 1964 until 30 July 2006 broadcasting over 2,000 shows - During its heyday in the 1970s, it attracted 15 million viewers each week

¹⁰⁷ Ronnie Pontiac, *The Golden Age of Rock Activism Newtopia Magazine* available on <http://www.newtopiamagazine.org/> (2004) quoted in Deena Weinstein, *Rock Protest Songs : So Many and So Few in The Resisting Muse : Popular Music and Social Protest* edited by Ian Peddle (Ashgate 2007) p.5

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5

¹⁰⁹ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.66

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.67

The Who's Pete Townsend reflects on the attitude of British bands when touring the US, 'young Americans were concerned about being blown to bits in Vietnam and I, a naïve English twit, came prancing over hot on the heels of the Beatles and Herman's Hermits to make my fortune and bring it back to Britain'¹¹¹.

The paucity of politicisation amongst British youth is also highlighted by Jenny Diski's investigation into Britain during the sixties. She separates the decade into two stories, the swinging London of mods and boutiques which was 'an extrovert, indigenous moment', and the counter-culture of hippies and revolution which was 'a more self-conscious, Americanised phenomenon'¹¹². As a writer who experienced the decade and took place in the Grosvenor Square demonstrations of March 1968, she laments that in a decade with such great potential for politics to flourish Britain failed to produce any great political books¹¹³.

British youth is still more synonymous with the riots at Brighton at Whitsun and Margate in 1964 than any radical or progressive political gestures. In addition to the tribal rivalry between mods and rockers another thoroughly British phenomenon and 'a rejection of the new hippy culture'¹¹⁴ was the emergence of the 'skinhead'. With a dress sense representing a 'formalisation of working clothes'¹¹⁵ exuding a strong belief in physical prowess, skinheads were very much an affirmation of traditional

¹¹¹ Pete Townsend quoted in Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) pp. 242-243

¹¹² Jenny Diski, *The Sixties* (Profile Books 2009) p.39

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.39

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Leech, *Youthquake* (Sheldon Press 1977) p.4

¹¹⁵ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture The Meaning of Style* (Methuen / London 1979) p.41

working class values. Skinheads were also at the forefront of the early waves of racist violence against the Afro-Caribbean community in Notting Hill in 1969¹¹⁶.

As a result of the British Invasion John Lennon became the UK's most important political-rock icon of the era. The transition from a-political pop-star to 'political' rock-star can be dated from his Maureen Cleave interview when he remarked that with modern communications the Beatles were more famous among their generation than Jesus. This interview took place as The Beatles prepared for their American tour, and this pre-figured Lennon's entry into the maelstrom of US politics.

His playful quip tested the limits of acceptability causing consternation throughout the US bible-belt, resulting in death threats and even prompting KKK protest rallies at the band's concerts. Interestingly the spat was only forgiven by the Vatican in November 2008 when its' daily newspaper *Osservatore Romano* described his remark as a 'boast' made 'by a young working-class Englishman faced with unexpected success'¹¹⁷.

A further indicator of how the new breed of sixties bands' marked such a departure from the stars of the fifties is captured in Frank Sinatra's comment on The Beatles and how they spearheaded the British invasion ...

'They are, in my mind, responsible for most of the degeneration that has happened, not only musically but also in the sense of youth orientation and

¹¹⁶ Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008)

¹¹⁷ David Randall and Richard Orsley, *The Independent* (23 November 2008) p.29

*politically too. They are the people who made it first publicly acceptable to spit in the eye of authority*¹¹⁸.

On a more positive note Van Zandt believes the Beatles played a defining role in the history of popular music but also more importantly in awakening American youth to the rich tradition of music in their own country.

He describes The Beatles as

*'unlikely missionaries from England who ... ironically as it would turn out, introduced us young Americans to what would eventually be recognised as a new art form, that much to our surprise was born right here in our country.'*¹¹⁹

For Van Zandt The Beatles changed society's perception and history's evaluation of the rock and rollers of the 1950s. As a result

*Their status would change from temporary circus freaks ... to pioneers of a new art form. I would never have heard of Little Richard or Bo Diddley or Chuck Berry or Jerry Lee Lewis or Carl Perkins or Muddy Waters if it wasn't for the British Invasion*¹²⁰.

¹¹⁸ Frank Sinatra quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.59

¹¹⁹ Stephen Van Zandt, *Rock and Rap Confidential* www.rockrap.com edited by Dave Marsh taken from Van Zandt's induction speech for The Hollies at the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame (March 15 2010) accessed April 11th 2010

¹²⁰ Stephen Van Zandt, *Rock and Rap Confidential* www.rockrap.com edited by Dave Marsh taken from Van Zandt's induction speech for The Hollies at the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame (March 15 2010) accessed April 11th 2010

Touching millions of people through their music it was also the Yoko Ono 'love-ins' and 'Give Peace a Chance' being sung by the anti-Vietnam movement at the Washington Memorial in 1969 which defined John Lennon as a significant political icon. His ability to be the first UK pop-star to play a symbolic political role was chiefly as a result of his proximity to US politics. Once politicised Lennon developed an appetite for activism which saw him paying demonstrator's fines, publicly supporting CND, giving financial assistance to the Clyde shipbuilders, joining a fast for Biafra and raising money for the British Black power leader Michael X.

In the UK Lennon met with Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn, both prominent and serious figures within the new Marxist left, however whilst in the USA he freely associated with the *Yippies* and learnt political lessons from Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and the radical street musician David Peel. Lennon seemed to be far more at ease with the American brand of radicalism than its British counterparts and one of Rubin's colleagues told Jan Wiener 'Lennon was always more comfortable with us because our style of politics was similar to show-business, which he was used to and could understand'¹²¹.

Leaf and Scheinfeld believe Lennon's involvement in the revolutionary spirit so rattled Nixon and Hoover that 'he was secretly declared an enemy of the state and put under surveillance' and served with a deportation notice informing him that 'his temporary stay in the USA was now over'¹²². In their film *The US versus John Lennon* footage of Lennon and Ono's 'love-ins' is mixed with news footage and

¹²¹ Jan Wiener, *Come Together a night for John Lennon's words and music* (Music DVD 2006) p.180

¹²² David Leaf and John Scheinfeld II, *The US versus John Lennon* (Lion's Gate Films 2006)

interviews with luminaries such as Walter Cronkite, Carl Bernstein, Gore Vidal and Noam Chomsky. Their reminiscences of the social convulsions of the period are at times quite romantic although it should also be noted that no hard evidence of the deportation notice is actually provided.

Lennon's role was also criticised by biographer Ian MacDonald as one of 'exhibitionistic self-promotion' and in *Revolution in the Head* he highlights some of the inevitable tensions that would run throughout the evolving genre of celebrity politics. MacDonald ridicules how John and Yoko 'jetted around the world in first class seats selling the idea of peace at third-rate-media events' and regards much of the media's derision as 'not only inevitable but justified'¹²³. Lennon's approach was however ideally suited to a politics based on this style of communication as he playfully suggested 'Henry Ford knew how to sell cars by advertising I'm selling peace'¹²⁴.

Despite these criticisms without John Lennon Street believes 'punk and Rock Against Racism would have had no model to follow'¹²⁵ and as an icon mixing music and politics for a mass audience Lennon's renowned status is second only to US folk impresario Bob Dylan. In his '*Greening of America*' Charles Reich describes Dylan as 'a true prophet of the new consciousness'¹²⁶ a term writers still attribute to Dylan today. As the key musician of the counter-culture Dylan did however have a variable relationship with its politics.

¹²³ Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in The Head* (Fourth Estate 1994) p.289

¹²⁴ Quoted in A. Fawcett, *John Lennon One Day At A Time* (London 1976) p.54

¹²⁵ John Street, *Rebel Rock : The Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford Blackwell 1986) p.223

¹²⁶ Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (A. Lane 1971) p.183

Influenced by vibrant social movements Dylan wrote what he called his ‘finger pointing songs’ with titles such as ‘Masters of War’ ‘The Death of Emmet Till’ and ‘A Hard Rain is Gonna Fall’. Through his music he unwittingly became the unofficial spokesperson for a generation and with songs such as ‘Blowing in the Wind’ and performing ‘We Shall Overcome’ with Joan Baez during the March on Washington in 1963, he provided ready-made anthems for the civil rights protestors. Eyerman and Jameson claim that many still regard Dylan’s ‘Like a Rolling Stone’ as the theme song of the sixties amounting to a ‘poetic cry of critique, a diatribe against pomp power and pretence, and a renewed call for justice, compassion and authenticity’¹²⁷.

Eyerman and Jameson also believe Dylan’s songs demonstrated how music can function as ‘a kind of exemplary, truth bearing action’¹²⁸. By singing, dancing or comprehending his words and music ‘something significant about one’s self and one’s world could be revealed’¹²⁹. The infectiousness of popular music is described by Lester Bangs as ‘the ultimate populist art form, democracy in action’¹³⁰ and Greil Marcus positions Dylan’s songs as belonging to a tradition of prophecy that ‘goes far beyond preachers and sermons’¹³¹.

In his 1966 song ‘Visions of Joanna’ Dylan criticized his role as public spokesman and his unintended transformation into a prophet-musician. This in many ways signified his break from the movement and coincided with a deepening of radical

¹²⁷ Eyerman and Jameson, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.126

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.126

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.126

¹³⁰ Quoted in John Street, *Rebel Rock : The Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford Blackwell 1986) p.223

¹³¹ Greil Marcus, *The Shape of Things to Come* (Faber and Faber 2006) p.11

critique¹³² as young people turned to the more radical sounds of the MC5 and Jefferson Airplane. This also marked a break in the nature of protest when the 'Summer of Love' became 'Days of Rage' as groups of young demonstrators moved from pamphleteering to petrol bombs.

In *Invisible Republic : The Basement Tapes* Dylan describes in his own words his surprise at walking on stage at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival with a Fender Stratocaster to be booed by the audience. Marcus sees this as 'a touchstone of modern culture' and reports how this sense of betrayal gave way to accusations of Dylan being a Judas when he played electric guitar in England with his back to the audience¹³³.

Although regarded as the 'minstrel of the movement' the young Dylan was not always in step with the feelings of his audience and the broader significance of the counter-culture¹³⁴. The folk revival of the early 60s saw itself as a crusade for national renewal in a country reeling from assassinations and racial violence. The songs of the people, especially from the poor rural south, possessed a redeeming moral force and Homberger suggests electronic guitars 'embodied the big money, high-technology corporate world that strangled the authentic voice of the people'¹³⁵.

For Dylan the iconic status accorded to musicians as the revolutionary figures of the era created personal tensions, as did being a successful rock-star advocating a politics

¹³² Clinton Heylin, *Dylan : Behind the Shades* (It Books 1991) p.42

¹³³ Greil Marcus, *The Shape of Things to Come* (Faber and Faber 2006) p.11

¹³⁴ Peter Doggett, *There's A Riot Going On Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of the 60's Counterculture* (Canongate 2007) (2007) p. 6

¹³⁵ Eric Homberger review of *The Shape of Things to Come* by Greil Marcus (Faber and Faber 2006) *The Independent* (August 25 2006) p.25

critical of wealth, prestige and commercialism. Why a musician rather than a political, religious, academic or revolutionary figure should emerge as the counterculture's spiritual leader and attract such a devoted following was also a source of puzzlement for Dylan. His decision to break from the movement although criticised by some of his contemporaries served only to add to his mystique and veneration as its most iconic figure.

In his rejection of politics fellow performer Ochs warned Dylan against being swallowed up by a mass audience and the negative powers of consumerism. Ochs remained committed to the counter-culture and continued to fire radical political messages through songs such as 'Draft Dodger Rag', 'Canons of Christianity' and 'White Boots Marching on a Yellow Land' until his untimely death in 1976.

Whilst Lennon, Dylan, Ochs and Baez articulated political messages the power of their performances became massively indebted to advances in technology. The combined impact of music and technological wizardry was embodied in the highly symbolic 'Our World' event from June 25th 1967. Headlined by The Beatles the first ever worldwide television satellite hook-up underlined the international language of music. 'Our World' represented a step in the globalisation of music, a triumph for advanced telecommunications and an example of how music could carry the hope of transcending politics.

Transmitted live from Abbey Road Studios playing 'All You Need Is Love'¹³⁶ The Beatles were followed by performers from nineteen nations in a two-and-half-hour

¹³⁶ Barry Miles, *Many Years From Now* (Vintage-Random House 1998) p354

event to a record television audience of over 400 million. In recognition of the disenchantment with politics the organizers stipulated that no politicians or heads of state could appear in the broadcast and in order to capture the authenticity of the event all participants had to perform live.

Performing songs to the first ever global audience at the height of the Vietnam War holding placards with 'All You Need Is Love' written in different languages was highly symbolic. For Scott Wilson this sixties' notion of love overcoming politics marks 'a point of transcendence .. a critical point in time'¹³⁷. Watching the images today the crackly quality of the footage still captures the early broadcast technologies and the music's youthful optimism conjures up feelings of hope, change and a belief that anything was possible. By making 'distant events of the day immediate'¹³⁸ The Beatles' Our World appearance prompted *Life magazine* to conclude that *the new rock music* was 'the first music born in the age of instant communication'¹³⁹.

Technology continues to play a significant role in the professionalisation of the music industry and for Eyerman and Jamison it was actually 'the era of the rock concert'¹⁴⁰ that symbolised the end of the sixties. The demise of the counter-culture and its belief in community was coterminous with a migration of performance from a collective setting to a more commercial and individualistic form. Instead of singing songs in a spirit of camaraderie icons such as Baez and Dylan became successful solo artists in their own right and became increasingly subjected to the differentiation of the

¹³⁷ Richard Harrington, His Musical Notes Have Become TV Landmarks *The Washington Post* (November 24 2002) p.6

¹³⁸ Mark Kurlansky, *1968 The Year that rocked the World* (Vintage (2005) p.182

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.182

¹⁴⁰ Eyerman and Jameson, *Music and Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p.107

corporate music industry. In time these musicians and creative personnel became integrated into a business increasingly part of a global corporate structure.

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For many the deaths of Hendrix and Joplin only a few weeks apart in 1970 symbolised the death of a generation, a lifestyle and even the counterculture itself¹⁴¹. A further symbolic line was also drawn to proceedings as Paul McCartney instituted High Court proceedings to wind up the affairs of The Beatles on 31st December 1970¹⁴². Lennon's response encoded in 'How Do You Sleep' on his *Imagine* album the following year demonstrated just how far relations had soured between the greatest songsmiths of the *British Invasion*.

As a period of intense questioning and social change Roszak maintains the sixties still represents a 'cultural constellation that radically diverges from the values and assumptions that have been in the mainstream of our society since the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century'¹⁴³. Through its festivals, songs, politics and personalities popular music helped define the decade via the emergence of rock-politics as the beginning of the end for solid modernity. As a tributary flowing into the uncertain waters of liquid modernity from here onwards the new phenomenon of political rock-celebrities would evolve in unpredictable ways as they gravitated ever closer to power.

This was the decade in which popular music first demonstrated that it could be an important vehicle for social and political change – a force that would soon resurrect

¹⁴¹ John Harris, *Hail Hail Rock'n'Roll* (Sphere 2009) pp.190-191

¹⁴² Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.409

¹⁴³ Theodor Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (University of California Press 1970) pp. xi-xii

itself as ‘the great refusal of punk rock’ in the mid 70s. This time the eruption’s geographical location might be different however once again it was popular music rather than politics that first emerged as a signifying social interface to define and conceptualise a new generation ... ‘the punk generation’.

Chapter 3

The 1970s – The Filth, The Fury and the Politics of ‘The Punk Refusal’

This is now the end of an era in pop music. It's the end of ideology. Everything is branded. It began with the compilation album – music to drive to, music to eat to – thus denying each artist their own ideological spirit. Pop is now given away with a few Esso coupons at your local garage¹.

If in the ‘sixties’ pop groups became the ‘new aristocracy’² for a period in the mid/late 70s some groups consciously attempted becoming ‘public enemy number one’. In the UK punk rock’s eruption was a powerful moment greeted with hysteria, awe and cynicism, which over time evolved into a significant global sub-cultural movement. In this chapter these reactions are translated through the experiences of the ‘ultimate punk group’ the Sex Pistols by examining punk’s links to the players and the politics of its’ counter-cultural narrative.

Punk marks a transitional stage in the emergence of the musician as global political actor, or less prosaically the morphing of rock-star into pseudo-politician. The legitimacy of the musician in the 80s and 90s as credible spokesperson for certain causes owes much to the radicalism of the ‘punk refusal’. Drawing a trajectory to delineate the transition of the musical celebrity from conscientious outsider to mainstream political insider, plots punk as a significant staging point. Punk’s valiant attempt to be ‘political without being boring’ made it an unlikely recruiting sergeant for parties of both left and right. Through its punk-reggae fusion and Rock Against

¹ Malcolm McLaren, *The Observer* (1998) quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.110

² Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming* (Faber and Faber 1991) p.5

Racism (RAR) it produced the biggest political protests in post-war Britain and with its self-obsession as a 'master discourse' of authenticity engaged truculently with debates over 'selling out' and colluding with commercial culture.

Before the corporate structure colonised every level of rock'n'roll in the 1980s Neil Nehring believes that London in 1977 was the second of only two spontaneous and largely uncontrolled musico-political eruptions of the twentieth century – the first being San Francisco in 1967³. This punk rock eruption, examined through the politics of RAR, forms the basis of this chapter and provides the second of five episodes in the process of transition of popular musician into political actor. The 'punk refusal' offers an insight into a period of political and ideological confrontation stretching from its early years of 1976-1979 into the fluidity of the post-punk era.

The music of this period granted access for a whole new generation to politics and was significant in nurturing the conditions for the emergence of the political musical celebrity actor of the 1990s and beyond. For a short period popular music became heavily intertwined with causes such as RAR, the National Front, the Anti Nazi League and C.N.D. creating a whole new route into politics for the punk generation. What is most significant about this new route was not only that it felt credible and intelligent but also for the first time it 'offered an opportunity for young people to be political without being boring'⁴.

³ Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p. 272

⁴ Paul Gilroy in Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p.274

Like any subculture many attempts continue to be made to understand ‘punk’ and what it was reacting against. An appreciation of its dynamics and its cultural significance has been attempted through decoding the values in the music, measuring its proximity to radical/movement politics, and assessing its engagement with debates surrounding authenticity and commercialism. Through these three distinct interfaces ‘punk’ as a form of popular musical critique reveals a kaleidoscope of intelligence about its key actors, its relationship with ‘sixties’ counter-culture, and the highly charged political, economic and racial conditions of 70s Britain⁵.

To appreciate punk’s ‘extensive impact on various cultural and political fields’⁶, I move beyond the notion that punk was an isolated bounded phenomenon ending on a certain date. Punk’s longer term cultural importance is appreciated in later chapters so I concentrate here on the immediacy of its arrival and how it was initially understood as an ‘immanent and transcendental critique of the pop culture industry’⁷.

During late 1970s Britain ‘punk rock’ became the most self-consciously political moment in UK musical history with commentators such as Roger Sabin describing punk as ‘an actual form of politics itself, a politics that concretely engaged with contemporary issues’⁸. From this initial critique punk rock has come to represent a cultural shift with identifiable after effects in literature, comics, film, journalism and even body modification.

⁵ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.29

⁶ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 2

⁷ Robert Garnett quoted in Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 23

⁸ Andy Medhurst ‘What Did I Get ?’ in Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 225

As the frenzy of the sixties subsided a period of farce ensued, whereby key counter-cultural figures such as Jerry Rubin reneged on their ideals and quickly came to be seen as figures of fun lacking any semblance of political credibility. Similarly popular music retreated from its overtly political posturing and although political content did not disappear entirely the number of instances in which music played a political role diminished.

For Jello Biafra the increasing professionalisation of the music industry and the self-indulgence of its stars created such distance between the musician and music lovers that music was re-created as a 'spectator sport'⁹. Seen as an era of movement towards stadium rock where the individual eschewed the group Jon Savage states that music 'had become a pompous, middle class facsimile of the anarchy that was 50s Rock'n'Roll'¹⁰. This un-inspiring and non-confrontational nature of early 70s music is cited by Savage, Hall and others as a necessary pre-cursor for the mid seventies 'punk rock' backlash.

V. Vale claims it is impossible to start to understand 'punk rock' without some knowledge of how dull the early seventies actually were. He contends that 'the hippie revolt had burned out; disco was mindless ; E.L.P. were playing a huge piano that revolved in the air ... and all that was being marketed as youth culture seemed totally irrelevant'¹¹.

It was also a time when the antics of controversial yet non-political artists such as David Bowie embarrassed and appalled certain commentators on the rock scene still

⁹ J. Biafra in V. Vale, *Search and Destroy* (V/Search Publications 1996) p.1

¹⁰ Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming* (Faber and Faber 1991) p.9

¹¹ V. Vale, *Search and Destroy* (V/Search Publications 1996) p.1

concerned for the 'authenticity' and oppositional content of youth culture. Taylor and Wall attacked Bowie's 'emasculatation' of the underground and his collusion with consumer capitalism to 'recreate a dependent adolescent class of passive teenage consumers'¹².

In his essay 'The Kids are Not necessarily Alright' NME journalist Mick Farran reflected on music's metamorphosis since the counter-culture lambasting this era as a 'limp wrested sell out of the ideals of the 60s'¹³. Farran, and other journalists such as Caroline Coon, believed that rock music had finally 'come off the streets and cocooned itself in an escapist world' whereby figures such as Lennon and Dylan were no longer regarded as 'delinquent rockers' but 'grown up super-stars'¹⁴.

This hiatus between the 'sixties' and punk rock was also a time when the music industry and its marketing strategy changed significantly. Napier-Bell sees the formation of the British Phonographic Industry in 1971 as a significant step leading to a more co-ordinated record industry and a more professional approach. Breaking a new artist now 'began to be talked about more in terms of marketing rather than music'¹⁵ and Farran comments that 'once maverick outfits turned into big money operations'¹⁶. It now became common for artists to attend marketing meetings and adopt a language of 'units sold' previously exclusive to record company executives.

Farran also claims this created a new strain of 'industry fat-cats' who for a time were

¹² I Taylor and D Wall, Beyond The Skinheads in Dick Hebdige, *Subculture The Meaning of Style* (Methuen / London 1979) p.176

¹³ Mick Farren, The Kids are Not Necessarily Alright *NME* (March 1 1975) available on *Rock's Back Pages* <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=1088> accessed Feb 1 2007

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, March 1 (1975)

¹⁵ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p 43

¹⁶ Mick Farren, The Kids are Not Necessarily Alright *NME* March 1 1975 available on *Rock's Back Pages* <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=1088> accessed Feb 1 2007

as 'conservative as the old Tin Pan Alley breed who did their best to stop creativity during the early 60s'¹⁷.

Another ominous sign of the industry's maturity was K-Tel's discovery in 1972 that there was money to be made in re-packaging old hits and re-selling them by means of TV advertising. K-Tel were closely followed by Arcade and by the mid seventies compilation albums accounted for over 30 per cent of album sales neatly summed up by Melody Maker's claim 'at the heart of the rock'n'roll dream is a cash register'¹⁸.

In his article 'Is the world ready for 1976 ?' Farren suggested that 'the world is simply waiting for something new to appear'. Whatever this might be he wrote 'it is one hell of long time coming' wondering if rock and roll was finally 'sliding out of its pre-eminent position'¹⁹. Farren's dismay at the taming of rock music demanded that some form of a sea change needed to occur, however he didn't anticipate it was about to unfold around him in London's hot summer of 1976.

General agreement exists over what punk rock was reacting against, however debate persists over the timing and location of its precise emergence. The first generally accepted reference was employed by rock critic Dave Marsh in the May 1971 issue of *Creem* describing *Question Mark and the Mysterions* as giving a 'landmark exposition of punk rock'²⁰ and in June 1972, the fanzine *Flash* included a 'Punk Top

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, March 1 1975

¹⁸ Andrew Gallix, interview with Simon Reynolds 3am Magazine 2 March 2009 available on www.andrewgallix.com/2009/03/02/interview-with-simon-reynolds/ accessed July 2009

¹⁹ Mick Farren, The Kids are Not Necessarily Alright *NME* March 1 1975 available on *Rock's Back Pages* <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=1088> accessed Feb 1 2007

²⁰ Dave Marsh, *Creem Magazine* (May 1971) Scott Woods in the introduction to A Meaty, Beaty, Big, and Bouncy Interview with Dave Marsh www.rockcritics.com – accessed May 2007

Ten' of 1960s albums²¹. Billy Bragg points out that *The NME Book of Rock*, the first rock encyclopedia, published in 1973, already had an entry explaining 'punk rock' as a term coined to describe local US white rock bands such as The Standells, The Sonics and The Seeds that sprang up all over America in the wake of the sixties British invasion²².

In terms of punk as a popular musical revolution although it had a pre-history that was American in origin it is difficult to deny that its epicentre was the UK and its chief protagonists were the Sex Pistols. Through this lens attempts to trace punk's musical roots, its overtly political nature and cultural manifestations have been linked to well-springs of dissent as diverse as the 'Situationist International'²³ traditions of English political radicalism²⁴ and working class subversion²⁵. These avenues of enquiry invariably converge on the experience of the Sex Pistols whose story provides the basis from which this chapter develops.

As 'the definitive punk rock band'²⁶ the Sex Pistols were a highly controversial London based outfit whose high profile impact was largely responsible for initiating the punk movement. In their short career between 1975 and January 1978 the band produced four hit singles and a number one album that was loud, uncompromising, full of wit, anger and visceral energy. Speaking in 1992 of the band's first single

²¹ Steven Taylor, *False Prophet : Field Notes from the Punk Underground* (Wesleyan University Press 2003) p. 16

²² Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.221

²³ John Savage, *England's Dreaming* (Faber and Faber 1991) p.49 and Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993)

p.8

²⁴ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p. 224

²⁵ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture The Meaning of Style* (Methuen / London 1979) p.81

²⁶ Artist Profiles, Sex Pistols www.bbc.co.uk Retrieved on September 22 2008

‘Anarchy in the UK’ Griel Marcus states that it is ‘as powerful as anything I know, it still disconcerts and resonates’²⁷.

Stylistically their ‘back to basics’ musicianship wrote off the prevailing professional cult of technique and their antics defined them as the antithesis of respectable rock stars. Their dedication to techniques of shock and provocation situated them outside the mainstream ‘as the great folk devil of their era’²⁸ and their brief yet controversial period of notoriety made the Sex Pistols ‘the most written about band in the world’²⁹.

Differing radically in looks, style and attitude to iconic ‘sixties’ bands, they tore up record contracts, offended public decency and deliberately embarked on a symbolic journey of chaos and destruction. Disbanding after an abortive US tour in early 1978 even in their aftermath the intrigue continued with high profile court cases, band related suicides and a full-length feature film, aptly entitled *The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle*. Defining a musical genre which still acts as a potent cultural symbol the Sex Pistols were finally inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2006 ; in predictable style they refused to attend the ceremony, calling the museum ‘a piss stain’³⁰.

With the advent of punk bands such as the Sex Pistols Griel Marcus claims that ‘very quickly, pop music changed – and so did public discourse’³¹. He contends that punk was seen as a new music, a new form of social critique, but most of all it was a new

²⁷ Greil Marcus quoted by Robert Garnett in Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 17

²⁸ Andy Gill, Malcolm McLaren : An Appreciation *The Independent* (9 April 2010)

²⁹ Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage : American Negativity and Rap/metal in the Age of Supercapitalism* (Manchester University Press 2007) p.50

³⁰ David Sprague, Sex Pistols Flip Off Hall of Fame *Rolling Stone* 24 February 2006

³¹ Greil Marcus, In The Fascist Bathroom (Harvard University Press 2001) p.2

kind of free speech. By testing the limits of social acceptability Marcus believes that 'punk inaugurated a moment – a long moment, which still persists – when suddenly countless odd voices, voices no reasonable person could have expected to hear in public, were being heard all over the place'³². Through songs such as 'God Save the Queen' and 'Anarchy in the UK' the Sex Pistols suddenly gave people who heard them permission to speak equally as freely. Popular music had suddenly claimed new territory, new subject matter and a new kind of defiance. Punk's denial of self-censorship legitimised outspoken attacks on the shortcomings and hypocrisies of modern society and these can all be re-traced to the complexity and drama of the Sex Pistols 'first no'³³.

To those who experienced it first hand this breach was unlike anything that had occurred before and to Factory Records owner Tony Wilson 'they were musically, culturally, in every way, the best thing in the world'³⁴. Through songs such as 'Pretty Vacant', 'Holidays in the Sun', and 'God Save The Queen' punk was co-opted as an ideological battering ram to attack everything from the government to social, cultural and political norms. Biafra maintains that this was 'the reason punk felt so good ... it was such a great weapon to attack everyone else with'³⁵. For the generation of writers who lived through punk their brief optimism in its potential for change contrasts the bleak pessimism of the political climate so for a new generation punk represented a nihilistic and contradictory voice of hope.

³² *Ibid.*, p.3

³³ *Ibid.*, p.5

³⁴ Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.92

³⁵ J. Biafra in V. Vale, *Search and Destroy 1* (V/Search Publications 1996) p.4

This excitement and anticipation was witnessed and documented outside London's first Punk Rock Festival at the 100 Club on Oxford Street in September 1976. In one of its formative accounts Caroline Coon saw 'indisputable evidence that a new decade in rock is about to begin'³⁶. Interviewing two 18-year-olds at the head of the queue Coon was told 'I've been WAITING for something to identify with ... there's been nothing for years. I just want to be involved'³⁷.

Andy Medhurst also conveys the palpable excitement of the dawning of what felt like a 'year zero' by recollecting how meaning hadn't yet been decided and everything felt 'intoxicatingly up for grabs'³⁸. His excitement of the Students Union's occupation of an administration building is remembered more for the memory and the experience than the actual issue itself.

*'Rigging up two large speakers and booming out the Sex Pistols' Anarchy in the UK across the campus was maybe a naïve gesture, however as an attempt to marry our local dissatisfaction to a broader cultural dissent, makes it iconographically unforgettable*³⁹.

Medhurst's account of music acting as the delivery mechanism for non-specific dissent resonates somewhat with the scene from the 1994 Hollywood movie 'The Shawshank Redemption'⁴⁰ where inmate Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) defiantly plays music across the prison tannoy and life temporarily stops as his fellow prisoners

³⁶ Caroline Coon : Parade of the Punks *Melody Maker* (2 October 1976)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1976

³⁸ Andy Medhurst, 'What Did I Get ?' in Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 220

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 222

⁴⁰ *Shawshank Redemption*, written and directed by Frank Darabont based on the Stephen King novel Rita Hayworth and The Shawshank Redemption (1994)

contemplate the melody. The defiance of playing 'Anarchy in the UK' to the whole campus and being present at the live recording of the Tom Robinson Band's 'Glad to be Gay' at Sussex University Students Union in December 1977 represent for Medhurst punk's most lasting personal legacy 'the relationship between music and politics'⁴¹.

For its converts whether their most important punk-related manifestation was the excitement, the politics, the outrage, the controversy or the music the Sex Pistols' story embraced them all. Their significance stretched beyond exploiting the transgressive potential of pop style by exposing and refusing what Medhurst describes as the 'illusory pleasures and fraudulent myths of the pop culture industry itself'⁴².

What set them apart was their purposeful disinvestments in anything that pop had previously represented and the band will always function as 'authenticating points of origin for new generations of guitar led, back to basics, pop nostalgists'⁴³. For Marcus the popular impact of the Sex Pistols 'created a breach in pop culture'⁴⁴ and their significance will be forever downplayed by attempts to fit them into some seamless narrative account of the story of rock'n'roll.

The challenging rhetoric of the Sex Pistols represented a fresh confrontational stance and a deliberate break from what was seen as the hippy drop out culture. Punk as a form of musical critique was the first music which possessed as an active constituent a

⁴¹ Andy Medhurst : 'What Did I Get ?' in Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 222

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.23

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.23

⁴⁴ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces : A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Faber and Faber 1989) p. 3

rampant desire to actively ‘seek out and destroy’ all other musical forms, especially those which had preceded it.

In an early interview with Coon Rotten complained of the ‘apathy and complacency’ of the hippies and how they were ‘all dosed out of their heads all the time’⁴⁵. Rotten articulated his stance towards politics as one that says NO, proclaiming ‘if something offends you – change it !’⁴⁶. By using the pop industry as their starting point, the Sex Pistols were therefore able to gain some critical purchase upon not only popular music, but also culture more broadly. Their contempt towards the prevailing 70s reverential attitude towards music was translated as a rebuke to any established ideology or practice.

As a new sub-culture punk’s deliberate courting of controversy resulted in record amounts of negative media coverage and it was often the Sex Pistols who were the scapegoats. ‘Terrifying the Bourgeois’ claimed the Observer as the Sunday Mirror warned that ‘the new found and disturbing power of punk rock – the spitting, swearing, savage pop music of rebellious youth – is sweeping teenage Britain’⁴⁷.

Fuelled by punk’s provocative insistence Willis believes it remains unique amongst musical movements in its nihilistic attempts ‘to bring down upon itself such vehement disapproval’⁴⁸.

One of the band’s most iconic moments was Malcolm McLaren’s arrest and detention for organising the band to play onboard a boat in the River Thames outside the

⁴⁵ Caroline Coon 1978 quoted in Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p 272

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 272

⁴⁷ Fred and Judy Vermorel, *The Sex Pistols The Inside Story* (London / Universal 1978) p.96

⁴⁸ Paul Willis, *Profane Culture* (London Routledge 1978) pp.58-65

Houses of Parliament in the summer of 1977. As one of numerous high profile incidents culminating in the single's runaway chart success Napier-Bell remembers ...

*'When the world's press arrived to watch the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 there was a big black blot in the middle of the celebrations – 'God Save the Queen' by the Sex Pistols'*⁴⁹.

For Gill the song sought to poison the festivities with its humiliating refrain 'No Future !'⁵⁰ and by 'managing to be ideologically scabrous and a meteoric number one hit' Neil Nehring believes this record still amounts to 'the most effective political effort in the history of British rock music'⁵¹.

Richard Branson, the then owner of the Sex Pistols' label Virgin Records, maintains that the Sex Pistols were deliberately kept off the number 1 spot in the week of the queen's jubilee party. Rumours still abound regarding an extraordinary secret directive to the BMRB (the compilers of the UK music chart) that certain chart return shops be dropped from the weekly census of best selling records⁵². Branson maintains that his Virgin store in Central London where most Sex Pistols records were being sold was inexplicably struck off the BMRB list⁵³.

⁴⁹ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.192

⁵⁰ Andy Gill, Malcolm McLaren : An Appreciation *The Independent* (9 April 2010)

⁵¹ Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p.297

⁵² Barry Lazell, *Punk ! an A-Z* (Hamlyn 1995) p.120 The record did reach no.1 in the NME chart which took less data input from the large chains such as W.H.Smith which refused to stock it

⁵³ Richard Branson, *Losing My Virginity* (Virgin Books 2009) pp.145-146

Warnings of a breakdown in societal values⁵⁴ reached newer and more hysterical heights, as punk became public enemy number one as it was vilified by conservative figures such as Mary Whitehouse and Malcolm Muggeridge. In the heat of 1977 Bernard Brooke-Partridge art chairman of the GLC added to the chorus of disapproval stating

*'my personal view is that it's nauseating, disgusting, degrading, ghastly, sleazy, prurient, voyeuristic and generally nauseating (repeated in error). I think most of these groups would be vastly improved by sudden death. The worst of the punk rock groups I suppose currently are the Sex Pistols ... they are the antithesis of human kind'*⁵⁵.

Footage of another of Brooke-Partridge's polemics was captured and reproduced in the 'Great Rock n Roll Swindle' in which he states

'I loathe and detest everything they stand for and look like. They are obnoxious, obscene and disgusting. The Sex Pistols are scum'.

Even the Tory shadow minister for education denounced the group's music as 'a symptom of the way society is declining'⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms Pop Music and Popular Culture* (New York / St Martins 1985) p.59

⁵⁵ David Huxley, *The Great Rock n Roll Swindle* quoted in Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p.95

⁵⁶ Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p. 302

In terms of public outrage their biggest controversy involved the live nationwide TV transmission of the expletives *fuck* and *bastard* during the Bill Grundy 'Today' interview. During this brief exchange the Sex Pistols were catapulted onto the front pages and into the nation's consciousness. Public hysteria was almost galvanised overnight whilst at the same time Lazell suggests 'disaffected youth all over the country suddenly became aware of the nihilistic liberation inherent in punk rock'⁵⁷. The following morning The Daily Mirror's iconic 'Filth and Fury' front page headline story carried a message urging people to 'Punish the Punks'.

Certain disc-jockeys such as Radio 1's Tony Blackburn refused to play the Sex Pistols and Dave Lee Travis even smashed a Sex Pistols record live on air. Punk had touched a raw nerve and for its new believers it exposed these DJ's as little more than establishment stooges sadly rooted in their own historical musical memory. The vehemence of the public's reaction to the Sex Pistols was borne out by physical violence and public protests which resulted in the cancellation of the group's 1976 'Anarchy in the UK' tour. In the social climate of the 1970s the band's censorship from radio and TV was hardly surprising, as were denunciations from fellow artists such as Cliff Richard however the refusal of record company packers to even handle the 'Anarchy in the UK' single was a first.

In terms of its tactics to subvert mainstream culture and its DIY ethic Sabin sees punk as representing 'the last gasp of the 1960s counterculture'⁵⁸. The Sex Pistols drama saw the resurrection of the non-conformist ideals of 'the sixties' and sharing the same language, sentiment, sloganeering and personnel albeit in a very different cultural

⁵⁷ Barry Lazell, *Indie Hits 1980–1999* (Cherry Red Books 1997) p.36

⁵⁸ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 4

setting as. With key actors and ex-student radicals of the sixties such as Jamie Reid and Malcolm McLaren punk became an extension and continuity of the political resistance of that era. Nehring sees McLaren as an important link as he ‘never relented on his earlier aspirations and tactics’⁵⁹ and Hall claims that the authoritarian reaction to which punk was a backlash ‘had its roots in 1968-69 when the threat of anarchy was first articulated’⁶⁰.

As artistic director of the film ‘The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle’ and through his production of record sleeves, album covers and promotional posters Reid’s artwork is synonymous with the Sex Pistols. Reid’s political stance through his art, reveals a continuity with his feelings surrounding sixties counter-culture and how it should be expressed in the mid-late 1970s. Reid although ‘disillusioned at how jargonistic and non-committal left wing politics had become’⁶¹ was still inflamed with the spirit that had attracted him to leftist politics in the 1960s. Reid saw the Sex Pistols as a perfect vehicle to communicate the ideas that had been formulated during that period, and to ‘get them across very directly to people who weren’t getting the message of left wing politics’⁶².

In Reid’s artwork and in punk culture more generally Hebdige sees the considerable influence of 60s pop art in its ‘facetious quotation’ of high and popular culture, and its ‘parody of cultural commerce’⁶³. Recognising the importance of these avant-garde

⁵⁹ Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p.272

⁶⁰ Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis Mugging, the State, Law and Order* (New York, Macmillan 1978) p.137

⁶¹ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces : A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Faber and Faber 1989) p. 55

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 55

⁶³ Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light On Images and Things* (New York Routledge 1988) pp.142-43

sixties radicals Simon Frith described punk as ‘an art-school demo with a firm place in the history of British radical art’⁶⁴. Through Reid’s artwork and McLaren’s rhetoric Frith links punk directly to the ‘fusion of political, aesthetic and cultural revolution represented by the Situationist International’⁶⁵.

Valorised post-humously by Hoyle as the ‘impish visionary behind the punk movement’ and the ‘most famous music manager since Brian Epstein’⁶⁶ McLaren absorbed situationism’s notion of using *absurdism* to provoke political and cultural upheaval and went on to apply them throughout his own career – even at his funeral⁶⁷. His unrelenting attempts to turn *spectacle* (what is accepted as structure and reality) into *situation* (exposing structure and creating opportunities for action) follows the logic of pure situationist theory.

Out of chaos, he said, should come a sense of purpose, a refusal of pre-packaged leisure culture⁶⁸, exhorting an almost biblical invocation of the power to think. With regard to the havoc the Sex Pistols were causing in the music industry McLaren claimed opportunistically that ‘the politics of boredom is a really wonderful weapon to use against the music business because that is the one thing they often try to sell’⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ Simon Frith, The Punk Bohemians *New Society* (9th March 1978) pp.535-36

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, (p.535-36) 9th March 1978 The Situationist International was a small yet iconic group of international political and artistic agitators operating from 1957 to 1972

⁶⁶ Ben Hoyle & Mary Bowers, Malcolm McLaren *The Times* (April 9 2010) p.4

⁶⁷ *BBC Newsnight*, Malcolm McLaren’s funeral cortege consisted of an open topped bus ride through Camden to Highgate Cemetery emblazoned with the words ‘I did it My Way’. Speakers blasted out loud music whilst the mourners hurled fake dollar bills to the onlookers from the upper deck (April 13 2010)

⁶⁸ Quoted in Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p.301

⁶⁹ Michael Watts, Malcolm McLaren *Melody Maker* (June 16th 1979) p.50

Following the band's sacking from EMI as a result of the Bill Grundy incident, McLaren pocketed the £40,000 fee and swiftly signed with A&M for almost double the amount. With typical panache he arranged for the new contract to be signed at a press conference outside Buckingham Palace. Within six days the band were once again sacked and signed to Branson's Virgin label, their third record label in four months⁷⁰. McLaren also deliberately courted prosecution by naming the band's debut album *Never Mind The Bollocks – Here's the Sex Pistols* as it would help record sales. His calculations were correct as the album topped the charts and as a bonus the Sex Pistols won the ensuing court case under the 1889 Indecent Advertising Act.

In a similar vein Reid used situationist slogans in an attempt encourage the Sex Pistols' audience to 'think for themselves' and to 'question the status quo and what is considered normal'⁷¹. His slick situationist packaging convincingly presented the Sex Pistols as intelligent degenerates, and in Hebdige's opinion as 'signs of the highly publicised decay which perfectly represented the atrophied conditions of Great Britain'⁷². The Sex Pistols therefore attempted to transform the negative and the profane into a positive and genuinely disruptive force or as Nehring describes it 'the destructive becoming the creative'⁷³.

Biafra claims that although punk was quickly co-opted by the media and multinationals, it was 'spiritually in tune with the early hippies and early beats'⁷⁴,

⁷⁰ Malcolm McLaren Obituary, *The Times* (April 9 2010) p. 63

⁷¹ Jamie Reid and Jon Savage, *Up They Rise : The Incomplete Woks of Jamie Reid* (London / Faber & Faber 1987) p.66

⁷² Dick Hebdige, *Subculture The Meaning of Style* (Methuen / London 1979) p.87

⁷³ Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p. 302 J. Biafra in V. Vale, *Search and Destroy* (V/Search Publications 1996) p.1

⁷⁴ J. Biafra in V. Vale, *Search and Destroy* in (V/Search Publications 1996) p.4

supporting the notion that the ideas of sixties counterculture were only temporarily buried, to re-emerge in a more fertile soil of a later age.

Whilst London's punk explosion might constitute Nehring's second great 'musical eruption', as a musical/political movement it also represents an interesting adjustment of focus to the outburst of the political music identified with the 'sixties'. As modern generations increasingly use music as an index to individual life stories and to the social and political conditions of the time even commentators such as Simon Jenkins who identify the defining art forms of 'sorry seventies Britain' as 'brutalist architecture, nihilist drama and punk rock'⁷⁵.

