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If I Had a Hammer: An Archeology of Tactical Media From the Hootenanny to the People's Microphone

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IF I HAD A HAMMER: AN ARCHEOLOGY OF TACTICAL MEDIA FROM THE
HOOTENANNY TO THE PEOPLE'S MICROPHONE

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by

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Abstract

American folk music gatekeepers have been rightfully critiqued for positing problematic naturalizations of authenticity. Yet, there are underexplored thinkers and artists across the history of folk music whose relationship to media is more complicated. By drawing on the field of media archeology, this dissertation explores the various diagrams and models of communication that can be pulled from the long American folk revival. Media archeology as described by such thinkers as Jussi Parikka and Siegfried Zielinski is not a conventionally linear means of narrating media history; media archeology rather seeks to uncover forgotten and all-but-lost potentialities within our historical media ecologies. In this way, drawing also on the work of Friedrich Kittler, Marshall McLuhan, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I explore the subterranean but vivid discourse on technology offered by several key players in American folk music history.

I begin by closely reading the work, writings, and eclectic projects of Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger. Lomax's anthropological and folkloristic research was grounded in a myriad of both analogue and digital media; he pioneered the use of sound-recording technology in the field, used IBM mainframes to analyze musicological data in the sixties, and even experimented with personal computers and multimedia software in the eighties and nineties. I probe Lomax's writings to find an anomalous and productive conception of the digital. Second, I look at Pete Seeger's complicated relationship to McLuhan; despite his problems with the Torontonian superstar, Seeger's own thought works towards a similarly medium-specific understanding of resistance. Chapter 3 considers Steve Jobs's and Apple's mobilization of Bob Dylan's work and star image. Although Apple's effacement of the machine has roots in Dylan's own artistic lineage (via Romanticism), we can also find a post-humanist Dylan—one interested in noise, machines, and parasites. The final chapter explores through-lines between the "Hootenanny" parties held by Woody Guthrie and his friends in the early 1940s and more recent mobile, music-making iPhone apps, with a final stop at the Occupy movement's "People's Microphone." These exploratory case studies bring to light a set of connections and convergences between digital history, folk music, and critical theory.

Keywords: American folk music; Digital culture; Tactical media; Media theory; Authenticity

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Chapter 1 – American Folk Music as Tactical Media

1.1   Introduction

President Barack Obama invited Pete Seeger and Bruce Springsteen to sing Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" at the Lincoln Memorial as part of his inauguration celebration in January of 2009. Despite the communist message of the song, Seeger's rusty banjo and the group sing-along seemed to dissolve all of the nation's tensions, both present and past, magically transforming it into an integrated and democratic community. A key feature of the performance was an apparent immediacy, a feature of "the folk" which dates back centuries. The microphones, cameras, and digital networks transmitting the source signals seemed to be transparently capturing the sincere expressions on offer (cf. Frith, 1981, 1986).

Images of "the folk" have long connoted a peaceful and pre-modern stasis; European folklore collectors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constructed the folk as a backwards-looking relic of a harmonious, yet imagined, social order (Bendix, 1996; Filene, 2000; Storey, 2003). This nostalgia has persisted in American folk music discourse in complicated ways. Many have written about various political dimensions of the American folk revival (see Denisoff, 1971; Hampton, 1986; Lieberman, 1989; Reuss, 2000), but absent from these discussions is a serious consideration of the revival's relationship with technology. What did Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan actually have to say about the particular media they were relying on in their numerous political and literary projects? To what degree did these thinkers, who were

also practitioners, anticipate or parallel the work of Harold Adams Innis, Marshall McLuhan, or Friedrich Kittler, who variously charted the social, aesthetic, and ontological effects arising from emergent technologies? In the writings of certain folk revivalists one can find a much more complex engagement with media than the one on the surface of the Obama celebration. This dissertation explores connections cutting across the American folk revival, media theory, and tactical media discourse. By drawing on medium theory, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and a synthesis of the two—tactical media—this dissertation seeks to find something useful in the folk revival: tools and concepts that might still have valence in our contemporary, digitalized media ecology.

1.2   A Longue Durée of Tactical Media

According to Rita Raley (2009),

tactical media signifies the intervention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking becomes possible. Tactical media operates [sic] in the field of the symbolic, the site of power in the postindustrial society. (p. 6)

Her thoughtful book goes on to explore examples of such works, including projects by the Critical Art Ensemble, Electronic Disturbance Theatre, and John Klima—all who have attempted to artfully effect, perhaps, what Marshall McLuhan (2003) referred to as "the reversal of the overheated medium" (p. 51), the medium here usually being the

digital networks across which global capital circulates.[1] According to McLuhan (1969, 2003), it was through synesthetic breakthroughs or "counter-blasts" that a fresh understanding of any shifts in our larger media ecology could be gained. Following McLuhan's media materialism, however, and thus going a little further than Raley's implication that they operate strictly on the symbolic realm, tactical media practitioners perhaps encourage "machinic subjectivities" and "a-signifying assemblages" to emerge from the media along which they play (whether via parody, prank, hoax or hacktivism).[2] The consequences can of course include semiotic disruptions, even if they do not end there; attention can be drawn, to cite only a few possibilities, to the liquidity and pervasiveness of capital's power to de- and re-territorialize desire, to the marginalization of minority voices and views in mainstream media culture, or to the overbearing clutch the neoliberal regime has on the stuff of life itself (Dyer-Witheford & DePeuter, 2009; Galloway, 2004; Lovink, 2002; Thacker, 2004). As the military metaphor suggests, tactical media are intended to strike straight to the heart of hierarchical hegemons.[3]

Raley (2009) focuses on "new" media and digital art practices, and she suggests that there is indeed something new about tactical media, which have emerged specifically

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[1] The Critical Art Ensemble (1994) draw a similar historical periodization: "The rules of cultural and political resistance have dramatically changed. The revolution in technology brought about by the rapid development of the computer and video has created a new geography of power relations in the first world that could only be imagined as little as twenty years ago" (p. 3).

[2] Below, I will explore in more depth the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, from whom I take "machinic subjectivities" and "a-signifying assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987). For now, let me briefly define the former concept as a mode of subjectification that breaks apart a structure or structures, and the latter as a group or groups of connections which reach beyond language and "the signifier."

[3] Von Clausewitz's nineteenth-century treatise *On War* (2007) influentially distinguished between strategy and tactics: "tactics teaches *the use of armed forces in the engagement*; strategy, the use of engagements for the object of the war" (p. 74). Michel de Certeau (1984) picked up some of these terms in his work on everyday life and resistance. Both these thinkers are in the background of most early discussions of tactical media.

from the informational technologies of post-industrialization. Indeed, from the Electronic

Disturbance Theatre's online "sit-ins" in service of the Zapatista struggles of Mexico in

the nineties, to Molleindustria's critical computer games, tactical media practitioners

have often operated within a high-tech playground of silicon-ready subversion. The

apparently inherent digitality of the field was most pronounced in its early flowering as

expressed, for instance, by the Critical Art Ensemble's projects and publications of the

early nineties, and here the virtual is abstracted, disembodied, hovering above the streets

and alleyways now long "evacuated" by power. As they begin *The Electronic*

Disturbance (1994):

> The rules of cultural and political resistance have dramatically changed. The
> revolution in technology brought about by the rapid development of the computer
> and video has created a new geography of power relations in the first world that
> could only be imagined as little as twenty years ago: people are reduced to data,
> surveillance occurs on a global scale, minds are melded to screenal reality, and an
> authoritarian power emerges that thrives on absence. The new geography is a
> virtual geography, and the core of political and cultural resistance must assert
> itself in this electronic space. (p. 3)

Acoustic guitars, the collective and collaborative performance of traditional folk songs,

live protest in general, would all seem to be obsolete. To challenge power structures in

the digital age, one needs to do battle in cyberspace.

Tactical media theorist Geert Lovink (2011) and even the Critical Art Ensemble

(2001) have softened on this point over the years.[4] They have given more recognition to

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[4] Indeed, as early as Garcia and Lovink's "The ABC of Tactical Media" (2003), attention was paid to both
new and old technologies, though the former were perhaps given priority.

"old," "live" forms of dissent and recognized that we need now to look below the "screenal reality" of mainstream digital culture.[5] For instance, in *Digital Resistance*, despite the title, the Critical Art Ensemble (2001) articulates a more layered and subtle conception of communication against power: "No cultural bunker is ever fully secure. We can trespass in them all, inventing molecular interventions *and* unleashing semiotic shocks" (p. 11; emphasis added). Elsewhere in the book they retreat from their earlier position: "Organic being in the world must be reestablished as the locus of reality, placing the virtual back in its proper place as simulacra" (p. 39). Still, despite the mounting challenges to postmodernism and to the first waves of cyberculture, as a historical object tactical media continues to be delimited as a specifically "new" paradigm of art and activism, as is evinced by Rayley's guide to the field. One looks to performative hoaxes, to avant-garde media and net art, or to the aesthetic use of biotechnology.

