Introduction

The Sex Pistols' "I Wanna Be Me"

It gave us an identity.

—Tom Petty on Beatlemania

Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being.

—Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Where fortune tellers sometimes read tea leaves as omens of things to come, there are now professionals who scrutinize songs, films, advertisements, and other artifacts of popular culture for what they reveal about the politics and the feel of daily life at the time of their production. Instead of being consumed, they are historical artifacts to be studied and "read." Or at least that is a common approach within cultural studies. But dated pop artifacts have another, living function.

Throughout much of 1973 and early 1974, several working-class teens from west London's Shepherd's Bush district struggled to become a rock band. Like tens of thousands of such groups over the years, they learned to play together by copying older songs that they all liked. For guitarist Steve Jones and drummer Paul Cook, that meant the short, sharp rock songs of London bands like the Small Faces, the Kinks, and the Who. Most of the songs had been hits seven to ten

years earlier. They also learned some more current material, much of it associated with the band that succeeded the Small Faces, the brash "lad's" rock of Rod Stewart's version of the Faces. Ironically, the Rod Stewart songs they struggled to learn weren't Rod Stewart songs at all. They were Stewart's re-creation of his own youth, covers of American rhythm and blues songs like "It's All Over Now" and Sam Cooke's "Twistin' the Night Away." In 1974, Cook and Jones added another Faces fan, Glen Matlock, on bass. In all but name, the Sex Pistols had formed.

In late November 1976, the Sex Pistols released one of rock's great debut singles, "Anarchy in the UK." Lyrically, the song is little more than a string of defiant but unconnected political slogans that promise an anarchic collapse of consumer society. The singer, sounding very young and very shrill, reveals his wish to be the instrument of change: "I wanna be anarchy." Musically, the band is strictly business: little more than a rhythm guitar in lockstep with solid but unremarkable drumming. The overall effect is of a shotgun marriage of frustration and intelligence. Even today, one can hear in "Anarchy" the traces of a society so rigidly class-bound that its youth felt they had no options but resignation or defiance.

The single met a strange fate. Within days of its release, the band was invited to appear on the British *Today* television program, a teatime talk show. The rock band Queen had been scheduled to appear to promote their new single, "Somebody to Love," but canceled only a few hours before the show's live broadcast. Their record label, EMI, offered the Sex Pistols as a substitute. Since punk was heralded as rock's do-it-yourself challenge to the pompous rock of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (and because EMI arranged for a limousine to pick them up), the young upstarts grabbed the opportunity. Once it got beyond its tepid start, the resulting broadcast was roughly equivalent to the "Anarchy" single.

At first, host Bill Grundy tried to provoke the band by pointing out the conflict between their anti-materialist politics and their large advance from EMI. Finding little response, he offered several other topics. Inspired by Johnny Rotten's use of mild profanity, followed by another from Steve Jones, Grundy challenged the band to say something outrageous. Jones obliged with the "fuck" Grundy had been

fishing for, and the show ended in chaos. Their exchange took a little less than two minutes.

Establishment shock and outrage dominated the next day's press: "The Foul-Mouthed Yobs," screamed a typical tabloid headline. Waiting on the platform for the morning train that would take him to his job as a computer programmer, Declan McManus (soon to become Elvis Costello) laughed with delight about the ruckus it all created among his fellow commuters. A small music scene in London was now the talk of England. But if the behavior of both Grundy and the members of the band was largely calculated for show (Grundy as the establishment's policeman, the band as the ugly face of disaffected youth), the rest of British society took very real sides.

Afraid of the controversy, promoters canceled bookings. Deprived of the immediate income of live performance, the Sex Pistols and its management company found themselves in serious trouble, and when EMI offered to buy out their contract early in the new year, the band eagerly jumped ship. Less than two months after its release, "Anarchy in the UK" was no longer available, withdrawn from circulation. Most of the rock world would not hear it until the release of *Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols* at the end of 1977. By then, punk had become highly ritualized, with fans and bands playing the part first enacted on *Today.*

Lost in the shuffle and EMI's termination of the vinyl single was its flip side, "I Wanna Be Me." (Greil Marcus wrote a massive book, *Lipstick Traces,* devoted to the question of the sources of the gesture of "Anarchy in the UK." Yet there's not a single word about the B-side.) Too crude to be re-released on *Never Mind the Bollocks,* "I Wanna Be Me" is almost literally a reversal of "Anarchy." "Anarchy" is the anthem of the early punk movement, an overwhelming renunciation of the social forces acting on British youth. "I Wanna Be Me" is about the personal cost of belonging to the nascent punk movement. Since the song was hardly the strongest in the Sex Pistols' bag of tunes in late 1976 (certainly no match for "Pretty Vacant" or "Problems"), the decision to feature it on their first single suggests that the band had a personal stake in "I Wanna Be Me."