Jenkins' work on the social conditions of the time which paved the way for the emergence of Margaret Thatcher and the 'greatest political and social revolution in modern British history'⁷⁶ is in concert with the impact 'punk' would have on British musical history. Just as 'Thatcherism' was a political revolution and punk a stylistic and musical revolution, for many years their successors were stamped with the hallmarks of being *post-Thatcher* or *post-punk*.

Differing from 'the sixties' as a more short-lived intense burst of musical and political energy modern musical history's most powerful political moment was essentially a British phenomenon. Biafra vocalist and song-writer for San Francisco's Dead Kennedys states 'there were no American Sex Pistols' .. 'things were so much more underground'⁷⁷. Punk spread very differently in the USA, so although bands from both countries played together and shared experiences from the very start, the main

⁷⁵ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.29

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.29

⁷⁷ J. Biafra in V. Vale, *Search and Destroy* (V/Search Publications 1996) p.1

difference lies in the level of exposure and outrage communicated through popular media coverage. Until the Dead Kennedy's 'PMRC' court case of 1986 Nuzum catalogues the temporary refusal of entry visas for the Sex Pistols in 1977 as the only incident of US punk-related censorship⁷⁸.

Parallels can also be drawn between the public outrage over punk as the high political watermark of British musical history and the 'sixties' as the most political episode in American musical history. Whilst this comparison supports Nehring's two eruptions thesis it should be emphasised that a division also exists. Whilst there is continuity in thought, action and key players notions of the 'sixties' as an international phenomenon of youthful liberation and Kerekes description of punk as a 'trans-Atlantic insurrection'⁷⁹ deflects an appreciation of the radically different experiences of Britain and America.

During the sixties only a few British bands such as the Groundhogs, Hawkwind and the Pink Fairies played a role, albeit only a minor one, in the counter-culture.

Similarly only a handful of politically minded US bands such as The Avengers, Dead Kennedys, X and Bad Brains figured fleetingly in the early years of the UK punk explosion. Just as the unique conditions of the US forged the 60s experience it was the conditions of the late seventies Britain that inaugurated the social, political and cultural revolutions of 'punk rock' and Thatcherism.

⁷⁸ Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory Music Censorship in the USA* (Perennial 2001) p.228

⁷⁹ David Kerekes, *Headpress Magazine* available on www.headpress.com/Headitorial accessed January 11 2008

Unlike the airbrushed images of 70s America Jon Savage claims that ‘England wasn’t free and easy it was repressed and horrible’⁸⁰ as three-day weeks, strikes and nationwide power shortages contrasted the supposed sunshine and freedom of her Atlantic cousin. Jenkins’ claims that ‘British politics was seldom so miserable as between the IMF crisis of 1976 and the ‘winter of discontent’ of 1979’⁸¹ and this very British setting of economic decline and industrial strife was the context in which ‘punk rock’ was played out.

During this period Hall maintains that Britain witnessed ‘a dramatic deterioration in the intellectual climate’ and public opinion became tutored in authoritarian postures by method of moral panics. Increasingly sensitive to charges of terminal decline and the end of empire these ‘sudden un-located surges of social anxiety’⁸² were especially pronounced in the climate in which punk emerged. This combination of economic decline and socially produced anxieties created a ‘conscious social polarisation last experienced during the economic depression of the 1930s’⁸³ and for Nehring an intractable link ‘between the onset of a new depression and the rise of punk’⁸⁴.

As Britain’s first politicised youth subculture Willis believes the significance of punk was its revelation of the inadequacy of the ‘political programmes and theoretical perspectives’ of left intellectuals, which had ‘utterly failed to even sense the importance of the cultural level of transformation’⁸⁵. Until punk Willis believes the

⁸⁰ Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming* (Faber and Faber 1991) p.9

⁸¹ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.3

⁸² Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (New York / Verso 1988) 23-24 & 34-35

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.34-35

⁸⁴ Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p.283

⁸⁵ Paul Willis, *Profane Culture* (London Routledge 1978) p.58

approach to the study of British youth culture had been ‘mean spirited, uncharitable and pedantic’ as it attempted to list all the things that these subcultures failed to be i.e. *organised, coherent, activist* in order to dismiss their political relevance. Hebdige maintains that punk was clearly significant as it taught us about ‘an unexpected range of cultural struggles and transformations’⁸⁶ through its determination ‘to detach itself from the taken for granted landscape of normalised forms’⁸⁷.

Punk therefore was far more than just the music and its whole surrounding culture from the very outset was pregnant with significance. By interrupting the process of normalisation, offending the ‘silent majority’ and contradicting the myth of consensus Hebdige maintains punk ‘offered a different means of critique’⁸⁸. Whilst punk’s cultural identity can be interpreted as one of resistance, Hebdige interprets this positively as an assertion of difference in constructing an identity that is *pro-active* as opposed to *re-active*. Indeed so many different musical styles bearing no obvious relation are now defined as being ‘post-punk’ and the subculture is admired as much for its attitude and sentiment as it is for its distinctive musical output.

Henry Rollins, vocalist with influential US band Black Flag, suggests punk’s attitude has been ‘uploaded to modern culture’ and colonised many areas of discourse in a positive way which bears testimony to its ongoing fascination⁸⁹. For Nehring the persistent interest of writers and cultural commentators still wrestling to understand the significance of punk’s historical position evidenced through the welter of band

⁸⁶ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture The Meaning of Style* (Methuen / London 1979) p.21

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.23

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.18

⁸⁹ Henry Rollins, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005)

biographies, scene stories and reviews ‘bears lessons not failed or lost ... but of ones still being worked out’⁹⁰.

Philosophically punk had no pre-set agenda and was as ambiguous and fragmented as it was anti-authoritarian. An ongoing process of mythmaking surrounds all youth sub-cultures so any consideration of punk from its proponents is potentially hamstrung by the desire to romanticise. In its early years (1976-79) Medhurst confirms the very idea of nostalgia was the ultimate rebuke a ‘contradiction in terms, a kind of betrayal, trading in punk’s forensic nihilism for a rose coloured cosiness’⁹¹.

As more mature and intelligent voices have now distilled how punk clearly stood for identifiably positive attitudes such as a belief in spontaneity, questioning and a D.I.Y. approach Billy Bragg claims that writers should not selectively ignore its negative tendencies or the fact that in its earliest days punk was ‘suffused with fascistic imagery’⁹².

Bragg’s comments draw this discussion into the realm of political sensitivities and engage with Sabin’s argument that many of punk’s racist leanings have been ‘edited out’ over the years⁹³. The Sex Pistols and their audience’s strong use of Nazi imagery juxtaposed with slogans⁹⁴ such as ‘we are not into music or politics, we are just into chaos’ certainly sent out confusing messages.

⁹⁰ Neil Nehring, *Flowers in the Dustbin Culture, Anarchy and Post-War England* (University of Michigan Press 1993) p. 8

⁹¹ Andy Medhurst ‘What Did I Get?’ in Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What: the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 224

⁹² Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.214

⁹³ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What: the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 210

⁹⁴ ‘Screen on the Green’ gig in Islington in August 1977 the Sex Pistols were joined on stage with fans wearing brown shirts and swastika armbands in Sabin, *Punk Rock So What – the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 210

Even in fictitious accounts of punk there is a tendency to change or romanticise : in the movie *Sid and Nancy*, for example, Sid's t-shirt is a hammer and sickle rather than a swastika⁹⁵. Despite its incoherency and flirtations with rightwing imagery⁹⁶ it is interesting that punk's most widely recognised connection to direct political action came in it's affiliation with the left inspired 'Rock Against Racism' (RAR) movement.

Formed in the furnace of the London punk scene, it was music and particularly punk that provided RAR's context, spark and cohesion. In his history of 'Rock Against Racism' Widgery claims 'punk expressed a political moment in terms of anti-racist activism'⁹⁷ and Paul Gilroy believes that punk supplied 'an oppositional language' through which 'anti-racism could speak a truly populist politics'⁹⁸. Punk was not however created in a vacuum and was born out of the same economic and political recession that had produced a rise in far right activity.

Sabin points out that 'subcultures have historically mimicked their parent cultures as much as rebelled against them'⁹⁹ and he challenges punk's positive relationship

⁹⁵ Alex Cox, *Sid and Nancy Love Kills* film biopic (Alive Studios 1986)

⁹⁶ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture The Meaning of Style* (Methuen / London 1979) p.113 Hebdige explains this paradox by using the concept of homology to describe the way in which apparently random elements of a subculture fit together. These apparently 'lawless subcultures' do therefore actually have an internal sense of order, which is visible to insiders. Despite this 'insider understanding' its contradictions, lack of theoretical clarity and tactical perspective do make punk slightly bewildering, even though to an outsider punk's consistently negative media attention gave the illusion of cohesion equivalent to a 'hydra-headed conspiracy against a whole way of life'. Also explained in Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis : Mugging, the State, Law and Order* (New York, Macmillan 1978) p.251

⁹⁷ David Widgery, *Beating Time Riot n Race n Rock n Roll* (Chatto and Windus 1986) p. 117

⁹⁸ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago / Chicago University Press 1991) pp.121-122

⁹⁹ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p.212

towards anti-racism in his article 'Rethinking Punk and Racism'¹⁰⁰ whereby he alleges that a certain amount of 'myth-making of anti-racism in punk' has taken place. Sabin suggests that the connection was more a matter of timing than a natural alliance as the appearance of RAR coincided precisely with the growth of punk and the zenith of the National Front.

Certain voices from within the punk community also serve to debunk romantic notions that there was some form of a natural anti-racist tendency amongst punks. Knox from the Vibrators admitted the band played RAR events not because they believed in the cause but because it was simply an opportunity to play¹⁰¹. Reflecting punk's un-theorised hatred of being told what to do Mark Perry of ATV and Sniffin' Glue Fanzine remarked 'I don't need to be told by some commie organisation to love blacks ... the SWP and the NF are as bad as each other'¹⁰².

By interrogating early coverage in the music press Sabin concludes that punk exhibited no 'fundamental or gravitational pull to the left'¹⁰³ and points to the nostalgic temptation for supporters of a counter-culture to over-emphasize its progressive thinking or political nature. Sabin traces this romantic tendency specifically to rock journalists such as Caroline Coon¹⁰⁴, Suzie Burchill and Tony Parsons¹⁰⁵ who all wrote authoritatively about the new music movement and were eager to champion punk to support their own 'anti-racist' world views.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp199-215

¹⁰¹ Teenage Depression Fanzine no. 8 (1978)

¹⁰² Lindsey Boyd, interview with Mark Perry *Sounds* (24 December 1977)

¹⁰³ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What: the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 212

¹⁰⁴ Caroline Coon, *The New Wave Punk Rock Explosion* (London / Omnibus 1978)

¹⁰⁵ Julie Birchall and Tony Parsons, *The Boy Looked at Johnny* (London/Pluto 1978)

The punk critique, which quickly matured in the space created by the Sex Pistols, was heavily influenced by this group of young creative writers¹⁰⁶ and also by contributors to the then emerging punk fanzine¹⁰⁷. Between 1976 and 79 the NME increasingly politicised the coverage of music, and in so doing 'encouraged their readers to be political and the musicians to be politicians'¹⁰⁸. For Street et al the ability of the music press to establish 'a counter-public around the idea of music as a political weapon' was a key source of legitimation for RAR/ANL¹⁰⁹. This prompts a re-examination of the role music played in these politically charged years up to the landmark general election of 1979, in which the National Front was defeated and Thatcher's social revolution began.

Founded in 1976 when the NF was enjoying its highest ever levels of support, RAR came about as a form of popular response to an overtly racist outburst made by Eric Clapton at a concert in Birmingham in August 1976. 'Sounds' relayed the details under the title 'Support Enoch says 'MP' Clapton'¹¹⁰ as he warned about the dangers of 'foreigners' making Britain a colony in under 10 years time and how he was thinking of retiring and becoming an MP for a Surrey constituency.

This outburst followed a separate racist incident involving David Bowie in March 1976 when returning from exile in Berlin he proclaimed that Adolf Hitler was 'the first rock star' and that Britain needed a 'right-wing dictatorship'¹¹¹ before speeding

¹⁰⁶ Julie Burchill, Tony Parsons, Charles Shaar Murray, Jon Savage, Greil Marcus, Gary Bushell were prominent figures in this group

¹⁰⁷ Sniffing Glue, Ripped and Torn, Search and Destroy, Punk, 48 Thrills

¹⁰⁸ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd: The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p.279

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.282

¹¹⁰ Clapton's Racist Outburst, *Sounds* (August 14th 1978)

¹¹¹ John Savage, *England's Dreaming* (Faber and Faber 1991) pp.242-243

off and appearing to give a fascist salute from the back of a chauffeur driven Mercedes. The Bowie incident gained limited media attention however the popular response to Clapton's polemic was for Billy Bragg the 'catalyst that returned rock to its radical roots'¹¹².

The debate was ignited when Red Saunders attacked Clapton in a letter to the music press stating 'half your music is black ... you're rock music's biggest colonist' whilst urging fellow music fans to 'resist the racist poison in music' and to 'unite and Rock Against Racism'¹¹³. This letter appeared in all three of the major UK music papers helped energise a new political movement, which according to Vulliamy for all its shambolic effervescence was 'among the most cogent mass endeavours in post-war Britain'¹¹⁴. RAR very quickly developed as a grassroots movement operating through a co-ordinated series of events, where black and white musicians stood together in unity to symbolically fight against the 'racist poison' in mainstream rock music. Although its' spark was musical in origin, the wider context of race relations in mid 70s Britain provides a fuller explanation of RAR's emergence.

In May 1974, the National Front had fought its most successful election campaign, winning 10 per cent of the vote in some areas of London. The National Front's main campaigning tool was a series of high profile shows of strength marching provocatively through immigrant neighbourhoods carrying a forest of Union Jack flags. The National Front gained 120,000 votes in the Greater London Council

¹¹² Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.228

¹¹³ Letters Page : *NME* August 1976 referenced in 'When Pop Stars Talk Politics: Clapton's Shocking Rant' Virgin Media www.virgin.net/music/pictures/profiles/when-popstars-get-political.php, accessed October 11 2006

¹¹⁴ Ed Vulliamy, *Blood and Glory* *The Observer* (March 4 2007)

elections and running battles at NF rallies such as Notting Hill in 1976 and Southall in 1979 bracketed Britain's most violent period of race relations.

In the summer of 1976 action by black youth, primarily directed towards the police, reached a zenith at the Notting Hill carnival when British T.V. carried the extraordinary spectacle of police lines breaking and running from an assault by teenagers armed with stones. Leaving 456 people injured and 60 people under arrest the Notting Hill Riots sufficiently impressed two idealistic white youths who were caught in the violence. Paul Simonon and Joe Strummer, who would both become founder members of The Clash, used TV imagery of the riots on the cover of their eponymous debut album.

For eye-witness Ed Vulliamy Notting Hill was more than just street violence as predominantly black crowds on Portobello Road chanted 'Soweto, Soweto'¹¹⁵ during a night that was both frightening and exhilarating yet 'empowering in its mayhem'¹¹⁶. Bragg contends that this experience had a seminal influence not just on the music of the Clash, but also on the whole punk movement and its political stance¹¹⁷.

During this period racism was 'on the British map' like never before as spokesmen such as Enoch Powell of the Conservative Party and Martin Webster of the NF were invited to contribute to discussions in newspapers and on radio and T.V.¹¹⁸. In between the Bowie and Clapton outbursts Powell had warned that Britain was 'being

¹¹⁵ Ed Vulliamy, Blood and Glory *The Observer* (March 4 2007)

¹¹⁶ Ed Vulliamy, Blood and Glory *The Observer* (March 4 2007)

¹¹⁷ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.215

¹¹⁸ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p.200

eroded and hollowed out from within' by 'alien wedges'¹¹⁹ and in May's elections the NF won 44,000 votes in Leicester and 38 per cent of the vote in Blackburn. Racism had become an overt issue and racist gags were everywhere from T.V. sitcoms such as *Love Thy Neighbour* to the 'Best Jokes' series in high street bookstores¹²⁰.

The Conservative Party then in opposition, also seemed anxious to steal the NF's fire by making race a key issue and the Labour Government did little to tackle what in time would be regarded as the 'institutional racism' within the police force and the law courts. This was symbolised in the high profile court case and acquittal of NF leader, John Kingsley Read, who was tried under the Race Relations Act. The case arose as a result of a speech he made in 1976 berating 'wogs and coons' and his reaction to the death of a young Sikh with the words 'one down, one million to go.' Surprisingly Kingsley Read avoided conviction on all counts to be advised by the judge 'I wish you well'¹²¹.

As a response to the rising spectre of racism in Britain RAR's crazy-paving of action and events up and down the country demonstrated how music and youth culture could activate and energise. The NF's 'Anti-Mugging March' in Lewisham on 13 August 1977, named after a police action rounding up black youths for supposedly stealing wallets was assailed and ultimately stopped by a counter-demonstration of some 10,000 anti-racists. This was one of the fiercest riots the capital had ever seen,

¹¹⁹ Enoch Powell referenced in 'When Pop Stars Talk Politics: Clapton's Shocking Rant', *Virgin Media* www.virgin.net/music/pictures/profiles/when-popstars-get-political.php, accessed October 11 2006

¹²⁰ Examples of these were *Best Asian, Black and Irish Jokes* etc.

¹²¹ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What: the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p.200

marking the first use of police riot gear on mainland Britain, and what Vulliamy described as ‘the NF's heaviest defeat on the streets’¹²².

As its momentum increased RAR was also endorsed by public figures such as Brian Clough and Terry Venables and its incarnation into the Anti Nazi League in November 1977 was ‘a critical moment in the battle against racism and the National Front’¹²³. The Anti Nazi League was set up as a popular front against fascism including high profile figures such as anti-apartheid activist Peter Hain and Labour MP Neil Kinnock. The new eye catching symbol of the ANL the *yellow arrow*, became an endlessly adaptable emblem, so everyone could be 'Against the Nazis', be it 'Skateboarders', 'Vegetarians' or ‘Musicians’.

Throughout the UK RAR had been grassroots in origin and therefore constituted not by party edict but by a ‘coalition of local cultural actors’ such as teachers, social workers, artists and musicians¹²⁴. One of the main attractions of RAR was its non-alignment, with the alliance acting as a coalition of disaffected voices fighting the endemic racism of seventies’ Britain. Saunders claims many of the key organisers in London RAR still saw themselves as part of the ’68 generation already being connected to cultural politics through their work in art or education.

Operationally therefore its success was a result of the intersection of musical with pre-existing political networks¹²⁵ and one of the group’s first activities was to arrange a

¹²² Ed Vulliamy, Blood and Glory *The Observer* (March 4 2007)

¹²³ Ed Vulliamy, Blood and Glory *The Observer* (March 4 2007)

¹²⁴ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p.278

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.278

massive rally in Trafalgar Square followed by a march through the East End of London culminating in a free open air RAR concert in Victoria Park, Hackney.

This 'ANL/RAR Carnival' of April 1978 was according to Billy Bragg 'a watershed' in terms of 'setting the tone for the decade to come'¹²⁶. For Bragg this event was a key moment in his own politicisation and also of the broader punk movement. He claims that many of those present on that day went on to support the Two Tone movement, the miners, anti-apartheid, Nicaragua, the GLC and formed the basis of Red Wedge in the mid 1980s¹²⁷.

As punk searched for meaning and purpose Garry Bushell believes that the ideological input from RAR and ANL gave it 'something to fight for'¹²⁸. Rather than its vitriolic rage being pointed everywhere and nowhere, RAR/ANL channelled its energy in a political direction as organisations from both ends of the political spectrum attempted to harness punk to their cause. Red Saunders was an active member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) who were a key organising influence in the creation of the ANL and through such activists exerted considerable influence in the early days of RAR.

John Blake's 'Rock's Swastika Revolution' reported how punk's penchant for swastikas was also attracting the attentions of the NF 'who were extremely active among audiences – and with the bands themselves'¹²⁹. NF leader Martin Webster was also quite candid in the 'racism' issue of Sounds of his desire to recruit 'robust young

¹²⁶ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.246

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.246

¹²⁸ Garry Bushell, *Youth Youth Youth, Sounds* (1986)

¹²⁹ John Blake, 'Rock's Swastika Revolution' *London Evening News* 7 May 1987 (quoted in Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p238

men' from all sections of society for his political agenda¹³⁰. NF newspapers such as the Bulldog even tried to put a fascist spin on punk songs such as White Riot by The Clash and White Noise by Stiff Little Fingers adding its support to the short lived 'Rock Against Communism' events of March 1979.

RAR's alliance with 'punk rock' benefited as much from being anti-authoritarian as it did from being anti-racist. A certain romance was associated with Afro-Caribbean youth, particularly in terms of their reputation for being confrontational with the police and a key figure in the punk-reggae fusion was Don Letts. As a musician and film-maker of Jamaican descent Letts would DJ both genres at his influential punk nights at London's The Roxy and he also played an important role in documenting the early punk movement through his *Punk Rock Movie* (1978) and *Punk : Attitude* (2005).

Key figures such as Joe Strummer and John Lydon were already both reggae fans so this fusion was in no way a usurpation of what the punk community regarded as authentic rebel music¹³¹. Chrissy Hind claims 'reggae was the backing track to the whole punk scene in London'¹³² and the affinity between the two genres was also complimented by Bob Marley's 'Punky Reggae Party' which claimed that punks and rastafarians were both 'rejected by society' and 'treated with impunity'¹³³.

¹³⁰ 'The Racism Issue', *Sounds* (March 25th 1978) pp 25-22

¹³¹ Marcus Gray, *Last Gang in Town The Clash* (Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation 2004)

¹³² Chrissy Hynde, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts*, Freemantle Media (2005)

¹³³ Bob Marley, *Punky, Reggae Party* Island (1977)

In the racially charged atmosphere of 70s Britain the tendency for punk bands to incorporate Jamaican reggae rhythms into their music was highly symbolic¹³⁴.

Through their lyrics

'Black man's got a lot of problems, but he doesn't mind throwing a brick

*White people go to school, where they teach you how to be thick'*¹³⁵

Strummer and Simonon restated the politics they had learned from Notting Hill the previous summer. The Clash perhaps more than any other punk band personified the anti-racist message taking their name from Culture's hit 'Two Sevens Clash' and releasing a cover of the Junior Murvin hit 'Police and Thieves'. Prior to punk Joe Strummer was familiar with the cultural underground of the late 60s and as a fan of Jamaican Reggae believed it was 'the only music still capable of carrying a political message'¹³⁶. For Strummer headlining RAR events, which still remain Britain's biggest post-war anti-fascist gatherings, was far more than an opportunistic marriage of political convenience.

The 1979 election which took place only days after the Southall riot and the death of school-teacher Blair Peach brought to a chilling close this era of high profile racial tension. Polling less than the expected average of 630 votes per candidate and less than 1 per cent of the popular vote it proved disastrous for the NF and on the streets at least, the NF had all but disappeared. If punk had helped to make politics less boring

¹³⁴ In addition to The Clash, The Ruts, Stiff Little Fingers, The Slits and ATV all used reggae beats and styles in certain songs

¹³⁵ The Clash, *White Riot* CBS (March 1977)

¹³⁶ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.56

its alliance with RAR 'did much to make racism unfashionable and thwart its rise in the UK'¹³⁷.

Within RAR Sabin maintains that punks carried the status of 'authentic voices' who would 'tell the truth'¹³⁸ about the state of the nation. Punk's obsession with itself as a discourse of authenticity and its DIY ethic magnified its desire to avoid 'selling out' to the temptations of commercial culture.

As punk was such 'a discourse of sincerity and passion'¹³⁹ for its creators, contributors and followers purposefully avoiding the seductions and compromises of commercialism was important to punk's self worth and represents a recurring theme throughout punk related literature. In fostering a belief in what is genuine, legitimate and real is better than other 'commercialised' and debased forms of culture even Saunders' incendiary letter of August 1977 referenced 'the rats and the money men who ripped off rock culture with their cheque books and plastic crap'¹⁴⁰.

In many ways however the short lived drama of the Sex Pistols personified the ultimate commercial contradictions of punk. In under 1 year the band had signed to three separate record labels, took great delight in accepting severance cheques from two of these and starred in a full length film. Even the band's name was cloned from a t-shirt in an attempt to promote McLaren and Westwood's King's Road shop *Sex*.

¹³⁷ David Widgery, *Beating Time Riot n Race n Rock n Roll* (Chatto and Windus 1986) p.102

¹³⁸ Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p.206

¹³⁹ Andy Medhurst, 'What Did I Get ?' in Roger Sabin, *Punk Rock So What : the cultural legacy of punk* (Routledge 1999) p. 227

¹⁴⁰ Red Saunders, Rock Against Racism Letter *Sounds* (August 14th 1978)

For McLaren the Sex Pistols offered potential as a performing advertisement and he made no attempt to conceal that he wanted 'to 'sell lots of trouser' off them'¹⁴¹.

McLaren's brazen attitude towards money, fashion and politics created a rift with Rotten who claimed 'Malcolm and Vivienne were really a pair of shystersselling anything to any trend that they could grab onto'¹⁴².

Throughout their short career the Sex Pistols never had a problem with the idea of making large amounts of money, nor any embarrassment about discussing their earnings and profits. Naming their film '*The Swindle*', their compilation album '*Flogging a Dead Horse*' and their 1996 comeback tour '*Filthy Lucre*' shows an acute awareness of their commercial collusion. Re-working Situationist slogans such as '*Cash from Chaos*' Coon believes the Sex Pistols embraced a 'love for the commercialisation of culture'¹⁴³ which other punk bands tended to shy away from.

As a keen music lover Bragg was initially suspicious about punk owing largely to what he believed to be the contrivance of the Sex Pistols¹⁴⁴. For Bragg McLaren's band had been too much of a manufactured creation and were therefore far less credible than bands such as The Clash. After this initial scepticism Bragg relates how he became converted to punk after experiencing a quasi-religious 'Road to Damascus' moment when he suddenly decided that it was *for real*.

In *The Progressive Patriot* he relates how this special moment occurred during a Clash gig after which 'the occupant of Seat 37 Row K of the Rainbow Theatre would

¹⁴¹ Tom Hibbert, 'Pernicious? Moi?' interview with Malcolm McLaren *Q Magazine* (August 1989)

¹⁴² John Robb, *Punk Rock An Oral History* (Elbury Press 2005) p.106

¹⁴³ Caroline Coon, TV documentary *Punk and the Pistols* (Arena 1995)

¹⁴⁴ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p. 231

never be the same again'¹⁴⁵. Bragg's experience demonstrates how as individuals we negotiate and establish our own personal meaning(s) from music. In his case this personal moment of realisation had a powerful and galvanising affect as he quickly developed an affinity with something bigger (*punk*) than either the band or the song in question.

For other observers their brazen honesty meant the Sex Pistols were the real deal from the very start. Julie Davis' *Punk* subtitled 'a book by the fans for the fans' details an interviewee who states

*'.. it seems that the only punks are the Sex Pistols ... who else has destroyed not one but two recording contracts. I'm not putting down the others (The Clash and the Vibrators), it's just that the system they claim they want to abolish is swallowing them up. The Sex Pistols won't let this happen to them'*¹⁴⁶.

From the very beginning, through its bands, followers and thinkers 'punk rock' was always aware of how the slick recuperation of the counter-cultural constituted a form of commodified rebellion. Captain Sensible of The Damned disapproved of punk groups signing to majors and when The Jam signed to Polydor remarked 'Paul was all about believing he was marvellous which was the entire opposite of what punk was all about, it was about 'no heroes''¹⁴⁷.

The much-discussed decision by The Clash to sign to CBS for £100,000 and retain their articulate political stance was a further example of attempting to balance

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p236

¹⁴⁶ Julie Davis, *Punk by the fans for the fans* (Millington 1977) p.13

¹⁴⁷ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.197

authenticity with commercial pressures. This juxtaposition proved difficult and Bragg believed the contradictions in maintaining their ideals whilst being rock stars was what ultimately tore the band apart¹⁴⁸.

From the moment of its sudden inception there was always a tangible feeling that punk's immediacy somehow contained the seeds of its own impending death. The label on the A side of the 7" single 'Alternative Ulster' by Stiff Little Fingers proclaimed '*punk is dead*' whilst the B side declared '*but we're still dying*'. Whilst some equate punk's hasty conclusion with the demise of the Sex Pistols during their controversial American tour in January 1978¹⁴⁹ other writers such as John Robb maintain that punk's most productive years came after 1979¹⁵⁰.

Despite its best efforts to the contrary punk followed a familiar sub-cultural narrative whereby an oppositional impulse is transformed into a marketable commodity. The Clash sung about the dangers of 'turning rebellion into money'¹⁵¹ whilst on a less serious note The Television Personalities achieved national airplay with their single 'Part Time Punks'¹⁵² which dealt with the commercial contradictions of trying to be part of a non-mainstream movement. The awareness amongst sections of the punk community that as a subculture it would become defused by mainstream society was borne out as its images and symbols were re-used and made safe. Unlike the sixties punk's anticipation of the inevitability of its own incorporation in certain respects gives the genre a defiant lustre rather than diminishing its importance.

¹⁴⁸ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.246

¹⁴⁹ Matt Davies, *Do It Yourself Punk Rock and the disalienation of International Relations in M I Franklin, Resounding International Relations On Music, Culture and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan 2005) p.118

¹⁵⁰ John Robb, *Punk Rock An Oral History* (Elbury Press 2005) p.99

¹⁵¹ Lyrics taken from The Clash, White Man in Hammersmith Palais, CBS (1978)

¹⁵² The Television Personalities, Part Time Punks Rough Trade (1978)

Matt Davies claim that the key contradiction in punk is ‘its ossification as a style against its dynamism as an ethic’¹⁵³ suggests re-writing punk as simply another stage in the commercial exploitation of youth ignores its complex cultural and political value. Punk’s legacy persists as an intellectual weapon with which to criticise and question, and as a route to inspire political activism. There are no limits to how far the process of cultural incorporation can go and no discernable point where authentic suddenly became inauthentic.

In defence of exemplary texts such as Sex Pistols’ songs and punk’s sub-cultural style its defiance and critique still retains considerable cultural power even as commercialism incorporates them and spins out its replicas. Within the relentless march of commercial culture facsimiles of oppositional cultural forms might be inevitable however this does not somehow obliterate the fact of their emergence, nor their continuing usefulness. Savage’s statement that ‘many of the people whose lives were touched by punk talk of being in a state of shock ever since’¹⁵⁴ will hold true whatever the levels of commercial expropriation.

As punk was so ‘determinedly *in the world* dealing in social issues and talking about politics’¹⁵⁵ it offered a route into politics and spur towards activism for many of its adherents. From amongst this number a few key voices harnessed the rage and cynicism to become immortalised as representatives of the punk generation. Forever wearing the pin-badge of punk authenticity figures such as Lydon, McLaren, Reid and

¹⁵³ Matt Davies, *Do It Yourself Punk Rock and the dis-alienation of International Relations in M I Franklin, Resounding International Relations On Music, Culture and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan 2005) p.119

¹⁵⁴ Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming* (Faber and Faber 1991) p.108

¹⁵⁵ Jon Savage, How Punk Bridged The Class Divide *The Independent* April 10th (2010)

Strummer continue as its most revered icons however the space they opened up allowed a profusion of other voices to be heard. Out of these it would however be unlikely candidates such as Geldof, Weller and Bragg, who armed with punk's legacy of questioning and defiance, would become the most influential voices of rock-politics during the following decade of the transition.

Chapter 4

The 1980s – The Decade of Polarity (the Triumph of Aesthetics over Ethics)

These departures have ‘broken the foundations of past solidarities and the resulting disenchantment goes hand in hand with the demise of the spirit of militancy and political participation’¹.

Starting with inner-city riots and ending with the violent Poll Tax demonstrations in London’s Trafalgar Square eighties’ Britain was a decade of polarisation and transition. With tensions running high it witnessed the gritty social and economic re-engineering of Thatcherism, record levels of unemployment and the violent upheaval of the miners’ strike. Paradoxically these took place alongside vast increases in the wealth emanating from the hastily deregulated City of London and accelerating economic expansion catapulting Britain to the top of the OECD growth list. In the transition from solid to liquid modernity these juxtapositions therefore make the decade one of both endings and beginnings, of winners and losers and in Garnett’s assessment one of ‘anger and apathy’².

On the decline was the power of trades unions, movement politics and many of the values of the traditional Labour Party, which seemed increasingly outdated against changing attitudes towards wealth, class and social mobility. On the rise was a new self-confidence in the value of free market economics, a push for financial

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *La Misere du Monde* (Paris Seuil 1993) p.631 quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.148

² Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy* (Vintage 2008) p.25

deregulation and an appetite for privatisation. In contrast to the grey images of the unemployment lines these changes spawned very different cultural markers such as yuppies and rich-lists and in so doing created a period in which the formula for achieving wealth, stardom and status seemed to become a lot more calculating and efficient.

These changes refracted throughout all spheres of social life and within the universe of popular music Harris states ‘the ideological battle lines were as clearly drawn as anywhere else’³. In the post-punk environment rigid polarities were drawn between those who still believed in politics and articulated this through the burgeoning ‘independent scene’ and those who jettisoned their ideals and were lost to the slick, mediatised, pro-business world of what Weller famously dubbed as ‘The New Pop Aristocracy’⁴.

Since pop’s explosion four British weeklies affectionately known as the ‘inkies’ had dominated the music press and cleverly articulated its’ relationship to politics. In a decade described by Douglas Booth as ‘a world of wannabes desperate for fame’⁵ the amount of coverage and the level of importance accorded to politics within the music press shifted dramatically. As punk quickly receded from the cultural landscape political content became increasingly displaced and diluted as glossy magazines, music videos, tabloid gossip columns and MTV became the predominant modes of transmission.

³ John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p.4

⁴ Paul Weller quoted in Paul Lester, *UNCUT Last Man Standing* available on <http://www.wellerworld.co.uk/Uncut.html> - accessed January 11 2009

⁵ Douglas Booth, *Worried About The Boy* The Eighties Season, TV drama about George O’Dowd from Culture Club Channel 4 (16th May 2010)

As popular music's interest in politics started to decline the British music industry started to recover much of the economic lustre it had enjoyed during the sixties. The 'second US invasion' resulted in record levels of business and propelled the record industry once again into a real home-grown economic success story even prompting statements of cross-party approval in the House of Commons⁶. This rekindled source of national pride was increasingly disseminated through tabloid gossip columns as aesthetic transformation was communicated through the arrival of high quality music videos. Gradually a pageant of new pop-celebrities such as Boy George, Adam Ant and Simon Le Bon emerged and took their positions in centre stage revelling in the adoration of the public gaze. As these new actors competed amongst themselves and jostled for prime position the more political figures such as Joe Strummer, Paul Weller and Billy Bragg, although significant within the music world, were edged towards the margins.

As the decade progressed these old dividing lines between these two camps in terms of ideology, outlook and political activism began to blur as music stars started to cross-pollinate through unifying events such as Live Aid (1985). As an important cultural landmark attracting its own *post-Live-Aid* tag⁷ this became the template for future awareness campaigns, fund raising events and heralded the evacuation of popular music from 'movement politics' of solid modernity towards the 'campaign politics' of liquid modernity. Live Aid was initiated by rock-stars as a political response to the refusal of the US and UK governments to increase their aid budgets⁸. I

⁶ Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.150

⁷ Talking not about music but social change with regard to South African attitudes towards homosexuality Radio Presenter Nicky Campbell talked of the era 'Post-Live Aid', BBC Radio 5 Live, (9.25 am June 11 2010)

⁸ Daniel Trilling, *The Art of Listening : Live Aid* The New Statesman (8 July 2010) available on <http://www.newstatesman.com/music/2010/07/live-aid-pop-money-ethiopia>

examine the irony of how an attempt to subvert prevailing aid orthodoxy ultimately promoted the mantra that capitalism was the solution rather than the cause of the world's problems.

Within this transition from *dissensus towards consensus* the Red Wedge Collective (1985-1990) stands out as a unique occasion when desperation pushed reluctant musical dissidents into the mainstream of politics. Red Wedge signified the disarray of the British left in providing a viable alternative to the self confidence of Thatcherism and represented the last gasps from within popular music to resist the arrival of 'celebrity liberalism'.

In the first half of what Blair described as 'a decade of *'who cares ?'*⁹ music with political content was rarely far from the public ear. Although the decade is remembered more for the rise of 'new pop' and videogenic acts it was also a time of 'idealism, anger and artistic adventure'¹⁰. Molotov Cocktails were thrown on Britain's streets during the summer of 1981¹¹ as the 'soundtrack to the riots' was provided by The Specials' number one single 'Ghost Town'. This mournful state-of-the-nation rant charted alongside UB40's '1 in 10' which lamented the growing ranks of unemployed as 'statistical reminders of a world that doesn't care'¹². With 'copy-cat' riots spreading throughout the UK Norman Tebbit's measured warning that 'decent people don't riot'¹³ received rapturous applause at the Conservative Party Conference

⁹ Tony Blair, election speech at Aylesbury Estate, Southwark (2 June 1997) quoted in Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy* (Vintage 2008) p.6

¹⁰ Neil Spencer, *Fraternising with the NME*, *The Observer* (3 July 2005) p 9

¹¹ Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy* (Vintage 2008) p. 96

¹² UB40, *One in 10* – DEP Records (1981) reached number 7 in the UK music charts

¹³ Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy* (Vintage 2008) p. 101

as The Beat's 'Stand Down Margaret' added to the growing chorus of anti-Conservative voices¹⁴.

In 1982 Paul Weller enjoyed his third consecutive UK number one with 'A Town Called Malice'¹⁵ a song aimed at the injustices of Thatcherism heralding his arrival into leftist politics¹⁶. His experiences campaigning alongside 'scoundrel' politicians in the general election the following year tainted his outlook towards the Labour Party. As an increasingly vocal critic of British politics over the following decades he refused New Labour use of his song 'The Changing Man' in their election campaign of 1997.

In the following year the quiet ponderous eulogy of Elvis Costello's Shipbuilding, recorded and released by Robert Wyatt, was a subtle condemnation of the Falklands conflict and brutal swipe at government policy. For Garry Mulholland the song exposed the inhumane consequences of Thatcherism as 'a matter of personal survival, doused in unbearable irony'¹⁷ and Garnett laments how Wyatt's 'magnificent protest song' was prevented of making the UK top thirty by 'the melodic but vacuous ballads' of Spandau Ballet and 'consumption conscious bands' such as Duran Duran¹⁸.

Britain's most enduring psychedelic band of the sixties Pink Floyd also voiced their disapproval with the concept album 'The Final Cut' subtitled '*a requiem for the post-*

¹⁴ The English Beat, *Stand Down Margaret*, a track off *Just Can't Stop It* album (Go Feet) reached 22 in the UK music chart (1980)

¹⁵ The Jam, *A Town Called Malice* Polydor Records (released January 1982)

¹⁶ Robert Sandall, *The Modfather Returns* interview *The Sunday Times* (September 2 2007)

¹⁷ Garry Mulholland, *This is Uncool* (Cassell (2002) p.186

¹⁸ Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy* (Vintage 2008) p.104

war dream’ targeted at the hardening sinews of Thatcherite Britain and the end of the post-war consensus. Dissent registered from the cover of Iron Maidens' Sanctuary featured the band’s roadie Eddie slaying an effigy of the Prime Minister and the first track on U2’s album *War*, ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ epitomised Bono’s turn towards greater political involvement. Coincidentally 1983 also witnessed Labour suffer its heaviest post-war defeat ¹⁹ and a young ex-barrister and ‘musician of sorts’ Tony Blair entered parliament for the first time.

In 1984 The Special AKA scored an international hit with their upbeat single ‘Free Nelson Mandela’, which became a distinctive theme tune for ANC rallies in South Africa. The song was covered by Elvis Costello as a tribute to Mandela on his 80th birthday celebrations and listed by Jennifer Thompson as one of the top twenty political songs of all time²⁰. Politics wasn’t just restricted to the reggae, rock and post-punk fraternities as even Boy George requested the removal of the Star of David from a photograph of the band in Smash Hits as it had become a symbol of oppression after Israel’s invasion of Lebanon²¹. Other hit protest songs from non-political bands such as ‘When Two Tribes’ by Frankie Goes to Hollywood ²² and Culture Club’s ‘War is Stupid’ reflected the polarised atmosphere of the early 80s which provided the perfect context in which political songwriters could garner purchase.

More politicised figures such as Strummer and Bragg helped transform the nihilism and controversy of the British punk explosion into a more focused and intellectually reasoned approach to politics. In 1983 Bragg emerged as a high profile voice of leftist

¹⁹ Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008)

²⁰ Jennifer Thompson, *Top Twenty Political Songs* New Statesman 25 March (2010) p.21

²¹ Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.58

²² Holly Johnson, Frankie Goes to Hollywood Radio 5 interview, commented ‘we were not a political band but at the time this was a protest song’ (November 11th 2009)

rock politics and ballads such as ‘Which Side Are You On ?’, ‘World Turned Upside Down’ and ‘The Great Leap Forward’ established him as Britain’s foremost musical activist. Blending folk, punk and protest he collaborated with REM, Wilco, Natalie Merchant, Leon Rosselson, The Levellers and Kirsty MacColl and performed cover versions of The Internationale and The Red Flag. Whilst he and Weller would both sign up to politics with a big ‘P’ through their Red Wedge activities it was however one of his mainstream contemporaries who became the key political yet ‘avowedly non-political’²³ voice of the post-punk decade.

This happened in 1985 when personalities from across the music spectrum crystallised their energy under the banner of Bob Geldof’s Live Aid project. Whereas Bragg’s Red Wedge sought to work within the political establishment Live Aid aimed to transcend and bypass mainstream politics. Live Aid achieved this by embodying traditional protest values such as spontaneity, anger, irreverence, frustration and grassroots activism however Geldof’s approach had serious consequences for politics. Live Aid and Red Wedge were therefore two very different yet highly significant events in the development of the political rock celebrity, which mark 1985 as a watershed for rock-star politics.

Before assessing the political implications and the timing of Live Aid and Red Wedge it is important to contextualise some of the broader social and political changes within Western society. The years leading up to 1985 were ones of increasing uncertainty as the music industry enjoyed massive revenue growth through the ‘new pop’ icons against an austere background of unemployment and deindustrialisation. These

²³ Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p.269

changes were connected to variations in social behaviours and the revolution in economic thinking of Thatcherism.

For Jenkins Thatcherism was not only a break with the past but a complete departure from the post-war sense of order and fair play²⁴. Prior to Thatcher's accession all the major politicians of the 60s and 70s had been tutored during the inter-war period so the spectres of mass unemployment and war were major influences on their policies, outlook and expectations. Conversely a different combination of post-war affluence, the permissive sixties, the Cold War and the decline of empire had moulded Thatcher's belief-systems.

Until 1979 there had at least been broad agreement between the main parties on how the country should be run however Thatcher saw this as a reflection of a debilitating and all too cosy post-War consensus. Seeing herself as a reforming radical she understood her mission as one of arresting decline before it destroyed Britain.

Proclaiming 'prosperity creates not the selfish society but the generous society'²⁵ Thatcher was pro-business, pro-individual, pro-British and rabidly anti-communist.