A deep genealogy of tactical media theory might go back further than the rise of digital networks and personal computing; we might go back to thinkers and practitioners not often considered in histories of tactical media or digital culture, not in order to evade the digital or postmodernity, but as a way of expanding our conceptions of what might constitute digitality and even media as such. Alan Lomax, for instance, was a folklorist who began working in the 1930s in the United States. He might still be most famous for having discovered, in 1933, the singer and guitarist Huddie "Lead Belly" Leadbetter in a Louisiana penitentiary with his father, John Lomax, and for enthusiastically documenting

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[5] Arthur Kroker and Michael A. Weinstein (1994) were perhaps among the first to express this hunch in their early, critical look at cyberculture's forgetting of embodiment.

and promoting hundreds of other "folksingers" over his long career (see Szwed, 2010).
But young Lomax was also to become a tactical media theorist of sorts. His writings
glower with excitement about his new weaponry (he was very much an early adopter,
from LPs to stereo to IBM's mainframe System/360 to Apple's Quicktime). Although he
also expressed the belief that sound-recording technology is a transparent tool (Filene,
2000)—as a folklorist he was equally concerned with content—his vivid prose often
breaks down the boundaries between user, folk, and machine entirely. Like The Yes Men
or the Critical Art Ensemble, and both anticipating and paralleling the thought of Gilles
Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Marshall McLuhan, Lomax sought resistance and rupture
from *within* the circuits and channels of modernity. And, as we will see, Lomax was not
alone.

The current introductory chapter will outline the issues this dissertation will
address, as well as the means by which this will be accomplished. First, I will briefly
delimit the research objectives of the project; second, I will offer a literature review
pertaining to the cultural objects of my study; third, I will explain my theoretical and
methodological orientations; finally, I will offer a chapter breakdown.

1.3   Research Objectives and Questions

One objective of this dissertation is to trace continuities between three profoundly
related but not often compared cultural fields. Raley (2009) does cite Situationism and
the Yippies as precursors to tactical media, but she leaves this thread to the sixties
underexplored in her study, and she does not even consider the field of American folk

music. Yet, there are several noteworthy connections joining the folk revival, Marshall McLuhan, Deleuze and Guattari, and tactical media.

First, "Electronic Civil Disobedience" is an articulation of tactical media offered by the Critical Art Ensemble (1996) that takes its name from the writings of Henry David Thoreau, the nineteenth-century American transcendentalist thinker who had a profound influence on conceptions of "the folk" in the United States, including Alan Lomax's (Bluestein, 1972). Gregory Bateson, the cybernetic anthropologist who developed the concepts of "plateau" and "schismogenesis" which were later adopted by Deleuze and Guattari (Massumi, 1992)—and who was married to Alan Lomax's mentor, Margaret Mead—certainly seems to have had an influence on Lomax, who would have met Bateson and been familiar with his work.[6] Despite his resistance to certain aspects of the discipline, cybernetics also had an influence on McLuhan, who adopts "servomechanism" from Norbert Wiener. In turn, McLuhan's *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1969) and his idea of "infowar" directly inspired the concept "tactical media" (see Richardson, 2003). Pete Seeger's journalistic writings reveal a familiarity with contemporary media scholarship as well; in addition to McLuhan, he discusses Jacques Ellul and Hans Magnus Enzensberger (see Seeger, 1972). In addition to the direct influences and conversations, these diverse artists and thinkers more generally tend to articulate similar anxieties and desires. By approaching them as parts of a broader phylum (cf. De Landa, 1997), we will be able to glimpse the fascinating drift of concepts and machines across a new genealogy of tactical media interventions.

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[6] Lomax also took courses with the cybernetic anthropologist Raymond Birdwhistell in the early sixties (Szwed, 2010), which increases the likelihood that he encountered Bateson's theories.

The second objective is to reconsider the significance of technology in American folk music culture by exploring Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Bob Dylan through the lens of media theory. We will be interested both in the traces left by media on these writers and the degree to which they were self-reflexive about this process. Although song collectors and folklorists since the Grimm Brothers in the nineteenth century have been sensitive to the differences between print and oral communication, studies in the discipline of folklore have tended to focus on the content of musical works and rituals and to neglect the media involved in their preservation and transmission (Brady, 1999; Filene, 2000). Many contemporary scholars of the American folk revival have inherited, it seems to me, this insistent focus on content over medium. Some have begun to consider extra-textual aspects of folk music culture, including technology (e.g. Brady, 1999; Cantwell, 1996; Filene, 2000; Narvaez, 1986), but much of this work has tended towards the descriptive. For instance, John Szwed's (2010) recent biography of Lomax excellently foregrounds the folklorist's lifelong interest in and use of technology, but Szwed does not pursue the theoretical implications of this relationship in his somewhat hagiographic work. The same goes for Benjamin Filene's *Romancing the Folk* (2000), the main objective of which is to highlight how American roots music has been curated and constructed by intermediaries such as Lomax over the twentieth century. More theoretical questions deserve to be posed about these thinkers and artists. How can Alan Lomax and his fellow travellers be considered as tactical media theorists? What might this offer us in terms of an alternative history of digitalization? Although conventional cultural wisdom tends to place the folk revival within an older, social-realist paradigm of Marxist cultural theory, in what ways has the American folk revival

anticipated later post-structuralist and neo-Marxist thinkers such as Deleuze and Guattari?

Third, I hope to contribute to utopian studies and to the growing field of what we might call "authenticity studies" by further complicating the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity in mediatized, utopian visions.[7] Ours has been thought to be a "post-authentic" epoch, at least from the vantage point of academe (e.g. Baudrillard, 1994; Grossberg, 1992; Sternberg, 2006), and tactical media artists might seem to be reveling strictly on the plane of the "simulacrum." But how have folklorists, folksingers, and real-yet-virtual protestors all tackled the productively ambiguous connections between an alienating, allegedly inauthentic media network and the utopian goal of becoming "real" together? Authenticity is often thought to be a naïve concept, one that posits a pastoral world or a trans-historical subject (Shumway, 2007), but in what ways has authenticity been thought to be locatable or achievable within particular media ecologies? How has the emergence of new technologies (for instance, the IBM System/360) made possible, or coincided with, new conceptions of authenticity and utopia? Utopia has returned as a serious concept in cultural and political analysis (see, for instance, Cazdyn & Szeman, 2011; Gardiner 1992, 1995; Jameson, 2005), but a much smaller handful of scholars have recently encouraged us to reconsider the valence of the ideal of authenticity as well (e.g. Lindholm, 2008; Middleton, 2006). Charles Taylor (1992), for instance, provocatively defends the value of debating and working out what it

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[7] My understanding of utopia is greatly informed by Bauman (1976), Bloch (1986), and Levitas (1990); and my understanding of authenticity is greatly informed by Guignon (2004) and Taylor (1992). These thinkers, and the concepts, are explored in more detail in chapter 6.

means to be or to become "authentic." An archeology of tactical media via the America folk revival offers one way to answer Taylor's call in a utopian register.

Finally, although I am interested primarily in the level of medial discourses—assemblages of technologies, bodies, diagrams, performances, and texts—this dissertation also aims to consider questions of political economy. Following Vincent Mosco (1996), I understand political economy broadly as "the study of control and survival in social life" (p. 26). We will not be undertaking quantitative industry or policy analyses, then, but thinking more generally about the intersections of texts and technologies with socio-economic power. The Romantic notion of transparent expressivity, for instance, covers over a global network of exploitation and immiseration; the familiar Marxist critique of possessive individualism (Lukács, 1971; Macpherson, 1962) is now more than ever applicable, particularly in digital consumer culture. As Matteo Pasquinelli (2008) puts it, "[t]he supposed 'autonomy' of the new cultural and technological commons is paid for by those who conduct the material work" (p. 44), and Apple's iGadgets in particular embody a promotion of the irrepressible expressivity of creative monads—a motif which obscures the complex networks of collaborative production that make such devices possible.[8] From another angle, we might think about how the folk revival's vision of a community joined in song has been mobilized by mainstream media culture around the notion of the "prosumer." Just as the audiences at the early "Hootenannies" (participatory

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[8] Ry Taffel (2012) offers a fascinating analysis of the material costs of ICTs from a perspective that blends both political economy and media ecology. Drawing on Gregory Bateson's systems theory, Taffel explores labour exploitation, e-waste, and other negative "externalities" of the digital media industries. On the networks of devastation (of both humans and non-humans) undergirding contemporary digital culture, see also Berardi (2009), Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter (2009), Gabrys (2011), Nest (2011), and Pasquinelli (2008).

folk concerts in New York City first held in the 1940s) were expected both to sing along and presumably to enjoy it, so are we all now expected to work for free, producing not only entertaining content but also metadata as we build our online presences, which are increasingly mined by corporations and states alike (Fuchs, 2010a, 2010b; Manzerolle, 2010, 2013). Thus a slightly more political-economic lens in chapters 3 and 4 will help us to veer away from the celebratory tone of much late-sixties media activism (e.g. "the more media the better!"). It will also help us see the subtleties of the genealogy on the table. Is the Macintosh a tactical medium? Why not? Where else should we look when thinking of, for instance, Bob Dylan's relationship to digital culture and media theory?