The impersonal threat behind "I wanna be anarchy"—the punk as a natural, destructive force—gives way to a very different idea of

identity. For "I Wanna Be Me" is perhaps one of only two or three songs written by the Pistols that can be construed as personal. The rest of their seventeen original songs divide into two groups. One batch emphasizes the role of disaffected youth: "Pretty Vacant" and "No Feelings" top this list. Then there are their topical social critiques, loaded with Situationist slogans: songs about consumerism, the British monarchy ("God Save the Queen"), and the legacy of fascism ("Holidays in the Sun" and, less so, "Belsen Was a Gas"). Like so many of their songs, both "Bodies" and "I Wanna Be Me" are tirades set to music. Yet this pair is different, if only because the narrator's rant actually positions him against someone else, one-to-one, so that Rotten's fury has a target. He sounds less like a blustering, posturing youth and more like a real person addressing someone else.

"Bodies" is one of the Sex Pistol's strongest songs. While the passing of years makes it apparent how *conventional* most of their songs really were, this track retains all of the fury and inchoate passion that punk promised. These three minutes of rock are truly sublime. "Bodies" also explicitly calls attention to issues of race and gender. The music starts out sluggishly and then lunges forward with the arrival of the vocal; the music pummels the listener for three minutes as the vocalist berates a young woman for choosing an abortion over bearing the child of a "black" who's gotten her pregnant. More misogynist than anti-abortion, he becomes nearly inarticulate with profanity as he contemplates an outsider (she's "from Birmingham") who is so aware of identity that she aborts the child rather than bring forth a body with an undesirable racial identity. As the music hurtles along, the band's unswerving drive heightens the sense that the vocalist is losing control. At the end, his real revulsion surfaces. The issue is not the girl so much as himself. The lyric suddenly shifts its target. He repeatedly insists that he's not an animal, that he's not a body. With a final cry, we learn that he's not even addressing us. We are merely overhearing him—he calls out for his "mummy."

Whereas "Bodies" responds to the young woman's shallow sense of identity and then redirects that anger inward over the question of the vocalist's own body and the relationship he thus bears to his mother, "I Wanna Be Me" is conflicted in quite a different way. Musically, the

song isn't very memorable. Opening with a staccato riff that sounds derivative of Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild," the arrangement quickly settles into a general background roar punctuated by wooden drumming. Its one interesting moment is the false ending—a trick that Matlock, Jones, and Cook perfected by copying Rod Stewart arrangements. The singer's increasing hysteria cuts off, perfectly synchronized with the band's sudden silence: it feels like a speeding motorcycle that's suddenly reached the end of a dead-end street. Three seconds later, Cook smacks his snare drum and the song crashes forward again. (Their direct model for this gesture may very well be the Faces' "Had Me a Real Good Time." But the Sex Pistols could never admit to having a good time, hiding behind cover versions like the Stooges' "No Fun.")

The lyrics of "I Wanna Be Me" are another matter. Other punks positioned themselves against all that rock had come to represent. The Sex Pistols realized that the burden of making music in the shadow of the Beatles and Led Zeppelin included the critical apparatus supporting the modern entertainment industry. The lyrics are oddly prophetic about the band's coming struggle to define themselves in a world where their own image would be mediated by a hostile press—ignorant listeners who later found it among the debris of *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1979) or on subsequent song collections could easily conclude that it was written about the Grundy incident. In its initial context, as the flip side to a song that repeats the slogan "I wanna be anarchy," the words to "I Wanna Be Me" are perhaps most striking for *failing* to repeat the title phrase. In this song, the title phrase is heard only at the very end. (Neil Young uses the same trick for "Last Dance" [1973]—but then Johnny Rotten was quite the Neil Young fan.) Pop songs, after all, are supposed to have titles that capture the "hook" or chorus. This general rule lends a tremendous power to Bob Dylan songs that so obviously violate it, such as "Positively Fourth Street" and "Rainy Day Women."