These preferences when combined with the free market ideology she had absorbed from Hayek and her close friend Sir Keith Joseph provided the missionary zeal to help Thatcher socially re-engineer any signs of creeping socialist fecklessness within Britain. Joseph's conversion to monetarism after what he described in 1974 as having endured 30 years of socialism had the force of a religious experience and Thatcher was foremost among his disciples.

²⁴ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.33

²⁵ John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher The Iron Lady* (Pimlico 2003) p.249

The importance of this new economic thinking is reflected in Thatcher's memoirs which name-checks 'monetarism' on one hundred and fifteen occasions whereas 'unemployment' is mentioned only fifteen²⁶. Although Thatcherism would dominate global politics for almost thirty years Bauman rightly suggests that support for the 'the triumph of rampant, individual and individualising consumerism over social solidarity and the 'moral economy' was not a foregone conclusion'²⁷. This is underlined by Pugh who reminds us that during the 1970s neo-liberalism was 'a radical alternative to the problems of the day'²⁸ and a significant ideological defence against socialism.

Transformational, unyielding and confrontational are adjectives that have been applied to both the individual and her style of leadership during 13 years as Prime Minister. This tends to give the impression that Thatcherism was an out of control juggernaut so it is useful to remind ourselves that her revolution only really got underway after she recovered from opinion polls which positioned her as the most unpopular prime-minister of all time. Only after being emboldened by the unexpected 'The Falklands Factor' could she finally fashion herself into the 'Iron Lady' she had always aspired to be. Her mission was also greatly assisted by disarray amongst the left and once The Labour Party pinned its hopes on an election manifesto dubbed the 'longest suicide note in history'²⁹ her revolution was truly underway.

²⁶ Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008)

²⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p. 41

²⁸ Jonathan Pugh, *What is Radical Politics Today ?* (Palgrave MacMillan 2009) p.2

²⁹ Gerald Kaufman, quoted in Rajini Vaidyanathan 'What did the Longest Suicide Note in History Say ?' *BBC News Magazine* available on <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/8550425.stm> (4 March 2010) accessed April 30 2010

Thatcherism is also associated with real-life celebrity-capitalists such as Richard Branson, who at 245 on the Forbes Rich List ³⁰ via his Virgin record mail-order business was a self-made millionaire by the time he was 24. Knighted in 1999 for 'services to entrepreneurship' Branson was once an idealistic hippy of the flower-power generation. By transferring concerns for the world into 'less elevated concerns for his own interests'³¹ he represents the 'the children of the sixties' who rejected idealism in favour of personal gain to become the voters of the eighties putting Reagan and Thatcher in power³².

As a confident, youthful role model Branson became one of the UK's most celebrated wealth creators gleefully mixing commerce with a playboy celebrity life style. His media friendly approach was altogether more relaxed than the stern be-suited magnates of previous generations and his public image suggested it was now possible to be wealthy, admired and cool all at the same time. Following Virgin's success during the punk era Branson started releasing company stock for a flotation. In true eighties style over 100,000 private investors applied for shares and Branson saw these shares as currency to 'make a bid for Thorn-EMI, the largest record label in the country'³³.

His ambition symbolizes both the entrepreneurialism of the decade and the speed at which the bastions of the solid industrial phase of the music industry were coming under attack from new arrivals. As Alex Ogg explains it is remarkable that an independent label founded only just over a decade previously was 'even able to

³⁰ Forbes Magazine, *Richard Branson (b. 1950)* www.forbes.com/lists/2006/10/2Y71.html (September 2008) accessed November 1988

³¹ Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy* (Vintage 2008) p. 222

³² Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in The Head* (Fourth Estate 1994) p.117

³³ Richard Branson, *Losing My Virginity* (Virgin 2009) p.396

contemplate such a takeover³⁴. Branson has always attracted detractors who claim he achieved wealth and status through ‘hippy camouflage’ however Branson has never denied an indifference to music relative to his enduring love of business and advancement³⁵.

Changing attitudes towards wealth and career became evident not only in business but in all areas of social life. A study by The American Council on Education³⁶ indicated that college freshmen had become more interested in status, power, and money than at any time since the early 1960s and for the first time ever ‘Business Management’ was the most popular major in American Universities.

In the UK Ian Jack’s interviews with a sample of Oxford University students, revealed many were already heavily preoccupied by matters of wealth and status. One interviewee confided that his sole ambition was ‘to be very, very rich ... as rich as one could possibly be’³⁷. Re-enforcing its global nature of Bauman highlights the work of Russell Jacoby who summarised his findings with generations of Polish students who ‘once dreamed of healing society’s ills but now dream of going to good law schools’³⁸.

Thatcherism encouraged Britons to adopt what Dillon has describes as ‘the American version of capitalism’³⁹ to legitimise the demise of the post-war economic consensus

³⁴ Alex Ogg, *Independence Days Edison and Light Bulbs* (Cherry Red Books 2009) p.49

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.49

³⁶ The American Council on Education Freshmen Study www.acenet.edu (in conjunction with UCLA 1980) accessed May 25th 2008

³⁷ Ian Jack, *Before The Oil Ran Out Britain in the Brutal Years* (Vintage 1997) pp 94– 98

³⁸ Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect : Utopian Thought for a Anti-Utopian Age* (Columbia University Press 2005) p.148 quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) p. 93

³⁹ Mick Dillon, *Imagining War Theory, Culture and Society* (Issue 5 2005) p.22

and position Britain as the vanguard of a social and economic revolution. Of the 22 OECD countries Britain's ranking for 'economic freedom' and 'entrepreneurialism' rose from fifteenth in 1980 to first in 1989⁴⁰. The eighties was a decade of transition and tension, when the ideological polarity of its participants made it difficult to imagine that any form of compromise would ever be negotiated⁴¹. The policy differences between the manifestos and ideologies of left and right were probably at their greatest in the eighties than in any other post-war decade. Consequently opinions still decode Thatcherism either as a much-needed structural economic readjustment, or as an unforgiving attack on society's most vulnerable people.

Prior to the 1980s the primary economic tool to manage the periodic booms and slumps of the international system was the tax and spend of Keynesian fiscal management. Based on Cambridge School economics and these mixed-economic policies of moderate state intervention even prompted President Nixon to proclaim 'we are all Keynesians now'⁴². Under Thatcherism however any appetite for a more equal distribution of wealth and a strengthening of social security was attacked and unravelled during the chancellorships of Nigel Lawson and Norman Lamont.

The change in emphasis from a welfare economy towards one based on the virtues of the free market espoused by Friedman's Chicago School represented a revolution in economic thinking and a challenge to the global post-war economic consensus.

Privatisation swept through Western economies as every institution was quickly

⁴⁰ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.142

⁴¹ Peter Hoskin, Labour Didn't Think This One Through Don't Take Us Back to the Eighties *The Spectator* (3 April 2010)

⁴² Milton Friedman, We Are All Keynesians Now *Time Magazine* (December 1965) available on <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,842353,00.html> accessed February 2008 – Nixon made various statements during his presidential campaign in 1972 which resulted in Friedman's phrase being commonly attributed to Nixon

examined for value and Lawson's Financial Services Act of 1986 transformed London's money market to mimic New York's model via the 'big bang'.

The Conservative Government felt the London banking sector had become over-regulated and believed the promotion of unfettered competition would quickly restore its once competitive edge. The quick transition to screen-based electronic trading increased activity and precipitated a complete alteration in the structure of the market. With its 'get rich quick' mentality and 'telephone number' bonuses Jenkins claims the City of London rapidly transformed from 'a place of aristocratic decorum to one in which tasteless wealth and the idealisation of money became the norm'⁴³.

After its post-war peak in 1979 UK union membership fell by a third to 9 million in 1990⁴⁴. At the root of this was the changing nature of the UK and the international economy and in the USA an even steeper trajectory of decline reveals that unionisation fell from 24.1% of the work-force in 1979 to 13.9% in 1998⁴⁵.

Thatcher's strong desire to 'tame the unions', which Gray posits as the number one goal of her premiership⁴⁶, was part of a broader attempt to re-structure not only the economy but to revolutionize the nation's social values. Through anti-union legislation, council house sales and waves of 'popular-privatizations' the British working class, once a repository of nostalgia and cultural romance, was re-engineered to become an aspirant bourgeoisie. The iconic struggle of the miners sandwiched between the Conservative landslides of 1982 and 1987 symbolized a fading resistance to the new religion of economic liberalism.

⁴³ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.142

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.142

⁴⁵ US State Department, *The Decline of Union Power AFL-CIO statistics*
http://economics.about.com/od/laborinamerica/a/union_decline.htm - accessed (May 1 2010)

⁴⁶ John Gray, *Gray's Anatomy* (Penguin 2010) p.6

Proclaiming that ‘if economics are the method then the object is to change the soul’⁴⁷ the philosophy of Thatcherism understood individuals as naturally acquisitive and that any attempts to stifle this healthy instinct should be resisted. Although Thatcher personified thoroughly traditional values such as thrift and hard-work she also legitimised greed by justifying tax breaks for the wealthy and creating a discourse which emphasised incentives for the work-shy. By attacking those who ‘driveled and drooled’ over sympathetically about the underprivileged, she consistently denigrated any viewpoints from which greed could be attacked⁴⁸.

Whilst Thatcherism adopted a hard-line towards the poor there was a noticeable softening of attitudes towards the rewards of the ‘deserving rich’. Her encouragement for everyone to participate in the great adventure of capitalism represents a big step towards the full-scale commercialising ethos, which would pervade every aspect of British culture by the end of the century. For Bauman Thatcher’s infamous catchphrase ‘there was no such thing as society’ was simultaneously ‘a shrewd reflection on the changing nature of capitalism, a declaration of intent and a self fulfilling prophecy’⁴⁹.

Thatcher’s programme of privatisation and deregulation was revered by Reagan and admired by John Howard as Britain surged to become Europe’s most dynamic economy. Reagan’s evangelistic conversion to the wonders of neo-classical economic thinking was demonstrated during his State of the Union Address in 1982.

⁴⁷ Margaret Thatcher, Interview *Sunday Times* (3rd May 1981)

⁴⁸ Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy* (Vintage 2008) pp. 234-5

⁴⁹ Quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 64

Here he explained to his fellow Americans that when he addressed representatives of developing nations he proudly proclaimed that he no longer

'apologised for America's wealth but championed the strength of the free marketplace system and how that system could help them realize their aspirations for economic development and political freedom' ⁵⁰.

'Free-market' ideals and neo-liberal thinking swept through institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. As Latin American and South-East Asian economies moved in the direction of 'open markets' consistently left-leaning countries such as India also gravitated away from models of state control towards Western market-led strategies.

Pugh cites Thatcher as the key political instigator who helped develop neo-liberal capitalism as the 'organising framework for society'⁵¹. Through her alliance with Reagan in conjunction with this network of international institutions Thatcher was critical in promoting the 'liberation of corporate power'⁵². Her contribution towards the 'Washington Consensus' and what was little short of a raging obsession with privatisation in Russia and its former satellites in the 90s, should not therefore be under-estimated.

In addition to being a stalwart supporter of the 'magic of the marketplace' Reagan's Presidency embodied another key constituent of the decade – the fascination with

⁵⁰ Ronald Reagan, State of the Union Speech (January 1982) available on web resource <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/medialist.php?presid=40> – accessed May 2007

⁵¹ Jonathan Pugh, *What is Radical Politics Today?* (Palgrave MacMillan 2009) p.2

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.2

celebrity. Described by West and Orman as ‘the ultimate in celebrity political participation’⁵³ Reagan’s electoral successes combined a masterful use of television and radio with a ‘great sense of pseudo-event theatrics’⁵⁴. Joshua Gamson believes the acquisition by political leaders of ‘the traits, conversational codes and presentational skills’ developed by Hollywood was epitomised by the arrival of Reagan⁵⁵.

Demonstrated most vividly during the live TV Presidential debate of 1980 Reagan famously delivered the humorous ‘*there you go again*’ one-liner when questioned by Jimmy Carter on the subject of healthcare. After the debate Carter admitted that he felt Reagan’s comment was so disarming that it changed the dynamics of the whole event⁵⁶.

In the following campaign there followed the ‘verbal smack-down he casually laid on the youthful and unsuspecting Walter Mondale in 1984

‘I want you to know that I will not make age an issue of this campaign ... (pause for effect). I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent’s youth and in-experience ... ’ Reagan then paused for audience approval before flashing a confident grin to the cameras⁵⁷.

Labelled by both friends and enemies as ‘The Great Communicator’ Reagan’s use of plain, easy to understand language and endlessly quotable maxims was part of a P.R.

⁵³ Darrell M. West and John Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Longman 2002) p.61

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.46

⁵⁵ Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame* (University of California Press 1994) p.66

⁵⁶ Meenal Vambukar, TV Debate Moments Carter v Reagan 1980 *New Statesman* (15 April 2010) p.22

⁵⁷ Frank Luntz, White House Favourite taps into Hunger for Change *News of the World* (June 8 2008) p.21

offensive that suited the public mood. From engineering a boycott by 62 countries of the Moscow Olympics over the expansionary impulses of what he famously dubbed the 'Evil Empire'⁵⁸ to demanding that Mr Gorbachev 'tear down this wall' Reagan remains one of the most popular and charismatic presidents of the twentieth century⁵⁹.

In stark contrast only days after Reagan's inauguration the less media-friendly Michael Foot led the Labour Party into the UK general election. As a lifelong asthmatic already past the official retirement age, the 'donkey jacket wearing'⁶⁰ Foot proved to be an easy target for the press. As one of the last party leaders whose self-worth rested more on intellectual credentials than public persona, Foot's contemptuous attitude towards the image-makers merely compounded the problem. Consistently derided for what they saw as his bohemian eccentricity Foot's portrayal as an old school romantic radical was nothing short of an un-covenanted boon for the Thatcherites fostering the impression that Labour seemed 'old, out of touch and irrelevant'⁶¹.

Image-building in politics is obviously nothing new as spectacle, pomp, charisma and rhetoric have long been part of the aura of political power however Reagan's re-election in 1984 was unique as nearly all the polls showed that the electorate disagreed with him on almost all major issues of social, political and foreign policy. Reagan however seemed able to make mistake after mistake yet miraculously avoid unpopularity and was rarely ever called to account.

⁵⁸ Ronald Reagan, speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando Florida (March 8 1983) on www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganevilempire.htm and accessed March 3 2009

⁵⁹ Darrell M. West and John Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Longman (2002) p.46

⁶⁰ Foot was famously attacked for wearing a "donkey jacket" at the wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day.

⁶¹ Austin Mitchell, *4 Years in the Death of the Labour Party* (Methuen 1983) p.52

Editor of *The Nation* Carey McWilliams reflects how Reagan's image could be deployed to almost instantaneously demolish any narrative or criticism that anyone cared to construct⁶². The 'teflon president' as he became affectionately known, left office riding high on a wave of public affection even though senior members of his administration were found guilty of serious infringements of legal procedures.

If celebrity appeal became a pre-condition for attaining political power, then the increasing importance of a clear and well thought out media management strategy to retain it was captured in Christopher Lasch's '*Culture of Narcissism*'⁶³. Lasch theorised that culture was increasingly reliant on the media to define its needs and the rise of consumerism gave rise to a new type of narcissistic personality structure, which had led to a fear of commitment and lasting relationships.

A controversial figure pouring scorn on the whole spectrum of mainstream political thought, Lasch attacked both progressivism and feminism. As a result various quotations from his book appeared under the headline '*emotional fascism*' on the sleeve of Elvis Costello's 'Armed Forces' album. For Lasch the narcissistic personality structure also gave rise to a boundless admiration for fame and celebrity and a growing obsession for 'soft news', which began to emerge as politics increasingly gave way to lifestyle⁶⁴.

⁶² Carey McWilliams, The Politics of Personality *The Nation* (August 14 2003) available on <http://www.thenation.com/doc/19621027/mcwilliams> - accessed May 1 2010

⁶³ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (London 1980) p.44

⁶⁴ Kathy Koch, Can the media regain the public's Trust *The CQ Researcher* (1998) available on <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/index.php> accessed May 2007

For Cashmore this shift was epitomised by USA Today's 1982 launch, which was big on graphics and entertainment with limited reporting on government and world politics⁶⁵. Kathy Koch believed its commercial success encouraged other newspapers to follow a formula whereby political news was diminished or written in a more personalised way. This and the arrival of 'celebrity magazines' provided another visible clue of new consumer trends that would come to fruition in the next decade⁶⁶.

As celebrity fascination became more prominent it was symbolic how the decade commenced with the shooting of John Lennon by a 'deranged attention-seeking fan', Mark Chapman⁶⁷. In his final interview Lennon commented 'the world is no longer like the sixties'⁶⁸ and his killer's craving for celebrity status only served to underline this. On his way to the police station Chapman's comment 'I am no longer nobody ... I have killed the biggest somebody'⁶⁹ suggested to O'Hagan that this killing was 'the first, and most chilling, manifestation of the dark side of our obsession with celebrity'⁷⁰.

The exit of Britain's most political rock-icon coinciding with the arrival of Reagan as America's least politicised president offers an unusual conjunction in the astrology of the political celebrity. According to Paul McCartney Lennon will always be remembered for his 'unique contributions to art, music and world peace'⁷¹ whereas

⁶⁵ Ellis Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture* (Routledge 2006) p.210

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.210

⁶⁷ Sky TV, *John Lennon The Death of A People's Hero* (Sky Arts TV Channel May 2008)

⁶⁸ Sky TV, *John Lennon Story* (Sky Arts TV Channel April 2008)

⁶⁹ Sky TV, *Killing of John Lennon : TV Documentary* (Sky TV Arts February 17 2007)

⁷⁰ Sean O'Hagan, 50 moments that shaped popular music history *The Observer* (10th July 2007)

⁷¹ Paul McCartney, Playboy Magazine interview *Playboy Magazine* (December 1984) available on www.music.indiana.edu/som/courses/rock/paulint.html retrieved July 2008

Reagan is more renowned for well-publicised gaffes and one-liners rather than any lasting contribution to politics.

In the UK this softening of attitudes towards wealth and celebrity became most prominent in Thatcher's third term in office, during what Marr describes as 'the years of hubris'⁷². As Britain's 'young urban professionals' went on to play a prominent role in the social and cultural discourse of the decade⁷³ the pulse of wealth and celebrity was reflected on television and in the cinema. Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* offered a vivid portrayal of eighties' excess through the unscrupulous, asset-stripping, corporate raider Gordon Gecko (Michael Douglas). Championing the maxim 'greed is good' the sharp-suited Gecko personified the ruthless self-righteousness of excessive ambition. The 'Greed is Good' aphorism was actually taken from a speech made by the successful financier Ivan Boesky⁷⁴ who had amassed a personal fortune of US\$200 million by betting on corporate takeovers. Described by Time magazine as 'one of America's richest and savviest stock-market speculators'⁷⁵, Boesky was jailed for insider dealing the following year.

In the UK wealth addiction from the opposite end of the social scale was parodied through Harry Enfield's 'Loadsamoney'. Described by Chris Rojek as 'the gross embodiment of Essex man'⁷⁶ his caricature became an overnight sensation after debuting on Saturday Night Live enjoying a UK chart hit with a spin-off single.

⁷² Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008)

⁷³ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.211

⁷⁴ Ivan Boesky, *Greed is Good* speech made at the University of Berkeley (1985) available via http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Boesky - accessed May 10 2008

⁷⁵ Ivan Boesky, *Ivan 'The Terrible' Boesky* *Time Magazine* (The Time Magazine Archive December 1st 1986) accessed June 2008

⁷⁶ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London 2001) p.23

Enfield contemplated legal action against Kelvin MacKenzie⁷⁷ over The Sun's misuse of the *Loadsamoney* catchphrase however fearing this might generate publicity for the newspaper he relented and dropped the character from his act. Although it was unlikely that this comedic depiction would be misinterpreted as a *positive* role model for greed, 'Loadsamoney' epitomises the vulgar materialism popularised by the Conservative Government.

This attitudinal shift was also clearly in evidence in popular music as colourful personalities such as Boy George and Sting jettisoned the ideals of punk to become instant millionaires. Clive James' observation as 'how the rebellion becomes the aristocracy with such terrific speed'⁷⁸ was typified in the playboy antics of Adam Ant and John Moss.

Bauman's notion of the 'triumph of aesthetics over ethics'⁷⁹ becomes increasingly evident in how popular music was consumed and performed. Its vibrancy was greatly assisted by the music video, which stands as the most important technological development of the decade and was central to both MTV and the international success of the British music industry.

With today's profusion non-stop 24-hour music stations it is surprising that MTV's in 1981 launch was largely a 'non-event'⁸⁰. Restricted by a limited supply of music videos the channel initially only made haltering and uncertain steps until 1983 when a

⁷⁷ Peter Chippendale and Chris Horrie, *Stick it Up Your Punter The Rise and Fall of the Sun* (Mandarin 1992) pp. 239-40

⁷⁸ Clive James, Nick Hornby Interview *Sky Arts 1* (5.30pm 4 March 2010)

⁷⁹ Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001) p.21

⁸⁰ Eric Nuzum, *Parental Advisory Music Censorship in the USA* (Perennial 2001) p.83

deluge of videos from bands such as The Police, Culture Club, Adam and The Ants and Duran Duran.

Popularised by the Rolling Stone cover story of July 1983 which proclaimed '*Great Britain invades America's music and style ... Again!*' the 'Second British Invasion'⁸¹ saw eighteen British singles chart in the American top forty, beating the previous record of fourteen in June 1965⁸². For Smash Hits editor Mark Rimmer this was 'the year of megastars'⁸³ when personalities such as Simon Le Bon and Boy George were afforded levels of attention usually only granted to royalty. In creating their own vast personal fortunes they were instrumental in enabling MTV to entertain a newly accessible youth demographic.

Duran Duran are the band perhaps most strongly associated with the visual aesthetic and the conspicuous values of this second invasion. As the first group 'to ride in on a video wave'⁸⁴ Lister believes their international success makes them 'the toast of the Thatcher decade'⁸⁵. As the most successful of the New Romantic band Duran Duran sold more than 85 million records charting 21 singles in the *Billboard* Hot 100 and 30 in the Top 40 UK Singles Chart⁸⁶. Video was an important factor in their success as they became almost an overnight sensation with 'Hungry Like the Wolf'. At the time

⁸¹ Wikipedia, *The Second British Invasion of 1982-1985* available on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Invasion - accessed July 7th 2008

⁸² Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.64

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.64

⁸⁴ Serge Denisoff, *Tarnished Gold : The Record Industry Revisited* (Transaction Publishers 1986) p. 365

⁸⁵ David Lister, Pop's aristocracy but no punk at Queen's concert *The Independent* (Wednesday 27 February 2002)

⁸⁶ Duran Duran biography, *Duran Duran website* available on resource http://www.duranduran.com/wordpress/?page_id=14000 accessed July 7th 2008

the record was on its third American release and the band were actually selling more records in Portugal than they were in the UK⁸⁷.

In the US radio-stations had always been the medium whereby songs gained popularity, however as a result of MTV they were suddenly receiving requests for songs and bands they hadn't even heard of. Videos disrupted the industry as it helped bands reach a new and younger audience that unlike its predecessors cared little for the politics and the pretension of the rock tradition. Spending over \$250,000 shooting the band's following video⁸⁸ EMI concurred with Rolling Stone's suggestion that the videogenic Duran Duran were 'a natural for music television'.

The producers quickly discovered that 'the easiest way to make a band look interesting was to make them look rich'⁸⁹ so the video featured yachts, champagne and beautiful people re-enforcing singer Le Bon's ostentatious lifestyle. For Napier-Bell its success was a 'tribute to marketing and a triumph of packaging over substance'⁹⁰.

By enabling record companies to market and package bands to a greater degree than ever before, MTV's Brian Graden, claims that MTV amounted a 'cultural and musical revolution'⁹¹ changing the relationship between pop-stars, audiences and record companies. Whereas rock-stars had often thought of themselves as disagreeable,

⁸⁷ Dave Rimmer, *Like punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.74

⁸⁸ James Slack, *Did Video Kill The Radio Star ? MTV 20 Years On Rock's Backpages* (28 July 2001) available on www.rocksbackpages.com/ accessed December 11 2008

⁸⁹ Dave Rimmer, *Like punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.77

⁹⁰ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.256

⁹¹ Brian Graden, *MTV celebrates 20 years* (BBC News August 1 2001)

rebellious and uncompromising in the video age Napier-Bell insists that ‘pop stars needed to be instantly pleasing’⁹².

With its slick demographic marketing Steven Seidman suggests however that only a certain type of this ‘instantly pleasing’ imagery found a natural home on MTV. Pulling together a number of studies on gender and racial stereotyping Seidman reveals that MTV represented over 90 per cent of police officers and business executives as men whilst women were typically cheerleaders, secretaries and librarians. Similarly over 95 per cent of characters of colour were portrayed as athletes, entertainers or in non white-collar roles⁹³.

As a concept MTV has been criticised for devaluing the importance of music and replacing it with a visual aesthetic and a commercialising ethos. Steven Levy suggests its greatest achievement was to ‘coax rock’n’roll into an arena where you can’t distinguish between entertainment and the sales pitch’⁹⁴.

The aesthetics and underlying philosophy of MTV provided an alternative to the serious and highly politicised music press of the early 80s. Marcus Gray believes a positive effect of punk was raising the standard of debate so the era marked the pinnacle in music writing and rock journalism⁹⁵. The four weeklies, *Record Mirror*,

⁹² Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.269

⁹³ Steven Seidman, An investigation into sex role stereotyping in music videos *Journal of broadcasting and electronic media* (spring 1992) pp 209-215

⁹⁴ Steven Levy, Ad Nauseum : How MTV sells out Rock and Roll *Rolling Stone Magazine* (December 1983) p.33

⁹⁵ Marcus Gray, *Return of the Last Gang in Town* (Helter Skelter 1995) p.417

Melody Maker, Sounds and New Musical Express quizzed, dissected and contextualised rock and created a sense of a genuine subculture so 'it was no longer enough to talk about drugs, groupies and guitar solos ... musicians whether new or old were expected to have opinions'⁹⁶.

Rising MTV figures and the success of glossy music magazines contrast markedly with the decline of the traditional music press. In less than five years Smash Hits rose from obscurity to outstrip the combined figures of the four *inkies*⁹⁷. The lure of popular music attracted Robert Maxwell and Rupert Murdoch who entered a bidding war for the services of John Blake whose daily columns of music trivia and celebrity scandal had proved enormously successful in the London *Evening News* and *Standard*. Fleet Street soon adopted this style of reporting entering an era of pop gossip to catch young readers through a mixture of sex and scandal.

A casualty of this re-engineering of formats, attitudes and expectations was the oppositional critique of 'punk', which splintered into various factions. US punk, which had always been more underground than in the UK, fractured into sub-genres such as 'hardcore', 'straight-edge' and 'no-wave'. Still ignored by the mainstream press Roger Miret believes this era amounted to 'a gigantic underground movement, a sort of secret history'⁹⁸ as bands such as Minor Threat, Husker Du and Black Flag set up touring and record trading networks across the continent.

Ian Mackaye's Dischord Records and his influential Washington DC outfit Fugazi epitomise the movement's anti-commercialising ethos. By refusing to produce any

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.441

⁹⁷ Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.58

⁹⁸ Roger Miret, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005)

merchandise other than records, or appear in magazines carrying any tobacco or alcohol advertising or sexualised images, they were according to Thurston Moore ‘the counter-culture to the counter-culture’⁹⁹.

In the UK punk sentiment continued to be expressed through icons such as Bragg, Strummer and Weller who baulked at the de-politicisation of the ‘New Pop’. Musically this was delivered through a fluid mixture of post-punk sounds that for some marked a musical progression yet to others a capitulative retreat. A dedication to activism and radical politics persisted amongst ‘anarcho-punk’ bands such as The Mob, Flux of Pink Indians and Conflict whose attitudes and anti-capitalist rhetoric still endures amongst anti-globalisation protestors. An absolute contempt for stardom and the trappings of commercialism ensured most of these bands retreated into anti-commercialist bunkers and even further off the public radar¹⁰⁰.

One exception to this was Crass who actively sought controversy through their confrontational poetry, lyrics and artwork and achieved certain notoriety when they were accused by the Times of being ‘in league with the Kremlin’¹⁰¹. For a time their home brewed stencil based anarcho-promotional material was practically the punk DIY scene of the day and wholly at odds with the anti-political leanings of Oi bands such as the 4 Skins and the Business. Championed by Garry Bushell Oi projected an aggressive non-political machismo and through the mantra ‘Punk’s Not Dead’ seemed to express a nostalgic desire for nationhood and tribalism amidst a sub-cultural chaos they refused to understand.

⁹⁹ Thurston Moore, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005)

¹⁰⁰ George Berger, *The Story of Crass* (Omnibus Press 2006) p.66

¹⁰¹ Chris Heard, *Rocking Against Thatcher BBC Online*

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/music/3682281.stm> January 2008

In this post-punk flux Malcolm McLaren orchestrated a highly unusual solo music career introducing hip-hop/break dance culture to British audiences whilst Adam Ant (for whom McLaren had performed a £1,000 *attitude makeover*) became the new poster boy for the teen market as ‘Prince Charming’. As a response to these cultural re-adjustments ex-Smash Hits editor David Rimmer published ‘As If Punk Never Happened!’¹⁰², examining amongst other things McLaren’s switch from businessman to musician and Adam’s ‘self conscious move from the margins to the mainstream’¹⁰³.

Ignoring the traditional music press and going directly to Fleet Street Adam indulged himself in daily gossip columns and his throwaway comment that politics was ‘the single most uninspiring, unemotional, insensitive activity on this planet’ was rebuked in *Record Mirror* by Paul Weller who responded ‘... that show business crap that Adam Ant wants to bring back ... just makes me want to puke’¹⁰⁴. Patenting the ‘Prince Charming’ image through the Merchandising Corporation of America Adam did his legal best to control every badge, T-shirt, poster or sticker bearing his name so whereas The Beatles lost millions through inept management and pirate merchandising the stars of the eighties set up merchandising and publishing companies right from the start.

Rimmer suggests ‘a good business head was suddenly more important than the ability to play an instrument’¹⁰⁵ as the punk generation absorbed its methods, learnt its lessons yet ditched its ideals. Boy George for instance stated that he far preferred the

¹⁰² Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.65

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.8

¹⁰⁴ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001)p.66

¹⁰⁵ Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.11

American way of doing business because in England ‘everyone is trying to make money but they are just ashamed to admit it’¹⁰⁶. Similarly band member John Moss¹⁰⁷ after auditioning for The Clash rang Bernie Rhodes explaining ‘I don’t believe all this political shit and I don’t believe you even believe it’¹⁰⁸. Dressed in Italian suits and driving high performance sports cars Moss seemed ‘more like a successful young businessman than an internationally famous pop star’¹⁰⁹. So whilst for Weller their adulation of celebrity and sales royalties was abhorrent the New Pop’s ‘wasn’t in the least bit guilty about it’¹¹⁰.

The Clash was the only remaining first generation punk band that had tried to stay steadfastly loyal to their political roots. Described by McCarthy as ‘thinking man’s jobs’¹¹¹ their leftist stance, personified by their use of Red Brigade imagery and political sloganeering, had always been unique amongst the nihilism and anti-politics of their contemporaries.

For Don Letts The Clash were the most political UK punk band so whereas ‘the Sex Pistols made you want to bash your head against the wall, the Clash would give you a reason to do it’¹¹². Combining political ‘iconoclasm with a swaggering gang mentality’¹¹³ biographer Marcus Gray describes them as the ‘greatest band of the post

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.63

¹⁰⁷ John Moss turned had played with Adam Ant in the Nips turned down a job in the Ramones and toured with punk band London and was a good example of the punk – New Romantic cross over

¹⁰⁸ Dave Rimmer, *Like Punk Never Happened* (Faber and Faber 1985) p.32

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹¹¹ Jackie McCarthy, *White Riot Seattle Music Weekly* (December 1999)

¹¹² Don Letts, *The Story of The Clash* Sky Arts Channel (9.00pm August 12th 2008)

¹¹³ Marcus Gray, *Return of the Last Gang in Town* (Helter Skelter 1995) p.441

sixties era' and around the time of the release of London's Calling NME journalist Danny Kelly claims they 'were the most important band in the world'¹¹⁴.

Pioneering the fusion of punk with reggae, dub and funk through highly original albums such as Sandanista and Combat Rock¹¹⁵ Stuart Warder claims 'for some The Clash are still the only band that ever mattered'¹¹⁶. Strummer's refusal to appear on 'Top of The Pops' or to allow their music to be used on TV commercials built a reservoir of respectability and 'The Clash Myth' is still being developed and recycled through waves of re-releases, tribute albums, band biographies and magazine retrospectives¹¹⁷.

Following their high profile RAR appearances the band supported the miners, showed solidarity with national liberation movements and Strummer continued to support causes such as the striking London firemen until his untimely death in December 2002. Their attitude as much as their music won The Clash the accolade of Britain's 'most influential punk band' and entry to the rock'n'roll hall of fame in 2003. Their legacy is well documented in 'The Future is not yet Written' where Bono admits their musical and political influence was largely responsible for the formation of U2.

A far less romantic view of The Clash was provided by the outspoken and 'political' celebrity in waiting Bob Geldof whose band The Boomtown Rats had been acquired by Ensign in 1977 for £1,000,000 prompting his untimely boast that the Rats 'had

¹¹⁴ Danny Kelly quotation from NME appearing in Marcus Gray, *Return of the Last Gang in Town* (Helter Skelter 1995) p.422

¹¹⁵ From their third album London's Calling (CBS :1979) onwards The Clash experimented with different sounds and ideas. They fused punk with reggae and incorporated jazz and funk rhythms on later albums Sandanista (CBS :1980) Combat Rock (CBS :1982).

¹¹⁶ Stuart Warder, *The Story of The Clash* Sky Arts Channel (9.00pm August 12th 2008)

¹¹⁷ Clinton Heylin, *From The Velvets to the Voidods* (Penguin Books 1993) p.30

signed for more than the Beatles or the Rolling Stones'¹¹⁸. With statements claiming they just wanted to 'get rich, get famous and get laid'¹¹⁹ Geldof incensed the music press and irked Strummer who labelled the Boomtown Rats as 'the Bay City Rollers of punk'¹²⁰.

These mocking jibes of in-authenticity provoked a lively feud between Geldof and what he described as the 'the punk establishment – as embodied by the NME and bands like The Clash'¹²¹. Geldof complained that 'the Stalinist music press'¹²² saw the commercial success of The Boomtown Rats as 'evidence of capitalist deviancy' and his outspoken manner as proof he was 'on an ego trip to which everyone else in the pop world was exempt'¹²³. Whereas some bands oozed authenticity Geldof openly admits that in terms of street credibility, what he believed to be the most important and un-quantifiable asset to possess in music, 'his band scored a perfect zero'¹²⁴.

For Geldof The Clash 'were total hype from beginning to end'¹²⁵ and in songs such as 'Looking After Number One' he claims The Boomtown Rats made far more meaningful political statements than the 'sheer cant and rhetoric' of The Clash¹²⁶. Taking issue with Strummer's inane tokenism as 'a true son of the proletariat' whilst living in Regents Park with socialite Sebastian Conran he mocked the Clash lyric

¹¹⁸ Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p.146

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 156

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 162

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 159

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160

‘Sten-Guns in Knightsbridge’¹²⁷ as being the equivalent of ‘Gucci socks and Harrod’s gun cases’¹²⁸.

Geldof’s criticisms reflect Chris Salewicz’s observation that by continuing to be political in the post-punk environment The Clash seemed like ‘loners whose moral sense is one of the last relics of another time’¹²⁹. Salewicz’s comments tap into a growing awareness that notions of ethical or principled behaviour were fast becoming incongruous with the deepening acceptance of consumer culture. Fast forward ten years to 1991 and the surprising level of muted acceptance which greeted the posthumous appearance of ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go’ in a Levi’s commercial and the re-release of ‘Rock The Casbah’¹³⁰ topping the charts, reveals the decade as one in which moral co-ordinates and expectations shifted significantly.

It is somewhat ironic however not unsurprising that it was the a-political Bob Geldof and not Joe Strummer who turned out to be the more pivotal figure in the narrative of the political rock celebrity. In part it was Geldof’s non-political stance and deliberate distancing from the ideological polarity of eighties’ politics that paved the way for his unlikely role as creator and spokesperson for Live Aid.

Joining the old guard’s fight against the rising tide of apathy and ignorance was a whole new generation of musicians who coalesced under the moniker of what became known as ‘indie’ music. Through labels such as Rough Trade and bands such as The

¹²⁷ The Clash, lyric from the song 1977 appearing on the b/w White Riot single (CBS 1977)

¹²⁸ Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p.160

¹²⁹ Chris Salewicz, *Last Gang in Town The Clash* (Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation 2004) p.440

¹³⁰ The Clash, *Should I Stay / Rock The Casbah* (CBS 1991) Originally released in 1982 and re-released in 1991 reaching Number Fifteen in UK Chart

Smiths, John Harris believes ‘the leftfield of UK indie music’ was a rejection of all kinds of 80s dominant cultural norms, slick commerciality and swaggering masculinity¹³¹.

Like any stylistic or cultural attribute ‘*indie*’ is difficult to define evolving as popular shorthand to describe counter-cultural trends seen in music, literature and film¹³².

Used to describe both the artists and their labels, Bob Stanley sees its lo-fi ambience and ‘second-hand charm’ as a reaction to the synthetic music of the ‘non post-punk subversives’ such as Howard Jones and Nik Kershaw and the ‘no jobs, no cash, no choice’ reality of Thatcher’s Britain¹³³.

Indie therefore offered an ideological alternative to the denizens of the ‘New Pop’ whose delight in their newfound wealth was ‘fully in keeping with the Thatcherite ethos’¹³⁴. Indie represented solidly un-Thatcherite principles and a belief that love of music should always take precedence over the balance sheet. Spearheaded by bands such as Jesus and Mary Chain and The Smiths through DIY fanzines and plastic bagged 45’s, Morrissey urged *indie* bands to avoid the allure of the music video in order to ‘get back to the pure music’¹³⁵. With non-profit venues such as London’s The Living Room, Manchester’s Hacienda and The Hull Adelphi, Stanley believes that a

¹³¹ John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p.4

¹³² Paul Morley, *Twee : Paul Morley's Guide to Musical Genres*, BBC Radio 2 (June 10 2008) available on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00bz94n> - Morley cites the release of NME's C86 tape as a key moment in the naming of the genre. This era-defining compilation cassette reflected the first ever publication of a weekly indie singles and album charts during the week ending January 19th 1980. The adoption of indie charts in the 80's UK music press stimulated interest in the genre and its origins. The free cassette featured bands such as The Pastels and the Shop Assistants and was a belated follow up to the 1981 NME release C81.

¹³³ Bob Stanley, *C86 compilation CD '48 tracks from the birth of indie pop'* (Castle Music 2006)

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7

¹³⁵ Morrissey, *The 50 Worst Predictions of All Time* Sky One (Saturday 28 June 2007)

true alternative network had developed and ‘by the mid eighties we were in the midst of a true-pop, anti-rockist revolution’¹³⁶.

Neil Spencer believes the viewpoints expressed by the UK music press ‘gives the lie to the lazy characterisation of an era of stripe shirted yuppies chanting the greed is good mantra’¹³⁷. Describing NME as being ‘defiantly oppositional, anti-Tory, anti-nuke and pro-green’ how it produced anti-Thatcher stickers and even gave Neil Kinnock a front cover spread at the 1987 general election¹³⁸ re-balances to an extent these unrealistic perceptions of the decade.

This style of critique seems all the more more vivid as it was being expressed at a time when the desire to achieve stardom through mainstream music seemed to become a lot more calculating. This was reflected in the race to sell out the most consecutive nights at Wembley in the run up to Band Aid in Christmas 1984, Duran Duran’s record of five in 1983 was topped by Culture Club and then Spandau Ballet rubbishing Paul Weller’s claim that Duran Duran was ‘positive proof that capitalism doesn’t work’¹³⁹.

Similarly Stanley’s notions of indie mounting an ‘anti-rockist revolution’¹⁴⁰ were not in evidence during the swagger of the 1985 British Phonographic Industry (BPI) Awards ceremony which for the first time in its twelve year history was staged as a

¹³⁶ Bob Stanley, *C86 compilation CD '48 tracks from the birth of indie pop'* (Castle Music 2006)

¹³⁷ Neil Spencer, *Fraternising with the NME The Observer* (3 July 2005) p. 9

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9

¹³⁹ Paul Weller, *'The New Pop Aristocracy'* *Melody Maker* (January 1985)

¹⁴⁰ Bob Stanley, *C86 compilation CD '48 tracks from the birth of indie pop'* (Castle Music 2006)

grand televised event¹⁴¹. Its chairman and CBS managing director Maurice Oberstein gave The Police a special award for services to the industry as the first British group since the sixties to conquer foreign markets and enjoy a significant number of number one hits around the globe. The evening was one of glamour, guest celebrities and limousines even including a special appearance by Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock.

As a result of its runaway economic success¹⁴² the House of Commons put an approval motion before parliament stating ...

'This House congratulates Culture Club, The Police and Duran Duran and other British stars on their success in the Grammy Awards ; and acknowledges the enormous pleasure they bring to millions of people around the world and the exports they and their industry achieve for the United Kingdom'.

During his speech at the BPI awards Kinnock stated that the record industry was 'maybe the last British industry with vitality'. Its size and importance for the UK economy was contextualised by Tom Bailey who described the Thompson Twins as being 'almost like a multinational' as their annual sales turnover was bigger than some companies quoted on the UK stock exchange¹⁴³.

Against this increasingly fragmented backdrop of post-punk, new pop and indie 1985 also marked the mid-point of Thatcher's second term, the violent unrest of the miners' strike and the emergence of an unlikely figure to re-ignite his flagging career and

¹⁴¹ The British Phonographic Industry website, www.bpi.co.uk accessed April 21 2010

¹⁴² The British Phonographic Industry website, www.bpi.co.uk accessed April 21 2010 - The USA represented over a third of music sales and in the previous two years UK artists had accounted for 35 per cent of the Billboard top 100 singles and albums.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.150

make musical history. Although already well established he seemed an unlikely candidate to take centre stage and draw towards himself the undivided attention of the global media. This musical celebrity was soon to become a powerful campaigner who would exert significant influence on public discourse for many years.

Lank and haggard in appearance he had no connection with *indie music* and his caustic public image was certainly at odds with the tastes and mores of the New Pop scene. Nevertheless Bob Geldof harnessed an outpouring of grief to mobilise massive public support for his Band Aid and Live Aid projects.

These historic events mark significant points in the development and ‘politicisation’ of the rock-celebrity. With no time for the ideologues of either left or right and with no particular interest in politics he proved an ideal type to make music’s biggest post-political gesture. To understand how he was able to draw so many stars towards his avowedly ‘non-political’ position it is useful to contextualise Geldof’s cultural capital prior to his entrance into rock-star politics.

Geldof claimed never felt he or his band were part of the punk movement, however in terms of musical style and attitude they were. The band’s early hit singles such as *Mary of the 4th Form* and *She’s So Modern* were very much part of the evolving punk/new wave genre. In terms of being out-spoken, controversial and defiant Geldof certainly ticked most of the boxes of a ‘punk-refusenik’ even down to having his own ‘Bill Grundy’ style moment.