1.4 Literature Review

I will now sketch out some of the key scholarly contributions in the several fields within which my objects of analysis can be situated. First, I will review the relevant scholarship on folk music and media (more specific literature reviews, relating to the particular case studies, will be offered in the chapters themselves). Next, I will explore the field of media theory. Third, I will sketch out the research on tactical media. Finally, I will offer an overview of relevant work on the history and aesthetics of digital media and culture.

Folk Music and Media

Research on the subjects of Carnival and early articulations of "the people" has been a useful starting point, for questions concerning the mediation of "the folk" go back at least to the projects of the German thinkers Johann Gottfried Herder and the Grimm

Brothers in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Peter Burke (2009) points out, Herder and the Grimms were among the first to imagine how the everyday life of "the people" could be expressive of a nation's spirit. Their promotion of anti-Enlightenment irrationalism anticipates later song collectors and folk theorists: the folk are "natural, simple, illiterate, instinctive, irrational, rooted in tradition and in the soil of the region, lacking any sense of individuality" (Burke, 2009, p. 9). Though this Romantic anti-modernism exploded most notoriously with the rise of fascism in twentieth-century Europe, it has also done ideological work on a more subtle level. For example, as Ian McKay (1994) has demonstrated, images of wholesome pre-modern "folk" have also been mobilized over the course of the twentieth century in Canada's Maritime Provinces. The discourse of the Maritimes as a place "out of time," which was built and disseminated in part by the song collector Helen Creighton, both concealed and lubricated the pains of modernization in the region, and such images continue to be utilized by the tourism industry (McKay, 1994). Although in some ways the anti-modern understanding of "the folk" has persisted into the twenty-first century, my dissertation is rather interested in provocative ruptures in the work of particular theorists and artists within this larger, centuries-old discourse.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986) offer a more theoretically informed reading of popular culture in early modern Europe than Burke. They extract a post-structuralist poetics of Carnival from Mikhail Bakhtin's allegedly "troublesome folkloristic approach" (p. 26). Stallybrass and White read Carnival not as an event through which hierarchical relationships are inverted, because such simple inversions necessarily retain oppressive power structures. Rather, they approach Carnival as both a

text and an interpretive practice through which binaries and categories are dissolved and deflated altogether. Thus the fair, for instance, *mixes* work and pleasure, thereby problematizing the categories' binary opposition (Stallybrass & White, 1986). We will see a similar move being carried out by the likes of Lomax, Seeger, and Dylan with respect to the question of authenticity versus mediation. Even more germane is Stallybrass and White's consideration of authorship in relation to Carnival. They argue that Bakhtin does not sufficiently distinguish between "diverse domains of symbolic action and discourse" (1986, p. 59). *Pace* Bakhtin, Stallybrass and White claim that the performative and the ritualistic cannot be transparently documented by a text. They consequently draw our attention to the media used to do such translating.

Stallybrass and White masterfully bring post-structuralist insights to bear on early modern, European "folk" culture, but the meaning of technology in American folk music discourse has gone underexplored, and thus so has the genre's complicated articulation of authenticity.[9] Much work in popular music studies that considers the folk revival has

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[9] The basic story of the American folk revival has been told many times, so I will refrain aside from this footnote. Early song collectors in the late nineteenth century—Francis James Child of Harvard University, for instance—were more interested in chasing after old texts of British ballads than they were interested in listening to American "cowboys" or African American field workers (Filene, 2000; Storey, 2003). Even early song-collecting expeditions in the Appalachians were designed to hunt down remnants of "pure" English music; for instance, Cecil Sharp thought that Appalachia was so primitive and backwards that it had essentially preserved medieval English culture (Filene, 2000). John Lomax was one of the first to turn to the music of his fellow countrymen, as he tried to collect cowboy songs of the frontier and then African American songs on his trips through the Southern states (Filene, 2000; Porterfield, 1996). This more academic form of revivalism permutated in the thirties and forties into a performative-political music scene. Woody Guthrie, Aunt Molly Jackson, Pete Seeger, and Josh White blended vernacular American musical forms with socialist and communist political sentiments, and often played for unions and other political bodies (Denisoff, 1971; Reuss, 2000). The McCarthy scare forced this movement underground, for the most part, but the nation's interest in roots music resurfaced in the mid fifties on a larger scale when groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers sold millions of recordings (Cantwell, 1996). By 1964 folk music was on network television, it was discussed in numerous magazines dedicated to the genre, and college students around the country were learning and singing old folk songs (see Cantwell, 1996; Cohen, 2002).

come at the genre from the point of view of rock culture. Simon Frith's (1981) pioneering

work on taste in popular music locates a naïve and undialectical understanding of

mediation in the folk revival; the notion of pure and untainted folk music was wielded by

gatekeepers and tastemakers in rock culture as a means of distinction: "The folk

argument entered rock via the American folk 'revival' of the 1940s and 1950s. This too

was bound up with rural romanticism, with a search for values and ways which could be

opposed to urban commerce and corruption" (1981, p. 161). Theodore Gracyk's (1996)

study of the aesthetics of rock similarly positions folk music. Whereas rock has tended to

explore the ontology of recorded sound as an inherent aspect of the genre, a modernist

aesthetic strategy Gracyk terms "record consciousness" (p. 69), folk music culture has

wanted to disappear the recorded-ness of sound. For example, acts like The Beatles

explored sonic textures that could not be recreated live, whereas field recordings of old

blues singers seemed to want to directly capture the grain of the live, embodied

performance event (Gracyk, 1996). Keir Keightley (2001) has similarly explored how

rock music culture has drawn from two diverging traditions of authenticity: Romantic and

Modernist. Within the Romantic discourse of authenticity, which derives from the folk

revival, value is attributed to a "sense of community, sincerity and directness, 'liveness,'

'natural' sounds, hiding musical technology" (Keightley, 2001, p. 137). Modernist

authenticity, on the other hand, derives from "experimentation and progress, status of

artist, irony, elitism, celebrating technology" (Keightley, 2001, p. 137). Again, the

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The songs and political edge of the early revival were also carried forward by the Civil Rights and anti-war
movements, and by environmentalism (see Ingram, 2008; Rodnitzky, 1976, 1999; Roy, 2010).

revival's complex relationship to media is skirted over. Although they have rightfully identified the indebtedness of rock to Western folk music cultures, the popular music scholars cited above tend to erect folk as modern rock's or pop's simplistic other, oblivious to the powers of noise and machines.

Of course, scholars have written about the American folk revival and about the Lomaxes in more detail. Serge Denisoff's (1971) landmark history of the folk revival in relation to American left-wing politics is a notoriously unsympathetic account of the "proletarian folksong movement" (a phrase that I will nonetheless appropriate; Denisoff uses it to distinguish between the earlier political movement of the thirties and forties and the later commercial "boom" of the fifties and sixties). Denisoff explores in detail how the work of Woody Guthrie and the Almanac Singers mirrored shifts in the cultural policies of the Soviet Union. He occasionally touches on the question of media, suggesting that, in contrast to the later commercial "boom," the essential locus of folksong for the urban folksingers was in the live performance event. Drawing on McLuhan, Denisoff suggests that the protest song movement was a "cool," participatory culture. The early sixties revival, on the other hand, is positioned by the author in a narrative of "selling out":

> The key variable here follows McLuhan's argument of media; that is, the revival artists used the medium of recordings predominantly, as opposed to the collective mass meeting emphasis of the 1940s. Therefore, each long-playing record required ten or more selections. Equally, the marketplace prescribes a given frequency of record production which, in effect, saturates the mass culture with issues and individual statements of protest. (1971, p. 186)

This story of folk music history leaves underemphasized Alan Lomax's successful career as a network-radio broadcaster in the 1930s and his writings about media and communication; it leaves aside Seeger's television series *Rainbow Quest*, which tried to "cool down" the revival by encouraging the viewer to participate and to learn the songs performed on the program. Further, Denisoff's (1971) claim that "the proletarian renaissance did not depend on the media" (p. 186) is unsupportable. Leadbelly began to tour with the Lomaxes in 1935 as an already mass-mediated phenomenon (Filene, 2000).

Denisoff tends to simplify a complex, heterogenous movement as a mere appendage—first of communist ideology and then of commercialism. Robert Cantwell is more sympathetic in his *When We Were Good* (1996), which closely reads the rich layers of meaning that line key texts and events of the revival, including the rousing finale of Newport 1963, which involved Seeger and Dylan joining hands with others to sing "We Shall Overcome." The winding, self-reflexive study (Cantwell was active as a performer during the revival's heyday) deploys the concept of "ethnomimesis" which the author has also developed elsewhere (see Cantwell, 1993). Cantwell provocatively sidesteps the revival's own debates about authenticity; he looks at the Romanticization of rural "folk" by educated urbanites as a ritualized, performative, and distinctly American negotiation:

> The midcentury folksong movement, a tissue of impersonation, enactment, spectacle, music, and narrative within a coterie, arose from the interplay of the ethnomimetic culture of New York, through its intellectuals, artists, and entrepreneurs, with the popular and provincial cultures that lay beyond it to the south and west. … Like all things theatrical, its characters inspired imitation and, through mobile and momentary performances of folksong, established a fluid dramatis personae and a portable mise en scene on the social stage, coaxing

susceptible young people out of their inherited identities and touching the social background with hues of the past. (1996, p. 63)

Cantwell's dramaturgical approach allows him to highlight the performativity of authenticity. Moving away from the concept of ideology, Cantwell considers how these performances and sounds made meaning for a particular stratum of American society at a particular moment.