The words to "I Wanna Be Me" address members of the press who will fabricate and distort their story in search of a "scoop." But the singer's complaint takes a more interesting turn in the one phrase that *is* repeated again and again: "you wanna be me." Writers and photographers were codifying punk in the national press and, soon enough, on

television. Their real interest in punk, the catch phrase suggests, is their own desire to live on the edge, to see, the lyrics proclaim, through "real eyes." As the situation unfolds in fragments, the singer comes to some recognition that the media's vicarious interest in his position as the bellwether of a fringe music scene threatens to strip him of his own identity. The media succeed in defining their own position by positioning *him*. Having satisfied Rotten's desire to make a name for himself in the public realm, the media threaten to turn him into the purely symbolic figurehead of a movement he is not allowed to define. For if the media control the process of familiarizing the public with punk's visual code, punk's familiarity will erase anything individual about his message.

As with "Bodies," the singer's final utterance is crucial. At the very end we finally hear "I wanna be me," as if it has only just occurred to him that he needs to assert his own precarious personal identity, an identity that, until now, he took for granted. If punk performance was all about the risk of being ridiculed for being yourself, so that questions of craft were shoved aside as irrelevant to musical expression, then "I Wanna Be Me" is a symptom that the singer knows he must always remain subject to larger social forces. It might take some work to be who he was.

"I Wanna Be Me" displays a level of critical thought and self-awareness that shames such punk contemporaries as, say, the Clash. The Clash produced only one early song on a similar theme, "What's My Name." But their song reduces the problem of identity to the system's failure to recognize the individual. That recognition, in turn, is reduced to having the world know one's name. (Not that the singer can name the various representatives of the system paraded through the song.) The vocalist's cry of "I'm not who I want to be" turns out to be a fairly routine complaint that consumer society is based on hollow promises; the pimple creams and other products he's tried have not made him "who I want to be." (It hasn't yet occurred to the singer that he's peddling a product; in real life his fans would someday turn this complaint back on him.) "What's My Name" ends with the threat that his anonymity gives him power, since "you" won't know who he is when he breaks into your home and gets you. The Clash were still a

long way from the self-critical reflections about the struggle for self that emerge on parts of *Give 'Em Enough Rope* (1978), where songs such as "Safe European Home" begin to question their naive perspective on youth and class.

A deeper irony is at work in early punk. For just as the lyrics of "I Wanna Be Me" express outrage that media have used them so that "you" (the press? the audience?) can live vicariously, many Sex Pistols songs are obviously derived from earlier rock songs that they encountered through the mass media. Much has been written about the visual code of punk, with far too little said about punk's musical code. The architects of the Sex Pistols sound were Jones, Cook, and their original bass player, Glen Matlock. Even as the Pistols rose to national fame in the British media, cover versions dominated their live sets. Songs by the Small Faces and the Who were staples. Although contemporary bands like Queen and Pink Floyd made the "Anarchy in the UK" single sound like music from another planet, audiences for the live show were provided a larger context. Where a Small Faces song like "Watcha Gonna Do About It" provided punk attitude, the Who's "Substitute" gave them their first real anthem about confusions over personal identity. Snatches of the instrumental parts that Jones and Matlock had learned together were used as riffs and chord changes for their own compositions. The Pistols' topical response to the Grundy fiasco, "EMI," is one of the catchiest things on *Never Mind the Bollocks*—all the more so to the record-buying public who'd ignored the obscure Modern Lovers track it copies. Their only appropriation from a British contemporary was the opening riff to "Holidays in the Sun," copped from the Jam's "In the City." Jones and Matlock knew enough to steal from the one other London band whose arrangements paid homage to the Who and the Small Faces.

The pop sensibilities of Matlock and Jones ensured that Johnny Rotten had an interesting platform for his ravings. Rotten often claimed that his primary mission in the Sex Pistols was to destroy rock 'n' roll. The presence of Matlock and Jones insured that every performance was infused with irony: the leader pillaged the castle as the workers tried to shore it up around him. It also meant that their version of punk emerged through a manipulation of the identities constructed by other,

earlier rock bands. In rock, there is no virgin birth, no year zero. In the case of the Sex Pistols, the political defiance of "God Save the Queen" is simply a substitution of class resentment for the casual misogyny of their 1960s prototypes. The target was different but the attitude was the same.