This occurred just before leaving for his first major UK tour when the Boomtown Rats were asked to play on Ireland's number one TV show *The Late, Late Show*. When interviewed by host Gay Byrne Geldof made no attempt to curb his views or his language and 'the venom and frustration which had been welling up inside him for more than a decade just spilled out'¹⁴⁴. He attacked Ireland's 'medieval-minded clerics' and expressed his 'complete loathing' for a country riddled with prejudice. Geldof was greeted with cries of *shame* from the live audience and as a result the band was regarded 'rather like a home grown Sex Pistols'¹⁴⁵. The following morning his local priest asked his congregation, 'to pray or the soul of this poor, demented boy, and for his father who has been caused such anguish'¹⁴⁶.

Outside his native Ireland Geldof's most controversial episode was the reaction to the single 'I Don't Like Mondays' when it was released in the USA. The actual song title had been a slogan used by a British trade union publicising a series of one-day stoppages during the Winter of Discontent, but the song told a very different story. Its real subject matter was a young San Diego girl called Brenda Spencer who had casually leaned out of her bedroom window to shoot at children playing in the schoolyard across the street. During her killing spree a local journalist telephoned the house from where the shots were being fired and the shooting stopped as Spencer answered the call. Once she confirmed that she had been shooting at the schoolchildren the startled journalist asked her why, to which she paused and then replied quite bizarrely 'I Don't Like Mondays'¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁴ Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p.156

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 192

When this was brought to the attention of Spencer's parents they threatened legal action against the record company. With the possibility of litigation and some radio stations refusing to play the record Columbia started to panic and after one week's sales decided to withdraw the record. Geldof was incensed. He knew the subject matter was controversial so deliberately avoided referencing Spencer, the city or the school. He had wanted to bring into the public square the culpability of a father 'who had apparently given his daughter a gun for Christmas every year since she was ten years of age'¹⁴⁸. Spencer, who served a 25 year jail sentence, revealed in a letter to an inquisitive Boomtown Rats fan that 'she was delighted about the song as she had always wanted to be famous'¹⁴⁹.

Despite their 'stunning year' of 1978 when they sold more records than any other band in Britain¹⁵⁰ the Boomtown Rats had been on a downward spiral ever since and by 1981 Geldof was the epitome of a fading pop-star. With his string of successful hits coming to a gradual end unlike some of his erstwhile punk contemporaries he was unable to re-energise his flagging fortunes. By 1984 the band had hit rock bottom resorting to a hectic, no-budget university tour of 44 gigs in 48 days.

Geldof might not have the looks and presentation to shift effortlessly into New Pop however he was undeniably a charismatic, controversial and intelligent figure yet unfortunately these were no longer qualities sought by the music industry. As Napier-

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 205

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198

Bell suggests 'ideas and attitude were out formula was in'¹⁵¹ and with Sting's claim that 'the rock rebel is now defunct'¹⁵² it all looked pretty bleak for Geldof.

This uncertain status Geldof was a good position from which to breathe life into Band Aid and then resurrect his own journey by providing the guidance and unity of purpose to mastermind Live Aid. As Geldof belonged to no camp either musically or politically his ambitious attempts to pull these projects and personalities together were met with a remarkable degree of acceptance and support.

Billed as the 'largest rock concert the world will ever see' and the 'rock concert to top all rock concerts'¹⁵³ the non-stop 24 hour Live Aid event was a defining moment in cultural history and a key conjunction in the musical-political crossover. Running from London and Philadelphia, Live Aid was the culmination of an outburst of emotional rage from a group of popular musicians and Napier-Bell believes it was the first time rock-stars seized the initiative and started acting like politicians¹⁵⁴.

The initial stirs of protest were created by Michael Buerk's October 1984 television report on the Ethiopian famine, which Geldof describes as 'horror on a monumental scale'¹⁵⁵. His haunting pictures of a human desert of disease and starvation of 'almost biblical proportions' were broadcast around the world and allowing this to continue 'two thousand years after Christ' were for Geldof 'tantamount to murder'¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵¹ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.88

¹⁵² Sting, *Smash Hits* (1982) quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p. 256

¹⁵³ Nicholas Witchell, *BBC 6 o'clock News* (May 1985) accessed on August 8th 2008
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/ilove/years/1985/musicclip.shtml>

¹⁵⁴ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.97

¹⁵⁵ Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p. 269

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 271

The charity single for famine relief '*Do They Know It's Christmas? / Feed The World*' was recorded in November 1984 by 40 of the UK and Ireland's best-known pop stars. Released on 25 November 1984 the record shot to the top of the UK hit parade¹⁵⁷ and is still the fastest ever selling single. Geldof's 'the biggest band of all time'¹⁵⁸ raised over £8 million, sold over three million copies and hit number one in 13 countries¹⁵⁹.

From the outset Geldof was determined to keep the project 'non-political' and worked hard to integrate mainstream pop celebrities with politically aware figures such as Paul Weller and Bruce Springsteen. Positioning the famine as a moral issue of global proportions standing above politics, his DIY approach formed a constituency of feeling that the serious nature of the crisis was a matter too important to be left to politicians.

Showing no particular political allegiance is one matter however as Fox points out to be 'political' is to understand the mechanisms of power and therefore by inference being non-political is to be 'mystified, wilfully and complicitly unconscious of these mechanisms'¹⁶⁰. Throughout the life cycle of the project, which morphed into the all consuming Live Aid, this characterised Geldof as he resisted any attempts to politicise or use the event as a vehicle for political matters. Rebuking Weller's request for Band Aid to be used to raise money for striking miners Geldof maintained a doggedly a-political stance throughout.

¹⁵⁷ Live Aid, The Greatest Show on Earth
http://www.herald.co.uk/local_info/live_aid.html#bandaid accessed on August 3rd 2008

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 281

¹⁵⁹ Carl Wilkinson, Live Aid in their Own Words *The Observer* (October 2004)

¹⁶⁰ Marcus Fox, *Cold World – the aesthetics of dejection and the politics of militant dysphoria* (Zero Books 2009) p.12

Geldof had approached Weller with some trepidation as they had always been rather brusque towards one another in the press. During previous encounters Geldof developed the impression that Weller was in the business of ‘mouthing specious political platitudes’¹⁶¹ similar to the pseudo-politics of The Clash. Surprised by Weller’s positive response the icy relations thawed and over time Geldof came to regard him as ‘a person of genuine conviction’¹⁶². This change of heart was largely influenced by listening to a number of intense political discussions between Weller and John Moss during the single’s recording sessions at Abbey Road studios.

Motivated by the UK’s example organisations in other countries set about recording their own benefit singles, the best-known being ‘We Are The World’ by ‘USA for Africa’. Featuring a galaxy of stars such as Michael Jackson, Bob Dylan, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder owing to a number of factors, including Geldof’s chance invitation to the American Music Awards, ‘USA for Africa’ ended up copying the UK template and being organised by Geldof.

In the run up to Christmas 1984 Band Aid sold almost two million copies in the USA inside two weeks but failed to make the number one slot even though it was out-selling the current number one by over 400 per cent. This oddity arose because the US charts were based on a combination factors of which sales are only a part, a system described in Geldof’s own inimitable style ‘as absolutely fucking ludicrous’¹⁶³.

At the time the Band Aid infrastructure consisted only of Geldof, an accountant and a solicitor, who faced the logistical nightmares of ordering grain, chartering planes and

¹⁶¹ Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p. 286

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 286

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 292

hiring boats to ensure all the funds could be deployed effectively. Convinced the best way to ensure all the money reached its intended destination was to cut out the middleman Geldof reluctantly agreed to fly out to Ethiopia and Sudan in December 1984. Keeping true to his word that no penny would be wasted the visit only took place after assurances were given that all his expenses would be covered in full by the newspaper and media companies, who would be benefiting from the footage¹⁶⁴.

Treating his visit like a mission he worried little about offending his hosts and even less about lambasting the legacy of the Ethiopian revolution. On seeing a gigantic poster of Lenin, Marx and Engels bearing the slogan 'Long Live Proletarian Internationalism' in the capital's Revolution Square he questioned what relevance 'three nineteenth century Europeans in high collars and flowing locks' could possibly have to the Ethiopian peasant¹⁶⁵.

When he met with the Ethiopian Government Geldof clashed over matters of ideology and their scepticism, which warily eyed the visiting media scrum as another Western conspiracy to dethrone their pro-Soviet regime. During one meeting, in order to emphasize his frustration, Geldof repeatedly banged his fist on the table and 'punk diplomacy' - as the press later called it - was suddenly born¹⁶⁶.

During his visit the press called him, cynically at first then half seriously, *Saint Bob* which Geldof found 'more ludicrous than offensive'¹⁶⁷. During his visit he recounts how he encountered Mother Theresa and caught a rare glimpse of how the power of

¹⁶⁴ Bob Geldof, *Is That It?* (Pan Books 1986) the trip was paid for in full by the Daily Star, Daily Telegraph and TV am p. 292

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 292

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 292

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 301

celebrity could be leveraged for beneficial ends. Geldof described Mother Theresa as being ‘outrageously brilliant’¹⁶⁸ in how she was able to demand a free ticket to Washington from any airline in order to meet the US President. She impressed him as ‘the living embodiment of moral good’¹⁶⁹ and he admired her lack of false modesty and certainty of purpose.

As a result Geldof realised that the moral ground she occupied was a powerful tool giving her and more importantly others the belief that she had a right to demand action. He remembers her as being ‘as deft a manipulator of the media as any American PR expert’¹⁷⁰ and recalls how she took his hand and said ‘remember this, I can do something you can’t do and you can do something I can’t do. But we both have to do it’¹⁷¹.

Returning from Ethiopia galvanised with a renewed sense of purpose and concerned with the prospect of ‘compassion fatigue’ Geldof felt something needed to be done to maintain momentum. Unclear as to the exact timing he approached Wembley stadium in spring 1985 to discuss staging a fundraiser and although initially greeted with scepticism this resulted in the biggest concert in history.

In under 3 months with only a small team, Geldof orchestrated a concentrated media blitz and with round the clock negotiations created the first global telethon. Through a combination of pleading and brinkmanship he secured 24-hour coverage from MTV

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 301

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 301

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 301

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 302

broadcast, the BBC and a major US network inclusive related advertising revenues plus a massive sponsorship deal from Pepsi.

As momentum grew the Live Aid team received free security and stewarding courtesy of the Metropolitan Police, free air tickets and the use of Concorde from British Airways, and the use of Noel Edmonds' helicopter company to ferry bands back and forth from Wembley Stadium. The only bodies reluctant to participate were the US and UK governments and as Geldof enlisted the support of A-list celebrities such as Princess Diana Harvey Goldsmith is reported to have remarked 'they are better than politicians ... in fact keep those *tossers* out of it and keep it non-political'¹⁷².

Keen to ensure maximum US exposure Geldof deliberately scheduled Live Aid to coincide with Independence Day 'pop music's greatest ever gesture'¹⁷³ raised combined revenues of £140 million¹⁷⁴ attracting an estimated 1.5 billion viewers in over 100 countries.

For Geldof this demonstrated that

*'the lingua franca of the planet is not English but rock'n'roll – through which we were able to address the intellectual absurdity and the moral repulsion of people dying of want in a world of surplus'*¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 370

¹⁷³ Bob Geldof, BBC News Online

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/music/3682281.stm> accessed (October 14 2008)

¹⁷⁴ Harvey Goldsmith quoted in Carl Wilkinson, Live Aid in their Own Words *The Observer* (October 2004)

¹⁷⁵ Simon Garfield, Live Aid : The Man, *The Observer* (17th October 2004)

As a result Geldof outflanking the politicians, through Live Aid he had contributed significantly to the credibility, sincerity and legitimacy of non-traditional actors.

On the London bill were Paul Weller's Style Council, Elvis Costello, Adam Ant and Spandau Ballet interspersed amongst artists such as Sting, Bryan Ferry, Elton John and David Bowie. Rock was represented by Status Quo, U2 and the reformation of The Who. As Paul McCartney brought the UK section of the concert to a close the television cameras turned to Philadelphia where 60s protest singers Joan Baez and Bob Dylan mixed with the New Pop of Duran Duran and British bands such as Judas Priest and the specially reformed line-ups of Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin.

Live Aid's single most memorable incident is what is now referred to as 'The Geldof Moment', those few seconds during the Boomtown Rats' rendition of 'I Don't Like Mondays' when Geldof held the world's concentration in his clenched fist. This brief yet poignant moment symbolised the elevation of Geldof from rock-star to almost God-like status.

Spandau Ballet's Gary Kemp described the euphoria of those few seconds when Geldof suddenly quietened the Wembley audience and then held them and the watching public in suspended animation with the line '*because the lesson today is how to die !*' as follows.

'Dare I say it, it was evangelical, that moment when Geldof stopped 'I Don't Like Mondays' and raised his fist in the air. He was a sort of statesman. A link

between punk and the New Romantics and the Eighties. You would follow him.

*He just has a huge charisma; he'd make a frightening politician*¹⁷⁶.

In the introduction to his autobiography Geldof describes how the special nature of the day's events 'was epitomized in that moment'¹⁷⁷. As he raised his hand and the music ceased he ...

*'stood and looked, tracking my gaze from one side of the auditorium to the other as if to fix each individual with my eyes. [he continues] ... I wanted to make contact with them all, and draw them in ... at that moment there was no difference between the man on the stage and the audience, none at all. We were all part of some greater purpose, all attempting an understanding of one another and all part of something completely outside ourselves'*¹⁷⁸.

In these few seconds Geldof experienced 'a clear moment of absolute certainty' realising that until then 'nothing in his life had been worth anything'¹⁷⁹. Despite such a dramatic personal epiphany Geldof has been quite unrelenting in his dismissals of what he refers to as 'The God Syndrome'¹⁸⁰. After the event Geldof reported how people approached him 'moist eyed, touching you as if they expected you to ascend on a cloud'¹⁸¹. He recounts how 'one unctious cretin told me if Christ was on earth he would be with me', to which Geldof replied 'if Christ was on earth I would ask him why he wasn't in Africa'¹⁸².

¹⁷⁶ Carl Wilkinson, Live Aid in their Own Words *The Observer* (October 2004)

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 401

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 319

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 319

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 319

By spearheading Live Aid Geldof's international renown became almost stellar.

'Saint Bob' was awarded a knighthood, became the first rock-star to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and to address the US Congress¹⁸³. During a photo-shoot flanked by various senators including Teddy Kennedy he was embraced by Speaker of The House Tip O'Neill who announced to the cameras 'we very much admire this young man and any laws we have to pass to smooth his path and any red tape we have to cut to do likewise, we're going to'¹⁸⁴. When the American Government declared 13 July to be Live Aid day, the legislative document was the most signed bill ever to go through Congress. Geldof remarked quite poignantly there is 'something seriously wrong when so many politicians pay court to a pop singer'¹⁸⁵.

In his journey from ranting rock-star outsider to respected political campaigner Live Aid re-energised Geldof's celebrity status and endorsed his new role as spokesperson on global affairs. As a result Geldof met dignitaries such as Queen Elizabeth and to spent time with world leaders to discuss problems of starvation and under-development. During one heated debate with Margaret Thatcher about simplifying the matter of using surplus food for famine relief he famously remonstrated 'No, Prime Minister, nothing is as simple as dying'¹⁸⁶.

The accession of a rock-star to statesmanlike status was unique and he was therefore the prototype for an altogether different type of public figure. He wasn't a hell-raiser like Keith Richards or Keith Moon or acclaimed for his musical genius like Hendrix or Clapton. Rather he used his position as a moderately successful rock-star to

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, .p. 401

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, .p. 407

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, .p. 403

¹⁸⁶ Simon Garfield, Live Aid The Man, *The Observer* (17th October 2004)

mobilise public sentiment behind a humanitarian campaign. So although Geldof is still referred to as a musician, he has achieved far greater renown as a celebrity campaigner for famine relief.

During Band Aid and Live Aid he displayed remarkable dexterity of judgement and an unerring ability to manage complex projects and daily upheavals. With his down to earth, simple yet no-nonsense approach Geldof was quite at ease massaging celebrity egos, negotiating deal and generating great PR. Thus the largely under-educated and unkempt figure of Geldof demonstrated a level of measured intelligence facilitating his own re-introduction to the world of celebrity.

What initially appeared to be an off-the-wall pop-star rant was in reality a highly coordinated and sincere challenge to the failure of politicians and modern politics. By creating Live Aid Geldof appealed to almost every constituency imaginable – celebrities, royalty, music lovers, humanitarians and the politically marginalised worldwide. Transcending politics by championing non-politics was in P.R. terms a master-stroke as Geldof's uncompromising stance and charismatic personality generated intense levels of heart-felt admiration and fierce support. His failure to integrate politics or engage with its messy particulars allowed political notions of accountability and culpability to recede from public view.

Heralded as history in the making it is only however with the benefit of hindsight that Live Aid's enduring significance and unique mix of circumstances can be more clearly appreciated and disentangled. On the level of popular music Napier-Bell maintains that the attitude of New Pop Aristocracy had temporarily adjusted the power balance within the industry and without this Live Aid could never have

happened. Bands such as Spandau Ballet had always insisted on complete control over all their musical and managerial affairs so Rimmer describes the event as ‘a combination of the punk DIY ethic ¹⁸⁷ with the swagger and self-belief of the New Pop’. This therefore represented a curious role reversal, whereby pop stars were suddenly arguing with their record companies not about contracts or royalties but the moralities of human rights and personal freedoms.

Napier Bell claims the project worked because the artists ‘instigated it, managed it and pressurised the record companies into co-operating’¹⁸⁸. On the surface this might not seem overly significant but for the music industry this was a paradigm shift. To be involved in Live Aid this was new territory both intellectually and politically marking a brief yet important moment when rock celebrities transitioned from objects of entertainment to authors of political discourse.

Whilst the high visibility of Live Aid focused on the praiseworthy ambition of saving lives its performers and consumers also derived considerable benefit which got lost in the chatter and noise of the event itself. Jean Baudrillard contends that events such as Live Aid, increasingly position the West as a willing consumer of ‘the ever delightful spectacle of poverty and catastrophe, and of the moving spectacle of our own efforts to alleviate it’ ¹⁸⁹.

Little was mentioned in the press regarding the orgy of self-congratulation enjoyed by Live Aid’s participants and the commercialised contradictions that inevitably refract through such events. Baudrillard’s denunciation of the trend towards greater moral

¹⁸⁷ Gary Kemp, *The Spandau Ballet Story* (Sky Arts Channel July 2008)

¹⁸⁸ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.308

¹⁸⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Polity 1994) p. 66

and sentimental exploitation resonates with Bauman's notion of 'Carnivals of Charity'¹⁹⁰ whereby serious political issues are trivialised by being turned into forms of entertainment.

Bauman invokes Bakhtin's notion of the function of 'carnival' and how its enactment 'reasserts norms through the periodical yet strictly controlled visualisation of their reversal'¹⁹¹. He points to a tendency in the affluent parts of the world 'to relegate charity, compassion and brotherly sentiments to carnival – thereby legitimising and 'normalising' their absence from the every day'¹⁹². Citing Live Aid as an example of how moral impulses are channelled into sporadic outburst of charity Bauman believes justice is turned into a festive, weekend event helping the moral conscience to regard its absence during working days as the norm.

Live Aid is also an example of what Bauman describes as a meaningless and 'painless morality' stripped of every and all obligations¹⁹³. The moral impulse underpinning these supposed outbursts of magnanimity is ultimately geared to the wellbeing of the self which sets the limits of where we are prepared to go in our readiness to help. Such bold declarations to act in defence of the downtrodden might therefore suggest a rising sensitivity to human misery, however in reality they invariably incur minimal personal sacrifice. Far from signalling a willingness to renounce a lifestyle of

¹⁹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Work Consumerism and the New Poor* (Buckingham Open University Press 1998) p. 78

¹⁹¹ Bakhtin quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge Polity 1997) p.69

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.69

¹⁹³ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) p.41

consumerist indulgence Bauman believes it confirms the West is increasingly reluctant 'to accept even minor personal inconveniences',¹⁹⁴.

David Rieff maintains that Live Aid became 'the prototype for a new style of celebrity activism',¹⁹⁵ that actually did more harm than good. Referencing later examples such as Richard Gere's campaigning for Tibet to the benefit concerts for the Asian tsunami he is critical of the focus on celebrity participants rather than the tragedy itself. Just as the reporting surrounding Live Aid did little to foster an understanding of the persisting or underlying causes of the Ethiopian famine, the ingratiating style of coverage to boost viewing figures and advertising revenues subtly transforms the real subject matter into a preoccupation with showbusiness.

Geldof's insistence on the non-political nature of Live Aid also re-enforced its post-political consequences. Although politicians might not be held in high regard the danger of divorcing politics from an event such as Live Aid, removes the vital elements of controversy and criticism that politics invariably brings to the table. Heated debate and a healthy skepticism towards just about everybody's motives accompanied Geldof throughout the Live Aid process. What is evident from his autobiography is that without this hectoring and questioning approach most of the dealings he undertook to make Live Aid a reality would not have happened. What he consistently failed to do was extend this into the realm of the political so the big question marks hiding behind the West's complicity could be addressed.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.42

¹⁹⁵ David Rieff, Did Live Aid do more harm than good ? *The Guardian* (Friday June 24 2005) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jun/24/g8.debtrelief> - accessed on August 10 2008

That Live Aid's non-establishment based, grassroots reaction was mobilised into a successful global phenomenon bears witness to the power of politics with a 'little p'. Beck's notion of politics with a 'big P' is unavoidably connected to politics with a 'little p', so the two continually feed off one another and it is impossible to have one without the other. As in any eco-system the removal of a key component has potentially lethal consequences elsewhere and herein lies a problem with Geldof's deliberate exclusion of anything prefixed with a BIG P. Throughout the Live Aid process and largely as a result of their lack of response to Geldof's initial overtures, politicians were deliberately excluded from the event.

As Goldsmith's remarks suggest being snubbed prompted an amount of satisfaction in being able to create such a spectacle without any governmental assistance. The conspicuous absence of governmental intervention makes Geldof's achievement even more impressive bearing testimony to the potency of rock-celebrity however the net result of this absence opens up a void that celebrity chatter is apt to fill. This robbed the crisis of notions of accountability and legitimate targets upon which sights could be clearly focused. Celebrity noise occupied the press and the airwaves and was able to do so precisely because Live Aid and African famine was positioned as a non-political issue.

Removing a sense of the political from an event such as Live Aid is a post-political symptom of the movement from solid to liquid modernity. With political beliefs increasingly relegated to the background the subject is increasingly susceptible for a hegemonic embracement of capitalism. Within vast redemptive political rituals such as Live Aid rather than politics or ideology it was the power of seduction of

celebrities and rock-stars that was paramount. Politics therefore wasn't allowed to exist within Live Aid and its displacement by the hum of celebrity chatter implied it was of no importance. Instead of a laser-like focus on the political roots of the crisis it was imagined to be an 'Act of God'.

That the hunger had obvious political causes and was partly man-made rather than natural, was never a serious consideration. The origin of the famine was largely the result of wars waged by the Ethiopian government against guerrilla forces and the forced agricultural collectivisation policy pursued by the Mengistu regime. Rieff claims the ruthlessness of these policies from 1974 onwards were equal in their radicalism to those pursued by Stalin in Ukraine in the 1930s¹⁹⁶.

Whilst Buerk's language and use of biblical themes surrendered any considerations of human responsibility, the underlying message that famine is not man-made is distinctly at odds with certain commentators. Foremost amongst these is Mike Davis who holds the view that modern sites of African famine such as Ethiopia can be explained, 'not as a result of being outside the world system ... but in the very process of being forcibly incorporated into it'¹⁹⁷.

Interrogating the densely interwoven histories of colonialism and consumerism Davis stretches the line of causality deeper into the murky past of relations between Africa and the West. In his "secret history of the nineteenth century" Davis explores a period in which an estimated 50 million deaths resulted from three separate waves of drought, famine and disease. Prior to this point in history he contends that Africa was

¹⁹⁶ David Rieff, Did Live Aid do more harm than good? *The Guardian* (Friday June 24 2005) http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jun/24/g8_debtrelief - accessed on August 10 2008

¹⁹⁷ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (Verso 2002) p.10

not a “land of famine”¹⁹⁸ however evidence of this notion is largely absent from almost all the available literature.

Davis detects a turning point in world history when “peacetime famine permanently disappeared from Western Europe” yet simultaneously “increased devastatingly throughout much of the colonial world”¹⁹⁹. Whereas the Buerk report certainly succeeded in mobilising public support, and Live Aid raised vast amounts of money and saved many lives, the lack of any political dimension excluded these considerations.

The Westernised feel of Live Aid also attracted valid criticisms surrounding the imbalanced racial mix of the artists, and the post-colonial notion of the Rich White North conducting its own discussion about the Poor Black South²⁰⁰. The initial reporting on the famine and the memorable footage of Michael Buerk as the lone white man striding through a desert of dying Africans is pregnant with racial and colonial significance.

In comparison with the overt stage-management of future events such as Live 8 Live Aid did represents a largely spontaneous grass roots out-pouring of public outrage. For a short time in 1985 the protests and picketing of E.U. food-mountains and wine-lakes represented a political link between the people of Europe and the people of Africa, and a link between the local and the international. Simple gestures of sending blankets and food parcels from local collection points throughout the West caught the public mood as did the unexpected emergence of sales outlets for the Live Aid record

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.10

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10

²⁰⁰ Black Voice Magazine, quoted in Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p. 365

in unlikely locations as a butcher's shop in Plymouth and London's Fortnum and Mason²⁰¹.

The revulsion at the injustice of over-consumption in the West whilst famine conditions persisted in Ethiopia articulated through Geldof's fiery and uncompromising approach, ultimately failed to make a connection with broader political considerations. Whilst these isolated and un-co-ordinated protests efforts had the potential to connect a concerted political initiative might have joined up the dots and made some sense out of the whole Ethiopian predicament – but this wasn't allowed to happen as the press and Geldof reminded us that famine was above politics.

The ease whereby 'soft news' and celebrity culture are consumed and digested through events such as Live Aid offers protection for the persistence of unequal relations between the 'Rich North and the Poor South'. Famine is inevitably mediated by a complex chain of causal and functional dependencies however these can easily disappear once the vital element of politics is taken out of the equation. This displacement of the political provides camouflage as moral dilemmas recede from sight, and already unlikely occasions for scrutiny and conscious deliberation become increasingly rare.

A more critical response to the West's role in relation to Africa was Steven Van Zandt's protest hit 'Sun City' which was an unlikely chart hit in both the UK and the

²⁰¹ Bob Geldof, *Is That It?* (Pan Books 1986) p. 290

US²⁰². Van Zandt exposed hypocrisy by targeting so-called *non-political* artists such as Queen who had ignored international embargoes and accepted the lucrative invitation to play in Sun City Concert. The single was recorded by a collaboration of musicians named 'Artists United Against Apartheid' championing 'change not charity, freedom not famine'²⁰³. Van Zandt used many of the same artists that participated in Live Aid such as Bob Dylan, U2 and Bruce Springsteen to openly attack the apartheid regime. Referring to 'phoney homelands' and blacks being denied the vote the record was banned in South Africa and owing to its explicit criticism of Reagan's policy of 'constructive engagement' was only played by only about half of US radio stations.

Whereas Live Aid remains the *non-political* musical event of the decade, the creation of Red Wedge ranks as one of the most *overtly political* musical events of the century. Sympathetic to CND, Nuclear Free Zones and Free Festivals, Red Wedge was an attempt to create a dedicated political vehicle to help the Labour Party win the 1987 election to end eight years of Tory rule. Formed in the wake of the miners' strike Red Wedge was a unique example of musicians working inside the existing political system with an established mainstream party.

Ever since its explosion during the counter-culture the political critique of musicians had invariably been organised around single-issues such as civil rights, war or racism deliberately avoiding any close affiliations with the establishment or political parties. With his realisation that The Clash were 'better at posing than politics' Bragg had

²⁰² Artists Against Apartheid, *Sun City* Manhattan Records (December 1985) reached 38 in the US Billboard Chart and 21 in the UK singles chart.

²⁰³ Danny Schechter, 'The More you watch the less you know' (ABC News Jan 16 1986)

resolved that in order to defeat the great evil of Thatcherism²⁰⁴, the most effective course of action was to build an alliance of musicians and artists within mainstream politics. As its co-founder Bragg entered the political machine to work with rather than against the establishment.

For fellow mavericks such as Morrissey and Weller working with one enemy to defeat another with the endorsement and approval of Kinnock's Labour Party was an agonising decision. The unprecedented move of rock stars and politicians uniting under one flag to fight Thatcherism reflects the levels of desperation amongst the left. As a result of the violence, ill-feeling and hardship generated by the miners' strike Napier-Bell claims Thatcherism had achieved something that once seemed impossible 'pop musicians supporting not just a cause but a political party'²⁰⁵.

Prior to the events of 1984/85 the NUM still possessed a fearsome political reputation. Playing a key role in deposing the Heath government and forcing Thatcher's humiliating climb-down from her pit closure programme in 1981, the union represented a bastion of resistance to the new market oriented Britain. For ardent Thatcherites the NUM was a leftist beast that must be slain in order to usher in a new de-unionised era, for others it was the remnant of a once great industry and proud body of workers struggling to come to terms with de-industrialisation.

With the calculating Ian MacGregor as head of the NCB and the NUM under the firebrand stewardship of Arthur Scargill Britain entered its' last significant period of violent industrial unrest. In the year from March 1984 over 11,000 people were

²⁰⁴ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.247

²⁰⁵ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.299

arrested and over 8,000 charged with a variety of public order offences as the dispute struck a resounding political chord throughout Britain. Popular music's response was an impassioned backing track of songs such as Billy Bragg's 'Which Side are You On', The Redskins 'Keep on Keepin On', U2's 'Red Hill Mining Town' and Ewan Maccoll's 'Daddy - What did you do in the Strike ?' which encouraged people to become active.

In the charged atmosphere benefit gigs were organised up and down the country often consisting of unlikely combinations of artists. Bands such as New Order, Aztec Camera and Wham set aside any musical differences to raise money and awareness for the miners' cause. After the strike had officially ended this loose constituency of musicians unexpectedly came together to form Red Wedge and embark on an unprecedented course of action within Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Taking its name from a 1919 poster by Russian constructivist El Lissitzky entitled *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* the official launch party was hosted by Labour MP Robin Cook on the House of Commons' terrace on November 21st 1985. During the launch Morrissey quipped 'the only thing that could possibly save British politics would be Margaret Thatcher's assassination' as Weller justified the coalition by explaining 'all we want to do is to get rid of the Tories'²⁰⁶. Once endorsed by the Labour Party, Red Wedge was granted office space in its Walworth Road H.Q. from where it organised a number of major tours.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.309

The first, in early 1986, featured Bragg, The Style Council, The Communards and Jerry Dammers with guest appearances from Madness, Prefab Sprout, Tom Robinson, Lloyd Cole and The Smiths. When the general election was called in 1987, Red Wedge organised a comedy tour featuring Lenny Henry, Ben Elton, Craig Charles, Phil Jupitus and Harry Enfield, and published an election pamphlet *Move On Up*, with a foreword by Labour leader Neil Kinnock.

After Labour's third consecutive defeat Bragg reflected the dismay at losing so heavily an election it had genuinely expected to win commenting 'what is music capable of ... winning elections ? I don't think it is'²⁰⁷. A few further gigs were arranged and the group's magazine *Well Red* continued until funding ran out and Red Wedge was officially disbanded in 1990. Coincidentally this happened just a few months before *Marxism Today*, the 'theoretical house magazine'²⁰⁸ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, also ceased publication. The end of *Red Wedge* and *Marxism Today*, which had been in print since 1978 and described by Martin Jacques as 'Britain's most influential political magazine'²⁰⁹, were symbolic of the impact events in Eastern Europe would have on the left. For Blackshaw the intellectual readjustment and the subsequent demise of academic Marxism 'evoked the cusp of society's metamorphosis from solid to liquid modernity'²¹⁰.

The spectacular images of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall during two years after Reagan's speech calling on Mr Gorbachev to 'tear down this wall' provide fitting

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.309

²⁰⁸ *International Journal of the Communist Left*, No.7, April-September 1993 accessed on website <http://www.sinistra.net/lib/upt/comlef/coso/cosoecibee.html> - November 2008

²⁰⁹ Martin Jacques, http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/index_frame.htm accessed on April 8 2010

²¹⁰ Tony Blackshaw, *Key Sociologists Zygmunt Bauman* (Routledge 2005) p.36

closing scenes to this tumultuous decade. As if to vindicate that its detractors had been right all along communism very quickly came to feel like an historical curiosity and at the Conservative Party Conference in October 1990 Thatcher dwelt on the victory over communism to hysterical cries of ‘ten more years, ten more years’²¹¹.

As polarity soon became consensus it is curious to reflect on how strongly the environment had shaped opinions. For instance Brian Graden’s championing of the eastward expansion of MTV as a Western crusade and Bob Stanley’s description of the UK indie scene as evidence of ‘socialism in practice’²¹² were both very much of their time and in retrospect characteristically overstated. This desire to couch their endeavours in a language which suggests they were combatants into a final showdown between forces of good and evil underlines how vivid the ideology of the left and the right really was.

With radical politics fast disappearing and serious political commentary all but displaced from the music press, the end of the decade marked an end of traditional left-right divisions ushering in the nineties as a decade of post-politics. For Gray this would be ‘a period of triumphal delusion’ with Western powers acting as missionaries for their reaffirmed belief in democracy as the ‘new universal panacea’²¹³. The publishing of Francis Fukuyama’s best-selling ‘End of History’ (1989) and Baywatch star David Hasselhoff singing ‘Looking for Freedom’ whilst stood on the Berlin Wall offer a bizarrely consumerist vindication to the triumph of Western capitalism.

²¹¹ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons* (Penguin 2006) p.143

²¹² Bob Stanley, *C86 compilation CD '48 tracks from the birth of indie pop'* (Castle Music 2006)

²¹³ John Gray, *Gray's Anatomy* (Penguin 2010) p.7

Never sanctified as ideal models of communism the USSR and its Eastern Europe satellite states did however represent symbolic alternatives to Western capitalism, but after the wall fell so did these symbols of resistance. Consequently leftist politics lost much of its appeal and any residual feelings connected to what Simon Jenkins described as the 'crypto-socialist' politics of Red Wedge seemed increasingly irrelevant and anachronistic. The winding up of Red Wedge, Marxism Today, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall signified the end of a decade in which people hadn't stopped believing in politics, however unlike their parents' generations had stopped believing that politics could make any real difference.

Chapter 5

The 1990s - The search for identity and meaning in an age of consensus

*'Counting on the short life expectation of public memory and masquerading as the latest novelties, all imaginable retro styles, together with all conceivable forms of rehashing, recycling and plagiarising, find themselves crowded into the one limited time span of the music fans' attention' ...*¹

Whereas the three previous decades delivered 'the counter-culture', punk rock, indie music and Live Aid, the final decade of the millennium is associated with an altogether different kind of landmark. In a decade when celebrity and branding invaded every corner of modern culture, popular music's most memorable political articulations were those made in support of the pro-Blair *Cool Britannia* phenomenon, a brief period in which music continued its transformation from a source of youthful opposition to a mechanism of establishment support². With its evolving lineage of genres and sub-genres, rock'n'roll had become diluted, defanged and an increasingly pliant metaphor for every succeeding generation to use as it saw fit. Long had the once secular youth religion ceased to be the property of one specific group and for the first time Britain even had a Prime Minister whose image was intimately bound up with his self-affirmed membership of the rock'n'roll generation.

Britpop's alliance with the meteoric rise of New Labour to the top of the hit parade was a high profile yet incongruous alliance of rock stars with the political

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p. 41

² John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p. 99

establishment. Although this unusual ‘love-in’ was destined to be short-lived it was an important development in rock-star politics which not only felt right at the time, but worked for everybody involved. From the first hand experience of participants such as ‘Rock The Vote’ co-ordinator Kalnyuk and commentators such as John Harris it is evident that the Cool Britannia / Britpop phenomenon was intimately bound up with the workings of the New Labour electoral machine and this provides the central theme from which this chapter will develop.

It was mergers, not only between the spheres of politics and music, that symbolized the decade as previously distinct entities came together in powerful new ways. Companies shape-shifted like never before and merger mania took hold in almost every area of commerce as brands, celebrities and now politics became part of the variegated liquid modern mix. Mega mergers between previously unconnected organisations in banking, retail, media and telecommunications brought forth unlikely alliances with slick marketing campaigns that changed both high streets and global markets. Similarly New Labour’s approach to politics showed a remarkable ability to synthesize and mimic these changes by re-creating its’ symbols, icons and markers to create an illusion of newness and change.

By invading everything from politics to modern art and chic restaurants concepts of ‘brand extension’³ and ‘personal branding’⁴ ensured that creations such as New Labour and Britpop became two of the most recognisable brands of the decade. In isolation each had their own logos, merchandising potential and cultural meaning,

³ The ‘extension’ where familiar brands such as the logo of the industrial machinery manufacturer ‘Caterpillar’ appears on shoes and watches and tyre manufacturer Michelin is applied to Restaurant guides (1995)

⁴ ‘personal branding’ a term first used by Tom Peters in 1997 article to application of one’s name to various products – such as Trump Towers and Beckham perfume

however when combined under the banner of 'Cool Britannia' they exerted far greater power.

The synergies between politics, music and fashion merged to produce a feeling of newness, change and youthfulness perfectly suited to the image New Labour was trying to project. As branding and celebrity became tools to 'compete for the consumer's soul'⁵, music's role in commercial and political campaigns increased. Musicians themselves started competing aggressively with consumer brands and Klein cites Sean 'Puffy' Coombs who in the space of two years had leveraged his own 'magazine, several restaurants, a clothing label and even a line of foods'⁶.

As a result of these changes cultural theorist Ellis Cashmore insists that something distinct happened to the world of celebrity. Unlike those who maintain celebrity culture is merely an extension of a long-standing collective pre-occupation⁷ Cashmore insists that this decade experienced a paradigm shift. Instead of just being devices to market consumer products, celebrities became products themselves with their own market worth to be utilised in new and different ways as organisations paid to harness association with their ideals and visions.

The celebrification of Tony Blair as a new breed of politician and someone for whom rock'n'roll was as important as politics was significant in encouraging players from the Britpop generation to support his electoral campaign. Following Geldof's lead Bono's emergence as political actor and 'spokesperson for Africa' reveals the rock

⁵ Elliot Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture* (Routledge 2006) p.174

⁶ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (Fourth Estate 2001) p.50

⁷ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown Fame and its History* (New York Vintage 1997) and Joshua Gamson, *The Assembly Line of Greatness Celebrity in Twentieth Century America* (University of California Press 1994)

and politics alignment was occurring in new and more powerful ways. The marketing of Blair and Bono as hybrid rock-star/politicians reveals synergies in terms of presentation, media management and political outlook as the Blair-Bono axis shared characteristics destined to stamp themselves onto the style of future political leaders.

These liquid modern changes in the fields of celebrity, consumerism, fashion and politics ensured their relationships through the amplification of rock music also adjusted dramatically. By the 1990s the 60s belief that ‘The Man Can’t Bust Our Music’ had transformed into a realisation that popular music was less a source of anti-establishment integrity than a willing slave of corporate culture. This perception was reinforced by an emerging body of literature⁸ often from rock’n’roll enthusiasts whom concluded their once youthful secular religion had actually been a complete political failure. In what was fast becoming a ritual denunciation of the 60s it seems the most significant thing about the decade was no longer the *making* of the counter-culture but the *selling* of it and this process bore fruit most markedly in the neo-liberal 90s.

With business interests increasingly paramount and citizens transformed into consumers it was a time of re-invention whereby anything that could be imagined might just be possible. In ‘*Cold World*’ Marcus Fox uses analogies from Coleridge and Marx to amplify how in a world increasingly taken over by commercialism there is a ‘failure of imaginative power’ within the arts and politics⁹. As Marx’s heroic world is overtaken by bourgeois commercialism ‘fervour, chivalry and sentimentalism

⁸ See Doggett (2007), Frank (1998), Heath and Potter (2006), Young (2003), Kot (2002) Chang (2002)

⁹ Marcus Fox, *Cold World – the aesthetics of dejection and the politics of militant dysphoria* (Zero Books 2009) p.27

are drowned in the icy waters of egotistical calculation',¹⁰ innovation was far more prevalent in the world of business than within politics, which gravitated towards bland consensualism. The 90s culture of remixing, re-fashioning and re-releasing saw music become a hostage to nostalgia and an extraordinarily effective commercial tool. Nike shoes were now sold to the accompaniment of words by beat-poet William S Burroughs and to soundtracks by The Beatles, Iggy Pop and Gill Scott Heron. Even anti-consumerist books and albums became best sellers in their own right and the language of opposition was conveniently hi-jacked by TV commercials and ad-slogans.

In *The Art of Life* Bauman reflects on this subversion and suggests ...

The liquid modern world is in a state of permanent revolution. Deprived of its pristine referents the idea of 'revolution' has been trivialised : it is used and abused daily by writers of commercials, introducing any 'new and improved' product as 'revolutionary' ¹¹

In this liquid mix Microsoft's products were suddenly touted as products of liberation and high profile advertising campaigns encouraged the citizens of the world to challenge everything in order to find themselves. With peace signs decorating the walls of Starbucks' coffee shops and design houses recreating 'punk' styles as fashion accoutrements, the ritual de-fanging of every conceivable form of counter-cultural thinking seemed almost complete. By the end of the 90s even old school counter-

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.6

¹¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) pp.2-5

culturalists and the most hard-bitten 80s indie-disciples would concede that all resistance seemed ultimately futile.

Politically as well as musically the period was one of fluidity and change. Notions of left and right are only useful as long as they reflect the dominant axis of political tension and in the 90s writers such as Giddens reminded us that the explanatory capacity of these categories weakened considerably¹². With the decline of state socialism, the trade union movement and academic Marxism our once predictable political compass quickly lost its traditional bearings. With ideology draining from 90s politics rock'n'roll diminished as a channel for anti-establishment integrity and apart from a handful of high profile liberals such as Sting and Michael Stipe rock-stars became effectively neutered. With the exception of a few popular bands such as The Manic Street Preachers and The Levellers rock groups seemed altogether far less incendiary and controversial than their predecessors.

As capitalism provided the pre-eminent beat to which all genres now danced, rock musicians were now admired less for their politics than the sophistication with which they made themselves wealthy¹³. As consensus took hold protest music suddenly seemed old fashioned so by the early nineties the coalition of pop-cultural dissidents that bemoaned Thatcher's every move had suddenly disappeared. Any fixed sneers of dissent still remaining since punk's emergence gradually loosened becoming slowly absorbed into a culture of laddish Brit-pop and pre-fabricated boy bands. In comparison with the previous three decades the relative absence of politics in popular music remains one of the 90s most distinguishing features.

¹² Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right* (Polity 1994) p.198

¹³ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.34

With the arrivals of Clinton and then Blair the decade has attracted comparisons with the liberalism of the 60s as the West experienced an electoral shift towards the left¹⁴. In reality the legacy of this shift was actually a convergence of some progressive social policies with a rigid right-leaning economic agenda amounting to a race towards market deregulation. This prompted Alan Greenspan to summarise the decade as having ‘a one-line plot summary the re-discovery of the power of market capitalism’¹⁵. In addition to highly visible changes to the style of marketing and communications the hype and expectations surrounding how ‘globalisation’ would transform the world and how we understood it prompted excitable predictions of the end of the nation-state and the imminent decline of American power.