Cantwell also attempts to describe the media environment within which the revival emerged. He mentions McLuhan and cites Daniel Czitrom in his chapter on Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*. In the Anthology, Cantwell (1996) claims, "we can view the birth of a counterculture at the very moment that a new medium, television, was making a spectacle of American life and drawing us unwittingly into its audience" (p. 199). And he identifies the roles that LP technology and radio had in the availability and form of folk commodities into the fifties (Cantwell, 1996). Yet, Cantwell voices a simplistic critique of television as a degraded and low medium, one not suited to the dialogical essence of the folk movement: "Though the folk revival found limited exposure on television, its real milieu was extra- or sub-televisual, one of records, concerts, and clubs" (1996, p. 201). There is something to this claim, for the pages of *Sing Out!* and *Broadside* did tend to voice an anti-mass paranoia and a DIY ethos. Still, Cantwell's position does not help us to understand Pete Seeger's later television series, for instance, and he does not give any attention to the many connections between American folk music and digital culture. He admirably foregrounds the presence of technology and mass media in the mid-century revival, and I will draw on his descriptions particularly in chapter 5, but American folk music culture's engagement with

the concept of media is more complicated than Cantwell's somewhat impressionistic and occasionally journalistic account suggests.

More recent books by Americanists Benjamin Filene (2000) and Marybeth Hamilton (2007) have begun to explore in more detail the role of technology in American folk music. Filene traces American folk music from the genre's overt concern with preservation (e.g. the British song collector Cecil Sharp, who scoured Appalachia for remnants of English ballads) to its more dynamic understanding of folklore as a living tradition as articulated by Alan Lomax, Charles Seeger, and Bob Dylan. The latter period of American folk, as Filene points out, was influenced by anthropological functionalism; for the functionalists, even pop songs could become folk songs, if they functioned as folk music (Filene, 2000). Thus Filene has begun to consider the modernist aspects of American folk music theory (i.e. authenticity is not to be preserved from the past but made in the present). As well, Filene's attention to the construction of "the folk" leads him to consider the myriad media involved in folk preservation projects, from archives to federal institutions to recording technologies, though media as such are not the focus of his study. The American "folk" was not out there in "the field," waiting to be discovered and promoted by song collectors like Alan Lomax and Benjamin A. Botkin. On the contrary, roots and folk music traditions have been actively invented through a rich and complex set of articulations and negotiations. Lead Belly, for instance, loved commercial hillbilly tunes, and yet the Lomaxes had him perform in his prison garb, which they believed to be the proper getup for the untutored, primal savage they were trying to present (Filene, 2000).

Filene is one of the first to consider American song collectors' engagement with various devices and media. He discusses Alan Lomax's career as a radio broadcaster, even briefly his Cantometrics and Global Jukebox projects. In the chapter on Lead Belly, he foregrounds the paradox the Lomaxes were confronting: they were trying to find music outside of modernity, but they did so with the help of a Ford car and top-of-the-line Dictaphone sound recorder, the latter which had been specially engineered for their particular needs (Filene, 2000). Still, there is much work left to do on the modernist and media-theoretical dimensions of American folk music culture. For instance, Filene (2000) points out that the Dictaphone was celebrated by the Lomaxes for its ability to precisely document performance. But is this all we can say about the Lomaxes's engagement with technology? What if we also asked whether the folklorists also approached sound recording as a form of writing, as a technological re-territorialization of the voice's so-called "grain" (cf. Barthes, 1977)? Alan Lomax certainly did cling to a "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida, 1976) with respect to sound recording, as there are moments in his writings where he posits sound recording as the clear capturing of sonic truth. At the same time, however, his poetic inclinations as a writer and his clear fascination with the high-tech have led his work into some amazingly post-structuralist shadings. Barriers between active subject, passive object, and neutral tool break down as we glimpse a post-humanist assemblage of a machinic and monstrous folk body. If we follow this thread, what kinds of utopia and authenticity do we begin to see articulated?

Marybeth Hamilton (2007) has also explored the aesthetics of the machine in the writings of John and Alan Lomax. Her account, which is situated in a larger study of race in blues music culture, focuses primarily on the field-recording expedition. She contends

that the Lomaxes were driven by an anti-modernist impulse yet were fascinated by technology, but she stops short at her observation that this is an embarrassing paradox. Again, Alan Lomax's writings deserve closer scrutiny than this kind of critique affords; the produce of his digital period, in particular, warrants closer and more theoretical discussion. Thus in this dissertation I build on Hamilton's and others' research by drawing attention away from "the field" (I will also be interested, in the chapter on Lomax, in technologies of analysis and dissemination deployed after the initial recording event, such as the archive, the mainframe computer, and the personal computer) and towards a more generous and imaginative account of the complex ways American folk music culture has engaged with technology.

Ronald D. Cohen's recent book *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (2002) also picks up on some of the themes followed by Filene and Hamilton, though he is more interested in the mainstream manifestations of American folk music. Cohen's focus is the mid-century commercial boom of the revival; he explores the organizations, performers, magazines, record labels, festivals, and activists who impacted the various articulations of American folk music in popular culture. Of particular interest is his close attention to the vicious debates over the meaning of authenticity fought out at such sites as the Newport Folk Festival and the pages of *Sing Out!* magazine. The sheer breadth of Cohen's positivist history, however, leads him away from the close reading of particular thinkers and practitioners that I hope to accomplish here. Cohen races from one anecdote to the next, offering an admittedly admirable and useful summation of the revival's workings, yet he does not pause to meditate on the theoretical issues intersecting with his objects. Although Cohen does

highlight how "authenticity" and "the folk" have been constructed and imagined via various media and performance traditions, his method allows important questions to slip by. In this dissertation, we will be less interested in the total history of folk revivalism in the United States, less interested in the complete, linear narrative of all that was done and said, and more interested in the exceptions and the ruptures across this discourse, which takes slower reading to uncover.

The disciplines of folklore and ethnography have also recently awoken to the question of media. Erica Brady (1999) has examined the ways in which ethnographers at the turn of the twentieth century used the phonograph in their field expeditions. Brady is sensitive to the paradox of "pre-modern" preservation within the context of mass-mediated societies. On one hand, the phonograph was at the center of the accelerations and dislocations of modernity; on the other, many ethnographers began to look to the phonograph as a tool with which they might preserve "disappearing remnants" (Brady, 1999, p. 2). Looking primarily at the discipline of ethnography, Brady describes how this paradox played out as various field workers came to use the phonograph in their efforts. Sound scholar Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past* (2003) probes this history further by exploring the broader cultural context in which ethnography in the late nineteenth century developed. Sterne connects early efforts in the field of ethnography to embalming and canning practices and the larger Victorian cultures of death and preservation. However, neither Brady nor Sterne has given much attention to the Lomaxes or to the more activist and commercial sides of song collecting and folk revivalism, which will be my focus.

Other scholars in folklore studies have also begun to consider the place of technology in the discipline. Hermann Bausinger (1990) has reconsidered the stability

and distinctiveness of the categories of "folk" and "technology" in Germanic folklore: "technical requisites and motifs have entered all areas of folk culture and exist there as a matter of course" (p. 21). American studies scholar Gene Bluestein's contributions follow a similar line of argumentation. His term "poplore" suggests that the ever-tenuous distinction between folk and pop is inapplicable to American cultural history, wherein distinctions between high and low, authentic and commercial, have tended to blur (Bluestein, 1972). As well, in her comparative study of the German and American folklore traditions, Regina Bendix's *In Search of Authenticity* (1997) considers not just the content of folklore and music but the institutional interests and dispositions that have privileged particular understandings of authenticity and "the folk" over others.

However, what remains to be done is a theoretically sophisticated reading of American folk music's engagement with *media* as such, which my study will attempt. From the point of view of American folk music's most influential and prolific theorists, what kinds of communication were made possible by new media? How does one approach the system of mass media with an ear towards authentic performance? How do we plug the folk into the machine, and what are the implications of such an event? More than just producing a new piece in the historiography of American folk music culture, I aim to use Lomax, Seeger, and Dylan to think through issues of "infowar," authenticity, and digitality. What does a late Texan folklorist have to teach contemporary media theorists and even artists? What does Bob Dylan have to teach computer programmers? What does Woody Guthrie have to teach bloggers and iPhone app designers?