"I wanna be me," wailed Rotten, threatened by the awareness that someone else wanted to be him. Away from the microphone, John Lydon—the person who'd become Johnny Rotten by joining the band—felt threatened by his dependence on others in assuming that role. Less than three months after the Grundy interview catapulted the Sex Pistols to national and even international fame, Rotten drove Glen Matlock out of the band. Accounts differ as to why Matlock left, but the consensus points to Rotten's inability to share power; the Sex Pistols were to be an expression of his sensibility, and his alone. Replacing Matlock with a friend, Sid Vicious, Rotten unwittingly provided a new symbol of the punk movement: punks were inarticulate, untalented, and self-destructive. Worse, Rotten no longer had a writing partner. Only three new songs entered the band's repertoire after Matlock's departure. Asserting his own identity by destroying the democracy of the working band, Rotten found that he no longer had the means to express himself. Stuck with a bass player of limited competence, the game of rote performance became oppressive and the band fell apart within nine months. Johnny Rotten reverted to John Lydon.

This is not a book about the Sex Pistols. It does, however, explore the dilemma of "I Wanna Be Me." Questions of identity hinge on an individual's position within a larger culture. If personal identity involves a constant struggle against the impositions and assumptions of others, then it also seems to depend on appropriations from a larger cultural apparatus that is beyond our individual comprehension. That cultural apparatus includes popular culture and mass media. Foreshadowing what has become known as standpoint theory, Hannah Arendt drew on ancient Greek thought to observe that we cannot be direct spectators of our own action. Our perspective on our situation is inherently partial. We never achieve the critical distance to see and grasp our own situation with adequate understanding. Yet our actions always position us

in relation to others whose opinions frame the meaning of our conduct. As actors in our own culture, we must play a part—as if adopting a role in a game or in a play.

At the same time, every attempt to gain the distance and understanding of spectators—seeing oneself from their standpoint—is similarly self-defeating. To judge oneself from a standpoint that is not one's own is to trade one's own prejudices for someone else's. Thus every attempt to grasp one's own identity arrives at an impasse. If personal identity is constantly threatened by the hegemony of culture, then it is simultaneously announced through a subordination of self to culture. If I make music for a spectator who wants to be me, Johnny Rotten realizes, it endlessly complicates the "me" I'm striving to be.

But issues of identity in the sphere of popular music are further complicated by more abstract problems about music and meaning. For if musical meaning is always a matter of a code of discourse, then individual participants will inevitably encode unintended meanings. With those unforeseen meanings there can be an unexpected moral weight. In drawing on the musical codes of 1960s British pop, the Sex Pistols' defiant assaults on the British system implicate them in the very ideologies that they repudiate. Railing against British society from a perspective of economic and political impotence, the Sex Pistols bought into the ideology of white privilege and male privilege. Rooting through other traditions for fresh materials, Lydon's post-Pistols band, Public Image, implicates him in the ideology of colonialism.

Or so we are to believe if we accept the emerging consensus on such matters. The oldest ideas about art locate its power in its capacity to imitate the world, holding out the promise that each new work of art can by itself show us the world anew. Looking at a picture book, a preverbal child can distinguish the doggie from the ducky simply by seeing the difference. But as a specifically *musical* gesture, a guitar riff or a melody or a dissonant voice is strangely mute. It represents nothing at all. Its capacity to mean anything, to convey one meaning rather than another or to support one ideology rather than another, rests on its relationship to previous music. Johnny Rotten hoped to exploit the arrogance and raw power of earlier rock without accepting anything else

from it. To succeed in this project he needed something that he did not have. He needed a musical vocabulary that would mean whatever he shaped it to mean. He wanted, in other words, to be the Rolling Stones at the beginning of their career, not the Rolling Stones of the 1970s and of records like *Goats Head Soup* and *It's Only Rock 'n' Roll*. Looking back after twenty years on his decision to quit the Sex Pistols, Rotten summed up the group's failure, especially their horrific tour of the United States: "it had become a Rolling Stones affair."

1

Like a Rolling Stone

A Community of Consumption

If you ask some people why they go for R&B you get pretentious answers. . . . For me it's merely the sound. . . . It doesn't express damn-all to me, really. . . . But I like the sound.