The decade’s lasting geopolitical impact would be the ‘Washington Consensus’ whereby countries willingly mimicked or were cajoled by bodies such as the IMF to go along with its new sweep of history. Within this setting conservative voices which had exuded delight over the lessons learned from the fall of communism now evangelised over the ‘creative destruction’ of 90s capitalism’¹⁶. Consumerism spread like a new religion and raged like a whirlwind particularly throughout the ex-communist bloc¹⁷, only to grind to a halt a decade later with the global credit crunch tempering once supportive voices to reconsider the ‘irrational exuberance’ of the ‘roaring nineties’¹⁸.

¹⁴ The shift from the Reagan-Thatcher-Chretien to the Clinton-Blair-Mulrooney axis

¹⁵ Alan Greenspan, *The Age of Turbulence Adventures in a New World* (Penguin 2008) p.14

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.59-69

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) p.51

¹⁸ Joseph Stiglitz, *The Roaring Nineties Why we are paying the price for the greediest decade in history* (Penguin 2004) p.61

The music industry also changed considerably as top line revenues moved from music sales to concerts and merchandising. Stylistically ‘artistic temperament was out and formula was in’¹⁹ so new acts were carefully planned, programmed and executed. Interestingly these formulaic approaches were also adopted by Blair’s New Labour whose critics also found themselves using similar adjectives to describe the evacuation of integrity and meaning.

Similarities between the operational codes and techniques came to define how the worlds of music and politics were communicated through the machinery of spin, marketing and celebrity. Klein observed that ‘pre-fabricated’ artists such All Saints and Boyzone ‘had never been so prominent’²⁰ and Robb’s retort that ‘they don’t put a foot wrong and display a desperate lack of humanity’²¹ could be applied as much to New Labour as to the whole boy-bands phenomenon. Faultlessly choreographed and meticulously rehearsed this was a decade in which spontaneity and conflict was managed out of both music and politics.

In the run up to the 1996 election popular music became an electoral asset and in its transition from a source of youthful opposition to establishment support was courted by politicians across the spectrum. Both major parties perceived benefit by association so mixing, courting or fraternising with pop-stars became an electoral sport. In May 1996 Tory Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley sent invitations for a government sponsored reception to high profile and key opinion formers within the music industry. One recipient Alan McGee of Creation Records was destined to play a key role in New Labour’s electoral success largely via his association with Britpop

¹⁹ Simon Napier-Bell, *Black Vinyl White Powder* (Ebury Press 2001) p.394

²⁰ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (Fourth Estate 2001) p.50

²¹ John Robb, *The Nineties - what the fuck was all that about ?* (Ebury Press 1999) p154

pioneers Oasis. In response to this invitation McGee issued a press release, which found its way into Melody Maker and NME attacking Bottomley and her record as Health Minister.

As news of McGee's article spread he was invited to meet with Margaret Macdonagh Labour's General Election Co-ordinator and shadow Home Secretary Jack Cunningham. It was quickly apparent that McGee was a potential asset and he was instrumental in facilitating further discussions between New Labour's marketing team and Brit-pop artists such as Damon Albarn and Noel Gallagher. As these relationships developed and the press releases began to appear Cool Britannia's electoral bandwagon started to pulse.

Following one later encounter Blair commented how impressed he was with McGee and the entrepreneurial success of his company. When interviewed at the Labour Youth Experience Rally by Steve Coogan at the Blackpool Norbreck Castle Blair commented 'Alan's just been telling me how he started Creation twelve years ago with a one thousand pound bank loan and now it's got a thirty four million pound turnover. Now *that's* New Labour'²².

This mutual backslapping continued at the Brit awards when Noel Gallagher announced 'there are only 7 people in this room giving hope to the young'. Gallagher was referring to his 6 strong Oasis entourage and the demur Tony Blair sitting in the audience. As the TV cameras panned to his table the normally unruffled Blair looked embarrassed as an excitable Gallagher remained at the winners podium exhorting

²² John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p.271

people to 'shake his hand' whilst gesticulating and shouting to the audience 'Power to the People ... he's the man! '. For Harris this was 'the final gloss on the hip politician'²³ a defining moment for someone who only a few months later would confidently declare 'I am a modern man. I am part of the rock'n'roll generation – the Beatles, colour TV, that's the generation I come from'²⁴.

With newspaper headlines such as 'What's the story – Don't Vote Tory', McGee's Daily Record article 'I Hate the Tories' and Mick Hucknall's appearance in a Party Political Broadcast the coalition between pop stars and New Labour was now in full gear. Not wishing to be excluded from associations with rock-star hip mentions of 'Cool Britannia' appeared in Tory election pamphlets and during his Guild Hall Banquet speech even Prime Minister John Major claimed London to be the 'coolest city on the planet'.

Blair's high profile circulation throughout the music world had started the previous year with his 'Q Awards' appearance. Darren Kalnyuk suggests this whole campaign was predicated on an understanding that the approach had to be very different to what had created Red Wedge ten years earlier²⁵. With the young people's brief entrusted to Kalnyuk, New Labour set about pulling more and more pop-stars on board in order to get as many young voters to register and vote as possible.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.271

²⁴ Tony Blair, Speech in Stevenage 22 April 1997 quoted in Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain* (Quartet Books 2000) p.64

²⁵ Darren Kanyuk, Sing When You're Winning *The Guardian* (May 16 2003)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2003/may/16/artsfeatures.politicsandthearts> - accessed May 11 2008

As spin and media management replaced ideology Kalnyuk's roll-call was unsurprisingly more Ben Elton than Billy Bragg. Sophisticated celebrity endorsement so effective in the marketing of consumer goods was openly courted and invited into British politics like never before. That Britpop and Cool Britannia were relatively short-lived does not disguise the fact that the whole experience was planned and well executed and in electoral terms very effective²⁶. All too easily discarded as a brief yet insignificant overlap between the worlds of pop and politics, Cool Britannia was far more than the chance encounter some commentators might suggest²⁷.

According to McCutcheon et al musical celebrities provide particularly potent symbols and are worshipped more intensely than any other kinds of celebrities²⁸, so the merger of the politics and popular music offered a profoundly powerful combination. An 'over-identification' with musical celebrities in terms of looks, style, attitude and dress has been evident ever since the dawn of rock'n'roll however in the celebratory atmosphere of the nineties this relationship flowed into many areas of public discourse. From Noel Gallagher supporting New Labour, to Bono fighting Third World Debt, to Kylie Minogue protesting against the fur trade the association between cause and celebrity became increasingly familiar.

In the case of the government's 'conquest of cool' the simple acts of fraternising, purloining lyrics or simply projecting a fresh youthful image was all the Party really

²⁶ The percentage of the youth vote (under 21) was higher in 1997 for New Labour than any previous or future election to date statistics are available on <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/> accessed May 1 2009

²⁷ Darren Kalnyuk, Sing When You're Winning *The Guardian* (May 16 2003) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2003/may/16/artsfeatures.politicsandthearts> - accessed May 11 2008

²⁸ Lynn McCutcheon, Conceptualisation and Measurement of celebrity worship *British Journal Of Psychology* vol. 93 no1 (2002) pp. 67-87

needed to do. McGee who had claimed that 'Blair could do for British politics what Creation had done for British music'²⁹ admired how New Labour 'unleashed all this media interest and then just stood back and watched'³⁰. Most of the hard work was conducted behind the scenes by Kalnyuk and his party cadres however the names attached to the headlines were always those of supportive rock-stars. As New Labour's electoral campaign grew in stature the public could be forgiven for believing that Blair was deliberately being singled out for special praise by a host of sympathetic musicians.

McGee mentions how the telephone in Creation's offices 'hardly stopped ringing for over two years' as Five Live and Radio 4's Today programme solicited his views on the government's performance. McGee's much courted punditry by sources of serious political news is significant in two ways.

Firstly it reveals a relaxation of the rules surrounding serious political discourse had taken place allowing someone with minimal political experience, to occupy airtime traditionally associated with political experts. Secondly for an outsider such as McGee to have regular insight into the workings of New Labour demonstrates how broad the political church had become, at least for a period of time.

After the highly publicised star-studded occasion of Blair's no. 10 soiree where pop-stars and politicians guzzled champagne to toast New Labour's electoral success the fraternising ceased almost as suddenly as it has once begun. Perhaps Blair took heed of Norman Tebbit's warning to keep well clear of that 'drug-taking megalomaniac

²⁹ Alan McGee, Daily Record Article in Michael White, Blair & Co do hate the Guardian *The Guardian* (January 30 1998)

³⁰ John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p.309

who thinks his band is bigger than god'³¹ or just moved on as he opened a new and more powerful contact sphere. Whatever the reason the Britpop party was over and Kalnyuk claims 'the relationship between New Labour and its track-suited friends was as lifeless as a Dead Pop Star'³².

Although short-lived Cool Britannia's association with celebrity culture, branding and slick presentation continued to dominate as similar desires for mass-market success and awards ceremonies dominated the music industry. With traditional bastions such as 'Top of The Pops' and 'the inkyies' in terminal decline popular music became more closely associated with glitzy award ceremonies such as 'The Brits'. Whereas once upon a time music lovers might have viewed such events as pollutants of artistic purity, the commercialising ethos of the 90s ensured that any fence still separating mainstream and alternative was finally demolished³³.

Just as the collapse of the Berlin Wall ushered in a new era of political consensus Harris believes the desire to achieve big league aspirations ensured British musicians reached 'unprecedented depths of compliance and timidity' providing a stark contrast to the angst and polarity of previous decades³⁴.

Unlike counter-culturalists such as Lennon and Dylan Rojek believes the consensualism of the 90s enabled campaigning figures such as Bob Geldof and Bono to assume a new kind of moral authority. In an increasingly secularised society the

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.46

³² Darren Kanyuk, Sing When You're Winning *The Guardian* (May 16 2003) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2003/may/16/artsfeatures.politicsandthearts>

³³ Examples of these are Rick Sky's 'music section' in the Daily Mirror. It's focus on the ceremonies, styles and antics of pop-stars rather than the music, was in keeping with the glossy celebrity magazines.

³⁴ John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p.99

aura once associated with sages or charismatic leaders³⁵ transforms celebrity-musicians into new sources of meaning and validation.

This reverential magic helps explain the intimate and credible connections forged between politicians, musicians and the public through Cool Britannia. Indeed the view that celebrity culture becomes the functional equivalent of religion, with its own beliefs, practices and rituals has a certain purchase when considering the loyalty and obsession of rock music fans. For Rojek these figures act as ‘symbols of belonging and recognition’ helping their adherents to find a sense of purpose in the ‘post-God world’³⁶.

In this setting Bono (aka Paul Hewson) is a prime example of a quasi-religious celebrity figure who merged spheres, opting to capitalise on his rock-star image in the world of politics. The ability of Bono to translate his charismatic magic into the sphere of politics from entertainment owes as much to the emerging similarities between the two spheres as it does to the skill of the individual. In what West and Orman describe as ‘politics as entertainment and entertainment as politics’³⁷ this liquid modern crossover is part of a more profound shift.

The pulse of dissent beating since the 60s through figures such as Dylan, Lydon and Bragg came so close to power during the 90s in figures such as Bono that criticisms of institutionalisation and co-option became commonplace. For instance Monbiot’s article ‘Bards of the Powerful’ suggests that Bono had become so cozy with the

³⁵ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London 2001) p.58

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.95

³⁷ Darrell M. West and John Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Longman 2002) p.x

world's political leaders that he was 'lending legitimacy to power'³⁸. More ideologically charged musicians such as Joe Strummer and Phil Ochs were always wary of close proximity to power, however in a decade when anything became possible Bono willingly threw himself into the cauldron of rock-star and even Washington politics.

The alignment of politics and music is described by Paul Du Noyer as a process of 'celebrity liberalism'³⁹ as more socially progressive bands such as Radiohead and REM became associated with groups such as Amnesty International and issues such as fair trade. For West and Orman the influx of celebrities from the worlds of acting and music into the political process represented the perfect mix of 'Hollywood, Washington and the mass media'⁴⁰.

Bono's re-emergence onto the political scene after remaining silent since his appearance at Live Aid was a combination of timing and opportunity. He claims the nineties were 'far more sexy than the eighties' representing a time of juxtaposition which demanded 'new ways of presenting old idealism' whilst simultaneously avoiding the fatal traps of 'being dull and spreading compassion fatigue'⁴¹.

Avoiding being overtly political at a time when politics was grossly unfashionable smacks of cynicism, yet for Bono this manoeuvring was quite legitimate. To avoid being labelled naïve yet retain the appearance of credible political rock-star Bono

³⁸ George Monbiot, Bards of the Powerful *The Guardian* (June 21 2005)

³⁹ Christopher Farley, Waiting for the Next Big Thing *Time Magazine* (6 December 1996) attributes the term to Paul Du Noyer of Q Magazine

⁴⁰ Darrell M. West and John Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Longman (2002) p.62

⁴¹ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p. 266

purposefully remained an uncertain and unpredictable figure. Operating through well-timed aphorisms, gushing sincerity and high profile appearances he was neither a conformist nor a confrontationalist.

By choosing to tread an inoffensively acceptable third way firmly based on a foundational humility before a transcendent higher power, Bono in many ways mimicked Tony Blair. The commonalities in their styles of operation and presentation were mixed with a belief in the spirit of 'rock'n'roll' and a disinterest in the orthodoxies of left-right politics. Contextualising the conditions and timing of their respective journeys to the pinnacle of the musico-political hit parade brings both actors into sharper focus providing a better understand their rock and politics cross-over.

As Britain's first rock-star politician Blair's timing was quite impeccable and marked a break with the recent past. With an abundant optimism in the new post-communist era, the aspirational, cosmopolitan and youthful Blair heralded a change in style to further unsettle John Major's anxieties over Britain's dwindling cultural expanse. It was the differences in presentational style, mannerisms and behaviour rather than the substance of their politics that made them appear to be from different worlds setting the backdrop for a refashioned political landscape avowedly Tory since Thatcher's accession in 1979.

The 'evolution' from Majorism to Blairism that was to ensue over the following years provides an initial foray into a newer style of inter-generational rock-star politics that played so cannily to the public desire for change. 'Evolution' rather than revolution is

the key word because what took place was a change in leadership style, approach and rhetoric rather than one of real policy differences. Unlike the previous shift from left to right in 1979 that had truly amounted to a social and economic revolution, this was an evolution of style rather than revolution of substance.

That Major and Blair were different characters belonging to different political generations and therefore more suited to wholly different cultural landscapes could not have been more evident than it was in the nineties. The austere and serious politics of the eighties Britain had given way to a less serious, more relaxed and more charismatic style of leadership. The bland grey imagery of John Major portrayed through the political satire 'Spitting Image' painted a picture of a man increasingly out of touch with the new decade. As Harris suggests to his own generation he was a throwback, to millions of people under the age of thirty he was 'an inhabitant of a different universe',⁴².

Only one year after winning the 1993 election with a record number of votes⁴³, Major spoke of a 'country of long shadows on cricket grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and old maids bicycling to communion through the morning mist'⁴⁴. This romantic view of English suburban gentility had been lifted from Orwell's 'The Lion and The Unicorn', described by Bragg as the best piece of socialist literature ever written by an Englishman⁴⁵, and therefore an unlikely source for a Conservative Prime-Minister. Major's anxiety replayed a familiar narrative that

⁴² John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p.69

⁴³ The Conservative Party polled over 14,000,000 votes in the 1993 election - the highest popular vote recorded by a British political party in a general election. **United Kingdom Election Results** is a website by David Boothroyd, published in 1994 <http://www.worldcat.org>

⁴⁴ Billy Bragg, *The Progressive Patriot* (Black Swan 2006) p.45

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.49

bedevils every generation, albeit packaged in a nostalgic Englishness, of being lost in times of rapid transformation. John Major's longing for a return to the certainties of solid modernity made him appear to be rooted in a monochrome world before rock'n'roll and the colour TV which moved even his supporters to describe Major as 'probably the last man in Britain to wear a tie to Sunday dinner'⁴⁶.

His lamentations for a bygone age projected an image distinctly at odds with how Blair optimistically embraced the newness of 'globalisation' and 'multi-culturalism'. Onto this exciting new backdrop Blair confidently projected youthful aspirations such as appearing cool, thinking differently and offering change. These were the spurious yet beguiling rock'n'roll foundations upon which New Labour's electoral machine was to be based.

Blair had been mesmerised by the electoral success of Bill Clinton and its messages about charismatic leadership. This reaffirmed his belief that an electable Labour Party had to rid itself once and for all, of the unnecessary millstone of ideological content that had dogged previous campaigns. Fundamentally at odds with traditional Labour Party ideals Blair replaced Clause 4 with a vague statement on values and aims which was not only a deft piece of political manoeuvring, but a symbolic act that under New Labour nothing would be permanent. By re-styling the party's image, Blair was emphasising a break with the past in a desperate attempt to ditch any association with Old Labour concepts.

⁴⁶ Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain* (Quartet Books 2000) p.99

New Labour was so intimately bound up with the imagery and appeal of its leader that 'Blairism' will come to define the late 90s almost as much as Thatcherism defines the 80s. Only ever displaying a passing interest in politics before joining the Labour Party in 1975 in comparison with his contemporaries Blair was an unlikely contender for high office. His love of rock'n'roll went much deeper and his claim that 'it wasn't only an important part of our culture but an important part of our way of life'⁴⁷ evoked both the man and the decade.

Blair's charisma, style of presentation and forward looking approach proved attractive amongst British voters and his considerable popularity was reflected in a 'slew of heart-stopping statistics'⁴⁸ Blair was the youngest ever Labour Party leader and youngest Prime-minister of the twentieth century, achieving the highest ever approval ratings of any Prime Minister or party leader⁴⁹. Blair also became Labour's longest ever serving Prime Minister achieving three consecutive election victories, two of which were landslides.

By delivering Labour from 18 years in the political wilderness Blair was hailed as the saviour of the New Left however as a representative of a new breed of rock-star politician Blair shares more in terms of tastes and style with figures such as David Cameron and Barack Obama than any of his erstwhile Labour Party peers. Young and well educated yet appearing to be socially rootless his pleasant yet not overly sophisticated accent was almost impossible to define. During the 1996 election campaign his favourite album was Oasis' Definitely Maybe and his Desert Island

⁴⁷ Tony Blair at the 1994 Q Awards quoted in John Harris, *Don't Look Back in Anger New Statesman* (12 May 2003) available on <http://www.newstatesman.com/200305120035>

⁴⁸ Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008)

⁴⁹ Hoge Warren, 'Blair Urges New Way for European Left' *New York Times* (6 July 1997)

Discs Top 10 included Free, The Beatles and Bruce Springsteen. So during his meteoric rise to power the British public probably knew more about his musical tastes than his policy goals.

Whereas Blair the politician used music as his backing track to enhance his street credibility and youthful credentials, Bono used politics so he would be taken more seriously. From the longest appearance at Live Aid ⁵⁰, to headlining New York's 9-11 memorial concert to appearing on the cover of TIME magazine under the headline 'Can This Man save the World ?'⁵¹, Bono became the uber-rock-star. Conscious that 'being relevant is a lot harder than being successful'⁵² never had a rock celebrity been granted as much air time or invited to speak at events such as the World Economic Forum.

As co-organiser of Live 8 and 'spokesperson for Africa' Bono has enjoyed supportive tabloid media coverage however his less publicised roles as venture capitalist and tax evader have created a reservoir of resentment. What seems to trickle through various commentaries and social networking sites is a dislike of Bono's messianic certainty and the contradictions he ignores by indulging in his millionaire celebrity lifestyle typified by Dave Grohl's jibe that meeting Bono 'made him want to give up being in a rock and roll band'⁵³. With the launch of a concentrated media blitz and PR campaign

⁵⁰ U2 were scheduled to play for 15 minutes however an extended version of In The name of Love which involved Bono climbing off the stage to dance with a member of the audience stretched their onstage time to 25 minutes longer than any other band and much to the dismay of the 3 other band members and particularly the organisers !!

⁵¹ Bono Can This Man save the World ? Front Cover *Time Magazine* (December 26 2006)

⁵² Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p.34

⁵³ Dave Grohl quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.272

to publicise U2's 12th album 'No Line on the Horizon', it was 'Bono fatigue'⁵⁴ rather than high profile campaigning that created the headlines.

His measured and non-confrontational approach was in keeping with the relaxed, open style of Blairist consensualism and Bono's rock-star advocacy is testimony to how the power of celebrity became almost inseparable from the political process. Marr suggests that during the nineties celebrity fascination previously the preserve of red tops and glossy magazines was now communicated through 'sofa chats and a gurgled gush from once respectable newspapers'⁵⁵.

For instance The Guardian's Madeleine Bunting reported how Bono's mission for Africa 'was legendary' and re-invented 'how rock-stars do politics'⁵⁶. Whereas musicians used to protest and be highly critical of politicians by adding some glamour to the issue of debt-relief Bunting believes Bono pioneered a new model of how celebrities can use their power more effectively.

Rather than polemics and verbal assaults Bono tends to disarm politicians and interviewers by using his charm and pre-fixing his answers in the typical format 'I salute Gerhard Schroder for the deal on debt relief at G7 however ...' This slick and syncopated style borrows techniques used by salespeople to defuse and manage

⁵⁴ Eddie Mair, *BBC Radio 4* (March 10 2009) Reporting a licence payer who wrote to the BBC complaining of licence payers who had written to the BBC complaining of 'Bono fatigue' as a result of U2 appearing for in-depth interviews on five of its radio and TV stations plugging their new album in under a week. It was not so much the music but the way Bono was positioned by the interviewers as some kind of overly wise and spiritual modern day sage that had irked the listener.

⁵⁵ Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008)

⁵⁶ Madelaine Bunting, 'A Day with Bono' *The Guardian* (June 2005) p.7

awkward objections and ironically Bono imagines these as two separate industries describing himself as a salesman of ideas, both musical and political⁵⁷.

Simon Kelner of the Independent claimed Bono's unique perspective on world affairs ensured his access to world leaders was second to none⁵⁸. Kelner was responsible for running the newspaper's special RED issue edited by Bono and US philanthropist Bobby Shriver in order was designed 'to throw the weight of the corporate world behind the battle against disease' and aids in Africa⁵⁹.

The 'RED Partnership' initiative was launched by Bono at the World Economic Forum in January 2006, and is essentially a brand licensing arrangement between Bono's organisation and partner companies such as Emporio Armani, Starbucks, Gap and Microsoft. These companies then contribute a percentage of their sales revenues of any RED branded products to the global fund for fighting disease.

Bono's high profile appearances and initiatives prompt Ellis Cashmore to single him out as being representative of an increasingly important community of non nation-state 'actors' influencing both discourse and action. In addition to RED Bono has helped to create the ONE Campaign, DATA (Debt AIDS Trade Africa), and EDUN, a clothing company which is striving to stimulate trade with poverty stricken countries.

He has also appeared at both Labour and Conservative party conferences prompting Chrissy Iley to claim 'there has never been a rock-star who wielded so much

⁵⁷ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p. 17

⁵⁸ Simon Kelner, *The Independent : RED edition* May 2006

⁵⁹ Simon Kelner, *The Independent : RED edition* May 2006

power⁶⁰. Bono, who incidentally is part-owner of Forbes magazine, appeared in its Generous Celebrity List for his charitable work with DATA, had 3 nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize and received a knighthood in 2007⁶¹.

Interestingly his high profile journey shares much in terms of timing, technique and company with New Labour's Tony Blair. Despite obvious differences in their backgrounds whereby Bono rose from humble beginnings in North Dublin compared to Blair's affluent public school upbringing, both are of a broadly similar age, devout Christians and self-affirmed family men. Religious devotion and parenting skills are not traditionally associated with rock-stars however Bono epitomises the multi-tasking management skills of the successful liquid modern and breaks the stereotypical rock-star mould.

For both figures the 1990s was a decade of rapid personal and financial growth and although Bono achieved multi-millionaire status long before Blair the latter's attitude towards wealth and lifestyle is quite insightful. Andrew Rawnsley claims that based on staff reports from number 10 Downing Street the Blairs liked money and glamour far more than people realise and this was a constant source of friction with officialdom⁶². Blair's cabinet secretary Sir Richard Wilson repeatedly rejected expenses claims from Cherie for furnishings, hairdressing and clothes as the Blairs gained a reputation for liking exotic travel, expensive clothes and the company of the rich and famous.

⁶⁰ Chrissy Iley, Bono the shades come off *Sunday Times Magazine* (June 6 2009) p.14

⁶¹ Look to the Stars, Celebrity Charity Work (Bono) on www.looktothestars.org/celebrity/26-bono accessed April 23 2010

⁶² Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of The Party* (Viking Books 2010) pp.123–128

Rawnsley also reveals that Blair made a revealing aside at the Davos summit in 2002. Finding himself seated between the ‘stupendously loaded’ Bono and ‘the billionaire magnate’ Bill Gates he groaned out loud that he had ‘chosen the wrong career’⁶³. This wasn’t the only time that wealth provoked Blair into expressions of awe and jealousy. Dwelling on the success of his contemporaries during an interview with Anne Appelbaum he remarked ‘it’s amazing how many of my friends I was in school and university with have ended up so rich. There’s a mate of mine I ran into the other day – we used to run discos together and things – now he’s worth millions’⁶⁴.

Rawnsley claims Blair ‘seemed to dream of another life in which he was a stonkingly rich actor, rock-star or entrepreneur’⁶⁵ and this desire even moved the normally supportive Paddy Ashdown to scorn Blair’s penchant for ‘surrounding himself with human bling’⁶⁶. Blair’s aides reveal that he would return from breaks in rich people’s villas quite deflated, moaning to his intimates how it made him feel poor. Sally Morgan responded to these outpourings of self-pity by reminding him that he was better off than most Britons even though this wealth didn’t yet quite stretch to that of Cliff Richard and Richard Branson who could afford Tuscan villas and super-yachts⁶⁷.

New Labour’s period in office helped fashion an era in which the super-rich increased their visibility and influence. By 2003 Bono was estimated to enjoy an annual income of in excess of £5m dwarfing the Prime Minister’s relatively meagre income of £150,000. Admiring Bono for his entrepreneurialism as much as his music Blair

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.126

⁶⁴ Anne Applebaum, Interview *Sunday Telegraph* (18 March 2001)

⁶⁵ Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of The Party* (Viking Books 2010) p.126

⁶⁶ Interview with Paddy Ashdown in Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of The Party* (Viking Books 2010) pp.127

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.126

ensured that the injustice of what he saw as a lowly politician's income was quickly re-balanced when he left office. On standing down as P.M. in June 2007 Blair charged in excess of £200,000 for 90-minute lecture slots and accepted lucrative positions with JP Morgan Chase and Zurich Financial. In under a year Blair had almost closed the gap on his rock-star rival as his lecturing and advisory roles earned him an annual income of above £7m⁶⁸.

During the 'roaring nineties' Bono and Blair shared similar contact spheres, rubbed shoulders with the rich and the famous, and were increasingly sought out as producers of expert discourse on global issues. Both quickly matured into unique twenty first century roles as 'spokesperson' for Africa and as EU/UN special envoy for peace and reconciliation⁶⁹.

Born only seven years apart as members of the baby boomer generation in their early years they both displayed a far greater passion for music than politics. Bono formed his first rock band at thirteen and after 'the alarm bell of music woke him up to the world'⁷⁰ he formed what went on to become the global rock phenomenon U2.

Blair harboured similar dreams singing in rock-bands and John Rentoul notes how the young Blair modelled himself on Mick Jagger whilst at Fettes⁷¹ and his resulting command of Rolling Stones' lyrics secured him a role in college rock band Ugly Rumours. Prior to enrolling at Oxford Blair had taken a gap year to become a rock

⁶⁸ David Hencke, Insurance job takes Blair's earnings above £7m *The Guardian* (29 January 2008)

⁶⁹ The official title is 'official envoy of the quartet of the Middle East' on behalf of the UN, the EU, US and Russia

⁷⁰ Bono, on receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.270

⁷¹ John Rentoul, *Blair Unbound* (Simon and Schuster 2007) p.32

promoter and although fairly successful he put down his guitar and jettisoned his musical ambitions in favour of a career at the bar.

Coming from Tory stock it was uncertain which party Blair favoured and discussions with his contemporaries have revealed that 'he was less concerned about party affiliation than his ambition of becoming Prime Minister'⁷². After he turned his attention towards a career in politics only then did he choose to join the Labour Party. In time he was able to resurrect his youthful associations by picking up his Fender Stratocaster to cultivate the now familiar image of the 'hip politician' playing and fraternising with rock-stars.

Whereas Blair dabbled in music Bono submerged himself in politics. His cover shot as Time Magazine's 'Man of The Year' in 2005 saw Bono occupying a place normally associated with politicians and world leaders. Previous 'Men of the Year' included Clinton, Gorbachev, Reagan, Bush and Bill Gates and besides Pope John Paul (1994) Bono was the first European to receive the award in over forty years and is the only rock-star ever to be nominated.

As the planet's biggest rock star it is interesting that someone who benefits so markedly from stardom is so dismissive of the notion of celebrity. Deriding stargazers as 'members of a new cult' indulging in little more than fantasy and magic⁷³ he

⁷² Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (Macmillan 2007) DVD 2 Entertain video (2008) As the son of a lawyer who was a staunch Conservative Party loyalist and had stood as a Conservative Party candidate surprise has been expressed over Blair Junior's choice to join the Labour Party. Marr suggests Labour's more sympathetic philosophy of social justice fitting with his Christian beliefs is the most plausible explanation – a possible second factor was his involvement with partner Cherie Booth who had strong socialist views.

⁷³ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p.207

actually claims to despise the notion of ‘a rock-star with a cause’⁷⁴. Proffering explanations based on Christian scripture he has equated celebrity followers as misguided people on a mistaken journey, revealing that ‘the true life of a believer is one of a longer, more hazardous uphill pilgrimage, where the illumination for your next step is slowly uncovered’⁷⁵. How this applies to Bono’s personal journey remains unclear however although he claims ‘celebrity is ridiculous’ he does recognise that it is ‘currency, and he wants to spend his wisely’⁷⁶.

Similar to the young Blair politics was always a secondary pursuit for Bono, only undertaken in earnest after he had stopped ‘throwing rocks at the obvious symbols of power and the abuse of it’⁷⁷ during the ideologically unfashionable eighties. As already highlighted Blair regarded ideology as backward and un-progressive and any remnants were a massive hindrance to Labour’s electability.

Both were also similar in crafting their own styles and making themselves relevant to the mood of the nineties. As a 90s rock-star Bono admitted it was liberating to jettison the confinements and taboos of the eighties style police and he felt comfortable plundering styles to re-create himself as the ‘identi-kit rock-star’. This exercise ideally suited the eclecticism of the 90s as 40 years of cultural produce presented Bono with a serious back catalogue from which to plunder. He admits to using ‘Elvis’ jacket, Jim Morrison’s leather pants, Lou Reed’s shades, Jerry Lee Lewis’ boots and Gene Vincent’s limp’⁷⁸ to remix himself and his music through theatrical events such as Zoo TV.

⁷⁴ Chrissy Iley, ‘Bono the shades come off’ *Sunday Times Magazine* (June 6 2009) p.16

⁷⁵ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p.233

⁷⁶ Paul Valley, The Big Question *The Independent* (16 May 2006)

⁷⁷ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p.85

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38

After the suspicion and intensity of Cold War politics Blair's social rootless-ness and informal manner was also in keeping with the freer and less prejudicial zeitgeist of the nineties. Like the charismatic Bill Clinton he was more suited to the new open collared environment than his predecessors and the pre-occupation with being open and honest is another shared presentational similarity. Blair's craving of 'hip credibility' and Bono's desire to be taken more seriously saw significant personal image enhancement by moving away from their traditional moorings and towards a hybrid aggregation of 'rock-star-politician'.

Accountability has never seemingly been a problem for Bono in his adopted roles as 'spokesman for Africa' and Time Magazine's 'Man of the Year'. As influential articulator of the enlightened Western conscience, Bono is comfortable with criticisms that he carries no democratic mandate yet fights in the name of democracy. Far from his role subverting one of the foundations of democratic politics he warns how politicians should be nervous when they confront him because he believes 'he represents the poor and wretched in this world'⁷⁹.

It would be unfair to depict Bono as unhinged and messianic however criticisms of Bono playing the role of a modern day Christ figure⁸⁰ are not uncommon. When asked why politicians should fear him he responded 'God has a special place for the poor', however when asked to comment on being one of the most powerful people in the world he replied 'I don't have any real power but the people I represent do'⁸¹. When pressed further he reveals the constituencies who invest him with this power

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.124

⁸⁰ MySpace, *Bono is Evil* on www.myspace.com/bonoisevil accessed May 11 2008

⁸¹ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p.149

are in fact ‘the 18-30 age group of floating voters’, the African dispossessed and ‘those who have no voice at all’⁸².

Coming from a long line of travelling salesmen, Bono explains his role of ‘selling ideas in the political and commercial worlds’⁸³ as a logical progression from selling songs and melodies to record companies and audiences. Always tuned in to the potential of merchandising he seems to have few concerns over the contradictions that commercialism represents.

Whilst once recounting the parable of the Camel and the Eye of the needle Bono was quizzed if this bible-story bore any relevance to his own life circumstances and vast personal fortune. After a brief pause a pensive Bono replied ‘What am I supposed to do with all the money ... Give it back?’⁸⁴. Oblivious to the fact that amassing largesse poses certain contradictions it was the dismissive nature of his response, which prompted poet Terry McCarthy to suggest that his blue sunglasses ‘filter out the harsh light of daily reality’⁸⁵.

Although never truly radical in a political sense Bono did however lose any semblance of rebelliousness as he moved ever closer to positions of power and influence. In Blair’s early political career he was an active member of CND, endorsed left wing policies and advocated Britain should leave the EEC. Once he had even claimed to be a ‘socialist’⁸⁶ as it ‘corresponded most closely to an existence that is

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.149

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁸⁴ Terry McCarthy, *When Bono Went Republican* www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbExXACibY accessed on March 1 2009

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, accessed on March 1 2009

⁸⁶ Robert Taylor, *My Socialist Dream* *New Statesman* (June 19 2006) available on <http://www.newstatesman.com/200606190031> accessed April 1st 2008 This was based on a letter from Blair to Michael Foot during the 1982 Beaconsfield by-election which was only published in 2006

rational and moral’⁸⁷ however like Bono he gradually discarded any socialist leanings to adopt the language of 90s super-capitalism. Embroiling himself in the lobbyist politics of Washington Bono quickly endeared himself to Bill Gates, leading members of The Congress and even George W Bush.

Time spent in the company of Paul O’Neill the entrepreneur, treasury official and ex-chairman of RAND corporation helped confirm that trade and commerce were actually mechanisms of world salvation, rather than its destruction. Reflecting this conversion he recently commented ‘philanthropy is like hippy music, holding hands. Project Red is more like punk rock, hip-hop, it feels like hard commerce’⁸⁸. This newfound fluency in the language of super-capitalism, replete with a new vocabulary and framework of understanding, was amplified further by his resolute defence of U2’s less than liberal business practices, and the activities of his venture capitalist firm Elevation Partners.

Disquiet over Bono’s business dealings became public as pressure group ‘The Tax Justice Office Network’ (TJON)⁸⁹ highlighted U2’s tax avoidance strategy, which involved relocating their publishing company’s registered offices from Ireland to Holland. TJON protested that awarding Bono the ‘Liberty Medal’⁹⁰ for supposedly fostering a belief in ‘justice, fairness, self governance and communal responsibility’ was inappropriate given that Bono sanctioned the relocation for tax purposes.

⁸⁷ Tony Blair 6 July 1993 maiden speech : full transcript available on website www.channel4.com/news/articles/politics/domestic_politics/blairs+maiden+speech/467307 accessed January 11 2008

⁸⁸ Bono and Ali Hewson, *Business Rocks Start Your Own Business Magazine* (Dec 2008) available on http://www.sybmagazine.com/features_bono.html accessed May 9 2009

⁸⁹ The tax justice network, TJON www.taxjusticenetwork.com accessed May 1 2008

⁹⁰ An award presented by the Philadelphia National Constitution Centre in 2007

The African Union estimates tax dodging by foreign companies costs about \$150 billion a year – three times what Africa receives in aid⁹¹. Ironically Bono had previously highlighted this connection even accusing his home country of Ireland of being one of the countries that through its selfish taxation policies was failing to support Africa.

Possessing interests in businesses that contribute to the very ills that his philanthropic work is trying to correct does not seem to trouble Bono. The private equity company Elevation Partners⁹² of which Bono is founder and managing director, invested \$300 million in Pandemic Studios the company responsible for the production of the videogame ‘Mercenaries 2’. The game caused controversy as it was criticised for ‘promoting the invasion, destruction and takeover of Latin American countries’⁹³.

With admiration for more confrontational rock icons such as Lennon, Dylan and Joe Strummer Bono is however aware of the contradictions of a rock-star wandering inside the corridors of power rather than placarding at the gates outside. Holding meetings with Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jeffrey Sachs suggests that the once outsider rock-star was colluding with the establishment and whispering into the ear of the prince⁹⁴. For Bono these are naïve simplifications, because unless he is willing to

⁹¹ Peter Panepento, Critics Say Bono’s Business Practices Belie Africa (*The Chronicle of Philanthropy* Oct 8 2007) <http://philanthropy.com/blogPost/Critics-Say-Bonos-Business/9569/> accessed February 7 2008

⁹² Elevation Partners, www.elevation.com accessed January 2010 : Founded in 2004 by Bono and business associates from Apple, Silver Lake and Blackstone Group. Elevation Partners also has a financial interest in Forbes magazine most famous for its annual Rich Lists. Owned by GOP supporter and ex-candidate the magazines motto is the ‘capitalist tool’ see <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/> - accessed April 14 2010

⁹³ www.vensolidarity.net links to Alliance for Global Justice on www.afgj.org/?page_id=545 : accessed December 25 2009

⁹⁴ George Monbiot, ‘Bards of the Powerful’ *The Guardian* (June 21 2005)

create change by working within the system to achieve consensus, his ‘political work’ as he describes it⁹⁵ would amount to very little.

Whereas certain rock figures such as Todd Rundgren were moved to write songs such as ‘Fuck You Jesse Helms’⁹⁶ Bono developed great respect for the US senator whom he found to be a ‘beautiful man’⁹⁷. Working with Helms on debt relief and trading standards issues Bono admired Helms’ ability to stay steadfastly true to his convictions – no matter how extreme they might be?⁹⁸ For Bill Clinton Iley reveals that Bono’s ability to convert Helms from the belief that ‘AIDS was God’s retribution’ demonstrates that he ‘has a particular gift of mind’ and ‘a grace and power that is something to behold’⁹⁹. Bono had previously taken issue with Helms’ suppression of the Sandinistas and his dismantling of the National Endowment for the Arts, however within this new consensual environment these matters were conveniently forgotten.

Blair also displayed a tendency to express open admiration for previous adversaries and they too for him, most notably Margaret Thatcher¹⁰⁰ who remarked to the Tory Carlton Club that Blair was ‘a man who won’t let Britain down’¹⁰¹. Creating networks of influential and wealthy friends revealed neither operator had any real qualms about

⁹⁵ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p.111

⁹⁶ Todd Rundgren, *Fuck You Jesse* (1991) based on the Tipper Gore censorship hearings see lyrics on www.actionext.com/names/t/todd_rundgren_lyrics/jesse.html accessed May 2007

⁹⁷ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p180.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.185

⁹⁹ Chrissy Iley, Bono the shades come off *Sunday Times Magazine* (June 6 2009) p.21

¹⁰⁰ Barry Didcock, Life Without Margaret Thatcher based on interview with John Sergeant 2002 *Sunday Herald* (13 Feb 2005)

¹⁰¹ Quoted in John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) spoken at the Tory Carlton Club in January 1997 p. 239

courting the political right, including luminaries such as Bush, Murdoch and Berlusconi¹⁰².

Life as a rock-star politician does however have complications as it did during the G8 Genoa summit when Bono was once again photographed on the wrong side of the riot lines laughing and cavorting with world leaders. Evidence of his glad-handing with Vladimir Putin whilst rioting was taking place was particularly ill timed as a young Genoese protestor was killed in violent exchanges with the security forces. As pictures of the guffawing pair started to appear Bono claimed its context was misinterpreted amounting to 'one of his worst moments ever captured in a photograph'¹⁰³. In light of what has emerged about his attitude towards wealth and power maybe the camera exposed more about Bono than just an embarrassing image.

Bono continues to have a strong relationship with Tony Blair and the hierarchy of what was New Labour. In June 2009 Blair claimed Bono was far more than a 'fair-weather friend' and 'one of the people he liked and respected most in the world'¹⁰⁴. In September 2009 they met in Chicago, as Bono was playing a concert and Blair was on business for Zurich Financial Services. Blair remarked after the meeting 'Bono is here doing the U2 concert so we hooked up last night and had a nice conversation about various things we're doing in Africa'¹⁰⁵. Later the same month Bono was photographed clasping Mr Brown warmly at a ceremony in New York when the

¹⁰² Ed Vulliamy, By their friends shall we know the sultans of bling *The Guardian* (27 Oct 2005)

¹⁰³ Michka Assayas, *Bono on Bono Conversations with Michka Assayas* (Hodder & Stoughton 2006) p.237

¹⁰⁴ Chrissy Iley, Bono the shades come off *Sunday Times Magazine* (June 6 2009) p.19

¹⁰⁵ Jenny Booth, Bono's surprise appearance at Tory Conference *The Times* (Oct 8 2009) available online at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6866289.ece> - accessed December 11 2009

Prime Minister was presented with the World Statesman of the Year award by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation¹⁰⁶.

Ever since appearing on the stage of Labour party conference in 2004, where he praised Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's achievements Bono has admitted that he is seen as Labour Party's apologist¹⁰⁷. This is set to change as Bono made a surprise appearance by video link to the Tory Party Conference only a week after he had introduced Gordon Brown's keynote speech at Labour's conference in Brighton in 2009. Introduced by the party's deputy leader, William Hague, as someone 'you don't normally hear from at Conservative Conferences' Jenny Booth suggests the video gave a 'celebrity boost' to David Cameron and cemented the impression that power and influence was draining away from Labour in favour of the Conservatives'¹⁰⁸.

In previous decades politics had spawned many songs expressing anger, defiance and ridicule however in the age of New Labour as award ceremonies and celebrity columns cast their irresistible spell Blairism spawned virtually nothing. Youth culture, that once troublesome part of British life, was rendered strangely tame and the idea that music should be founded on something more substantial than its own popularity seemed anachronistic. In its own way celebrity culture provided fertile grounds for new styles of popular music which aimed to please rather than offend. Bands that could be quickly and easily assembled suited the conditions of liquid modernity and these factors were instrumental in the arrival of a new breed of boy-bands and girl-bands.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, accessed December 11 2009

¹⁰⁷ Allegra Stratton, Bono makes surprise appearance at Tory Conference *The Guardian* (Thursday 8 October 2009) available on guardian.co.uk accessed October 10 2009

¹⁰⁸ Jenny Booth Oct 8 2009, Bono's surprise appearance at Tory Conference *The Times* available online at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6866289.ece> - accessed December 11 2009

With an outlook more in keeping with celebrity and consumerism rather than controversy and politics, Victoria Beckham's aspiration to 'be as famous as Persil Automatic'¹⁰⁹ underscored how the anodyne and the inoffensive had displaced the eccentric and non-conformist. Brought together through an ad in the March 1994 edition of the theatre trade journal *Stage*, The Spice Girls shot to fame and were ranked by Forbes as number six in its 'Celebrity Power 100' of 1999. With no track record to speak of or obvious musical talent their commercial success was proof that in a short time bands could be assembled like furniture and marketed to achieve notoriety.