Medium Theory

The tradition known as medium theory offers an excellent vantage point from which to reconsider the mediation of both folk music and resistance. Medium theory in particular is useful because the gatekeepers and tastemakers of the folk genre c. 1963 are thought to have longed for pure presence, for the absence of mediation. Medium theory, however, allows us to ask questions such as: How do particular media ecologies ground the production of particular enunciations of utopia or authenticity? How have permutations of both utopia and authenticity been related to the emergence of new media assemblages? To what degree are Lomax or Seeger actually sensitive to this process in their work? Medium theory allows us—with Lomax, Seeger, and Dylan—to formulate articulations of authenticity and utopia that are not necessarily nostalgic, but which are situated within dynamically mediatized cultures.

Medium theory is a body of interdisciplinary thought that has been fundamentally concerned with the myriad effects of particular media on societies. Plato, Karl Marx, Lewis Mumford, and Siegfried Giedion are often named as precursors or fellow travellers, but the Canadians Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan have perhaps been granted privileged status as disciplinary "founding fathers" (see, for instance, Meyrowitz, 1997; Qvortrup, 2006). Their central claim is that media are not mere translators of data, ideas, or experiences. Rather, particular media come to have particular, determinate effects on the very kinds of data, ideas, and experiences that can be had in the first place within any given historical moment. Thus in *The Bias of Communication* (1991) and *Empire and Communications* (1986), Innis explores the

degree to which media structure and delimit modes of economic and political organization, but also art, culture, and even subjectivity. According to Innis, media play a key role in a culture's ability to record and to reproduce itself, and so the fate of civilizations can be traced back to the relative balance of their media ecologies: "Large-scale political organizations such as empires must be considered from the standpoint of two dimensions, those of space and time, and persist by overcoming the bias of media which over-emphasize either dimension" (1986, p. 27). Although there is an inherent conservatism in Innis's categories (balanced persistence is "good," ephemerality is "bad"), he gives those interested in destroying or resisting a "civilization" via medial projectiles much to think about.

Although McLuhan's analysis of the effects of media took him in different directions than Innis, his underlying theoretical framework is similar: media for McLuhan (2003) are not transparent channels but are themselves "messages," which in and of themselves have political and aesthetic consequences. In other words, media as "extensions of man" must be viewed as part and parcel of our social being; the subject cannot be considered in isolation, but only as positioned in relation to larger social and technological systems. As Olivia Harvey (2010) puts it, "McLuhan's analysis complicates the idea of radical exteriority generally found in arguments about the consequences of technological change by substituting instead an intertwined and inseparable organizational configuration between humans and technology" (p. 340). Anticipating Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the machine, McLuhan urges us to see the ways in which the self and the group are made in conjunction with technologies, technical as well as social.

Both utopia and authenticity are discussed in McLuhan's work. He is perhaps

most famous for his utopian tendencies, in particular the oft-cited passages in

Understanding Media where he describes the "global village" in mystical, religious

language: "If the work of the city is the remaking or translating of man into a more

suitable form than his nomadic ancestors achieved, then might not our current translation

of our entire lives into the spiritual form of information seem to make of the entire globe,

and of the human family, a single consciousness?" (2003, p. 90). And yet, the naivety of

his utopianism has perhaps been over-emphasized by early critics such as James Carey

(1967) and Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1974). He was ultimately ambiguous about the

effects of "cool" and participatory media, and his later books, such as *War and Peace in*

the Global Village (1968), give more emphasis to the more terrifying consequences of the

electronic "Pentecost" he previously celebrated (Kroker, 1984).

McLuhan was also interested in authenticity, though his status as a postmodern

prophet (see Genosko, 1999; Willmott, 1996) has perhaps obscured this aspect of his

thought. He reminds us constantly in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) of his desire to grant

humanity more "autonomy" within its wired situation. And his telling of the Narcissus

myth in *Understanding Media* tacitly demonstrates the degree to which the Greek hero

only needs "to become that which he really is," which is just a machine within a media

network:

> The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person.
> This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the
> servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to
> win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had

adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system. (2003, p. 63)

Narcissus is alienated, not from his natural nature, but from his status as a media technology, itself plugged into a reflective surface. Thus McLuhan's probing attempts to lead us to sensory awareness go beyond a nostalgic Romanticism, for he is sensitive to some of the revolutionary potentials of the new media of his time via a networked and post-human take on authenticity: "In the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968, p. 70).

Of course, some strands of medium theory have gone into Romantic and essentialist directions. McLuhan's musings on the corporate wholesomeness of the "global village" constitute one famous example of this, and McLuhan's student Walter J. Ong has also gone in this direction. Ong (1982) argues that oral culture is to be distinguished from chirographic and modern print culture in several respects; orality has a privileged position in the history of communication, as it is inherently "close to the human life world" (p. 42). Prior to the emergence of alienating, technological media, the spoken word allowed us to commune with ourselves and with our environment (Ong, 1982). The spoken word allowed us to get closer to the heart of human existence as Ong sees it. On the other hand, "writing is completely artificial" (p. 81). Ong thus offers a nostalgic mythology of the voice, which parallels much of folk music discourse (at least as its history has thus far been written).[10] This dissertation is more interested in the post-humanist line running from Innis and McLuhan through to Friedrich Kittler—the latter

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[10] See Jonathan Sterne (2003, 2011) for excellent critiques of the theological dimension of Ong's thought, which he also finds evident in McLuhan's writings.

will be discussed below in the methodology section—than in the orality debates (see also Goody, 1986; Havelock, 1963) that are also part of this tradition.

Media theory has been discussed and evaluated at length. McLuhan received much criticism in the wake of *Understanding Media* (e.g. Carey, 1967; Enzensberger, 1974; Williams, 1974), but recent scholars have taken a more sober and sympathetic look. Judith Stamps (1995) places both Innis and McLuhan in conversation with Frankfurt School thinkers Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin; Glenn Willmott (1996) explores New Criticism's influence on McLuhan, and McLuhan's break with modernist aesthetics in his later postmodern writings and persona; and Richard Cavell (2002) reconsiders McLuhan as a theorist of space. Additionally, both Innis and McLuhan have left visible marks on critical theory, including Jean Baudrillard, Friedrich Kittler, and Paul Virilio, and the entire fields of "media ecology" and "media archeology" (the latter of which we will explore in more detail below). Despite all the evaluations and continuations of Innis's and McLuhan's projects, however, no one has yet included the American folk revival in the history of this theoretical discourse. As will be shown, certain song collectors, activists, and singer-songwriters are fascinating examples of media theory *at work*.

Tactical Media

"Tactical media" describes a broad constellation of activist art and culture, including pranks, hoaxes, net art, video games, hacktivism, and pirate radio. The term surfaced in the nineties on the online forum Nettime, at the Next 5 Minutes conferences in Amsterdam, and in the writings of David Garcia and Geert Lovink (2003), who

documented some of these early discussions (Critical Art Ensemble, 2001). According to

Lovink, "[t]actical media are post-1989 formations. They are a set of dirty little practices,

digital micro-politics if you like. Tactical media inherit the legacy of "alternative" media

without the counterculture label and ideological certainty of previous decades" (2002, p.

254). Although various countercultural projects, alternative media, and "culture

jamming" might constitute precursors or parallels, tactical media theorists try to

emphasize the interiority of tactical resistance. Often informed by French post-

structuralist theory, the tactical media practitioner goes to work, almost like a Derridean

deconstructionist, within the networks and systems of media culture, rather than trying to

escape from them: "Tactical Media are never perfect, always in becoming, performative

and pragmatic, involved in a continual process of questioning the premises of the

channels they work with" (Garcia & Lovink, 2003, p. 108).

　　　With its vibrant rhetoric about revolution, virtuality, and war, tactical media

discourse contains fascinating reconsiderations of utopia. As Brian Holmes has poetically

described the field: "With one hand you point back to an empty shell, a dead end, an

abandoned future. And with the other you invite people to discover a territory that might

be worth living in" (quoted in Boler, 2008, p. 435). The Critical Art Ensemble (2000) is

also interested in the networks of virtuality set into motion by tactical media practices:

"The digital model, like the analogic, contains both apocalypse and utopia, and the

applications constructed now will in part determine the directions in which digital

processes will flow" (p. 151). Across tactical media discourse, then, we see utopia move

away from static impossibilities and towards potentiality, collaboration, and rhizomes.

Recalling the utopian spirit of Ernst Bloch (1986), tactical media artists look for the "Not-Yet" along the channels of the "Now."

Tactical media as a larger phenomenon, and particular works themselves, have received attention both inside and outside of the academy (e.g. Critical Art Ensemble, 2012; Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter, 2009; Galloway, 2004; Raley, 2009; Thacker, 2004). Some recent, fruitful discussions have questioned whether the concept of tactics remains useful on the current geo-political battlefield (see Dieter, 2011; Richardson, 2003; von Clauswitz, 2003; Wark, 2002). According to Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter (2005), for instance, we need to think more seriously about the organization and durability of networks, which requires a more temporal perspective than the concept of tactics permits. Nonetheless, despite the growing and increasingly self-reflexive literature, tactical media's connections to the American folksong movement have not been explored. The Electronic Disturbance Theatre attempted to lend a figurative microphone to Zapatista rebels in Mexico via their "FloodNet" application, recalling Alan Lomax's efforts to amplify the voices of dispossessed folk. According to Pasquinelli, "Deleuze and Guattari took the machine out of the factory, now it is up to us to take it out of the network and imagine a post-internet generation" (2004), and perhaps this was the goal of Seeger and Guthrie all along. Looking at connections between the American folk revival and contemporary digital culture will bring to light new vibrations across the long histories of activism and technology. As we will see, Seeger and Lomax even anticipated some of the concerns of tactical media's recent critics.