—Brian Jones

Mick Jagger and Keith Richards were occasional playmates as young children, growing up only two blocks from each other in Dartford, one of London's outermost suburbs. Both attended Wentworth County Primary School, and in some school photographs they stand near each other in their matching school uniforms. Richards remembers the uniforms vividly: "the cap, very strange contraption, like a skull-cap with a peak on it, school badge on the front. And a dark blazer with a badge on the breast pocket, a tie, and gray flannel trousers."[1] Richards despised the uniforms and everything they stood for: as a younger child he had liked to dress up as an American cowboy.

The English class system effectively separated the boys when they completed their primary education in 1954. Encouraged by his parents, Jagger passed the Eleven Plus examination, winning a place in grammar school and, with it, the possibility of a university education. Richards received a miserable score and was steered to Dartford's technical

school. Jagger's family moved to a more prestigious middle-class neighborhood, while the less affluent Richards family accepted a place in a subsidized housing project, the dreary "council estates" of Spielman Road. Six years passed before they talked to each other again. In the summer of 1960, Richards bought an ice cream at an outdoor stand staffed by Jagger. They acknowledged knowing each other, then Richards left. The two youths seemed to have nothing in common besides their distant childhood.

More than a year passed before they met once more. This time they found themselves taking the same morning train to London. This encounter was different, but not because Richards was carrying his acoustic guitar. Richards identifies the spark that rekindled their friendship:

> I get on this train one morning and there's Jagger and under his arm he has four or five albums. . . . He's got Chuck Berry and Little Walter, Muddy Waters. "You're into Chuck Berry, man, really?" That's a coincidence. He said, "Yeah, I got few more albums. Been writin' away to this, uh, Chess Records in Chicago." . . . So I invited him up to my place for a cup of tea. He started playing me these records and I really turned on to it.[2]

Richards renewed his friendship with Jagger because of those records. One LP in that batch of Chess recordings gave Richards his first taste of Muddy Waters: the 1958 compilation album *The Best of Muddy Waters* included "Rolling Stone" and "I Just Want to Make Love to You." It was not long before Jagger invited Richards to sit in with some friends to recreate the Chicago electric blues they both loved. Still playing together six months later, they went to see Alexis Korner and Blues Incorporated at a West London jazz club and were impressed with the Elmore James licks of a young slide guitarist who played on the same bill. They soon convinced him to share their squalid Chelsea flat. With the addition of Brian Jones, the Rolling Stones were a band in search of a stable rhythm section.

At this point, Richards and Jagger had never seen a Muddy Waters performance (Brian Jones had). Yet they became preoccupied with imitating the sound of his Chess recordings. We must credit the formation of the Rolling Stones to the role of recordings as the primary texts of rock. Even after the basic quintet coalesced at the beginning of

1963, their early career was dominated by performing and recording cover versions of blues and R&B songs they learned from records, particularly tunes by Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed. "When we started the Rolling Stones," Richards once observed, "our aim was to turn other people on to Muddy Waters."[3] Jagger and Richards felt that they'd really arrived as R&B musicians when Otis Redding and then Aretha Franklin cut cover versions of "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction." Although he now denies it, one must imagine that Peter Green, another Brit bitten by the blues bug, experienced a similar sense of having arrived when "Black Magic Woman" became a signature tune for Carlos Santana, just as Jimmy Page must have been delighted when both King Curtis and Tina Turner covered "Whole Lotta Love," itself derived from Muddy Waters's version of Willie Dixon's "You Need Love."

All of this took place four decades ago, so long ago that the popular success of the British rhythm and blues explosion can easily be taken for granted, like the Allied victory in World War II or the possibility that a Hollywood actor could really be President of the United States. Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and Johnny Rotten get more historical attention than Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, in part because Mick and Keith are still at it, releasing new albums and taunting the public with yet another chance to see them before they retire.[4] Yet the success of such music, Peter Van Der Merwe observes, is "one of musical history's best jokes." Suppose you are a European musician and the year is 1900 rather than 2000: "If anyone had told you that the most potent musical force of the twentieth century was to be American gutter music, you would have doubted his sanity."[5]

Even within the context of the time, the early 1960s, the success of such music could not have been predicted. In 1963, the era of "Be My Baby" and "Blowin' in the Wind," it looked as if the main directions of popular music would be the studio craft of Phil Spector and Motown. Or, for the more bohemian crowd, it would be the acoustic authenticity of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez—or, on the radio, the smoother "folk" of Peter, Paul, and Mary, who actually had the popular hit with "Blowin' in the Wind." In 1964, everything changed. The musicians of the so-called British Invasion solidified a cluster of conventions for

rock music and its performance that remain more or less intact: the band as unit of creativity, the charismatic lead singer, and the guitar as primary instrument. It is what we mean by "rock" music, for instance, in press reports that rock is losing ground to sales of pop and rap and country music.