In 1968 Jim Morrison, described by Manzarek as somebody 'possessed by a vision, by a madness, by a rage to live, by an all consuming fire to make art'¹¹⁰ coined a new term for the fusing together of sexuality and politics, the 'erotic politician'¹¹¹. If rock-stars were once potent, dangerous and challenging 'Girl Power' and its unexpected support for the 1997 Tory election campaign suggests any eroticism and controversy had finally been bleached from British politics.

This announcement was communicated during a Smash Hits awards ceremony when Victoria Beckham proudly declared 'we'd never vote Labour'. When questioned further fellow Spice Girl Geri Halliwell commented that 'socialism is bad - you work for your living and you deserve to keep what you've earned' before going on to declare her admiration for the strength of Lady Thatcher in her dealings with the unions'¹¹². The Spice Girl's decision to publicly come out in favour of The

¹⁰⁹ Ellis Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture* (Routledge 2006) p.199

¹¹⁰ Ray Manzarek from *Light My Fire* (New York: Berkley Boulevard Books 1998) quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p. 275

¹¹¹ David Waller, *Teenage Nervous Breakdown music and politics in the post-Elvis era* (Routledge 2006) p.81

¹¹² Simon Sebag-Montefiore, Spice Girls interview *Spectator Magazine* (Nov 29 1996)

Conservative Party was however greeted with almost total disinterest amounting to an absolute P.R. flop. Ten years earlier in the days of Red Wedge the very idea of pop-stars supporting the Tory party would have been almost unthinkable but by the end of the century and even with the backing of a well orchestrated media campaign nobody even seemed to care.

The taming and domestication of rock-stars has been linked by the Korean academic Heejoon Chung to the power of endorsements and contractual obligations. His detailed study of two Korean celebrities highlights the fact that mavericks still abound however they no longer attract the contracts indispensable to a celebrity career. Chung's study focused on two of South Korea's best known celebrities Taiji Seo a rock musician and Chanho Park a Major League Baseball star.

Chung's analysis of the '*baseball star v rock star in globalising popular culture*' revealed Seo was the symbol of progressiveness, resistance and deviation and Park that of conservatism, adaptation and normality'¹¹³. At a time when the value of celebrity endorsements went into the stratosphere, it was too dangerous for such highly prized collateral to become rogue elements. As a result there was no place for obvious rebels or protestors such as Seo, as the characteristics of resistance were not totally ignored but cleverly de-contextualised and turned into a stylistic affectation.

Nike is an example of how a company honed its advertising images to represent youthful insolence to position itself as 'a rebellious, maverick and anti-authoritarian company'¹¹⁴. It was unlikely in the high stakes nineties that Nike would have gambled

¹¹³ Heejoon Chung, 'Baseball star v rock star in globalising popular culture Similarities, Difference and Paradox in Discussion of Celebrities Interview' for the *Sociology of Sport Volume 38 No. 1* (2003) p.104

¹¹⁴ Robert Goldman and Stephen Papsen, 'Nike Culture The Sign of The Swoosh' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol 2 no 3 (1998) pp. 418-21

on figures such as Muhammad Ali who avoided the draft and protested against the Vietnam War or Billie Jean King, whose sexuality became such a source of scandal in the 80s. Youthful insolence might be easy to harness in the interests of 'cool' but King's transgression of sexual norms or Ali's moral stance (*notably and more importantly at a time of war*) might prove difficult when leveraging brand or product awareness.

The creation of 'cool' and its marketing in the service of commercial interests is a subject consistently linked with music and music culture. Notions of authenticity and 'selling out' reached a heightened pitch as business developed a voracious appetite for the exploitation of what was once understood as rebellion.

In *Sincerity and Authenticity* Lionel Trilling argued that the notion of authenticity is a thoroughly modern value arising as a direct response to the pressures of technocratic life¹¹⁵. With modern life understood as inauthentic and alienating, authenticity becomes more of a lost essence, an almost nostalgic quality of pre-modern life and Trilling's acid test of authenticity was the absence of commodification, or creativity for non-commercial purposes.

In the nineties any considerations that authenticity could be used as a simile for genuineness yet still hide the transaction were gleefully exposed by Heath and Potter, and Frank as being fundamentally flawed. Authenticity is an illusory phantom that does not easily coexist with publicity and commercialism, and as Deborah Root suggests it is all too easily manipulated so 'people think they are getting something profound when they are in fact just getting merchandise'¹¹⁶. The curious enthusiasm

¹¹⁵ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Harvard University Press 1984)

¹¹⁶ Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture Art appropriation, and the commodification of difference* (Boulder CO Western Press 1996) p.78

of modern business for the symbols, music and slang of the counterculture is therefore a fascination more complex than earlier and more simplistic theories of co-option might suggest.

During the 90s the process by which the system assimilates resistance by appropriating its symbols, evacuating their revolutionary content and then selling them back to the masses as commodities¹¹⁷ became increasingly understood as a process without sinister intent. Rather than a system with a divine or demonic purpose it was the sophisticated workings of a nexus of transactions within an advanced liquid consumer environment, which could then be understood as benign or toxic depending on one's prejudices and persuasions.

For Bauman the ability for capitalism to relentlessly innovate and turn anti-capitalist sentiment into self-empowerment reflects how

*'the society of consumers has developed, to an unprecedented degree, the capacity to absorb all and any dissent it inevitably, in common with other types of society, breeds – and then to recycle it as a major source of its own reproduction, reinvigoration and expansion'*¹¹⁸.

Consumer capitalism's increasingly sophisticated devotion to the exploitation of needs and desires results in a more desperate search for authenticity inside all the dimensions of our lives, activities and relationships. The growing realisation that absolutely nothing was un-corruptible prompted some valiant yet ultimately futile resistance and nowhere was this more evident than in the world of rock music.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell : How Counter Culture Became Consumer Culture* (Capstone 2006) p.35

¹¹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p.48

In his introduction to 'The Nineties' rock journalist John Robb uses Simon Price's description of the decade as 'an extreme tug of war between people who believe in authenticity and people who don't'¹¹⁹. For Price 90s rock culture no longer came from the streets but from the car boot sale as the recycling of once cherished record collections reaffirmed themselves through a welter of compilations, consistently reminding us of this week's version of the 'greatest records of all time'. Based upon his prescient observations about modern culture it is unsurprising that Price chose the sloganeering partisans of controversy the Manic Street Preachers, as the subject matter of his first rock biopic¹²⁰ and a vivid and lurid example of 90s self-examination was provided by the self mutilation of band member Richey Edwards.

During an interview with NME journalist Steve Lamacq after a gig at the Norwich Arts Centre¹²¹ when questioned about the band's seriousness towards their art, Edwards suddenly proceeded to carve the words '4 Real' into his left forearm with a razor blade¹²². News of Edwards' self inflicted injury, which required hospitalisation and seventeen stitches, spread quickly as his lacerations were gouged into the nation's consciousness. His actions soon became rock'n'roll mythology or in Stuart Bailey's words 'shorthand for total bloody commitment'¹²³ as the incident prompted intense curiosity in Edwards and the band's forthcoming debut album 'Culture, Alienation, Boredom And Despair'.

¹¹⁹ Simon Price, *Everything a book about The Manic Street Preachers* (Virgin Books 1998) p.11

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹²¹ Manic Street Preachers Richey Edwards *BBC Wales Music* (May 15 1991) on www.bbc.co.uk/wales/music/sites/manic-street.../biography.shtml accessed January 2009

¹²² Stuart Maconie, *Everything Must Grow Up Q Magazine* (October 1998)

¹²³ Stuart Bailey, *Traumaic for thr People : The Vanishing of Richey Manic NME* (30 December 1995)

When released the album cover was a depiction of Edwards' chest and left arm tattooed with a rose underlined with the words 'USELESS GENERATION'. The words were changed to the final album title 'GENERATION TERRORISTS' and selling over 250,000 copies to reach number 13 in the UK charts, stands as a rare landmark when a record with politicised content achieved notable chart success. The provocative cover concealed an intellectual twist as the inside liner notes featured quotations from a variety of literary, musical and political figures such as Chuck D (Public Enemy), Albert Camus, Henry Miller and George Orwell¹²⁴. In his new-found role as cover star and chief propagandist, Edwards attracted a retinue of adoring followers. His rapidly achieved cult status was enshrined through his mysterious disappearance on 1st February 1995¹²⁵ providing his followers with an ideal rock'n'roll epitaph.

For Heath and Potter the anti-consumerist zeal which prompted Edwards' desperate act of self mutilation was destined to fail as it merely played into the hands of the system by providing news fodder to be disseminated through glossy magazines, news editorials, and websites. In the hyper-consumerism of the nineties, acts of anti-consumerism such as the '4 Real' incident sit ironically as some of the most important cultural forces in the more affluent parts of the world¹²⁶. Modern critiques of consumer society in the form of books, films and in this case music, are in fact the success stories of modern consumerism and far from undermining consumerism actually serve to reinforce it.

¹²⁴ John Harris, *Hail Hail Rock'n'Roll* (Sphere 2009) p.100-101 Here under the title *the strange roll call of people mentioned in songs my the Manic Street Preachers* Harris actually lists 72 personages between *Motown Junk* (1991) up to *I'm Just a Patsy* (2007)

¹²⁵ Footnote : despite numerous uncorroborated sightings Edwards was declared presumed deceased in November 2008 : see Simon Price, *Everything a book about The Manic Street Preachers* (Virgin Books 1998)

¹²⁶ Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell : How Counter Culture Became Consumer Culture* (Capstone 2006) p.101

The sincerity of Richie's actions remains forever uncertain however its replications throughout the printed media of the nineties are still evident through the digital coverage it receives today. In 2003 Edwards was voted the 23rd greatest Welsh hero of all time¹²⁷ and in April 2007 twelve years after his disappearance, he was included in The Independent's twenty wildest pop-stars of all time alongside Ozzy Osbourne and Keith Moon¹²⁸.

Positioning themselves as rock iconoclasts of the 90s the band's manifesto to 'cut down the previous generation, kill their idols and burn out after one album'¹²⁹ proved to be empty rhetoric. Far from 'making themselves obsolete as soon as possible'¹³⁰ the Manic Street Preachers continued to produce successful albums enjoying a rock career littered with an abundance of acknowledgements and award ceremonies. In the a-political 90s The Manic Street Preachers are therefore an example of a band that was simultaneously a conundrum, a contradiction and an anachronism.

Being a volcanic mixture of deliberate outrage and super-sharp anti-establishment rhetoric the band were an amalgam of the politics of The Clash and the cynical nihilism of The Sex Pistols. Whereas most contemporary bands distanced themselves from politics and became suffused in a growing air of laddish anti-intellectualism, the Manic Street Preachers singled themselves out by doing exactly the opposite.

They saw the 90s as their personal culture war in which they were the pop-art suicide bombers of their day. Disdainful of their contemporaries and any allusions to the

¹²⁷ Culturenet Cymru 2003, The official Welsh culture-net website where his biography is immortalised and available for download

¹²⁸ Wildest Pop Stars, *The Independent* (5 April 2007)

¹²⁹ Nick Price, Band biography (Manic Street Preachers) available on www.tiscali.co.uk/music/biography/manic_street_preachers_biog/3 accessed February 28 2009

¹³⁰ John Robb interview with Richey Edwards, *Sounds* (January 26 1991) reproduced in John Robb, *The Nineties - what the fuck was all that about ?* (Ebury Press 1999) p.85

rock'n'roll myth their abundant usage of controversial literary and philosophical figures in their lyrics, liner notes and media sloganeering positioned them in Robb's estimation as 'the last of the manifesto writing bands'¹³¹.

Their commitment to leftist politics through releases such as 'Masses Against the Classes' was alarmingly out of place amidst the Happy Mondays, Stone Roses and a rising appetite for house and dance music. For Robb their opposition to the prevailing anti-intellectualism was a last gasp attempt to reclaim 'territory lost to the dumbed down Brit-pop version of the working class'¹³². For a band that had once been ridiculed as gimmicky, punk throwbacks by 1997 they had already secured best album and best group at the BRIT Awards where they rubbed shoulders with Tony Blair and Britpop's elite.

If Bono was to become the identikit rock-star of the 90s the Manic Street Preachers were the most vivid re-mix of what Stuart Bailie described as 'premium rock and political dialectic'¹³³. Racked with contradictions just as The Clash had been twenty years earlier over label loyalty, their departure to a major in a more consumer friendly environment attracted far less clamour than had greeted their forbears. By now the accepted allure of the majors was taken for granted and criticism came primarily from old-school indie disciples who in true nineties speak, had simply failed to 'move on'.

Our enchantment with the rock celebrity provides an interesting window into contemporary society and the experience of the Manic Street Preachers can be viewed as the unfulfilled conclusion of rock's romantic dream, embracing the idealism of the counterculture, the punk rock sneer and disdain at the indulgence and vacuity of

¹³¹ John Robb, *The Nineties - what the fuck was all that about ?* (Ebury Press 1999) pp.80-89

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 96

¹³³ Stuart Bailey, Manic Street reschers review *NME* (30 December 1995)

modern life. Their role parallels Christopher Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* and his description of this time as an ongoing journey away from the 'apotheosis of individualism',¹³⁴ namely the belief in the potential of humanity, which reached its height in the 60s with the 'counter-culture'.

Lasch postulated that for a short period during the sixties the momentum created by campaigning against structured inequalities and social injustice through movements such as CND, posed a potential political challenge to the established order. Over time however a realisation developed that winning intellectual arguments over racism, sexism, exploitation and structural inequalities may be one thing, however harnessing this to adjust the systems upon which society was based was a different and far more complex proposition.

Based upon the realisation that society tended to continue and to stay basically the same, people retreated from the 'apotheosis of individualism' to private preoccupations and matters of personal well-being such as health, wealth and psychic security. Over time these have since become the motivating factors for a generation that once wanted to change the world. The trajectory of Lasch's cultural re-orientation therefore parallels the journey of rock music from a place of political significance towards one of well choreographed entertainment.

In this journey towards a society comprised of consumers and investors Lasch has highlighted the following as examples of narcissistic traits gaining increased prevalence : a fear of binding commitments ; a willingness to pull up roots whenever

¹³⁴ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism American Life in an age of Diminishing Expectations* (W.W. Norton and Co. 1980) p.4

the need arose ; a desire to keep one's options open ; and an incapacity for loyalty or gratitude¹³⁵.

Lasch's observations are closely related to Bauman's five 'interconnected departures'¹³⁶ of liquid modernity particularly the collapse of long-term thinking. For Bauman the disappearance or weakening of social structures in which thinking and planning could be inscribed has led to a 'splicing of lives into a series of short-term projects and episodes' and this fragmentation 'stimulates lateral rather than vertical associations'¹³⁷.

The implications for a politics geared towards a faster and more transitory culture resonates with David Walley's critique of what he terms as the 'gestural shorthand of lifestyle politics'. In his quirky reflections on the de-fanging of rock music Walley suggests that as politics is now seen in terms of lifestyle choice, personal commitments are easily made and easily broken involving 'about as little effort as it takes to switch from a Big Mac to a Whopper or to choose more effective anti-depressant medication (*well this is the nineties*) – his italics'¹³⁸.

A further work which links to Richey Edwards' self mutilation and his desire for deep authenticity which also charts a similar timeline to Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* is provided by V.L. Blum's *Flesh Wounds*. Blum chooses cosmetic surgery as the perfect compliment to a developing consumer culture predicated on the principle that anything is possible if it can be bought and sold in the market. Blum proposed that the

¹³⁵ Christopher Lasch, *Updated Afterword in The Culture of Narcissism Revisited* (Norton and Company 1990) p.239

¹³⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Polity 2005) p. 3

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11

¹³⁸ David Walley, *Teenage Nervous Breakdown* (Routledge 1997) p. 81, his *initials*

boom in plastic surgery during the 90s was a result of our seduction by two dimensional celebrity images and our willingness to easily succumb to the attraction of modern fashions.

In essence her thesis represents another journey away from something wholesome and meaningful towards something more transitory and escapist. We have come, she argues, to locate our identities on the surface of the body, as opposed to believing, like our ancestors, that the face and the body express an inner character. Blum points out that before the 1970s mental health professionals generally believed that cosmetic surgery-patients suffered from 'some kind of pathology and were better off treated with therapy than surgery'¹³⁹. How this pathology or narcissism has now been reversed through the mania with self-image into legitimate business practice underscores for Blum the triumph of consumerism.

Her notion of the 'cult of the surface' whereby we desire things less for their appropriation and more for presentational purposes ¹⁴⁰ parallels the increasing concern with the triumph of style over substance which has dogged British politics since Thatcherism morphed into Blairism. When surgery is performed on the body politic or the human body it is the first cuts and incisions, which create the most intense reaction. As a result of this surgical re-engineering the increased heartbeat of 80s politics settled back to more acceptable levels during the 90s to almost flat-line by the end of the millennium.

¹³⁹ V.L. Blum, *Flesh Wounds the Culture of Cosmetic Surgery* (University of California 2003) p.12

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.67 or as she describes it 'to stimulate ourselves (*and our audience*) by projecting ourselves in a certain way'

Blum also contended that cosmetic surgery is more than just a by-product of a culture driven by vanity and greater affluence, but an experience that actively distils the raw materials of celebrity culture. Still based upon a desire to create change performance became geared towards the personal rather than the political sphere and the relationships between self-absorption, narcissism and cosmetic surgery all point to shifts in the intensity of a process which served not so much to advertise its products but promote itself as an ideal way of life.

These considerations point beyond the façade of the rock-star politics suggesting that the rise of the political rock-star is something more deeply woven into our cultural fabric than it might initially appear. Blum's arguments about the modern 'cult of the surface' and the fascination with celebrity culture is also extremely significant as cosmetic surgery is based upon a re-engineering of the self rather than a re-engineering of society. The basis upon which this change in focus has taken place is a belief system prioritising the self over society, a partial vindication of the Thatcherite 'no such thing as society' catchphrase¹⁴¹.

Bauman also comments on what he describes as 'the astounding expansion of cosmetic surgery', which underpins consumer culture's constant pressure to be *someone else*. Understanding life as an unending string of new beginnings positions cosmetic surgery as a routine instrument of the perpetual remaking of the visible self.

For Bauman it is

¹⁴¹ Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 64

*'no longer about the removal of a blemish, or reaching an ideal shape denied by nature or fate, but about keeping up with fast-changing standards, retaining one's market value and discarding an image that has outlived its utility or charm'*¹⁴².

Just as commodity fetishism possessed the society of producers Bauman sees subjectivity fetishism haunting the society of producers and as he suggests in *'Consuming Life'*

*'each new beginning may take you only so far, and no further; each new beginning augurs many new beginnings to come. Each moment has a vexing tendency to turn into the past – and in no time its own turn to be disabled will arrive'*¹⁴³.

As it has become increasingly difficult to escape the products and images of celebrity culture through our obsession with self-image society has been gradually drawn into an engagement with a different kind of fantasy. Whereas for Lasch the 60s marked a failure in terms of expectations of how we could change society the modern engagement with self-improvement is ultimately doomed as it is based upon a false expectation of how we can change ourselves by merely adjusting our physical body.

The switch from trying to change society (*the death of politics*) to changing oneself as the route towards salvation is in keeping with this gradual movement towards a liquid modern society of self-absorption and lifestyle decisions. Similarly the degree of

¹⁴² Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p. 101

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 102

sympathy in our treatment of this shift towards a society in which we perceive ourselves as consumers/investors rather than citizens/workers is a matter of interpretation. As Cheryl Harris suggests there has certainly been a softening of the older mass-society mentality to legitimately claim that we are not just 'joyless victims of commodification but cheerful contributors in the process'¹⁴⁴.

Blum acknowledges that had *Flesh Wounds* been written twenty years earlier she would unwittingly have adopted a more militant approach whereby those undergoing cosmetic surgery would have been understood as victims rather than participants. Her terminology such as the 'coercion of a youth-and-beauty-centred culture which *does not really feel like coercion at all*'¹⁴⁵ reflects a more general acceptance of the nineties' realisation of playing a role in our own non-predetermined destiny.

This more conciliatory approach resonates with Harris' observation that 90s rock music fans were far less condemning than the polemics associated with the 70s punk and 80s indiedom. In her opinion the net result is that rather than being pawns in a sinister game of corporate exploitation music fans actually 'found empowerment in their consumption of popular culture'¹⁴⁶.

The 90s was therefore a decade of more subtle transitions as romantic political notions faded only to be displaced by more personal yet still ultimately romantic notions of the self. This swapping of fantasies in an advanced consumerist environment shaped by market fundamentalism saw a more positive understanding of

¹⁴⁴ Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, *Theorising Fandom fans, subculture and identity* (Hampton Press 1997) p.61

¹⁴⁵ V.L. Blum, *Flesh Wounds the Culture of Cosmetic Surgery* (University of California 2003)

¹⁴⁶ Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, *Theorising Fandom fans, subculture and identity* (Hampton Press 1997) p.88

capitalism develop as Third Way politics suggested it was never really the great evil the left imagined it to be.

As part of this process a different appreciation of the nature of consumerism developed based on personalised distinction rather than group conformity, again offering a reversal of the notion upon which mass consumerism was once based. The idea that 'one size fits all' loses all purchase in the nineties, as flavours of consumerism become more individually tailored and transactions take on a more colourful experience¹⁴⁷. This gentler treatment of market led capitalism focused minds less on notions of social injustice and repressive conformity and more on the liberating aspects of consumer politics and modern technology.

So whereas most notable British music since the 1960s had long been counter-cultural, its 90s incarnations adopted the opposite stance, drawing much of its energy from being included in the mainstream, celebrated in the tabloids and entertained by the government. Whereas previous decades were synonymous with the idea of rock'n'roll rebellion however fatuous that might now be portrayed to be, the post Britpop nineties are more readily equated with acquiescence.

Popular music changed as it always does, however innovation seemed less about forging new ideas and more about blending existing styles and genres so the nineties was content to become a 'remix decade'. Its fascination with the culture and fashions of 60s music, the prevalence of cover bands and the influx of karaoke contributed to what Robb described as 'a rank air of nostalgia'¹⁴⁸. Much of this nostalgia was not just re-hashed but filtered through the marketing of the rave scene and the 'superstar

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell : How Counter Culture Became Consumer Culture* (Capstone 2006) p.106

¹⁴⁸ John Robb, *The Nineties - what the fuck was all that about ?* (Ebury Press 1999) p. 178

DJ' phenomenon so the period amounts to a complete recreation and revival of previous trends and genres in a new electronic format.

Unlike the punk generation history was now embraced rather than vilified and for Robb it was strange to see 'young people being more conservative than their parents'¹⁴⁹. Archconservative Peter Hitchens whose societal reflections stretch over a far greater historical time period, claimed that Britain had finally 'bred the most conformist and least individualist generation in known history'¹⁵⁰.

In the final year of the twentieth century Lawrence Ferlenghetti the once radical beat poet lamented how democracy was becoming increasingly defined as successful capitalism. He resurrected the notion that during the nineties a further cultural shift had been underway by describing how a surprised Henry Miller came back to the US after many years of living in Europe, and was prompted to write a book called the *Air Conditioned Nightmare*¹⁵¹.

Miller was shocked with what he found in his 'New America': a country where a total consumer culture had taken over and to Ferlenghetti's mind this was only the beginning of what consumerism is today. Miller's claim that 'another breed of men have taken over'¹⁵² seems very apposite forty years later after the 'roaring nineties' when corporate profits exploded, stock markets surged and CEO compensation went into the stratosphere.

Like Miller's 50s Ferlenghetti's 90s had succeeded in evaporating any sense of civility in a more intense form of competition with the 'I'll do anything to run you out

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.199

¹⁵⁰ Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain* (Quartet Books 2000) p.214

¹⁵¹ Arthur Miller, *The Air Conditioned Nightmare* (New Directions Publishing 1945/1970)

¹⁵² Lawrence Ferlenghetti, V.Vale interview *Real Conversations* (Research 2001) p.194

of business, short of cutting your throat mentality'¹⁵³. For Bragg the 'New England' of the nineties reflected the sentiment of the Dead To Me lyric 'there is only one rule, that there are no rules'¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.194

¹⁵⁴ Dead To Me, *Cuban Ballerina* Fat Wreck Records (2007)

Chapter 6

2,000 onwards - 9-11 and the death of protest music

The pace of change is now so fast that new phenomena can burst into public awareness and then disappear from view at such a speed they leave no visible traces or lasting impact. This speed bars the experience from crystallising, solidifying in attitudes and behavioural patterns fit to be recorded as 'durable traces of the spirit of the time' ¹.

Bauman believes we now understand history is a succession of events without any pre-given directions² and as this passage from *Consuming Life* suggests the speed of change ensures the *spirit of the age* is increasingly difficult to capture. This condition is reflected by Timothy Garton-Ash's description of the *noughties* as 'the decade without a name' and with an absence of innovative styles, genres or backing tracks Alexis Petridis suggests popular music changed very little from how it was at the end previous decade³. With sub-cultural and artistic creativity at a premium it is fitting that the biggest selling band of the first decade of the new millennium was the Beatles who sold over 30 million albums despite disbanding three decades earlier.

In an attempt to crystallise its more *durable traces* the chapter incorporates a selection of its key political and musical events in three ways : firstly with reference to the cultural politics and revised notions of political participation surrounding Live 8 (2005) ; secondly in connection with a selection of the decade's high profile political

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) pp.28

² Peter Beilharz, *The Bauman Reader* (Blackwell 2001) p.21

³ Alexis Petridis, Review of the decade on pop *The Guardian* (7 December 2009)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/06/review-of-the-decade-pop> Retrieved June 13 2010

moments involving artists such as Neil Young, Steve Earle and Rage Against the Machine (RATM) ; and thirdly in a critique of Chris Anderson's study of the music industry through his '*Long Tail*' thesis and how he believes digitisation offers potential for a re-distribution of power. The main narrative thread linking these incidents is an appraisal of the increasingly familiar discourse that the period has witnessed 'protest music' almost disappearing from the public's radar.

As the previous chapters have focused on the cultural axes of rock and politics Anderson's thesis offers a timely opportunity to incorporate certain structural considerations, sometimes posited as causal factors in the demise of protest music. Technological shifts in terms of downloads, file sharing and broadband have fundamentally changed the relationships between artists, record companies and the consumer so Anderson facilitates a useful reflection on how 'revolutionary' these changes have been within the music industry. Assessed relative to actual global music sales these changes will be considered both in terms of the 'paradigm shifts' within the ownership and control of their music industry and the cultural impact on protest music.

The losers in this liquid modern realignment have been record stores, live music venues and the industry's traditional bastions whose profit margins decreased in real terms by approximately 40% on the previous decade⁴. The winners on the other hand have been those who have been able to adapt to the brave new world of digitisation for instance Simon Cowell and the *blockbuster* cross-platform phenomena such as Pop Idol and X-Factor. So whilst the Beatles back catalogue surreptitiously racked up

⁴ Steve Knopper, *Appetite for Self-Destruction: the Spectacular Crash of the Record Industry in the Digital Age* (Simon and Schuster 2009)

the best-selling album of the decade ⁵ its most visible representations have been artists such as Britney Spears, Eminem, Beyonce, Robbie Williams, Westlife and fleetingly RATM.

Mixed throughout the analyses of Live 8 and *'The Long Tail'* are samples from the intersections between music and politics which have contributed to public discussion, on issues such as patriotism, ethnicity and religion. Amongst others these include the intriguing cases of John Walker Lindh, Natalie Maines, the political commentaries of Billy Bragg and the 'mediation' of iconic musical texts such as Hendrix's 'Star Spangled Banner' and Lennon's 'Imagine'. Rather than simplifying a definitive soundtrack these instances of overlap provide a network of entry points from which the roles played by rock-politicians within the public sphere can be accessed and interrogated.

As commentators are still coming to terms with the meaning of the counterculture and subcultures of the seventies and beyond, will in time provide adequate perspective from which the *noughties* can be judged and understood. In terms of landmark events 9-11 provides the most suitable starting point as it ended the period of relative consensus enjoyed since the end of the Cold War whilst kick-starting the 'War on Terror'.

The West stepped into the twenty-first century in a cloudlessly optimistic mood with a renewed belief in the triumph of liberal-democratic progress. Similar feelings of self-confidence had also been evident amongst the pioneers of civilisation at the turn of

⁵ Rolling Stone, *Eminem and the Beatles The top-selling artists of the 2000s* (22 December 2009)

the previous century ; however just as The Great War sapped this mistaken trust so too did the events of September 11th 2001. As the West hoped to export democracy and liberal governance as a re-worked secular political religion for the 21st century 9-11 was the catalyst for a new climate of fear which would define an era of heightened surveillance, uncertainty and war.

As US House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt's addressed Congress with the despairing comment 'we are now in a new world'⁶ similar feelings of hopelessness were reflected in the NME which claimed 'it seems trivial to talk about music right now'⁷. The following week Mark Beaumont concluded that as a result of 9-11 'rock'n'roll is definitely changing forever'⁸ reflecting Zalot's findings that the public's initial reaction was a feeling that music was of no consequence after such appalling events. These legitimate and understandable expressions were however quickly forgotten and after the initial shock subsided Cloonan and others explain how popular music quickly reverted to many of its traditional roles⁹.

As Gephardt's 'new world' entered a period of nervous uncertainty dominated by a fear of further terrorist attacks, Western governments became emboldened to resist any further attempts to interrupt the rhythms of Western life. After a brief and intense period of introspection George W Bush's intervention that his fellow Americans should resume shopping signalled that the fears of terrorism stood little chance of

⁶ Eric Nuzum, *Crash Into Me Baby : America's implicit music censorship since 11 September* available on <http://www.freemuse.org/sw7005.asp> accessed February 11 2008

⁷ Mark Beaumont, *NME Editorial* (September 22 2001)

⁸ Mark Beaumont, 'Can music ever be the same again ? *NME* (Sept 29 2001) pp.18-20

⁹ Martin Cloonan, 'Musical Responses to 9-11 : *From Conservative Patriotism to Radicalism*' p.14 in Dietrich Helms and Thomas Phelps (eds), *9/11 The world's all out of tune Popular Music post 9-11 September 2001* (Diplomica Verlag 2004) This is also vindicated in how the US turned to music as a form of healing and fundraising in the large concerts that were soon to take place in honour of 9-11.

defeating the seductions of consumerism¹⁰. In spite of 9-11's significant international consequences domestic life for the majority of Westerners very quickly returned to normality.

In fact the West emerged in a more determined mood to parade itself through unrestrained consumerism, elections, TV phone-ins and chat shows as one massive popularity contest. In time the images of the 9-11 attacks would be understood less and less in terms of an ideological or political challenge to the West and more as a uniquely spectacular atrocity perpetrated by rogue elements to upset the *natural* routines of Western life.

Bush also took the opportunity to remind the world that the great political struggles that had marked the previous century were now well and truly over, having been 'ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom, democracy and free enterprise'¹¹. Consistent with notions that it was ultimately the energy of America's entrepreneurs that had won the Cold War it was only by showing the same spirit and fortitude that the West would triumph again. Bush's sentiments were consistent with the Fukuyaman ideal that American liberal-democracy represented the 'end point of mankind's ideological evolution' probably constituting the 'final form of human government'¹².

For those who have taken time to listen to the political messages transmitted by popular music culture the assessments are mixed. On the one hand a stream of

¹⁰ George W Bush, *World Congress Centre Speech* (November 8 2001) accessed on 6 October 2009 from <http://www.september11news.com/PresidentBushAtlanta.htm>

¹¹ The National Security Strategy for the USA (2001) accessed online at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html September 3 2008

¹² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (Free Press 1992) p xi

commentators and artists¹³ expressed surprise and dismay at the lack of protest music in response to 9-11 and the War on Terror. Obvious comparisons with the important role music played on other occasions such as in the debate over Vietnam, fuelled claims that the period had witnessed the ‘death of protest music’¹⁴. This demise is explained variously by the fear of a new ‘McCarthy like era of censorship’¹⁵, structural causes such as greater media concentration, which excluded non-mainstream music for commercial purposes¹⁶ and even protest music’s failure to withstand the pressures of niche marketing¹⁷.

These explanations arose at a time when digitisation offered greater opportunities to access protest music and dissident political voices¹⁸. Music downloading has become a key ingredient in ‘culture jamming’ as the web is an increasingly important tool for global social-activist network building¹⁹. Armed with ‘tools to produce a counter-voice’²⁰ these new communications mechanisms routinely aid protestors²¹ and underpin the viral marketing of politically minded bands such as Public Enemy and Rage Against The Machine (RATM).

¹³ See Chang (2002) Kot (2002) Collins (2003) Young (2003) Pontiac (2004) Krugman (2007)

¹⁴ Jeff Chang, Is Protest Music Dead ? *Alter Net* (April 2002)

¹⁵ Andrew Gumbel, *Elton John Attacks New Era of censorship in America* available on www.freemuse.org/sw6566.asp (July 2004) accessed April 11 2008

¹⁶ Paul Krugman, Channels of Influence *New York Times* (25 March 2003) and Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (New Press 2000)

¹⁷ Jeff Chang, Is Protest Music Dead ? *Alter Net* (April 2002)

¹⁸ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006)

¹⁹ Interview with Jonah Peretti, *Stay Free Magazine* : Media Virus available on website <http://www.stayfreemagazine.org/archives/25/jonah-peretti-interview.html> (2002) accessed May 6th 2008 : Peretti is best known for his "contagious" or "viral" media, including the parody website BlackPeopleLoveUs.com - Jonah Peretti's most famous incident was replying to a Nike advertisement and ordering a pair of customisable Nike training shoes with the word 'sweatshop' on them. Once circulated Peretti's e-mail reached over 12 million people.

²⁰ Ann Powers, Zack de la Rocha Talks to Ann Powers, *LA Times* (August 11 2008)

²¹ Days of War Nights of Love (Crimethink/AK Press 2002)

In the uncertain post-9/11 climate various commentators agreed that many hitherto outspoken musicians lost the confidence to be vocal, critical or controversial²². Nuzum comments how the 'myopic jingoism permeating America, created an atmosphere of visceral intolerance'²³ as peace activists and civil libertarians were branded as 'un-American'. Re-evaluation was also evident in bands such as U2 as they transformed from 'once outspoken peaceniks' who for years had led their crowds in chants of 'No More War!' to 'a position of deep ambivalence'²⁴. Their half time performance at January 2002's Super Bowl was a lament rather than a call to action as they displayed the names of victims of 9-11 as a background to their track 'A Beautiful Day'²⁵.

Calls to prevent or even question going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq were noticeably absent from Bono's repertoire whilst Lenny Kravitz and Natalie Maines²⁶ were widely chastised for their openly expressing their opposition. Kravitz referred to by the New York Post as 'the enemy's pal'²⁷ reported receiving countless letters and phone calls rebuking him for recording an anti-war song featuring an exiled Iraqi pop singer. Another manifestation of this climate was the now defunct 'March on Hollywood' website which launched attacks on anti-Bush celebrities including

²² See Chang (2002) Nuzum (2002) Cloonan (2004)

²³ Eric Nuzum *Crash Into Me Baby America's implicit music censorship since 11 September* (2002) available on <http://www.freemuse.org/sw7005.asp> accessed February 11 2008

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153

²⁵ The same song was also to provide the soundtrack to Labour's general election campaign and third consecutive victory in 2006.

²⁶ March 2003 Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks said to an English concert audience 'Just so you know we are ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas'. Criticising the head of state as the country was on the verge of war outraged conservative political opinion and the response included the band being banned from certain US radio stations, ritual CD smashing/burning/bulldozing and a lurid depiction of the band on the May 2003 cover of Entertainment Weekly.

²⁷ Sarah Gilbert, Peace of the Rock *The New York Post* (27 March 2003) p.55

Madonna, Sheryl Crow and Michael Stipe²⁸. Stipe later commented that he felt ‘a backlash against his politics every time he walked a city block’²⁹.

Opposing war has never been a popular position, but it has created some memorable music. Examples from the Vietnam era include Edwin Starr’s ‘War’, Hendrix’s ‘All Along the Watchtower’ and Neil Young’s ‘Ohio’. The Gulf War of 1991 inspired tracks such as ‘I Wanna Kill Sam’ and ‘Bush Killa’ and Noam Chomsky teamed up with Bad Religion to release a split ‘no-war-for-oil’ spoken word record. In the post 9-11 environment however many acts quietly buried their edgier songs³⁰, radio playlists were rewritten so as not to ‘offend’ and conservative sentiment raged against mainstream artists such as The Dixie Chicks.

Frustration within the music community over the apathy of the young was expressed most vocally by Neil Young. He explains how ‘I was waiting for some young singer to come along, to write these songs and stand up. I waited a long time ... then I decided that maybe the generation that has to do this is still the Sixties generation’³¹. His disappointment and frustration at the lack of protest music prompted him to write the highly acclaimed album ‘Living with War’.

²⁸ www.marchonhollywood.com - Attacks Moby for commenting on GW Bush’s links with big business and George Michael for saying that another Gulf War would ignite Islamic fundamentalism. Accessed February 2005

²⁹ Peter Ross, Shiner Happy People *Sunday Herald* (15 June 2003) p.5

³⁰ Freemuse.com lists examples of the curtailment of free expression as a result of the 9-11. Examples include Primal Scream re-recording and changing the name of the song ‘Ban The Pentagon’ – Cat Stevens now Youseff Islam being denied access to the US ‘on national security grounds’ (Sept 2004) – Linda Ronstadt being expelled from a venue for ‘political remarks’ (July 2004) – Nuzum also lists Bush changing the title of their single from ‘Speed Kills’ to ‘The People that We Love’, the Cranberries pulling their video Analyse because of its use imagery of skyscrapers and aircraft and The Strokes removed ‘New York City Cops’ from the US version of the album ‘*Is This It*’.

³¹ Andy Gill, *The Independent Rock & Pop Section* (12 May 2006) p.19

With tracks such as 'Let's Impeach the President' 'Shock and Awe' 'Flags of Freedom' and 'The Restless Consumer' the highly political release reached the top twenty in the US, UK and Canadian charts³². Canadian television declared Young had 'unleashed a musical critique of U.S. President George W. Bush and his conduct of the war in Iraq'³³. On his own anti-war themed website which carries hundreds of protest videos and articles related to the conflict Young described his album as 'a metal folk protest version of Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan'³⁴.

The lack of youth music was evidence for Chang of the apathy of 'the post Lennonist generation'³⁵ and for Collins and Pontiac this served to confirm nothing has since matched up to the sixties as 'the real golden age of protest music'³⁶. Chang's article 'Is Protest Music Dead?' found parallels with Emma Young who asked 'where are all the protest songs?'³⁷ and Kot's claim that 'few are raising voices for protest music'³⁸. Chang et al are however too hasty to condemn the 'lack of righteous anger' and Collins underestimates the amount of critical sentiment that accompanied the build up to war.

In addition to Neil Young there is a longer list including The Dixie Chicks, Lou Reed, Dave Matthews, Steve Earle and REM who all used their platforms to speak out

³² Neil Young, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_with_War accessed April 13 2010

³³ Neil Young's new album takes a stand against war, *Ctv.ca website* (April 19 2006) http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060419/neil_young_cp_060419?s_n_ame=&no_ads accessed April 13 2010

³⁴ Neil Young, 'Living with War Today' *Neil Young .com* www.neilyoung.com/lwwtoday/index.html accessed on April 13th 2010

³⁵ Jeff Chang, Is Protest Music Dead? *Alter Net* (April 2002)

³⁶ Andrew Collins, Where Did it All Go Right Give Music A Chance (24th February 2003) www.wherediditallgoright.com/ accessed January 2009 and Ronnie Pontiac, The Golden Age of Rock Activism *Newtopia Magazine* available on <http://www.newtopiamagazine.org/> (2004)

³⁷ Emma Young, Where are all the Protest Songs? *Sydney Morning Herald* (January 28th 2003) available on www.smh.com.au

³⁸ Greg Kot, Falling On Deaf Ears *Chicago Tribune* (9th December 2002) available on http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-11-24/news/0211240279_1_protest-song-music-deaf-ears/3 accessed June 2 2010

against the war. 'Sweet Neo-Con' by The Rolling Stones questioned Bush's Christian morality and Eminem urged fans to vote against Bush, releasing 'Mosh' which attacked US policy over Iraq. George Michael's 'Shoot the Dog' video featured a cartoon of Tony Blair and George Bush's poodle on the White House lawn and this generated such a backlash that Michael feared he would never be able to return to the US³⁹.

Closer examination reveals rock music remains littered with many examples of protest songs and on-stage antics reflecting significant levels of resentment. Bruce Springsteen told his audiences that Bush has 'run roughshod over our civil liberties' and Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam impaled a mask of Bush onto his microphone before stabbing it and stomping it into the floor. America's biggest selling 'pop-punk' band Green Day released the seminal album 'American Idiot' which was a head on assault on consumer culture and the Bush presidency. Thom Yorke of Radiohead dedicated 'No Surprises', a song which contends that the government does not speak to us and should be brought down, to George W Bush⁴⁰. Coupled with Black Sabbath's performance at Ozzfest in front of a montage of Bush and Hitler with the caption 'same shit different asshole' moved Bragg to suggest that 'the protest song is back with a vengeance'⁴¹.

Protest songs continue to abound in the underground media and two full-length compilation albums entitled 'Rock Against Bush' were released by US label Fat Wreck including a Billy Bragg collaboration. The creation of the web portal protest-

³⁹ Genevieve Roberts, *Musical Critics The Independent* (17 April 2006) p.23

⁴⁰ Alex Ross, Radiohead's Unquiet Revolution *The New Yorker* 20 and 27 (August 2001) pp.117-18

⁴¹ Billy Bragg, 'Diary' *The New Statesman* (March 1st 2004) p.8

records.com by Thurston Moore collects and makes available free downloading of MP3's of new protest songs from a wide variety of artists. These include many anti-Bush parodies which Weinstein claims 'use familiar music to accompany piercing protest lyrics'⁴².

The 'Axis of Justice' organisation⁴³ created by Tom Morello (Audioslave and RATM) and Serj Tankian (System of a Down) was a political response to audience members promoting racist symbols and imagery at the Ozzfest 2002. The Axis is a non-profit organisation which aims to fight for social injustice and has brought together a mixture of artists such as Steve Earle, Lee Jones, Jadakiss, Leftover Crack and RATM to record and release anti-war songs critical of the US administration. Many of these artists have been denied airplay and more overtly political bands such as RATM became the subject of corporate and state censorship.