Digital Media and Culture

Journalists and scholars alike have often been swept away by their excitement about the possibilities of new (i.e. electronic and digital) media (e.g. Rheingold, 2000; Jenkins, 2008; Levy, 1997; Negroponte, 1995; Weinberger, 2002). A good portion of the critical scholarship on digital culture and technology has wanted to historically situate this temperament. For instance, Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron's (1996) essay "The Californian Ideology" ties the libertarian ethos of Silicon Valley back to the counterculture of the sixties. Although the so-called hippies were understood—by themselves and by their opponents—as an oppositional social group, their ideals of technological determinism have more recently been married to an economic liberalism:

> This new faith has emerged from a bizarre fusion of the cultural bohemianism of San Francisco with the hi-tech industries of Silicon Valley. Promoted in magazines, books, TV programmes, websites, newsgroups and Net conferences, the Californian Ideology promiscuously combines the free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies. This amalgamation of opposites has been achieved through a profound faith in the emancipatory potential of the new information technologies. In the digital utopia, everybody will be both hip and rich. (1996, n.p.)

Barbrook and Cameron illustrate how the utopian dreams of the New Left and the counterculture have been put to work by capital in its most recent round of transformations. Ironically, though the New Left and the counterculture did express communitarian values, the "Californian Ideology" is a thoroughly libertarian discourse: "[E]ach member of the 'virtual class' is promised the opportunity to become a successful hi-tech entrepreneur. Information technologies, so the argument goes, empower the

individual, enhance personal freedom, and radically reduce the power of the nation-state" (1996).

Fred Turner's *From Counter-Culture to Cyberculture* (2006) offers a similarly spirited critique, though it is more grounded in the methodologies of cultural studies. Focusing on Steward Brand, *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, and *Wired* magazine, Turner explains how the influential New Communalists of the sixties, though they took themselves to be critics of "bourgeois" culture and values, borrowed many of their ideals from the military-industrial research culture of the 1940s and 1950s. Turner's careful reading of Brand and his networks is less polemical than "The Californian Ideology," as he probes the complex layers of interdisciplinary collaboration and conversation that made it possible for certain concepts and goals to migrate from the cybernetics research of the postwar era to medium theorists and LSD-takers alike by the mid to late sixties. Still, like Barbrook and Cameron, Turner grounds the technological utopianism bound up with digitization as a socio-historical phenomenon.[11] Digital utopianism is less a revolutionary cause than a socio-economic effect of Western capitalist society in the United States at a particular moment of social and technical development.

Vincent Mosco's book *The Digital Sublime* (2004) also seeks to dismantle the shiny rhetorics of our contemporary digital consumer culture. Mosco subtly considers "myth" as both an obfuscation and a construction that has real, material effects; the pervasive myths of "sublime" technological determinism have functioned as a productive

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[11] Exploring the history of the Internet and personal computing from a similar theoretical viewpoint, Thomas Streeter (2011) has followed some of the threads unraveled by Turner back to Romanticism. Alan Liu's *Laws of Cool* (2004) also examines the convergences between bohemian counter-cultural ideas and postmodern informational work.

concealer of the deeper processes and contradictions at the heart of contemporary capitalist society (Mosco, 2004). Mosco focuses on the notion that time, space, and politics have all come to an end in the digital era.

Neo-Marxist thinkers who emphasize the autonomy of working-class subjectivity have been more ambiguous, productively so, in their reading of digital history.[12] Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999) harshly critiques the liberal celebrations of post-industrialization, which have often touted the socially transformative potential of digital networks. Drawing on Antonio Negri, however, Dyer-Witheford sees a liberatory potential in new media, which at the same time that it extends capital's grip on humanity's productive capacities has also let loose new forms of communication and creativity. Franco "Bifo" Berardi (2009, 2011, 2012) has also explored our digital ecology from this perspective. Less optimistic than his comrades Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri—who have also outlined the emancipatory possibilities of wired work in the age of "Empire" (see Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004, 2009)—Berardi considers the various ways in which the capturing of mass intellectuality by the networks of post-Fordist capitalism has degraded the territories of art, communication, and collective psychology.

Whereas the scholarship described above focuses on the institutional, political, and socio-economic contexts in which digital media have evolved, work in literary and cultural studies has been more interested in the meaning and aesthetics of digitality and information technologies. Lev Manovich's pioneering *The Language of New Media*

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[12] Sometimes labeled "Autonomist" Marxism, this tradition is conflicted and complicated, but it initially emerged from the Italian left of the 1960s and 1970s and emphasized the anteriority of the working class to capitalist structures. On the nuances and historical context of the broader tradition of Italian Autonomist Marxism, see Lotringer and Marazzi (2007) and Wright (2002).

(2001) seeks in McLuhanite fashion to understand the unique properties and aesthetics of digital media. Manovich finds a line of influence from avant-garde cinema through to new media, but the database and the manipulability of digital code are identified as unique facets of computational culture. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation* (1999) offers an aesthetic genealogy oriented by a similar methodology. Bolter and Grusin identify a double-edged logic at the heart of media change across modern history: new media tend towards either immediacy or hyper-mediacy. Sound recording, for instance, seemed to make it possible to get even closer to the grain of the voice, and photography similarly offered a new proximity to the referent (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). On the other hand, the World Wide Web, as they explain, tends to revel in the pleasures of mediation and to foreground its various layers of remediated content (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Building on one of McLuhan's (2003) central claims, Bolter and Grusin rigorously expand on the point that the content of one medium is always another.

While Manovich and Bolter and Grusin pursue the ontologies and aesthetics of digital media, others have undertaken more winding and subterranean paths. N. Katherine Hayles (1999) traces the blending of the human-machine binary back to the pioneering cybernetics work of Norbert Wiener. Although Wiener challenged the distinction between nature and culture, he simultaneously clung to a liberal notion of individual autonomy (Hayles, 1999). Hayles goes on to explore more delirious and provocative post-human cultural artifacts, such as the writings of William Burroughs and Philip K. Dick. More recent studies of new media and digital art have undertaken similarly spirited projects. Frances Dyson (2009) explores thinkers and artists who pursue an affective or corporeal relationship to new media. Anna Munster (2006) offers a like-minded critique

of Cartesian (i.e. disembodied) understandings of perception and information via close readings of the work of several media artists. Although a range of discussions have been progressing in the broad field of "digitality studies"—everything from insects (Parikka, 2010) to "evil" (Fuller and Goffey, 2012) to windows (Friedberg, 2006) have been covered in detail—this growing body of interdisciplinary work has universally ignored any connections between digital culture and the American folk revival.

In chapters 4 and 5 I find intellectual kinship with Turner, Mosco, and Barbrook (insofar as I try to ground one dimension of the utopian rhetoric joining the folk revival to mainstream digital culture), but I simultaneously try to straddle the more literary, aesthetic approaches of Hayles, Munster, Dyson, and others. Rather than just thinking about objective, "real" technologies and the veils obscuring their functioning, I aim to trace out techno-cultural artifacts and larger media diagrams in broad strokes. I will now explore in more detail the theoretical and methodological principles that will be guiding my own brush.

1.5   Theoretical Orientation: Pragmatism

Pragmatism is the general theoretical vantage point from which this study begins. Concepts are neither true nor false; more important is the degree to which they can be said to work (Dewey, 1938; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The pragmatist's perspective seems to me ideal for a reconsideration of authenticity and utopia across an archeology of tactical media, for pragmatic concerns necessarily preoccupy the tactical media theorist or practitioner. Does it work? Should we turn it up? Should we switch channels? Should we discard our current understanding of the channel entirely? Thus ideas of "the folk"

will be considered, not insofar as they reflect or obscure the truth of humanity's ability to know either the external world or itself, but insofar as they might make something happen.

More specifically, the theoretical lens that will be used in this project is a synthesis of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983, 1987, 1994) and medium theory as articulated by Marshall McLuhan (1962, 1969, 2003). Ultimately Deleuze and Guattari are privileged here, for their complex and joyously productive understanding of subjectivity seems excellently suited to a sympathetic genealogy of artists and folklorists whose primary objective is to "de-territorialize" the flows of "molar" media machines. Concepts like "de-territorialization," "schizoanalysis," "machine," "Body without Organs," "plateau," and "rhizome"—many of which were irreverently borrowed from other disciplines and thinkers—offer an excellent arsenal with which we can explore uneasily containable assemblages of technology, revolution and desire.