But a second set of conventions arose within these: rock music is white music, rock performers are male, and rock songs express men's feelings, especially men's feelings about women. These generalizations are stereotypes, of course, but such stereotypes usually find their way into the official record: "Songs such as Muddy Waters's 'Rock Me' are pleas for comfort, for sanctuary in a cruel world. When they were taken over by the rock generation, they came to be about the domination of women, leading to the heavy metal threat to 'nail your ass to the floor.'"[6] The Rolling Stones were born too late to be accused of direct collusion with British colonialism and Victorian codes of sexuality, but in an emerging theoretical and historical revisionism, they risk becoming poster boys for everything reprehensible and reactionary in rock.

This book will often return to the Rolling Stones, but it is not a study of any one group. It examines some complex questions that have emerged in the wake of their astounding success and continuing appeal. In an era where popular music is understood to be a major source of identity, what sort of identity can that be? "There's nobody singing to me now," sings Richard Ashcroft in the Verve's "Bitter Sweet Symphony" (1997), a song constructed over a sample of a fragment of a melody by Jagger and Richards. When I first caught these words to "Bitter Sweet Symphony," I immediately flashed to the first Smiths song that showed me there was more to the Smiths than initially met my American ears. The song was "Panic" (1986), and what grabbed me was its absurd, repeated exhortation to "Hang the DJ" for constantly playing music that "says nothing to me about my life." What does it mean when I feel that the song on the radio does speak for me? How can the music made by someone else, someone like the Smiths' Morrissey, say anything to me about my life? And what does it mean to complain that it doesn't?

Like a Long Distance Call: Popular Music as Mass Art

We don't want to make a record that three-quarters of the world is going to snub their nose at just so I can jerk off and play guitar solos. The biggest thrill is driving around and hearing your song on the radio between Led Zeppelin and the Stones. That's what we fucking got in this for.

—Aerosmith's Joe Perry[7]

We don't want to be found only in the specialty bin at the record store. We want to be in your face.

—2 Nice Girls on being pigeonholed as "women's music"[8]

The meeting of Jagger and Richards on a train in 1961 reverberates with most of the major themes explored in this book. Although physically reunited by mass transit, their real connection was mass art. They lived in the same suburb but commuted to different schools in London, reflecting the different futures that English society had decided for them: Jagger was in his first year at the London School of Economics while Richards was in his third and final year at Sidcup Art College. Jagger had a Chuck Berry album, and Richards was a Chuck Berry fanatic. They both belonged to a select brotherhood of English blues fans, a very small fraternity united by a rabid appreciation of American music that was known almost exclusively from recordings. (The Stones' first manager, Giorgio Gomelsky, may not have been too far off in estimating that in 1960 only forty people in London were seriously interested in authentic blues.) As Richards sums it up, Jagger "had all these American records, flash son of a bitch, because he comes from a better side of town from me. It's the music I'm trying to listen to. I've got a few singles, but he's got the bloody albums."[9] It was not merely a question of cost; one of the most impressive things about the LPs under Jagger's arm was that they were simply not available in British shops. Jagger got the albums by writing directly to Chess Records in Chicago (an early Rolling Stones instrumental was named with the address, "2120 South Michigan Avenue"). Here was a serious blues fan, whose partnership with Richards

is of continuing interest for the ways that their involvement with the blues would play a major role in creating another music, rock.