The most widely publicised example of this was the list of 156 records allegedly banned by Clear Channel from their 1,170 radio stations. The list drawn up by an over zealous employee which amounted to management-sanctioned censorship was downplayed by Clear Channel as 'a call for restraint ... rather than a ban'⁴⁴ included all songs by RATM. RATM's website was also closed by its ISP after what were described as 'numerous calls from the secret services complaining about anti-American sentiments'⁴⁵. Responding to this clampdown guitarist Tom Morello stated

⁴² Deena Weinstein, Rock Protest Songs So Many and So Few in *The Resisting Muse : Popular Music and Social Protest*, edited by Ian Peddie (Ashgate 2007) p.9

⁴³ Axis of Justice, Tom Morello (Audioslave) and Serj Tankian (System of a Down)

www.axisofjustice.org - accessed October 23rd 2009

⁴⁴ Eric Nuzum, Crash Into Me Baby: America's implicit music censorship since 11 (September 2002) available on *Freemuse* <http://www.freemuse.org/sw7005.asp> accessed February 11 2008

⁴⁵ Mark Beaumont, Can Music Ever Be the Same Again ? *NME* (29th Sept. 2001) p.20

‘intolerance can lead to censorship and the extinguishing of our civil liberties, or at its extremes can lead to the type of violence we witnessed on 9-11’⁴⁶.

In the UK Beaumont noted how BBC radio kept clear of ‘more upbeat songs’ to ensure the ‘station was in tune with how the listeners were feeling’⁴⁷. Examples include Radio 2’s decision not play Goldfrapp’s ‘Pilots’ and Aerosmith’s ‘Fly Away from Here’ neither political songs, but in the context of the attacks both could be deemed as inappropriate. Billy Bragg was one of a significant roster of British musicians who released anti-war songs in the run up to the military campaign in Iraq⁴⁸. His single ‘The Price of Oil’ released as a free of charge download received significant circulation across the internet although minimal commercial radio airplay.

System of a Down’s ‘Boom !’ did however enjoy significant airplay⁴⁹ and was immortalised in a video accompanied by excerpts from Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9-11*, interspersed with interviews and footage of the February 2003 anti-war protests. Lyrically the track linked the use of military action with corporate globalization and quotes the title of Noam Chomsky’s book ‘*Manufacturing Consent ... as the name of their game*’, a direct reference to the media’s role in war. ‘Boom’ is therefore a notable example of on the radar political music, both in terms of timing and context.

⁴⁶ Neil Strauss, After the Horror, Radio Stations Pull Some Songs *New York Times* (18 September 2001)

⁴⁷ Mark Beaumont, Can Music Ever Be the Same Again ? *NME* (29th Sept. 2001) p.20

⁴⁸ Examples of songs released in the run up to the Iraq War : Zack De La Rocha ‘March of Death’ ; REM ‘The Final Straw’ ; Lenny Kravitz ‘We Want Peace’ ; Billy Bragg ‘The Price of Oil’ ; Beastie Boys ‘In a World Gone Mad’ ; John Mellencamp ‘To Washington’ ; Mick Jones ‘Why Do Men Fight’ ; Cat Stevens ‘Peace Train’ (re-released)

⁴⁹ Boom ! was featured on the best selling album *Steal This Record* : The album reached 15th and 11th in the US and Australian charts where it achieved Platinum and Gold Disc awards respectively.

As already discussed in relation to Springsteen's 'Born In The USA' the opportunities to sample, remix and re-invent means it is easier for songs to undergo change and be connected to various political agendas. Negus suggests music is always raw material for interpretation as it accumulates and connects with new meanings and beliefs as it passes through time and travel to different places⁵⁰.

9-11's aftermath witnessed interesting twists as songs once used to critique the status quo were utilised in different ways. The compilation CD 'God Bless America' includes protest music from Seeger, Dylan and Mahalia Jackson who were removed from their original context to be used in a project to reunite the nation. A second compilation of patriotic favourites the 'America : A Tribute to Heroes, Freedom and Inspiration' CD⁵¹, featured Bruce Springsteen and Natalie Maines who were both critical voices in the post 9-11 political ferment.

In the patriotic fervour many radio stations received requests for 'Star Spangled Banner', especially Whitney Houston's version which had been performed at the Super Bowl during the first Gulf War. Certain rock stations preferred to play Hendrix's version so in the context of 9-11 as class and racial antagonisms were temporarily supplanted by national grief, Hendrix's once counter-cultural revolutionary music became a form of social glue to re-unite the nation.

The author's inability to control how a song or its versions are understood is clearly demonstrated by Star Spangled Banner which originated as a poem in 1831, was adopted as the US National Anthem in 1916 and then as a symbol of the counter-

⁵⁰ Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory an introduction* (Polity 1996) p.190

⁵¹ America A Tribute to Heroes, Freedom and Inspiration CD *Columbia Records* (2001)

culture when performed by Hendrix with guitar simulated sounds of war and gunfire at Woodstock in 1969. Pickering suggests songs connect with ‘appreciations and judgements that occur within definite social relations’⁵² so that their meaning is never constant and open to an infinite range of interpretations.

Popular music is best understood according to Negus in terms of a process of mediation, which ‘can undergo change and be connected to various political agendas’⁵³ and John Lennon’s *Imagine* provides another example. Deemed inappropriate for airplay by Clear Channel *Imagine* was covered by Neil Young at the America : A Tribute to Heroes Concert on 21 September 2001. With a legacy stretching back to the early 70s and as the official song of Amnesty International *Imagine* has been described by Street as having ‘obvious socialist sympathies’⁵⁴ and as ‘a vision of peaceful global communism’ by Robin Denselow⁵⁵. *Imagine* was also used at the Conservative Party Conference in 1987 to welcome Margaret Thatcher on to the stage, perhaps the most unsympathetic post-war British leader to notions of equality and social justice⁵⁶.

Such examples whereby songs are given additional meanings by being connected with particular ideologies and social agendas is for Frith an example of ‘hegemony at work’⁵⁷. Here Frith draws on an interpretation of Gramsci’s ideas of how dominant groups maintain power not only through coercion and persuasion but also by adopting

⁵² Mike Pickering, *The Past as a Source of Social Aspiration Popular Song and Social Change in Everyday Culture : Popular Songs and the Vernacular Milieu* (Milton Keynes Open University Press 1987) p.44

⁵³ Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory an introduction* (Polity 1996) p.190

⁵⁴ John Street, *Rebel Rock : The Politics of Popular Music* (Oxford Blackwell 1986) p.165

⁵⁵ Robin Denselow, *When The Music’s Over The Story of Political Pop* (London Faber and Faber 1989) p.106

⁵⁶ Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory an introduction* (Polity 1996) p.195

⁵⁷ Simon Frith, *Music for Pleasure* (Polity 1988) p.203

cultural symbols such as songs and then connecting these to their own political or ideological leadership. In the case of Thatcher's use of *Imagine* hegemony was won and maintained by incorporating a song, previously linked to a range of dissenting or oppositional beliefs, to re-define these beliefs in relation to a particular agenda.

In the consumer-oriented environment of the *noughties* Chris Martin's vocal and visual support for the well-marketed Fair Trade Produce Campaign is another example of how rock-stars increasingly interfaced with the political through consumerist activity. Striking a less incendiary pose than Woody Guthrie's 'this machine kills fascists' graffiti Martin performed with slogans such as 'Make Trade Fair' and 'MTF' stencilled on his fore-arm or hand. The popularity of Martin's high profile actions in supporting such campaigns was bolstered by some fairly direct rhetoric when he condemned shareholders as 'the ultimate evil'⁵⁸.

Martin's consumer-driven protest seems likely to become increasingly common as studies confirm how 'political consumerism' has become particularly popular amongst young people⁵⁹. Micheletti, Follesdal and Stolle reveal how action in the form of product boycotts and *buycotts*⁶⁰ now ranks by far the highest out of a range of options such as contacting a public official, writing to a newspaper or participating in

⁵⁸ Chris Martin, *Coldplay X and Y album interview* available on <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=3437> Chris Martin is the singer with bestselling UK band Coldplay and married to Gwyneth Paltrow (referred to mockingly in the US as Mr Paltrow) made these comments during the band's X and Y album interview :

Accessed January 2007

⁵⁹ Orlander's study, quoted in Michelle Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal and Dietlind Stolle, *Politics, Products and Markets exploring political consumerism past and present* (New Brunswick 2006). The study revealed that over 50% of young Americans aged 15-25 when asked if they had ever 'not bought something because of the conditions under which it was made' replied yes and a majority stated that they had done so in the last year. Also 28% of all Swedes between 16 and 29 have boycotted for a political reason within a recent 12 month p, and over 40% indicate that they have actively chosen a product for a similar reason

⁶⁰ Using labelling schemes to support organisations representing environmentalism, fair trade and sustainable development

protests and rallies. Utilising the market as an arena for political activism might not be new⁶¹ however linking visible forms of consumerist activity to music-stars and celebrities is. Daniel Trilling captures this by suggesting that pop-stars have suddenly emerged as 'a kind of supreme being with the power to direct consumers' behaviour'⁶².

The continued de-fanging of styles and the mixing of genres saw further changes in the attitudes of bands towards politics and power. In the UK an example of how punk could be hijacked and its notions of oppositional politics totally reversed is provided by the band Busted. Considered by many younger music fans to be 'pop-punk', the band hit the headlines in the run up to the 2005 election declaring their support for the Conservative Party⁶³.

Whilst the liquid modernity transforms the nature of political communication and encourages the emergence of new prophets it should be noted that for new bidders for fame to be taken seriously or to act politically always requires some basis of legitimacy. Musical genre as well as an artist's career remain important determinants of legitimacy. Just as punk, reggae and folk provide homes for political sentiments in ways in which dance music does not the example of Busted reveals that claims to political authority will continue to be threatened by a perceived lack of credibility.

⁶¹ Michelle Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal and Dietlind Stolle, *Politics, Products and Markets – exploring political consumerism past and present* (New Brunswick 2006) p.13 cites various examples of workers using their purchasing power to end domestic American sweatshops in the early 1900's

⁶² Daniel Trilling, The Art of Listening : Live Aid *The New Statesman* (8 July 2010) available on <http://www.newstatesman.com/music/2010/07/live-aid-pop-money-ethiopia>

⁶³ Jemima Lewis, Hey Cool They Vote Tory ! *The Telegraph* (10 October 2004)

Rather than producing memorable anti-war anthems the period produced some fairly confusing meanings, whereby counter-cultural content masqueraded as conservative reaction and in some areas traditionally non-political music became a focus for controversy. This confusion when coupled with the changes in consumer-driven protest prompts a re-evaluation of what now constitutes political activity⁶⁴. This has been attempted through Street et al's investigation into political participation during the largest musical/political event of the decade, Live 8.

In the post-Live Aid environment it is these events rather than subcultures or political movements that provide the most useful prisms through which the overlap between politics and music can be refracted. Examining the event in which Gordon Brown and Tony Blair were lauded by Bono as the 'Lennon and McCartney of international development'⁶⁵ allows an additional glimpse into the increasingly comfortable co-existence of celebrity, politics, marketing and commercialism and provides a useful retrospective link to Live Aid.

The predominantly serious and at times almost reverential treatment Geldof and Bono received from the media in 2005 provides a stark contrast how they were depicted in 1985. Using Bauman's notion of 'carnivals of charity' and Street's work on participation, Live 8 provides a means of unpicking and addressing concerns over what has been termed as the 'absence' or 'the death of politics'⁶⁶.

⁶⁴ Michelle Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal and Dietlind Stolle, *Politics, Products and Markets – exploring political consumerism past and present* (New Brunswick 2006)

⁶⁵ David Cronin, Bono *The Guardian* available on <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/bono> (2005)

⁶⁶ Bauman (1999) Mouffe (2006) et al

In July 2006 the leaders of the world's most powerful nations and the heads of the United Nations, The World Bank and The European Union converged on Gleneagles, for the G8 summit. As host nation the UK set the agenda for negotiations choosing to focus on climate change and economic development in Africa. Africa was already an established focus for certain rock-celebrities and with their assistance G8 quickly became the focus of advocacy campaigns such as Make Poverty History and Live 8.

Defenders of Live 8 claim that even though it was not a fund raising event, monetarily it achieved 400 times more than Live Aid, when measured in terms of the debt deal reached during the summit⁶⁷. Detractors on the other hand claim the debt cancellation promises never materialised and owing to onerous structural adjustment conditionalities many HIPC's (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) chose not to sign up. Financial assessments aside the summit is remembered primarily as a global media spectacle in which politicians, NGO's and rock-stars united through music under one common banner.

Bauman's concern that spectacular media events such as Live 8 are designed for relieving a troubled Western conscience rather than alleviating deep-seated inequalities, is highlighted under his synonym 'Carnivals of Charity'⁶⁸. Bauman contends that the West's consumption of these spectacles of suffering is both hypocritical and counter-productive. By encouraging the disappearance of serious public debate and discussion these stage-managed affairs are shallow in terms of

⁶⁷ This is based upon the G8 summit agreement to write off \$40 billion owed by the 18 Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC's) to The World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Fund (with an additional \$15 billion being eligible for debt relief based on structural adjustment conditionalities). Live Aid is understood to have raised circa £1bn in aid.

⁶⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Work Consumerism and the New Poor* (Buckingham Open University Press 1998) p. 78

politics yet rich in terms of entertainment and commercial opportunities. As a result any incongruities between consumerism and protest disappear, so it appears that both could be done simultaneously.

In its carnivalesque form Live 8 was an opportunity to forget the marching, leafleting and hard-to-hear speeches of old-fashioned rallies and a chance to picnic in the park with a beer and still feel good. The consumer friendly touch of the adman left fingerprints all over the Live 8 product offering its participants a feel-good factor through glamour and show business. The event ranked highly in terms of product placement, such as the white *Make Poverty History* wristbands, and enjoyed lots of celebrity endorsements such as Bono's pitches on the U2 Vertigo tour and Brad Pitt's prime-time US television pronouncements. According to Linda Polman, Bono's crusade became nicknamed 'the white band's burden' in international aid circles after the 1899 poem by Rudyard Kipling urging his readers to 'Take up the White Man's burden'⁶⁹.

Linda Polman suggests Live 8 presented a formula in which the public was engaged via consumerism rather than discussion and debate, so the whole exercise was 'more about moralising rather than positing a genuine political alternative'⁷⁰. Such formulas short-circuit political debate, neuter political protest and for Bauman leave us 'in search of politics'. By circumventing the polis there is a danger that politics becomes debased and framed in an all too simplistic binary formula concealing the complex nature of the issues.

⁶⁹ Linda Polman, *War Games The Story of Aid in Modern Times* (Viking 2010) pp. 60-65

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78

The event was imbued with slick and seductive consumerism however translating Live 8 as no more than a celebrity pageant created by well-connected admen is only a partial picture. The TV pictures were just the tip of the iceberg because Live 8 represented the continuity of existing political action and existing grassroots activism stretching back over the previous decade. In effect therefore, as Street suggests, Live 8 'was a political event from the start'⁷¹.

The background to Live 8 is to be found in campaigning organisations such as Jubilee 2000⁷², Jubilee Debt Research and Make Poverty History, and their personnel who campaigned within organisations like Oxfam and DATA. The challenges Jubilee 2000 faced in getting its message across in an increasingly crowded NGO environment and how Bono was ultimately catapulted into the limelight as its spokesperson provides useful insight into its political roots and the celebrification of political activism.

Jubilee 2000 created a post for which the main responsibility was to telephone musicians or their managers to recruit them to the cause. As part of its strategy Jubilee created an informal music industry steering group and two of its key figures were Richard Constant from Universal Music Group and Marc Marot of Island Records. Street notes that the presence of two powerful music industry players was crucial in terms of creating networks into which musicians could be drawn⁷³. Once underway many of the telephone calls went unanswered however U2's Bono, already

⁷¹ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 281

⁷² Jubilee 2000 was founded in 1996 and formally wound up in 2000 continued in the guise of bodies like

⁷³ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 281

sympathetic to the cause and conveniently signed to Island Records, was very receptive.

In 1999 'Jubilee 2000' received a special award at the Brits and this was a key moment in the journey towards Live 8. Named after the lead singer of Queen, the 'Freddie Mercury Award' had previously been given to War Child's *Help* charity record and to Elton John for his charity single, 'Candle in the Wind'. In 1999 Bono made the award speech and Muhammad Ali accepted the trophy on behalf of Jubilee 2000 and from that moment on the organisation had no further difficulty in recruiting musicians⁷⁴.

The alliance between Island Records, Bono and the organisers of the Jubilee 2000's recruitment campaign appears to be a straightforward conjunction of the right people with the right industry connections at the right time. The reality behind the public façade witnessed at the Brits was however far more complex involving a sequence of meetings and elaborate negotiations between a cluster of different interests. Not only was Bono's agreement needed, so was that of his other band members. Once secured then the British Phonographic Industry (BPI), the organiser of the Brits and then most crucially the TV company that owned the broadcast rights all had to be in agreement before matters progressed.

Live 8 also involved political negotiations between the Band Aid Charitable Trust and the Prime Minister's Office, The Treasury, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the London Parks Authority. It required global negotiations between

⁷⁴ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 281

political and bureaucratic actors in seven other major cities⁷⁵ supplemented by deals with broadcasters and multiple event organisers. An estimated outlay of over £11,000,000 had to be re-couped through sponsorship⁷⁶, advertising, rights deals and merchandising and this was facilitated through the participating bands signing away all rights to the Band Aid Charitable Trust.

The image of Bono speaking for DATA was therefore more than just a rock-star suddenly deciding to lecture the U2 crowd on the immorality of global inequalities. Street claims that he was in effect ‘the icing on the cake’, the public mouthpiece facilitated by many hours of laborious organisation, negotiation and hard work performed by a vast number of faceless contributors⁷⁷.

Interesting changes to news reporting can be traced from Live Aid (1985) to Live 8 (2005) in which the mainstream press gradually came to sanction (even sanctify)⁷⁸ the authority of figures like Bono and Geldof. Evidence of the two rock-stars being represented as speaking on behalf of the people became evident in almost all parts of the UK media. For example at the time of Live 8 The Independent devoted its entire front page to an open letter from Geldof to the G8 leaders, The Sun had an ‘souvenir 8 page Live 8 pull out’ and the Daily Mail’s front-page headline read ‘Geldof’s encore for the world’s poor’⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ Interview with Harvey Goldsmith (2006) cited in *Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation* : John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org 2008 Volume 10 p. 289

⁷⁶ Live 8 accounting.pdf, available on www.line8live.com accessed July 2009

⁷⁷ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 284

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.282

⁷⁹ *The Independent* (2 July 2005) *The Sun* (2 July 2005) and *Daily Mail* (1 June 2005) – quoted in John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 282

The suggestion that Bono and Geldof were speaking on behalf of the poor in Africa and for the UK public, gave way to a more important characterisation that they were ‘experts on debt relief and Africa’⁸⁰. The Independent ran the headline ‘Geldof rates the UN 4 out of 10 on Africa’ implying that Geldof’s views on the UN were worthy of serious attention and constituted serious news. Similarly The Guardian lionised Bono claiming ‘he had done more than any other to ensure that the cause of Africa gets on the agenda of the US administration’⁸¹, again endorsing rock-stars as authoritative and representative spokespeople.

If the style of news reporting is traced back to 1985 it is notable that although The Times mentioned Geldof on its front page it chose to print quotations from Live Aid’s accountant rather than the rock-star. This change in the coverage given to Geldof and Bono in 2005 was crucial in allowing rock-stars to inhabit the public sphere and represent its politics.

Tellingly it was reported that when an NGO pitched an article on African debt to the Daily Telegraph, they were told ‘we only want it if it is from Bono or Geldof’⁸². Such responses rightly reflect concerns over the power celebrities now wield in the political sphere, and how representations of Live 8 were shaped by the political values and perceptions of its stars.

The cultural politics of Live 8 itself were actually quite simple, as the artists were selected based purely on their popularity and market worth. The values encoded in the music were unimportant to the organisers, consistent with the indifference and

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 282

⁸¹ Madelaine Bunting, A Day with Bono *The Guardian* (June 2005) p.7

⁸² Interview with CAFOD staff member (2005) quoted in John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 281

contempt Geldof had expressed towards the politics of punk. Geldof was also dismissive of the idea that African bands should appear at Live 8 just because they were African. Selection was solely based on popularity and ‘for all their great musicianship’ he intoned that ‘African acts do not sell many records’⁸³.

Whilst Geldof was insistent that Live 8 was about creating awareness and not charity his approach shaped the form and style of participation, which gave life to a certain type of values and experiences. In so doing he created a populist vision located close to the centre of contemporary society and politics, which Street suggests was akin to ‘a version of Royal Ascot or Wimbledon’⁸⁴. In the run up to the Gleneagles protests Bunting reflected that if protest had already migrated from the street to the newspaper Geldof was instrumental in promoting gentrification to the level of the dinner party⁸⁵.

When imagined in comparison to the values and experiences secreted through other more fringe events such as Live Aid and RAR Bunting’s viewpoint seems plausible. Live 8 was very much a case of the rich, white West having a heated discussion with itself about the poor African other, and without any discernable form of traditional grassroots input – save for the few protestors who broke ranks with the ‘official Edinburgh protest’ to march on Gleneagles.

Comparing Live 8 with its predecessor also offers additional perspectives on the changing shape of politics and its surrounding discourse. Live Aid was a far more spontaneous out-pouring of public outrage at the injustice of an African famine situation. The protests and picketing of E.U. food-mountains and wine lakes

⁸³ Bob Geldof, Comment Section *The Guardian* (28 December 2005)

⁸⁴ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 282

⁸⁵ Madeleine Bunting, Africa’s Flash Moment *The Guardian* (June 20 2005) p.17

represented a far more obvious link between the campaigners in Europe and the starving in Africa. The activities of collecting and sending blankets and food parcels was a spontaneous and more meaningful reaction than the buying wristbands or bidding for tickets on eBay.

The sense of moral outrage and revulsion at the injustice of over consumption in the West whilst famine conditions persisted in Africa was also far more intense during Live Aid. This was largely as a result of Geldof's fiery and uncompromising approach which showed a dismissive attitude towards authority and kept the issue firmly in the public eye. If Live Aid was characterised by antagonism and conflict the rhythm and pace of Live 8 was very much based on goodwill compromise and consensus and this was determined largely by the different ways in which the public engaged with the two events.

Campaigning and organisation was largely taken out of the public's hands during Live 8 and spearheaded by its two spokespersons Bono and Geldof. From the outset participation was specifically limited because whereas Live Aid was about raising money Live 8 announced itself as being 'about justice not charity'. Live 8 was therefore a special case as its governmental and global policy orientation attempted to create a highly targeted campaign to directly influence the workings of political power. Its style of engagement ensured the public remained largely disengaged, save for buying wristbands and attending the concerts therefore representing a different form of political activity.

This alternative form of political manoeuvring prompted criticism some of which was directed at the chief players namely Bono and Geldof. Amidst the generally supportive press coverage George Monbiot was one critical voice highlighting the absence of any ‘recognition of the role rich nations have played in Africa’s accumulation of debt, or accumulation of weapons, or loss of resources, or concentration of power and wealth in unaccountable leaders’.⁸⁶ The whole thrust of the Live 8 campaign was very much framed as a positive appeal to the combined goodwill of the G8 leaders to do more to help the poor, equating in Monbiot’s view to a denial that the developed nations had played any role in creating African impoverishment.

In the positively charged atmosphere little if anything was uttered by the Live 8 spokespeople of how the G8 maintained a grip on the instruments of global governance and continued to attach programmes of privatisation as necessary pre-conditions to any newly negotiated agreements. The G8 fanfare on debt cancellation could not however totally disguise that the summit was laden with conditions. For instance Paragraph 2 of the Finance Ministers’ statement stated that to qualify for debt relief, developing countries must continue to ‘boost private sector development’ and eliminate ‘impediments to private investment both domestic and foreign’⁸⁷.

In fact numerous countries such as Peru, Haiti, Guyana and Nigeria had already been excluded from the HIPC programme for refusing to open their economies and ‘play neo-liberal ball’⁸⁸. In light of these facts Monbiot states that rock-stars trumpeting ‘shared anthems of peace and love are about as meaningful as the old Coca-Cola

⁸⁶ George Monbiot, Live 8 Article *The Guardian* (21st June 2005) on <http://www.monbiot.com/>

⁸⁷ HM Treasury Report (10-11 June 2005) available <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk>

⁸⁸ Schnews Newsletter G8 Special, *Guitar Politics with Strings Attached* (1st July 2005)

advertisement'⁸⁹. The crux of the whole Live 8 experience was that rather than supporting the creation of political movements that deny the legitimacy of the powerful in order to prise control from their hands⁹⁰, the Live 8 spokespeople were in Monbiot's opinion merely lending legitimacy to power⁹¹.

Claims about the cynical commercial orientation of G8 were bolstered further in an editorial carried on the eve of Live 8 by the same newspaper, when Washington hardliner Paul Wolfowitz was reported to have described the Live 8 effort to support Africa as 'almost a gift from heaven'⁹². Exactly what was meant by this statement is open to interpretation, one of which being that the galaxy of musicians added a gloss of starlight to the proceedings. Wolfowitz's optimism reflected Jeffrey Sachs' sentiments outlined earlier in the year when he adopted an almost biblical tone to declare the conditions were finally right for aid to act as a 'weapon of mass salvation'⁹³.

Monbiot's emphasis on the need for grass roots mobilisation as a necessary precursor to give the politics of Live 8 some teeth is quite different to the more collegiate approach adopted by Street et al in dissecting what constituted political participation in Live 8. Street and his colleagues suggest that the participants were not only the event organisers and the high profile rock-stars but also the 27 million who '*signed*

⁸⁹ George Monbiot, *The Guardian* (21st June 2005) on <http://www.monbiot.com/>

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, <http://www.monbiot.com/>

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, <http://www.monbiot.com/>

⁹² George Monbiot, Editorial *The Guardian* (20th June 2005)

⁹³ Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty How we can make it Happen in Our Lifetime* (Penguin Books 2005) p.25

up' to Make Poverty History via text messages, the wearing of wristbands or just listening to the music⁹⁴.

The equation of indulging in what are ostensibly leisure activities as acts of political participation broadens Parry's notion of participation '*as a matter of physical action with the direct intention of changing public policy*'. Within the framework of Live 8 involvement in deliberation, discussion and listening all therefore constitute political input. Street's move also implicitly acknowledges that as the audience for politics is changing politics must change accordingly, in order to have relevance and achieve critical resonance.

This broadening of the public sphere further facilitates the notion of an ongoing merger between the spheres of politics and music. This shift that embraces activities surrounding the production and consumption of art, music and literature allows greater opportunities and therefore legitimacy for the emergence of the cultural critic. By giving a voice to aspirations in opposition to the dominant political and economic structures, even if Live 8 was heavily consumerist and cleverly marketed, rock-stars and others encountered less objections to assuming the mantle of cultural critic.

In addition to concerns that protest is now reduced to carnival Bauman also sees a further irony in this shift as the very people responsible for the diminution of politics are either in denial or are unaware of their role. Bauman states his dislike for New Labour's business like approach and Blair's delegatory style which he regarded as deeply inauthentic and politically shallow.

⁹⁴ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 282

He points to the example in the Guardian when Tony Blair complained of ‘politics diminished to a gossip column’ and his call for the audience to face the alternative of ‘either having the news agenda dominated by scandal, gossip and trivia or by the things that really matter’⁹⁵. For Bauman such words cannot but baffle, coming from a politician who daily consulted focus groups in the hope of being regularly informed about grass-roots feelings demonstrating how Blair was crucial in diminishing the politics he bewails⁹⁶.

Bauman’s excoriation that the public sphere is increasingly crowded with ‘the private problems of public figures’ hastens the demise of politics⁹⁷. In this sense he sees the fleeting concerns of Blair translate more as those of a touchy celebrity, than the musings of a concerned politician. From Bauman’s perspective it is not unreasonable to translate that Blair is perceived to be as much a celebrity as a politician.

Liquid Modernity’s movement towards the short attention span of the sound-bite and the seductiveness of slick marketing short circuits rather than engenders political debate. These changes in how we consume politics and in how politics now consumes the attention of liquid moderns via its political-celebrities and media management techniques is a circuitous relationship. Similar factors also apply in our relationship with popular music and how it is created, commodified and circulated. This chapter now offers a brief departure from the cultural to the structural by considering the significance of digitisation to politics through changes to the ownership, distribution and enjoyment of recorded music.

⁹⁵ Tony Blair, The Guardian January 14th 1999 quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 70

⁹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 71

⁹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p. 70

Understanding the evolution of what we now term as the ‘music industry’ is quite fascinating. Based historically around live performances and printed song sheets the fairly recent arrival of recorded music around the turn of the twentieth century has evolved extremely rapidly through formats such as shellac, tape, vinyl, CD and most recently digital. Ever since ASCAP was founded to enforce the 1909 Copyright Act the industry has been alert to technological innovations, ownership issues⁹⁸ and various commodification strategies, which have seen its business models change more quickly than perhaps any other industry. The recent wave of evolution through digitisation has forced the industry to re-visit its recording, marketing and distribution functions and as a result Frith claims ‘for the music industry the age of manufacture is now over’. As a result companies are no longer organised around making things but dependent on the creation of rights⁹⁹.

The ownership of property has always been a crucial determinant of the distribution of power in capitalism, so in order to protect its value in the digital age the industry has worked towards creating conditions whereby Intellectual Property (IP) behaves in a similar way to how material goods behave in a market. Through high profile legal cases and industry-backed campaigns to outlaw illegal sharing or to support Digital Rights Management (DRM) Chris May claims it is now copyright rather than supply and demand that is the mechanism underpinning market prices¹⁰⁰.

Within this post-production world the once physical commodity of the record or CD is already of secondary importance to matters of IP and publishing rights. This battle for ownership of music is not just being waged between artists and the industry, but

⁹⁸ Alex Ogg, *Independence Days - Edison and Light Bulbs* (Cherry Red Books 2009) p.2

⁹⁹ Simon Frith, *Copyright and the Music Business Popular Music 7, 1* (1987) p.57

¹⁰⁰ Christopher May, *A Multi-Tiered Music Industry ? IPR open access and the audience for music : Journal on the Art of Record Production Issue 2* (October 2007)

also between the industry and the audience. In what Marsh terms as ‘its vicious war against music fans, making the words *file sharer* synonymous with *criminal*’¹⁰¹ the music industry increasingly tutors its consumers via FACT¹⁰² and bodies such as the RIAA into acceptable consumption patterns.

In what Dave Rowntree has described as ‘industry pressure to rob society of its inheritance’¹⁰³ these campaigns and manoeuvres attempt to break down the strong aversion of liquid moderns towards attempts to interfere in their enjoyment of music. Set in its historical context this aversion is somewhat justified, as commodification into a recorded format of the very ancient ritual of making music is an extremely recent phenomenon. ‘Relatively it is only in the last few moments of its lifespan that music has been technologised into physical objects such as vinyl’ which is seemingly once again evading capture and escaping back into the ether through digitisation¹⁰⁴.

The early twenty-first century has been subjected to a discourse that both the music industry and Western society is now feeling the impact of the technological advances of the 1990s. Foremost amongst these are the internet revolution and digitisation and with specific reference to the music industry Chris Anderson is a convincing advocate of how this has revolutionised not only music but economics, society and its culture more generally.

Anderson’s ‘Long Tail’ thesis, which started life as an article in the October 2004 edition of *Wired* magazine, then became a bestselling book and now continues life as a blog, attempts to explain through the advent of digitisation how the music business

¹⁰¹ Dave Marsh, *Rock and Rap Confidential RRC* www.rockrap.com June 4 2010

¹⁰² Federation Against Copyright Theft – see www.fact-uk.org.uk/

¹⁰³ Dave Rowntree quoted in Marina Hyde, *They Live Like Aristocrats Now they Think Like Them* *The Guardian* (December 9 2006)

¹⁰⁴ Andy Higgins, *Copyright and The Music Industry in the New Age*, *Blackpool Rox II Issue 9* (August 2006) p.6

has experienced a paradigm shift. Anderson claims these new economic rules signal ‘the end of the Blockbuster’ and the ‘new era of the garage band’ which he considers as a welcomed power shift from executives to consumers. As I later reveal there are a number of problems with some of these assertions however I will firstly outline his thesis.

For Anderson music is ‘the ground zero of the Long Tail explosion’¹⁰⁵ and the fragmentation within the music industry is representative of gradual shifts he sees taking place elsewhere in society. Digitisation now enables businesses to store products as bits on a computer rather than space on shelves and this combination of lower storage costs, easier access and a ready made global distribution network through the web mean that ‘the age of abundance is replacing the age of scarcity’¹⁰⁶. Traditional supply side restrictions and barriers to entry suddenly vanish into a globalised computer network and this amounts to nothing short of a revolution.

Anderson confidently stretches his thesis beyond the economics of the curve to assess the social and cultural impact of these changes. He boldly concludes that these economic changes are adjusting our perceptions, which for any economist grounded in the world of empirical data is a bold claim. It is not therefore in the structural changes to the shape of the ‘new economy’ but how we perceive and understand these changes rippling throughout our culture that Anderson offers fertile ground for discussion.

Before the advent of digitisation Anderson claimed that we had been trained to see the world through a ‘hit driven lens’ one that focused typically on the chart successes

¹⁰⁵ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail CD audio-book* (Random House 2006)

¹⁰⁶ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail CD audio-book* (Random House 2006)

of major artists such as Michael Jackson¹⁰⁷. With the advent of the web and its infinite niche marketing potential this dis-proportionality has been challenged and finally broken down.

Anderson, a long time supporter and fan of independent music, cannot help but betray an element of satisfaction as he describes bands such as 'Bird-monster' getting in his view a well deserved break as a result of viral internet marketing. He enthuses how in the new age of networked consumers and digital everything, a falling waterline of distribution and communication costs reveals a great uncharted landscape of products, so suddenly 'the invisible market turns visible'¹⁰⁸.

To justify his claim about 'the end of the Blockbuster' Anderson chose to focus on economic data rather than any personal musical preferences. Between 1990 and 2000 according to BPI and RIAA statistics album sales doubled, the fastest rate in the industry's history however at the end of the century this was suddenly about to change. For Anderson the deluge of boy bands synonymous with the late 1990s such as NSYNC¹⁰⁹ was the unwelcome result of a formulaic hit machine, which was thankfully about to be undone by digitisation.

From 2000 onwards overall music sales fell year on year so that by 2005 they had dwindled to a quarter of their peak in 1999¹¹⁰. Twenty of the all time top 100 selling albums had come out in the period 1996 – 2000 however the next five years produced

¹⁰⁷ Chris Anderson, 'hits and the changing shape of demand' *The Long Tail CD audio-book* (Random House 2006)

¹⁰⁸ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006) p.28

¹⁰⁹ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006) p.30 Anderson cites the example of boy-band *NSYNC which sold 2.4 million copies of *No Strings Attached* in its first week making it the fastest-selling album ever, topping the charts and selling 11 million copies by the end of the year. For Anderson it is unlikely that *NSYNC's record will ever be broken and this will possibly represent the 'last bit of manufactured pop to use the twentieth century's fine-tuned marketing machine to its fullest' – NYSNC's album was released on March 21 2000 also quoted and referenced in Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006) p. 32

¹¹⁰ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006) p. 32

only two, ranking at 92 and 95 respectively¹¹¹. With customers shifting to less mainstream fare and music fracturing into a thousand different sub-genres Anderson concluded this was the end of the Blockbuster era.

When Anderson broadened his field of vision the conclusions he drew from the music industry appeared to be corroborated elsewhere. When applying the same methodology to the popularity of hit TV shows he found a very similar pattern. He discovered that the ratings for top TV shows had been falling consistently since the 70s, and the number one show post 2000 wouldn't have even made the top 10 in 1970¹¹². Anderson discovered that year on year every major channel TV lost a greater percentage of its audience to an exploding myriad of niche cable channels. This statistical commonality between music purchases and TV viewing figures substantiated Anderson's suspicions that a fundamental shift was underway and his 'Long Tail' hypothesis was born.

The peak sewage and electricity surges once associated with popular soap operas and intervals at major sporting events were seen by Anderson as relics of the Blockbuster era. With the rash of new TV shows that have recently invaded modern culture such as Pop Idol, American Idol and X-Factor Anderson's sentiment does however seem a little premature. As he criticised the formulaic marketing responsible for the boy-bands of the late 90s Anderson is doubtlessly similarly unimpressed by its creation of a new genre of interactive TV blockbusters.

What Pop Idol and X-Factor represent is a new breed of sustained Blockbuster, as they not only captured the largest TV audiences but also the largest online audiences

¹¹¹ OutKast : Speakerboxx/The Love Below and Norah Jones Come Away with Me - quoted and referenced in Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006) p. 32

¹¹² Measured in terms of the proportion of viewing figures Press Release on March 21 2000 quoted and referenced in Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006) p. 38

of all time. As such these multi-platform shows not only re-write the history books but also re-invent them and when the franchising, marketing and commercial opportunities are taken into consideration the economic worth of the new Blockbusters is enormous. Measured in terms of customer call-ins and interactive votes these shows boast telephone network capacity records way in excess of the peak surges of the 'pre-Blockbuster era'.

Even though the media has changed in terms of ease of access and variety of output, which is significant to the shape and complexity of the music industry's operation, it has not led to the anticipated radical changes in how the industry is structured. This fragmentation and drift from the major sources ¹¹³ rather than reducing their importance has had the net effect of galvanising the major TV, radio and music networks into working even harder to retain control of their revenues and market share.

In short the already established media conglomerates have adapted in order to protect themselves, thus re-enforcing rather than revolutionising their control of the commercial landscape. It is no surprise that success stories of the digital age such as MySpace and YouTube¹¹⁴ were quickly identified and absorbed by established media corporations for strategic commercial purposes. As its exclusive advertising partner Microsoft was happy to announce that Lady Gaga became the first human being to attract over 10 million followers on Facebook¹¹⁵ suggesting Anderson's claim that the

¹¹³ Anderson refers to the radio, TV and music networks and as the 'carriers of culture', Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006) p. 38

¹¹⁴ MySpace was purchased by Rupert Murdoch's News International in July 2005 for US\$580 and in October 2006 Google bought YouTube from its two co-founders for Chad Hurley and Steve Chene for shares in Google with a market worth of US\$660m – YouTube had only been created in March 2004 New York Times 8th February 2007

¹¹⁵ Daniel Trilling, *The Art of Listening : Live Aid* *The New Statesman* (8 July 2010) available on <http://www.newstatesman.com/music/2010/07/live-aid-pop-money-ethiopia>

industry is changing 'to the consternation of suits everywhere'¹¹⁶ is not quite borne out in reality.

The cultural significance placed on Anderson's observations that direct music sales (albums, singles) are declining can be easily misunderstood and overstated. Anderson is factually correct to claim that most of the top 100 best selling albums of all time were released in the 70s and 80s but two key factors should be understood. Firstly although recorded music sales have been declining more music is being listened to than at any time in history, thus the cultural impact of music and possibly of its blockbusters is greater than ever before.

Secondly as the shape of the music industry changes revenues are maintained and in some cases grown through diversification into live concerts and merchandising and away from recorded music sales¹¹⁷. His contention that the shattering of the media into a zillion different cultural shards is 'something that upsets traditional media and entertainment no end' gives the impression that power is shifting. Whilst fragmentation continues and has always existed to some extent it is the same corporate giants¹¹⁸, which continue to dominate the music industry and the vast bulk of revenues from music distribution.

The public still seemingly remains fixated over chart-toppers and blockbusters. From Elvis Presley to the latest X-Factor winner the conveyor belt provides different versions of essentially similar products to temporarily occupy top spot on the cultural

¹¹⁶ Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail* (Random House 2006)

¹¹⁷ Robert Sandall, *Off The Record Prospect* (August 2007) p. 28

¹¹⁸ **Four major labels** currently dominate the music industry - Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and EMI - which according to Nielsen Soundscan Report (2005) account for over 80% of US and 75% of global market. Prior to December 1998 there was a 'big six' however BMG merged with Sony and Polygram was absorbed into Universal Music Group. Wayne Rosso "[Perspective: Recording industry should brace for more bad news](http://news.cnet.com/Recording-industry-should-brace-for-more-bad-news)". net. http://news.cnet.com/Recording-industry-should-brace-for-more-bad-news/2010-1027_3-6226487.html. January 2009 : Retrieved October 6 2009

landscape. The multi-platform nature of modern blockbusters such as Pop Idol debunks Anderson's claim that viewing patterns are fragmented by more alternatives competing for our on screen attention. Anderson's claim that hits are no longer 'quite the economic and cultural force they once were' only applies in a relative sense. A study by Anita Elberse suggests that the web actually serves to magnify the importance of Blockbusters¹¹⁹ as instant availability and access ensures heightened cultural impact as our senses are bombarded in more ways, and more often than ever before.

Although *The Long Tail* is a captivating read and provides some unexpected results when analysing the data of jukebox downloads from early adopters such as Rhapsody, the thesis fails to explain the sustained experiences of later and less successful companies. Subsequent studies have also revealed Anderson's choice of data selection is also highly selective and too narrowly focused¹²⁰. In choosing to base his thesis upon economic data to enunciate cultural change means Anderson confuses the two. Just as *The Long Tail* cannot explain the success of new Blockbusters such as Pop Idol, the meaning value and cultural importance of these events cannot be understood by the volume of units sold or the number of website hits.

The importance and relevance of Anderson's thesis is therefore diminished by its focus on quantitative rather than qualitative measures. Furthermore the recent

¹¹⁹ Anita Elberse, Should You Invest in The Long Tail *Harvard Business Review* (September 2005) available on www.hbr.org/2008/07/should-you-invest-in-the-long-tail/ar/pr accessed January 6 2008 : professor of business administration at Harvard Business School Anita Elberse calls the Long Tail theory into question, citing sales data which shows that the Web magnifies the importance of blockbuster hits . . .

¹²⁰ Will Page and Andrew Bud, *The Long Tail and its critics* (2007) available on web resource http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Long_Tail a sales analysis of an unnamed UK digital music service by economist Page and entrepreneur Andrew Bud found that sales exhibited a log-normal distribution rather than a power law; they reported that 80 percent of the music tracks available sold no copies at all over a one-year period. Anderson responded by stating that the study's findings are difficult to assess without access to its data.

visibility and access of millions of artists through music and social networking sites although new, is not however indicative of new forms of activity. Small gigs, relatively unknown bands, home recording, bootlegging, DIY, independent tape and record sales have been flourishing for decades. The real sea change therefore is that these activities are now on the digital radar and what Anderson observes are changes in the shape rather than in the substance of the industry.

Rather than therefore ushering in a break with the past I contend that digitisation has facilitated change by bringing into focus many pre-existing activities that are for the first time economically viable and globally accessible. One thing it has patently failed to achieve is ring the death knell of the Blockbuster – if anything it has enhanced it !

Anderson's selection of vocabulary which utilises terms such as 'fragmentation', 'niches', 're-constitution', 'fracturing', 'revolution' and 'remixing' shares much of the presentism of post-modernism, its misplaced optimism and consequently its over-exaggeration of change. Unlike Bauman however, Anderson puts a positive spin on this state of flux as he embraces the uncertainty of the new market economics rather than becoming suffused in the anxieties of accelerating change. For Anderson the progressive benefits of the internet have bequeathed 'empowered amateurs' and 'mass volunteerism'¹²¹ heralding a democratising power shift whereby 'the ants now have megaphones'.