There are two aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's work that I have found particularly appealing in this project. First, their insistence on the continued relevance of Marxism to the study of contemporary culture allows us to refrain from throwing out political economy entirely; social life in their view is marked by a multiplicitous and heterogenous set of forces and formations, including the axiomatic of capital. In *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), however, they nonetheless seek to establish a new paradigm for the study of political economy. The familiar distinctions between production, distribution, and consumption are no longer useful, they claim, and they consider the totality of desire that undergirds larger social processes: "[E]verything is production: production of

productions, of actions and of passions; productions of recording processes, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference; productions of consumptions, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain" (1983, p. 4). Deleuze and Guattari provocatively reorient our understanding of economic production as well as media, for rather than isolating or reifying individual agents or sectors, they seek to grasp a totality in motion. From this point of view, how do dreams—including dreams of technologies and "the folk"—go to work in contemporary digital culture?

I also import Deleuze and Guattari's version of post-humanism. For Deleuze and Guattari there are no clear distinctions to be drawn between humans and non-humans. Rather, they approach existence as a deeply stratified and striated machinic organism, one constantly breaking down and thus in constant need of repair:

> It does not suffice to attribute molar multiplicities and mass machines to the preconscious, reserving another kind of machine or multiplicity for the unconscious. … Keep everything in sight at the same time—that a social machine or an organized mass has a molecular unconscious that marks not only its tendency to decompose but also the current components of its very operation and organization. (1983, p. 35)

Deleuze and Guattari's optic moves us to view the agency of all sorts of actors, to ponder the diverse intersections of disciplines and subjects, individuals and societies, even lovers and loved. The Deleuzian turn to affect and to "mixed semiotics" has influenced a wide range of work in cultural theory (e.g. Grosz, 1994; Braidotti, 1994). Manuel de Landa (1997) has also made use of Deleuze and Guattari's post-humanist view of social and technical change, having written the history of military technologies from the point of view of a robot. I too find this post-representational post-humanism useful, as it allows us

to take concepts like "folk" and "authenticity" at the level of their functioning. We will not be critiquing Lomax's or Seeger's understandings of "the folk" but will rather be thinking about the folk (made up of abstract ideals, visual and linguistic representations, and intersections with other machinic phyla) insofar as they produce connections and virtualities.

With respect to Deleuze and Guattari's post-humanism, the concepts of "abstract machine" and "faciality" in particular will be useful in my approach to the relationships between media and culture. Faces, bodies, and models of communication are sutured together by historical regimes of subjectivation; for Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987), however, the production of "docile subjects"—which Foucault (1995) also famously explored—is always on the verge of pushing further. The face of the discrete individual must be seen as a loose collection of shards hovering over the desiring-machine of the body and the other organs and machines with which it collaborates—and this desiring-machine can be let loose by any number of tools. Deleuze and Guattari thus allow us to grasp simultaneously the efficiencies of power and its undoing, which would seem to be an indispensable variety of vision for the tactical media theorist.

There is a historically justifiable reason to work with a Guattarian-Deleuzian lens, which is that many radical and tactical media artists have found inspiration in their work. The Invisible Committee (2009) and the Critical Art Ensemble (1994) have tried to enunciate in their texts and practices the very concepts *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987) and Guattari's solo work (1995, 2011) have encouraged us to take up like hammers. By using this body of theory to look at the folk revival, then, we will be able to explore genealogical connections joining these distinct

fields. In the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari, however, this dissertation is not a pure application of their theory to the field of folk music (if such an application is even possible). I pick and I choose, from them and from others, as the particular case study suits me. Cybernetics and Kittler's "discourse networks" come in handy in chapter 2, McLuhan's medium-specificity and John Durham Peters's "dissemination" in chapter 3, Guattari's "faciality" and Kittler again in chapter 4, and "abstract machine" and even political economy in chapter 5.

Deleuze and Guattari's expansive and open concept of the machine has also motivated the way in which I have delimited the case studies (which also has been mostly pragmatic). The edges of some of the assemblages I have studied follow old conventions in cultural and literary studies (chapters 2 and 3 look at the "oeuvres" of individual "authors"). In chapters 3 and 4, on the other hand, I chart deeper paths, following diagrams of communication as they weave in and out of particular oeuvres (e.g. Bob Dylan's) but also larger histories (e.g. of sound recording and mobile media). Some events and actors make multiple appearances, as all machines are bound up with multiple others, though they can function differently in relation to each. I have tried to follow the trails wherever they might lead.

1.6   Methodology: Media Archeology and Imaginary Media Research

I will now consider in more detail how the general theoretical orientation will be explored in the actual case studies. The methodological procedure that will help me to analyze my objects of study from the theoretical orientation described above is media

archeology. This can be defined as a combination of medium theory and Foucauldian

discourse analysis that takes the media of discursive production also into account.[13]

Michel Foucault's influential studies of the conditions, limits, and productivities of

knowledge, and his theoretical exegesis of the archive, offer a way of approaching the

means by which epistemic regimes and discursive limits go to work (Foucault 1970,

1972). As he explains in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault does not study

discourses insofar as they point to an objective referent but rather as sets of possibilities

and limits in and of themselves: "Archeology tries to define not the thoughts,

representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in

discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain

rules" (1972, p. 138). Foucault's archeological method also brackets notions like

authorship, evolution, and linear progress, thereby allowing the irreducible contingency

of particular discursive formations to emerge.

With medium theory in the mix, however, we can also see how technologies

function within historical configurations of power and knowledge (Parikka, 2012).

Friedrich Kittler, although he has rejected the label "media archeologist," has broken this

ground; he draws on Foucault's method but argues that "discourse analysis cannot be

applied to sound archives or towers of film rolls" (1999, p. 5). Attempting to go beyond

Foucault, Kittler (1990, 1999) ponders the relationship between historical formations of

discourse production and the material media (e.g. pens, typewriters, phonographs, film,

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[13] On the intellectual lineages of media archeology, see Parikka (2012) and Huhtamo and Parikka (2011). Parikka's work (2007, 2010) has been particularly influential to me, as he too has tried to negotiate the insights of Deleuze, Foucault, Kittler, and the "Toronto School" of medium theory.

ISDN cables) and practices (e.g. humanist education in nineteenth-century Germany) that have established particular regimes of mediality. Taking literature as his object, Kittler hones in on the traces left by machines on texts. He argues, for instance, that the emergence of autonomous "technological media" blows apart the discourse of Romanticism, where orality and inner expression were foci of literary culture; the introduction of the phonograph made it possible to inscribe signals that the alphabet could not document, including the real of the body (Kittler, 1999). Although Kittler (1999) argues that digitalization has signaled the end of media as such, he continued to probe the ways in which literary writing (though it can no longer be called "literature") has inscribed this fact of our condition.

Kittler's academic persona has often been interpreted as apolitical or even reactionary (see Winthrop-Young, 2011). And his historical periodization often seems teleological: new media irrevocably sunder previous formations, rather than subtly or complexly "remediating" them as Bolter and Grusin (1999) would want to say. But Jussi Parikka (2012) has succinctly described the political stakes of this approach and found a subtler way into the method of media archeology pioneered by Kittler: "Media archeology should not only track the majoritarian understanding of the discourses and dispositifs of digital culture but also aim to follow the detours and experiments that remain virtual, yet real, in the shadows of the actuality of hegemonic understanding" (p. 24). Parikka uploads a Deleuzian "becoming" into Kittler's media-theoretical framework (Parikka, 2007). By tracing through statements, models, diagrams, and practices, one can study larger schematics of strategic vectors. And yet, media archeology also allows one

to chart the course of "minor" or "nomadic" counter-hegemonies such as those evoked by tactical media artists and their gadgets (Parikka, 2012).

The weight of Kittler's legacy aside, as self-defined media archeologists themselves have pointed out, the field is not really a field, and insofar as it is a method it is a fairly loose collection of approaches (Huhtamo & Parikka, 2011; Parikka, 2012). I have found the adventurously interdisciplinary studies of Parikka to be particularly insightful with respect to the building of my own practice. For instance, Parikka's archeology of computer viruses negotiates several layers of culture and technology; Parikka explores the discourse of viruses across a range of texts and artifacts, from newspapers to computer code to political economy to biology and immunology (Parikka, 2007). As he explains his approach:

> [M]edia archeology does not represent history, but instead works with materials that are deemed historical to come up with a piece of writing that consists of different but coalescing lines of materials and texts. It is a matter neither of giving form to a corpus of sources nor of submitting oneself to the historical 'facts,' but of following the tendencies inherent in the sources and summoning events from them. (2007, p. 11)

Thus media archeology is a form of "grounded" theory—one begins with the texts and diagrams on the table, allowing (insofar as it is possible) the agencies of things to speak for themselves.