Rock is only one among many types of popular music to circulate in the twentieth century.[10] In all that follows, I assume that rock is historically rooted in a type of American popular music that came to international prominence in the 1950s: "rock 'n' roll, rock and other kinds of music, mostly derived from the music of one of the minority cultures in America, that have become part of and revolutionized the popular music scene in America."[11] But genealogy is not the whole story. It is equally important to understand that rock arose as mass art, and a distinction between popular art and mass art underlies the arguments that follow. Had rock not been distributed as mass art and had it remained the "people's art" celebrated by *Rock 'n' Roll Is Here to Pay,* it might join the popular music of India or Nigeria as topics for discussion by ethnomusicologists, but it would not be a central area of concern in cultural studies.[12]

Let us begin by comparing mass art with popular culture. Popular culture embraces every imaginable sort of cultural activity, from nursery rhymes to games to fast food to pornography to holiday celebrations. However, a cultural practice belongs to "popular" culture only in contrast to the cultural practices favored by a distinct, more privileged class. (A classless society does not have popular culture, although it almost certainly has folk art.) Thus, among sports currently found in the United States, we can identify basketball and hockey as belonging to popular culture, but not polo or rowing. Popular art is likewise the art of the masses—think here of line dancing contrasted with ballet—and some form of popular music is found in every society in which different sorts of music are identified with different classes.

In order to be popular, popular art must be both economically and cognitively accessible to most people in a given society. People with no specialized background will understand and appreciate a popular work "virtually without effort . . . almost on first contact."[13] In short, mass art must employ a familiar vernacular code. A new recording of J. S. Bach's "Goldberg Variations" costs roughly the same as a new release by the Beastie Boys or Mariah Carey—and back catalogue of Classical labels is usually cheaper than back catalogue of the Beatles and Led Zeppelin.

Yet cognitively, as something to grasp and appreciate, Bach's music is inaccessible to most people at the start of the twenty-first century. Unlike Bach's European contemporaries, relatively few people have the musical background to understand and appreciate the brilliance of Bach's keyboard variations. Bach is a popular composer, so far as classical music goes, but his music is not popular art. Kitsch-classical music by George Winston and Yanni is more "user friendly" and comes closer to counting as popular music.

Only some popular arts are also mass arts. Another necessary condition is the element of mass production. Besides economic and cognitive accessibility, a popular art form will not count as mass art unless it also exists within a framework of modern mass industrial production and is aimed at a far-flung audience: "Like the mass manufacture of automobiles, mass art is a form of mass production and distribution, designed to deliver a multiplicity of artworks to geographically remote mass consuming audiences. Mass art is the art of mass society, predicated on addressing mass audiences by means of the opportunities afforded by mass technologies."[14] To put it crudely, mass art exists only when members of the audience can interact with specific works even when they have no access to anything directly created by the artist responsible for the work. Access to the work comes through its mass reproduction. While on a road trip a thousand miles from home, one of my windshield wiper blades broke. Thanks to modern mass production and distribution of identical auto parts, in a few minutes I had a replacement on my car from the nearest auto parts store. In much the same way, when my wife wanted some new music for the tape player in the car, we found the nearest music store and quickly returned to the interstate, listening to the Lyle Lovett album that she wanted to hear.

What follows from recognizing that mass art is a special sort of popular art? There are at least four important consequences. First, an existing popular art can be transformed into a mass art when it is adapted to the demands of industrial mass technology. Thus, Jagger and Richards would not have been connected by the music of Muddy Waters that fateful day had Waters remained content to make *popular music;* he could have stayed on the Mississippi plantation, playing weekend dances with the occasional foray into nearby Clarksdale, Mississippi, to

play on street corners. But Waters wanted to create *mass art*. He did not head north merely to be a professional musician; the Delta offered plenty of examples of such men. He went to Chicago because it held the promise of "opportunities to get into the big record field."[15] Mass art was the key to status, to being "a known person." "To get a name," Muddy Waters observed, "you got to get a record. People lived right up under me [in Chicago], they didn't know who I was until I got a record out. Then they say, 'He live right there!'—got to get a record."[16] Through his recordings, he became known far beyond Stovall's plantation or Fourth Street in nearby Clarksdale. Two decades later, his sound enthralled two English teens in a London suburb.

The second consequence is that mass art can be simultaneously accessible to geographically remote individuals. Its "spatial mobility" and rapid diffusion *creates* rather than *expresses* community.[17] Among the budding Rolling Stones, only Brian Jones had seen Muddy Waters perform live. Jones was even allowed to sit in with the blues legend on one of his forays to England because Jones already knew the music from the records. But at this point Jones did not yet know Jagger or Richards, and the latter pair would not see Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters in the flesh until they arrived at Chess Records in Chicago for two days of recording in June 1964. On the day Jagger and Richards met on the train, they lived on opposite sides of the same town, separated by class more effectively than by geography. Jones lived nearly a hundred miles from London, in the resort town of Cheltenham. Yet before they came together in the same place to make music together, and before they came face to face with the musical models they emulated, the three already participated in a common mass audience. Their "common ground," Richards remembers, "was Elmore James and Muddy Waters."[18] Ironically, when Jagger and Richards finally met Muddy Waters, they arrived at Chess Studios to record "It's All Over Now" only to find that the man painting the studio ceiling was their hero.