Change and uncertainty are factors which loom large in Anderson's thesis and his work resonates with many of the compelling yet unquantifiable notions within Bauman's work. At heart Anderson like Bauman is a theorist of change, all around

¹²¹ Chris Anderson worked on the Economist Magazine up until 2001 launching the magazine's on-line strategy before leaving to become editor in chief of Wired Magazine

him he sees old ways breaking down and is excited by how these are supplanted by new and alternative approaches. Methodologically Anderson's Long Tail is based on an examination of hard economic data and as such deploys a more rigorous and scientifically based approach than Bauman.

In searching for explanations for what they both perceive to be a deepening cultural malaise, their motivations do share certain similarities. Whilst not claiming that Bauman is a presence in Anderson's work, there are grounds to propose an affinity. Anderson's positions on counter-cultural music, the vacuity of celebrity and the seductions of consumer capitalism all rest easily within the framework of social thought indebted to Bauman.

Where they do differ is how Anderson sees changes in the digital environment precipitating positive and beneficial outcomes to translate as a power shift throughout society. Bauman is far less optimistic about the benefits of modern technology for the lives of liquid moderns and is concerned how ...

'quite a few academics tend to greet the internet and the world-wide web as a promising and welcome alternative or replacement for the wilting and fading orthodox institutions of political democracy'¹²².

Behind its seductive and appealing gloss Bauman envisages a less optimistic future dominated by greater insecurity, inequality and fear.

Anderson and Bauman both build links between society, economics and its culture but do so in different ways. Whereas Bauman identifies broad waves of fragmentation, individuation and uncertainty unleashed throughout society by the restlessness of

¹²² Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Polity 2008) p.107

modernity and how this affects the lifestyle decisions of 'liquid moderns', Anderson focuses specifically on the fragmentation and changes taking place within the music industry. From this case study Anderson then draws bold conclusions predicting how these changes will resonate culturally, for instance undoing our many years of being educated to develop and obey a 'hit driven mentality'.

Any positive implications for politics suggested by Anderson's notions of 'empowered amateurs' and 'ants having megaphones' is not shared by Bauman who rounds on 'the cheerful portrait painted by communication fetishists'¹²³ claiming that ...

*'real politics and virtual politics run in opposite directions, and the distance between them grows as the self-sufficiency of each benefits from the absence of the other's company'*¹²⁴.

The curious occurrence whereby RATM were propelled via a well-managed social network backed download campaign to create what Helen Pidd describes as 'a delicious dismantling of the X Factor Christmas No 1 juggernaut'¹²⁵ connects squarely with issues raised by Anderson's thesis. Through a combination of instant availability, low cost download and ease of access this surge of anti-X Factor sentiment achieved what Colin Paterson describes as 'possibly the greatest chart upset

¹²³ Ibid, p.109

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.109

¹²⁵ Helen Pidd, Rage Against the Machine beats X Factor's Joe to Christmas No 1 *The Guardian* available on guardian.co.uk (19.00 GMT Sunday 20 December 2009) accessed January 14 2010

ever'¹²⁶ and is exactly the kind of 'ants with megaphones' event that Anderson envisaged.

The short-running campaign was masterminded by Jon Morter, a part-time rock DJ and logistics manager, who encouraged people via Facebook and Twitter to purchase the track Killing In The Name to prevent the X Factor winner achieving a fifth consecutive Xmas number one. The Rage track, best known for its now-ironic refrain, 'Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me' was seen as suitably defiant to debunk what many perceive as the tidal wave of manufactured sentiment and hysteria that supports X-Factor releases.

On hearing that his campaign had prevented another X-Factor Christmas number one Morter responded 'I think it just shows that in this day and age, if you want to say something, then you can – with the help of the internet and social networking sites if enough people are with you, you can beat the status quo'¹²⁷. RATM's De La Rocha commented it was 'an incredible organic grassroots campaign' to defeat the 'sterile pop monopoly'¹²⁸.

Whilst many observers were pleased to see Simon Cowell fail to achieve another Xmas number one he was only defeated as a result of the mobilisation of sufficient numbers of liquid moderns with the ability and willingness to pay. The RATM track achieved the biggest ever download sales in a first week in the UK charts so it was a triumph for consumerism as well as a moral victory against 'sterile pop'¹²⁹.

¹²⁶ Colin Paterson, Rage Against The Machine beat X-Factor Winner in Charts (Sunday 20 December 2009) available on - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8423340.stm> - accessed January 14 2010

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, accessed January 14 2010

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, accessed January 14 2010

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, accessed January 14 2010

This was balanced somewhat by RATM's pledge to give all their profits from the single to the homelessness charity Shelter and to perform a free gig to thank those who bought their single. The other winners in the race for Xmas number one, Sony and Cowell's company Syco, were not as charitable as Sony recouped significant revenues as it was the licensee to both the RATM and the X-Factor track 'The Climb'.

Departing from these structural readjustments within the music industry I now return briefly to Bauman's enduring concern that modern politics is increasingly deficient by reflecting on some of the examples introduced earlier from within *noughties*' music culture. The insistence on the need for a politically engaged public is a thread which runs consistently throughout Bauman's work. In conditions of Liquid Modernity the gradual colonisation of the public sphere by the banalities of private lives of celebrities and the public's willingness to listen to 'lifestyle experts' makes this need more pressing than ever. Bauman despairs at how democracy becomes devalued when it is reduced to a choice between bureaucrats and is blandly monitored through customer-led feedback mechanisms.

His belief that politics needs to be re-enchanted and re-energised shares common ground with commentators from across the political spectrum¹³⁰. One such writer is Alan Bloom whose belief that America is suffering from an intellectual crisis often results in him being pigeonholed as right-wing owing to his denunciations of the left leaning academy¹³¹. In addition to his distaste for political correctness and the dumbing down of academic curricula in Bloom's writing there can also be detected a strong sense of disillusionment with politics, culture and society more generally.

¹³⁰ Rex Butler, *Slavoj Zizek Live Theory* (Continuum 2005) p.33 Butler suggests Zizek offers examples that the only serious political challenges are from nationalists and racist agitators also resonates this with cross-political disillusionment

¹³¹ Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon and Schuster 1988) pp.1-12

Whereas Bloom focuses on Supermen ¹³² Bauman writes of ‘innovational personalities’ figures with the charisma to inspire political action. For both commentators how, when and why this humanistic remedy will emerge to create an engaged public remains to be seen.

Such disenchantment with the current state of politics points us towards the intriguing cases of Steve Earle/John Walker Lindh, Natalie Maines and Fundamental. All these cases mix music and politics with notions of identity, gender, nationality and religion to provide examples of how the representatives of both right and left now share more than might be imagined. As left and right increasingly converge and switch positions in their attempts to appear more righteous these brief musical case studies offer useful points of illumination.

Many of the examples of radical forms of popular music have a negative relation towards capitalism, but are also very successful commercially. Bands such as RATM, Nirvana and Public Enemy tap into the negativity of capitalism itself yet are bound by their ambivalence towards the culture they inhabit. In denial there can also be affirmation and the case of the UK based Islamic hip-hop band Fun’da’mental some of the complexities of their ethnic, cultural, political and religious emplacement can be appreciated. Fun’da’mental’s most controversial recording *All Is War* (2006) acknowledges and takes on the declaration of George Bush from 12 September 2001 by correlating it with the torture of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib¹³³.

¹³² Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage : American Negativity and Rap/metal in the Age of Supercapitalism* (Manchester University Press 2007) p. 53 Details Bloom’s invocation of the might of the ‘Nietzschean superman’

¹³³ Ted Swedenburg, *Islamic Hip-hop vs Islamophobia In Global Noise Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA Middletown* (Wesleyan University Press 2001) p.69

The cover of the album features the image of 'Liberty' by Leon Kuhn, a UK artist specialising in political art that uses the technique of digital photo-montage. Kuhn's image sees the Statue of Liberty morphed into one of the hooded victims of US torture and Liberty's torch powers the electric torture cable. Heavily inspired by the Nation of Islam and taking lyrics from the Koran Wilson points out that 'Liberty' was a curious image for the band to use particularly given Islam's conventional prohibition on iconography and idolatry¹³⁴. The album provoked controversy with tracks such as 'Che Bin' comparing Osama bin Laden to Che Guevara and 'Cookbook DIY' which contains explicit lyrics about suicide bombings. The Sun newspaper's Grant Rollings denounced the band's vocalist Aki Nawaz as a 'Bomb Rapper' and Labour MP Andrew Dismore urged the police to consider prosecuting the band under anti-terrorism laws¹³⁵.

Puzzlement and outright condemnation was also expressed over the enigma of American citizen John Walker Lindh who converted to Islam and fought for the Taliban as a result of being radicalised through popular music. Having grown up in one of the most liberal places in America, Newsweek magazine asked why a normal middle class American boy had been 'drawn to the most illiberal, intolerant sect in Islam'¹³⁶. At 14 Lindh was a young American suburbanite with a passion for hip-hop who spent most of his time hanging out at malls looking for the latest gangsta rap records to add to his large collection. Rather than the Koran or Osama Bin Laden it was actually hip hop which first drew the young white American to the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and the Nation of Islam.

¹³⁴ Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage : American Negativity and Rap/metal in the Age of Supercapitalism* (Manchester University Press 2007) p. 185

¹³⁵ Grant Rollings, Fury at Suicide Bomb Rap *The Sun* (29 June 2006)

¹³⁶ Evan Thomas, A Long Strange Trip to the Taliban *Newsweek* (December 7th 2001) also available on <http://www.newsweek.com/id/75261> accessed October 2009

From the moderate anti-establishment beginnings represented by NWA and Air Jordans, Lindh sought out a different form of authenticity in the Koran and the religious instruction afforded by a local mosque. He travelled to Yemen in order to learn to speak pure Arabic and then onto Pakistan to join a madrassah in a region known to be stronghold of Islamic extremism. In the post 9-11 climate any attempts to try and understand the motivations of its perpetrators were frowned upon and one musician who provoked controversy by trying to do so was Steve Earle with his recording of 'John Walker Blues' from his 2002 album *Jerusalem*.

Earle explained that he was intrigued why Lindh had become so totally alienated from his own society, particularly as he was of a roughly similar age to Earle's own son. The song portrays Lindh as an ordinary American boy 'raised on MTV'¹³⁷ and is a liberal attempt to understand rather than defend Walker. In the sleeve notes to *Jerusalem* Earle makes it abundantly clear that he sees his role as defending the First Amendment of the US constitution which guarantees the right to freedom of speech, insisting on 'asking questions in our darkest hours'¹³⁸.

In response to Earle's album release *The New York Post* ran a headline 'Twisted Ballad Honours Tali-Rat' accusing Earle of glorifying Walker and *The Wall Street Journal* commented that Earle's claims to artistic freedom 'represented a watery line of defence'¹³⁹. In post 9-11 USA when compassion was at a premium this style of

¹³⁷ Martin Cloonan, *Musical Responses to 9-11 : From Conservative Patriotism to Radicalism* in Dietrich Helms and Thomas Phelps, *9/11 – The world's all out of tune Popular Music post 9-11*. September 2001 (Diplomica Verlag 2004) p. 26

¹³⁸ Steve Earle, *Jerusalem CD Sleeve Notes* (Epic 2002)

¹³⁹ Sue Wilson, *Iraq Has Nothing to do with 9-11 Interview with Steve Earle Sunday Herald* (30 March 2003) p.11

coverage ensured that definitions of what it was to be American were being re-configured. In the Bush world order these new configurations certainly did not include the possibility of supporting the Taliban. For some the fact that Lindh was shown to have Christian as well as Islamic sentiments merely compounded the insult¹⁴⁰.

Other commentators took aim at Lindh's parenting and his upbringing in order to invoke a plausible rationale for his thoroughly un-American behaviour. Shelby Steele of the Hoover Institution claimed Lindh was prepared for this seduction not only by 'the wispy relativism of Marin County' but also by a 'broader post-60s cultural liberalism'¹⁴¹. Jeff Jacoby attacked his permissive liberal parents for neglecting to develop their son's 'moral judgement' claiming Marin rather than Afghanistan was the start of his road to treason¹⁴².

In addition to causing widespread consternation Lindh's actions certainly served to upset notions of patriotism, ethnicity and honour. These juxtapositions are highlighted by Wilson when he suggests that had Lindh chosen to become a born again Christian and joined up with the rebels in Iraq, he might have become a conservative hero. He was after all a God-fearing soldier, serving a strict code of morality fighting in what he believed was a just war however he just happened to be on the wrong side¹⁴³.

¹⁴⁰ Martin Cloonan, *Musical Responses to 9-11 From Conservative Patriotism to Radicalism* (p. 27) in Dietrich Helms and Thomas Phelps, *9/11 The world's all out of tune Popular Music post 9-11*. September 2001 (Diplomica Verlag 2004)

¹⁴¹ Shelby Steele, Commentary Section *Wall Street Journal* (December 10th 2001)

¹⁴² Jeff Jacoby, American Taliban Blame Lindh's Permissive Parents *The Boston Globe* (December 26, 2001)

¹⁴³ Scott Wilson, *Great Satan's Rage : American Negativity and Rap/metal in the Age of Supercapitalism* (Manchester University Press 2007) p.94

This tendency for both left and right to seize on a live issue and synthesize it in a similarly way by recourse to familiar narratives was also evident in the reactions to the Columbine High School shootings carried out by two rock fans Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. Julie Webber's thoughtful analysis of the reactions to the Columbine shootings provides some interesting points. On one side liberal America called for greater gun control, as in Michael Moore's documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), while more conservative voices supported the pro rifle NRA and blamed a lack of parental authority, discipline and respect.

In reactions reminiscent of the Senate hearings during the PMRC inspired censorship campaign against offensive music during the 1990s, both sides roundly condemned what they perceived to be the violent culture of film, video games and music. Webber suggests these value judgements should be temporarily parked and commentators should look beyond these short sighted explanations to see the shootings as 'embedded in the social practices of the school and the society'¹⁴⁴.

In March 2003 Natalie Maines, the lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, told a London concert audience: 'Just so you know, we're ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas'¹⁴⁵. By criticizing the President on foreign territory whilst her country was at war Maines sparked intense criticism from fellow musicians and particularly from the band's conservative audience base. President Bush responded to the Maines controversy in a live interview with Tom Brokaw on April 24 saying he 'didn't really

¹⁴⁴ Julie Webber, *Failure to Hold : The Politics of School Violence* (Rowman and Littlefield 2005) p.18

¹⁴⁵ Natalie Maines quoted in Shut up and Sing/Dance/Act, *The Guardian* (March 11 2003) (Maines is a native of Lubbock Texas)

care what the Dixie Chicks or Hollywood thought ... but being able to speak out is the great thing about America. It stands in stark contrast to Iraq...'¹⁴⁶.

Ensuing death threats led to metal detectors being installed at stadiums where the Dixie Chicks were due to perform and after protesters burned their CDs and radio stations banned their songs, the band offered a partial retraction when Maines admitted that her outburst had '*been disrespectful*'. The extent of the backlash was significant and the furore became infused with patriotism and sexism as it resonated throughout the music world.

On the subject of patriotism and to the dismay of many fans of country music Maines enjoined a public feud with fellow country-star Toby Keith over his song 'Courtesy of the Red, White, & Blue' stating publicly that it 'makes country music sound ignorant'¹⁴⁷. Keith responded by belittling Maines' songwriting skills, and by displaying a backdrop at his concerts showing a doctored photo of Maines with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

At the Academy of Country Music (ACM) awards ceremony in May 2003 the hail of boos greeting the Dixie Chicks' nomination for entertainer of the year, gave way to deafening cheers as the accolade was awarded to Toby Keith. Cloonan suggests Keith

¹⁴⁶ Tom Brokaw live interview with GWBush, *Tom Brokaw Show* (April 24 2009)

¹⁴⁷ Natalie Maines, *LA Daily* (February 11 2003) news article Maines bashes Toby Keith's Patriotic Anthem <http://www.top40-charts.com/news.php?nid=3488> accessed on January 14 2008

typified what he describes as the conservative patriotic response to 9-11, which 'was to support, not to critique, to comfort, not to confront'¹⁴⁸.

Other voices were drawn into the spat such as Elton John who criticised Keith's conservative views and for attacking the Dixie Chicks as 'un-American'¹⁴⁹. In response to the misogynistic criticisms such as 'Dixie Sluts' and 'Saddam's Angels' circulating on the internet, Bruce Springsteen and Madonna also supported Maines' actions by publicly stating their support for the right of the women to express their political opinions. Maines continued to agitate as the Dixie Chicks joined the 'Vote for Change' tour, playing a series of concerts in support of John Kerry and against George Bush in American swing states¹⁵⁰. To this day Toby Keith still refuses to utter Natalie Maines' name.

Similar notions of nationhood and patriotism were kept alive in the UK through Billy Bragg's album 'English Half English'. Dubbed by the NME as the 'seasoned pinko storyteller' Bragg uses the wordplay of tracks such as 'Take Down the Union Jack' and 'Baby Faroukh' to explain how English-ness is intimately bound up with other cultures. In various interviews and columns he attacked how UKIP and the BNP mis-used the British flag to represent 'an inward looking, white society, angry at the present, fearful of the future, clinging to the past'¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁸ Martin Cloonan, Musical Responses to 9-11 From Conservative Patriotism to Radicalism in Dietrich Helms and Thomas Phelps, *9/11 The world's all out of tune Popular Music post 9-11. September 2001* (Diplomica Verlag 2004) p. 24

¹⁴⁹ Elton John, America's new 'era of censorship' *The Daily Telegraph* (17 July 2004) also available on <http://www.freemuse.org/sw6566.asp> accessed January 11 2009

¹⁵⁰ Jennifer Kay, Springsteen, R.E.M. Kick off "Vote for Change" Concerts Across Swing States (Oct 2nd 2004) on <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/1002-21.htm> accessed on May 1 2009

¹⁵¹ Billy Bragg, Diary *The New Statesman* (March 1 2004) p.8

Frey's suggestion that the job of the singer/songwriter is 'to try to reflect the world around him'¹⁵² reveals how much the political ground has shifted since Bragg first became a political artist in 1984 during the miners' strike. There is a noticeable change in emphasis from a socialist-informed union-proud politics to a wariness about the confusions of identity-politics and nationality. The album prompted a varied response with *Rolling Stone* calling it 'dippy fake Guthrie'¹⁵³ whereas the *New Statesman's* Books of the Year list for 2002 suggests 'if a booklet accompanying a CD can pass as a book, the lyrics propose more stimulating and varied ideas about who we are and might become than most heavyweight political texts have ever done'¹⁵⁴.

Bragg's political journey during the noughties saw him becoming a regular contributor to the Diary section of *The New Statesman* where he has been able to amplify issues that he covers in his songs. Indeed Willhardt claims that Bragg has been able to use this forum for substantive political proposals such as the plan for constitutional reform of the House of Lords¹⁵⁵. His ideas were taken seriously enough to result in meetings with high-ranking members of the Labour government as well as wide coverage in the popular press. For Willhardt Bragg's access to publications beyond the music industry is 'an authentic, political use for his art, even if music itself is absent'¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵² Hilary Frey, *Singing to Power* *The Nation* (June 17 2002) p.35

¹⁵³ Douglas Wolk, English Half-English Album Review *Rolling Stone* (March 14 2002) p.71

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Howe, The New Statesman Book of the Year List *The New Statesman* (December 2 2002) p.41

¹⁵⁵ Mark Willhardt, Available Rebels and Folk Authenticities Michelle Shocked and Billy Bragg in Rock Protest Songs So Many and So Few in *The Resisting Muse : Popular Music and Social Protest* edited by Ian Peddie (Ashgate 2007) p.44

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.44

The symbiosis between the styles of politicians and rock-stars was further demonstrated by the election of Barack Obama. Described by Frank Luntz as ‘the super-slick, super-cool political rock-star of his generation’ it is interesting that popular music has been integral to the phenomenon of ‘Obamamania’¹⁵⁷. Swept to victory on a wave of optimism and hope the first African-American president epitomised many of these appealing and challenging qualities.

By demonstrating an unerring ability to mix cool with charisma and serious with casual, Obama possessed the X-Factor an increasingly important element in the repertoire and make up of the modern politician. During his election campaign and once in power, as demonstrated at his inauguration ceremony, music played a prominent role. In the race for the Whitehouse Obama’s public appearances were accompanied by U2’s ‘City of Shining Lights’¹⁵⁸ and he was always symbolically surrounded by hordes of clean cut and enthusiastic youths with adulation in their eyes. Coincidentally the same song, along with U2’s ‘Beautiful Day’, were popular selections in fellow campaigner Hilary Clinton’s on-line poll to select her campaign tune.

As the first presidential inauguration ceremony to receive live international TV coverage it was bizarre to witness Pete Seeger and Bruce Springsteen joining forces to perform a duet of Woody Guthrie’s ‘This Land is Your Land’ a song once regarded as a leftist national anthem. Sandwiched between the Seeger-Springsteen duo and inauguration headliners U2, was Obama’s keynote speech entitled ‘Voices Calling for

¹⁵⁷ Frank Luntz, White House Favourite taps into Hunger for Change *News of the World* (June 8 2008) p.21

¹⁵⁸ Ellen Wulfhorst, Campaign Tunes Not So Simple in Campaigns *Reuters News Agency* : (May 27 2007) available on www.reuters.com/article/idUSN2548424520070530 accessed on April 24 2010

Change'¹⁵⁹. Unlike Earle's ill-fated attempt to understand John Walker Lindh through his music Obama's association with what once would be regarded as left-wing insurrectionary music was never questioned. In both cases context was king even though neither Obama nor Earle sought to overthrow America but to fulfil its potential.

Denzel Washington had opened the event to an audience of 400,000 declaring music to be 'the heartbeat of the American experience'¹⁶⁰ as a galaxy¹⁶¹ of stars from film and music sung and danced in 'the most open and accountable inauguration ceremony in history'¹⁶². The theme of renewal and healing was once again represented by Springsteen's rendition of 'The Rising', a track taken as a balm for the events of 9-11 when released in 2003.

Commenting on proceedings, Phil Gallo remembers that 'the last time America had turned towards music on such a scale was the concerts that followed the attacks of 9-11'¹⁶³. Whereas 9-11 plunged the world into fear and insecurity Obama offered hope

¹⁵⁹ Steve Hendrix and Justin Morralo, Jamming The Mall for Obama *Washington Post* (Jan 18 2009)

¹⁶⁰ Phil Gallo, 'We Are One' The Obama Inaugural Celebration *Variety Magazine* (Jan 18 2009)

¹⁶¹ The line up of speakers and performers included **Speakers:** Jack Black, Steve Carell, Rosario Dawson, Jamie Foxx, Tom Hanks, Ashley Judd, Martin Luther King III, Queen Latifah, Laura Linney, George Lopez, Kal Penn, Marisa Tomei, Denzel Washington, Forest Whitaker, Tiger Woods. **Performers:** Master Sgt. Caleb Green, Bruce Springsteen, Mary J. Blige, Jon Bon Jovi with Bettye Lavette, James Taylor with John Legend and Jennifer Nettie, John Mellencamp, Josh Groban and Heather Headley, Will.i.am with Herbie Hancock and Sheryl Crow, Renee Fleming, Garth Brooks, Stevie Wonder with Usher and Shakira, U2, Pete Seeger, Beyonce.

¹⁶² Phil Gallo, 'We Are One' The Obama Inaugural Celebration *Variety Magazine* (Jan 18 2009)

¹⁶³ Phil Gallo, 'We Are One' The Obama Inaugural Celebration *Variety Magazine* (Jan 18 2009)

and re-conciliation for a world haunted by war¹⁶⁴ and the deeply rooted cultural conflicts within American society.

During a day of concise speeches delivered by various actors, the only musician to speak out was Bono. Un-choreographed but perhaps not unexpectedly Bono seized the opportunity to confirm to the watching millions that ‘he, his band and all the nations of the world shared Obama’s dream’. After thanking ‘Sir Obama’ for inviting ‘four boys from the North side of Dublin’ to play the event, he declared during the band's performance of ‘In The Name of Love’ that ‘Martin Luther King's dream was not just an American dream -- also an Irish dream, a European dream, an African dream, an Israeli dream’¹⁶⁵. Thanks to what Dave Marsh described as Bono’s ‘Sesame Street view of the world’¹⁶⁶ it seemed to Tina Daunt that Obama had finally been ordained as ‘the rockin’ leader of the new world’¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁴ Obama’s nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize was made two days after his election victory – and the subsequent award in October 2009 drew gasps of surprise and cries of too much too soon. Universally seen as highly premature the nomination and award reflects the unbridled optimism and expectancy of what he will deliver

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/8299824.stm> accessed Oct 10 2009 and John Feehery Nobel for Obama is premature – accessed from

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/10/10/feehery.obama.nobel/> on Oct 11 2009

¹⁶⁵ Dave Marsh, Big Scar on the Horizon (Rock and Rap Confidential no. 226) www.rrc.com 19 March 2009

¹⁶⁶ Dave Marsh, Big Scar on the Horizon (Rock and Rap Confidential no. 226) www.rrc.com 19 March 2009

¹⁶⁷ Tina Daunt, Cause Celebre *Los Angeles Times* (Jan 18 2009)

Chapter 7

Conclusion – Change is the only constant

In a time of scattered and unconnected discontinuities changes that can acquire the formative power of an 'upheaval' are few and far between. Few if any stand out to suggest a generational rupture and to provide the raw material for 'generational self-constitution'¹.

The major conjunctions of the music-politics symbiosis such as RAR, Live Aid, Red Wedge, Cool Britannia and Live 8 demonstrate how popular music has been transformed from a source of youthful opposition to a mechanism of establishment support². If rock-stars once imagined themselves as disagreeable, rebellious and uncompromising, rather than bucking authority they have gradually become seduced into a competition to gain its acceptance. In their journey from a place of critical significance to one of ambience, celebrity and entertainment, their proximity to power has seen much of their potency co-opted and de-fanged.

Much of what drove rock's early counter-cultural explosion was antithetical to the system and a significant amount of the appeal of today's campaigning rock-stars emanates from music's early involvement with political and social issues. It is these unique musical roots that have enabled stars from Lennon to Bono to articulate their politics through Marshal's 'discourses of authenticity'³ so they have become important sources of meaning and validation.

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (Polity 2008) pp.2-5

² John Harris, *Britpop The Last Party* (Da Capo Press 2004) p. 99

³ P.D. Marshal, *Celebrity and Power: fame in contemporary culture* (University of Minneapolis Press 1997) p. xii

Along this route, rock-stars have therefore accumulated sufficient amounts of social and cultural capital to transform from minor political irritants to credible political actors. Armed initially with little more than shock value and sex appeal this process of accumulation explains how and why certain rock-stars have come to possess statesman like status.

The strong threads of authenticity and credibility nourished by rock-celebrities have become attractive sources of legitimacy resulting in the emergence of the hybrid rock-star-politician. As liquid moderns increasingly fail to see the point in politics, politicians have increasingly sought to stay relevant through associations with music and the more appealing aspects of its surrounding culture.

Bauman informs us how modernity's transition away from traditional religious and political belief systems contributes to conditions whereby meaning is sought from quasi-religious figures and innovative personalities. As McCutcheon et al point out, musical celebrities are the most potent of these symbols as they are worshipped more intensely than any other kinds of celebrities⁴. It is unsurprising therefore that politics has been magnetised towards this power in numerous ways.

Terence Blacker suggests the public has gradually been brainwashed with the lie that celebrities 'represent all that is good and selfless in the modern world and politicians

⁴ Lynn McCutcheon, 'Conceptualisation and Measurement of celebrity worship' *British Journal Of Psychology* (vol. 93 no1 2002) pp 67-87

are invariably bad, greedy and incompetent'⁵. Fuelled by assumptions about the inherent dishonour of politicians the perceived ethicality of rock-star politics grows in an inverse relation to its distance from real politics. This somewhat ironic predicament brings us back to Bauman's prescriptions for a vibrant public sphere.

Bauman also reminds us that public dismay with politicians and political institutions demands a reinvigoration of the political rather than a flimsy celebrity-driven solution. Even discredited politicians elected through an imperfect political process are preferable to unaccountable rock-stars defining the public agenda⁶. His unctuous reception on Capitol Hill even moved the doggedly a-political Geldof to concede that there is 'something seriously wrong when so many politicians pay court to a pop singer'⁷.

Acquiring enhanced political purchase as a result of being situated outside traditional politics is in many ways a failure of politics and a worrying paradox that is central to the emergence of celebrity politics. Geldof's anti-political stance during Live Aid remains one of rock's biggest 'post-political' gestures. Positioning famine as a non-political issue robbed the crisis of any notions of accountability, ensuring Live Aid and its successors are remembered as musical carnivals rather than responses to the serious political issues of inequality and under-development.

In what still remains a unique demonstration of a modern-celebrity figure having the potency to ignite such interest and mobilise such impressive support, Live Aid

⁵ Terence Blacker, A Caring Celebrity is no better than anybody else *The Independent* (23rd May 2006)

⁶ Frank Furedi, *Consuming Democracy : activism, elitism and political apathy* available on www.geser.net/furedi.html accessed July 11 2009

⁷ Bob Geldof, *Is That It ?* (Pan Books 1986) p. 403

revealed the remarkable cultural capital the rock-star had accumulated over the previous 25 years. If Thomas Meyer is right to suggest ‘democracy has become nothing more than ‘legitimation by the most successful form of communication’⁸ then Live Aid was popular music’s unexpected and unanticipated contribution to a lesson in the fine art of political seduction.

As a transitional event, Live Aid contributed significantly to the credibility of non-traditional political actors. In addition to providing the template for future campaigns for Africa it enabled celebrity-musicians to start functioning as authors of serious political discourse. By the time of Live 8 the broadsheets had come to respect Bono and Geldof as ‘experts on debt relief and Africa’⁹ and serious public figures whose opinions should be listened to.

As discussed in Chapter 5 Rojek believes these campaigning figures assumed a new kind of moral authority as they were endowed with the lustre of ‘post-God celebrity’ once associated only with sages or religious leaders. On the irrationality of seeking this kind of salvation Michael Stipe commented ...

‘the very weird world of religion scares me. It’s like people are creating fake heroes because they don’t have any real ones. The politicians have failed us, religion has failed us, so whom do we turn to? Celebrities – It’s wrong!’¹⁰

⁸ Thomas Meyer, *Media Democracy How the Media Colonize Politics* (Cambridge Polity Press 2002) p.65

⁹ John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, ‘Playing to the Crowd : The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 282

¹⁰ Michael Stipe quoted in Nick Holt, *The Wit and Wisdom of Music* (House of Raven 2006) p.116

Whilst these carnival events are portals bringing forth the cultural importance of rock-star-politicians the economic and technological imperatives of liquid modernity that also govern this relationship should also be acknowledged. Fundamental changes in how society understands and replicates itself have all facilitated greater opportunities and encouragement for the emergence of the rock-star as cultural critic.

By foregrounding the importance of presentation and marketing, both politicians and rock-stars have been able to exploit the many synergies co-existing between the worlds of popular music and politics. Blair's craving of 'hip credibility' exemplifies how politicians can take on the appealing and charismatic qualities of the rock-star to assist their invasion of popular culture. Conversely, Bono's desire to become a credible political campaigner was achieved by adjusting his game plan and moving away from traditional moorings towards the hybrid aggregation of the rock-star-politician.

In its marketing of hip the language of politics has increasingly bypassed the substance of policy in order to adopt the entertainment protocols of the pop celebrity. Politics is now so intimately connected to the individual that politicians are 'personalities' rather than representatives of ideology or party. As a result, coverage is more suited to the air brushed perfection of the music video or TV commercial than to serious debate and discussion. Just as New Labour is likely to be forever understood through the charismatic filter of Blairism, the distinct appeal of 'Obamamania' proved to be the key electoral asset of 2008.

These considerations point beyond the marketing posters and the PR campaigns to suggest rock-star politics is actually something woven far more deeply into our cultural fabric than it might initially appear. Witnessing the increasing familiarity of rock-stars at party conferences, addressing world summits and spearheading campaigns indicates the extent to which celebrity discourse has encroached upon political commentary.

This transition is also evident in terms of changes in the behaviours and styles of politicians in recent decades. The contrasting public images of recent leaders such as Obama, Cameron, and Blair and their immediate predecessors such as Thatcher, Bush and Major is ample evidence that these new personalities have cloaked themselves in rock-star hip as much as rock-stars have coveted the political.

Having been responsible for imposing the political meaning on music, the gradual displacement of politics from the music press makes the shadows of figures such as Guthrie, Lennon, Dylan and Strummer seem ghostly anachronistic within the current post-political consensus. Over a very short time the radically different experiences of Red Wedge and Cool Britannia serve to demonstrate how quickly the disappearance of ideology and polarity can birth a new consensus.

By succumbing to commercial pressures and the trappings of mass-market success, rock-n-roll has been seduced into abandoning its notions of non-conformism and political idealism, however spurious they are now portrayed to be. By willingly submerging into a world of glossy commercialism, John Savage captures this liquid modern shift by suggesting 'in pop there is no Youth Rebellion, only Youth

Consumption'¹¹ and in the transition from the 'potent and challenging' to the 'anodyne and inoffensive', he sees the untimely death of the rock rebel.

The uniting of the worlds of music and politics through the machinery of marketing, faultless choreography and meticulous rehearsal ensure that spontaneity and conflict are increasingly managed out. Electoral drifts to the left might prompt hasty comparisons with the 60s, however music and culture more generally now draws much of its energy from being included in the mainstream, celebrated in the tabloids and entertained by the government.

Just as Chung's analysis of how the lure of endorsements tames and domesticates rock-stars¹², Rollins sees the professionalisation of the music industry with its supporting eco-system of commercial rewards serving to 'cool mother-fuckers out'¹³. Ever since edgier rock-stars from the underground such as Green Day and Nirvana started to roll over and purr as 'their tummies were tickled by corporations such as Sony', Rollins maintains the framework of protest in music changed¹⁴. This wave of co-option, dilution, de-fanging or however it is articulated, is similar to what both Biafra and Pontiac suggest happened to 'punk' in the late 70s, as bands such as Blondie and The Knack were cherry picked by the industry and re-packaged into the more commercially oriented New Wave¹⁵.

¹¹ Jon Savage, *The Punk Process* *The Face* (no.19 November 1981)

¹² Heejoon Chung, 'Baseball star v rock star in globalising popular culture Similarities, Difference and Paradox in Discussion of Celebrities Interview' for the *Sociology of Sport Volume 38 No. 1* (2003) p.104

¹³ Henry Rollins, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005)

¹⁴ Henry Rollins, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005)

¹⁵ Jello Biafra, *Punk : Attitude A Film by Don Letts* (Freemantle Media 2005) and Ronnie Pontiac, *The Golden Age of Rock Activism in Newtopia Magazine* available on <http://www.newtopiamagazine.org/> (2004) accessed January 11 2009

In this new consensus, associations between campaign and celebrity have become increasingly familiar through millennial stars such as Noel Gallagher, Bono, Chris Martin and Kylie Minogue. In reality these are little more than branding exercises and their watered down version of politics raises awkward questions about ideology, commitment and action. Lacking any solid cohesion, these celebrity-driven campaigns, with their fleeting ‘virtual’ communities’, are almost totally devoid of the anger and the meaning, which once ignited movements such as RAR.

As a result, rock music has therefore become part of the life-style of the upwardly mobile and its icons join movie stars, not as representatives of a generation, but as models of self-advancement and style. Politics is no longer about unemployment, alienation and boredom but the swirl of celebrity and stylish consumption practices. As society stops questioning itself, the colonisation of public space with banal celebrity chatter provides camouflage as moral dilemmas quickly recede from sight, and already unlikely occasions for scrutiny and conscious deliberation become increasingly rare.

Liquid modernity’s elevation of celebrities to representatives of the popular conscience distorts agendas and closes down debate. As was witnessed with Live 8 the style of coverage transforms the real subject matter into a preoccupation with ‘personalities’ and invariably softer non-political news. This non-antagonistic methodology of consumer driven protest drains political energy and creates a void that celebrity chatter is apt and willing to fill.

Power and meaning are never fixed, however mixing celebrity with politics softens rather than hardens attitudes towards consumer capitalism, fosters an acceptance rather than a rejection of sound-bite politics and bequeaths a fluency in the language of super-capitalism. For Bauman, these debilitating trends re-order and extinguish many of the familial, educational and other structures that once stood in the way of the unlimited reign of the marketplace. This promotes an acceptance of consumerism's ever deeper penetration into the hearts and minds of individuals as an almost natural rather than ideological or politically driven occurrence.

This highlights the emancipatory paradoxes that lie at the heart of liquid modern society, which alert us to the special significance of 'seduction' by marketing, advertising, celebrity, and their entire range of media and associated imagery. These new disciplining mechanisms, which feel quite the opposite, gain traction, as previous systems of control such as religion, class and family have diminished in force. As structures and belief systems melt and flow into the currents of liquid modernity, political legitimacy loosens as it is no longer tethered to once familiar institutions, parties or ideologies.

Interpretations of what constitutes political activity, such as those promoted by carnivals such as Live 8, increasingly see politics positioned as a politicised consumer event conveniently encompassed within the realm of feel-good politics. It is one thing to suggest that societal changes may require an amended understanding of the political but to consider the jettisoning of debate in favour of short-term consumer-driven remedies is another. In times of flux, speed and uncertainty even greater care has to be taken to recover rather than abandon a sense of the political.

Carnival is also symbolic of how Bauman believes the operation of power has changed in the liquid modern transition. Rather than the Benthamite model where the few watched the many, the tables are now reversed and it is now a synopticon-style society¹⁶ with the many watching the few. These spectacles replace surveillance without losing any of its disciplining power as obedience is achieved through enticement rather than coercion.

For Bauman, this equates to the *end of the era of mutual engagement* whereby once binary oppositions between the supervisors and the supervised, capital and labour have fragmented¹⁷. With the disappearance of traditional oppositions these spectacles appeal to similar interests dormant in otherwise disparate individuals who are brought together when other interests are temporarily silenced. For Bauman, the excitement of this brief existence only lasts as long as the performance and there is no sense of their concerns or feelings being blended or fused into a 'group interest'¹⁸.

This is evident in the vapour trails of political sentiment that still attach themselves to conjunctions of rock and politics such as 'All You Need Is Love', RAR, Live Aid, Red Wedge, Cool Britannia and Live 8. In terms of the largest political gatherings the 'ANL/RAR Carnival' (1978), Live Aid (1985) and Live 8 (2005) interesting trajectories of change can be delineated both in terms of participation and politicisation.

¹⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000) p.86

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.200

As well as contributing to the thwarting of the rise of fascism in the UK participants in the first ANL/RAR carnival still for instance recollect feelings of empowerment through involvement¹⁹. The number who participated in Live Aid obviously dwarfed the 80,000 that gathered in Hyde Park for the RAR festival, however a better understanding of what constitutes participation is the key to assessing the politics of the event. Live Aid was more consumer spectacle than movement although it did at least demonstrate the potential for grassroots mobilisation, although these were disjointed and spontaneous.

Live 8 on the other hand was meticulously planned and stage-managed so the public was effectively marginalised from the start. Once again remote or virtual participation might have been enormous however the form and style of participation invited by Geldof gave life to a certain type of values and experiences. In so doing, Geldof created a populist vision based on the flimsy bastions of goodwill and friendly persuasion towards the G8 leaders with campaigning and organisation largely taken out of the public's hands. Live 8 was therefore a further step away from the unplanned, spontaneous and disjointed forms of opposition that had emerged during earlier events, because in 2005 the public were summoned only to observe, consume and listen.

In addition to the vapour trails of sentiment, interesting conjunctural observations can also be made about important letters connected with these events. These are the 'incendiary letter' written by Red Saunders about Clapton's racist outburst in 1977,

¹⁹ David Widgery, *Beating Time Riot n Race n Rock n Roll* (Chatto and Windus 1986) p.111

the letter from Live Aid's accountant published in the Guardian in 1985 and Bob Geldof's open letter to the G8 carried by most of the quality dailies in 2005.

Saunders' letter, although ignored by the mainstream press appeared simultaneously in the three main music papers, N.M.E, Sounds and Melody Maker. The music press was a catalyst for widespread political mobilisation, the defeat of the National Front and the largest anti-fascist post-war demonstrations in the UK. During the Live Aid weekend the musical carnival overshadowed the rants of rock-stars and the press seized upon a letter from Live Aid's accountant rather than anything generated by Bob Geldof. At this stage Geldof was regarded as more rock-star than credible spokesperson however by 2005 attitudes had changed as Geldof's G8 letter was covered by all sections of the press. On this occasion the letter addressed a different audience and although on the face of it was talking directly to power prompted different results, promoted different values and denied politics²⁰.

The same year Bono's appearance as messianic saviour on the cover of Time magazine under the question 'Can Bono save the world?' is symbolic of the extent of the transition of the rock celebrity. Rather than offering any insight, this headline and article represent an indictment of the failure of conventional forms of political leadership and public policy. As politics has come to share the same endemic restlessness as the music industry, liquid modernity will continue to prompt it to experiment with new ideas and fashions. Unless politics reinvigorates itself by more

²⁰ *The Independent* (2 July 2005) *The Sun* (2 July 2005) and *Daily Mail* (1 June 2005) quoted John Street, Seth Hague and Heather Savigny, *Playing to the Crowd: The Role of Music and Musicians in Political Participation*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* www.bjpir.org (Volume 10 2008) p. 282

substantive means, it will continue to desperately seek answers from such unlikely sources.

In May 2008 a public debate on the *efficacy of celebrity politics* was scheduled between rock critic Dave Marsh and Bono²¹. This was suggested by Bono as a result of Marsh's claim that he could think of no political problem that had ever 'gained a solution from celebrity involvement'. The debate would take place on Marsh's 'Kick Out The Jams' show on Sirius Radio, however it was cancelled as the Bono camp had second thoughts. Whilst it would have been interesting to see how Bono would defend 'celebrity politics' against one of its fiercest critics, what enlightenment this would offer to the workings of a process that has been underway for half a century, is uncertain.

It may indeed be the case that rock music has exhausted much of its repertoire of shocking gestures so much of what is left are the superficial theatrics of plagiarism and parody. As popular music is a source of such considerable cultural power that is likely to continue to magnetise politics, it is important not to lapse into the anxiety that the future of music, and indeed politics, only holds reiteration and re-permutation. As commercialism and politics will undoubtedly continue to incorporate music's fashions and probably de-fang its stars, this will not however obliterate the fact of their emergence, nor their continuing and potential usefulness.

By keeping alive the musical and political imaginations, music-stars can still offer ways of bypassing the de-familiarising effects of technology and reconnecting with a

²¹ Dave Marsh, *Big Scar on the Horizon* Rock and Rap Confidential no. 226 www.rrc.com accessed on 19 March 2009

sense of intimacy increasingly eviscerated by the fragmentary forces of liquid modernity. Although it is sometimes difficult to imagine how there will be ‘shocks of the new’²² it is equally important not to lapse into the morose conviction that nothing new or significant can happen. What further impacts music culture will have on politics is uncertain, however it will be intriguing to see how the latter exploits the former in its continuing pursuit of power and influence. It will therefore be interesting to see what happens to the curious figure of the hybrid rock-star-politician because, as Attali suggests, it is often within the musical arena rather than the political arena that change first becomes inscribed²³.

²² Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism – Is There No Alternative ?* (Zero Books 2010) p.39

²³ Jacques Attali, *Noise : The Political Economy of Music*, Theory and History of Literature volume 16 (University of Minnesota Press 1985) p.3

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