The same process that informed the musical sensibilities of Richards, Jagger, and Jones is at work today, only on a more massive scale. After hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians fled the war in Kosovo in the late spring and early summer of 1999, massive refugee camps were assembled in Albania and Macedonia. Once the refugees' most basic

needs were satisfied, relief workers faced the question of how to occupy the refugees' time. Among other ventures, Relief International provided the Albanian camps with a karaoke machine and some forty karaoke CDs. When the machine arrived in one of the camps, many of the delighted refugees demanded to know which Elton John songs were available.[19]

Many musicologists still believe in the superiority of classical music, rooted in its autonomy. ("Classical" is here used in the everyday sense of being music typical of the European concert, opera, and liturgical traditions.) That is, they think that classical music is better than popular music because the appeal of the former is "timeless," purely musical, and independent of the social situation of the audience. But wouldn't mass art, whose very existence is predicated on distribution to diverse audiences and across gaps of space and time, have a stronger claim to autonomy than classical?[20]

A third consequence is that a work of mass art is radically different in kind from the "works" or artistic products of traditional art forms like oil paintings and sculpture. The creations of mass art are meant to be distributed to audiences as *multiple* instances. Geographically separated individuals can read different copies of the same book, see different prints of the same film, and listen to different copies of the same recording. But unless a copy contains errors of some sort, each copy gives equal access to the same work. While a CD has better sound quality than a cassette or most files downloaded from the Internet, a CD copy of Madonna's *Music* or *The Immaculate Collection* is no more genuine or authentic than a black market cassette copy or an MP3 file. This situation contrasts sharply with such artworks as Titian's *Madonna with Rabbit* (painted in 1530). If one wants to experience that painting, one has to go to the one and only place where the genuine instance can be found. With traditional patterns of culture, the audience quite literally converges on the art. With mass art, the art makes its way to the audience.

With mass art, the audience does not respond to what artists directly create. This gap is not just a time gap between the process of production and the moment of reception. The gap is more radical: in mass art, artists create types but audiences interact with tokens.[21] Opening my wallet I find some dollar bills. Any of these slips of paper is as much a

dollar bill as any other. They are all tokens or instances of the same thing, provided that we understand that that "same thing" is really a type of thing. "The" dollar bill is a denomination of money. Because it is not identical with any specific physical object, "the" dollar bill continues to exist so long as there is a legitimate process for generating new tokens. Thus, individual tokens may be destroyed, as when my brother borrowed my vinyl copy of Neil Young's *Zuma* and then left it in a car on a hot day. It became too warped to play. Yet the musical achievement, *Zuma*, was not destroyed. *Zuma* is a type of thing, but audiences know it through its concrete instances or tokens.

Rather obviously, mass art is not the only sphere of art in which we can distinguish the work, as a type, from its instances or tokens. Any kid who's ever suffered through "Kumbayah" or "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" during a sing-along understands what it means to produce a new token of an existing type. Here, the tokens are *performances* or individual interpretations of a basic type. With performances, each new token interjects further interpretation of the type. I might sing "Here we are now, entertain us" to find out if you know Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," but this produces a token of a fragment of the song and not another token of Nirvana's *Nevermind*. *Nevermind* is an album and not just a set of songs. As mass art, instances of *Nevermind* are created and distributed through mass technologies, involving a multistage production and distribution process.

To be genuine instances of works of mass art, end-product tokens (the tokens that consumers pay to experience) must be physically derived from an appropriate first-stage object or template responsible for the physical characteristics of the end-products. Genuine tokens of a mass art—the film *Jailhouse Rock* or a CD of Neil Young's *Zuma*—must be derived by mechanical or electronic transfer from some original master.[22] The sounds that actually reach our ears may be many times removed from their source. Until digital sound became the norm, many fans shared music through home taping, a transfer technique that ensured a deterioration of sound quality with each transfer. Nonetheless, every copy remained an equally genuine instance of the same artistic creation. An original, physically embodied sequence of digital coding is the source of all the CDs, vinyl copies, digital downloads, and