Ziegfried Zielinksi is another media archeologist whose approach I have found useful here. Like Kittler, Zielinksi (2008) brings Foucauldian discourse analysis into questions of media history. But Zielinski is more interested in the impossible or forgotten

thinkers scattered across modernity. He explores the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, for instance, and his universalist theories of knowledge and sound. Kircher thought that sound functioned like light and could thus be channeled and directed using physical tubes that would relay music and voice magically to areas surrounding a performance event (Zielinksi, 2008). Rather than taking issue with Kircher's limited knowledge of the modern physics of sound, however, Zielinksi finds an "enthusiastic" polymath who fascinatingly melds the actual and the impossible in his writings and engravings throughout the seventeenth century. This kind of archeology—Zielinksi (2008) himself actually terms it *anarcheology* to emphasize his challenge to standard evolutionist histories of media—is the path that will be pursued here. Lomax, Seeger, and the Occupiers of Wall Street can certainly be critiqued for their "naïve" understandings of authenticity or community, but I have preferred rather to extract from their writings various and productive challenges to contemporary media culture.

But how will this method actually be deployed in my dissertation? Following Kittler and Zielinksi, my research terrain is primarily textual, though not exclusively so (we also consider some television shows, computer-aided anthropological methods, "dead" folk music databases, iPhone apps, etc.). I take, for instance, Lomax's writings—including letters written during his tenure at the Archive, the lectures he gave over his lifetime, and his numerous publications—as utopian media-machines. More specifically, it is the folkies' fleeting but numerous descriptions and discussions of technology and communication that serve as my focus. As a preview, consider the following joking aside in Lomax's letter to Oliver Strunk at the Library of Congress, written in 1941, four years before Vannevar Bush's "Memex" saw the light of day:

I hope that every note that is played in the United States during the next two decades, in war or in peace, in whore-houses or for Henry Ford rolls across the threshold of the music division, is catalogued, filed away in special self-liquidating cans which disappear until called for and demand constant attention from a staff of three-thousand in a building that old John's Blue Ox Babe could turn around in without scratching her tender arse a single scratch. (2010, p. 221)

Written at a time when he had become increasingly dissatisfied with the transmission capabilities of the Archive, Lomax seems to have begun to dream of a folkloristic cyberspace; he seems to envision not only a digital archive but also a Graphical User Interface. Elsewhere in his writings, Lomax emphasizes the overflowing sensuality of musical recordings:

The amplifier was hot. The needle was tracing a quiet spiral on the spinning acetate. … A gravel voice melting at the edges, not talking, but spinning out a life in something close to song … each sentence almost a stanza of slow blues …, each stanza flowing out of the last like the eddies of a big sleepy Southern river where the power hides below a quiet brown surface. (1993, p. xiii)

The data he was compiling was not textual, not "meaningful," it was rather beyond interpretation. Further, the machine is figured as the ground on which data in the field can be conceptualized (the voice spins like the record that records it). How does Lomax's eventual foray into computer-aided research manage to hold onto his almost Kittlerian account of sound recording? How does Lomax's digitality manage to retain a grounded, embodied conception of information vis-à-vis the other currents of digital utopianism of the 1980s and 1990s, which had swept many away in an enthusiasm for weightlessness? Like the Jesuit tinkerers studied by Zielinksi, Lomax and his imaginary media are forgotten possibilities buried under the history of digital culture. Woody Guthrie, Pete

Seeger, and Bob Dylan too have offered fascinating renderings of technology and communication, and these are the moments I will be considering in my excavation.

Finally, media archeology is a form of materialist historical research, but conventional or popular narratives of technological revolution or progress are not the purview of the media archeologist (Parikka, 2012). Thus this dissertation, though the chapters do follow a somewhat chronological order, does not explain the folk revival's engagement with media as a coherent or linear series of events. To run with the metaphors of tools and excavation, my media archeology does not involve a single, ordered dig but rather a series of abrupt slices into the deep sedimentation of technology and culture. These slices will fall at different angles, sometimes crossing previous ones, and, again, they are made by several varieties of tools. When we finally stand back, some kind of hole will indeed have been dug. But it might not be the right shape for the placement of neat summaries or theses. This will be a rhizomatic burrow of interconnections and potentialities.

1.7   Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 reconsiders American folklorist and broadcaster Alan Lomax as a medium theorist. I examine how Lomax's engagement first with the phonograph and then with digital computers came to inflect his understanding of "the folk" (or at least how this tendency is inscribed across his writings and projects). I also use Lomax's engagement with media to critique aspects of German media theorist Friedrich Kittler's work. I argue that Lomax's "deep digitality" is not an abstract, sovereign world of code rendering particular media finally obsolete (as it is for Kittler); Lomax simply sought to plug Gilles

Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "nomad"—which he just calls "the folk"—into the machine. Lomax thus points toward a fascinatingly utopian assemblage of always-embodied voices and digital systems.

Chapter 3 will closely read the work of Pete Seeger insofar as it engages with some of the claims and concerns of medium theory. Seeger was an influential thinker in the revival; bringing with him a deep pedigree (he had travelled with Woody Guthrie and performed in both the Almanac Singers and the Weavers), he was active at the Newport Folk Festival as a board member and performer, he wrote for both *Sing Out!* and *Broadside*, and he put out dozens of records in the fifties and sixties. Although Seeger took aim at McLuhan in particular in his *Sing Out!* column "Johnny Appleseed Jr.," I will explore how Seeger's theory of mediatized resistance is a subtle and sophisticated one which often parallels and even anticipates some of McLuhan's claims (and thus also the claims of tactical media theorists like Lovink and the Critical Art Ensemble). Resistance for Seeger is figured as an act of broadcasting (cf. Peters, 1999). The tool itself thus productively contaminates that which it relays in a hybrid convergence of folksy counter-blasting.

Chapter 4 picks up a slightly different thread. First, I comparatively analyze the meaning of technology in both Bob Dylan's star text (focusing primarily on his sixties output) and that of Steve Jobs and Apple Inc. The popular discourses surrounding both Dylan and Apple share roots in Romanticism: both stars have been worshipped for their individualistic authenticity (Dylan for his own authenticity, Apple for the individualized expression it makes possible for the consumer, thanks primarily to its late "hippie-artist" co-founder). Drawing on both Kittler's concept of "discourse networks" and Félix

Guattari's notion of "faciality," I consider the obfuscating power of this particular channelization of creativity. In the final section of the chapter, however, I return to some of Dylan's songs and writings (including his novel *Tarantula* and some of his liner notes). I uncover a post-human Dylan who properly acknowledges his position as a mere relay within a larger circuit of discourse production.

Chapter 5 again tries a slightly different way in to the long histories of tactical media and American folk music culture. I pull up connections between the "Hootenanny"—initially a form of participatory concert held by the Almanac Singers in New York City in the early 1940s—and contemporary social media. In some ways, Web 2.0 is a rearticulation of the media model of the Hootenanny (e.g. the participatory structure, the DIY rhetoric). However, by closely reading some of the writings of one of the Almanac Singers' most prolific member, Woody Guthrie, I also follow another line from the folk revival to the more recent Occupy movement. Although mainstream digital culture's incorporation of a folk aesthetic has been well suited to the dynamics of what Jodi Dean (2009) has called "communicative capitalism," the Occupy movement's "People's Microphone" also constitutes a mediatized hybrid anticipated by the Hootenannies held in 1940s Greenwich Village.

In Chapter 6, I conclude and attempt to synthesize the preceding case studies. This final chapter has seemed an opportune moment to explore in more detail the concepts of authenticity and utopia, which have been at the background of much tactical media practice and folk revivalism. After explicating some recent theoretical work on these concepts, I explain why a close reading of American folk music culture offers a novel way into them as well.

Chapter 2 – Folk Media: Alan Lomax's Deep Digitality

> If any McLuhanites are listening, I challenge them to let me visit their mailbox every morning for a month, and remove the contents of all their letters, presenting them only with the empty envelopes. The envelope is not the message. Just a part of it. (Pete Seeger, 1972, p. 296)

> Record grooves capture the vibrations of real bodies whose stupidity, as is well known, knows no boundaries. (Friedrich Kittler, 1997, p. 115)

> The modern computer, with all its various gadgets, and all its wonderful electronic facilities, now makes it possible to preserve and reinvigorate all the cultural richness of mankind. (Alan Lomax in Naimark, 1993)

2.1   Introduction

It is possible that the late German media theorist Friedrich Kittler was not the biggest fan of folk music. Interested as he was in the ability of "technological media" to write and record on their own, the music he cites tends to feature gadgets prominently. "Tap my head and mike my brain / Stick that needle in my vein," goes a song from Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (quoted in Kittler, 1999, p. xxxix). Jimmi Hendrix, the guitarist who specialized in distortion and who was the self-proclaimed founder of an "electric church," appears in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Kittler, 1999), and Pink Floyd's coldly machinic recordings are touchstones across Kittler's work on media (see Winthrop-Young, 2011). Indeed, the aspect of folk discourse that posits the possibility of sincere, unmediated communication (see Frith, 1981; Keightley, 2001) is precisely the kind of idealist notion that Kittler (1990, 1999) seeks to ground within the

material "discourse networks" that make historical ways of communicating possible in the first place.

Kittler was only a young man at the time, but one of the key players in the American folk revival of the fifties and sixties found one of German media theory's theoretical progenitors to be scandalous. Pete Seeger, who had suffered through the McCarthy era (during most of which he was blacklisted), does not seem to have had much time for Marshall McLuhan's work, which posits that media themselves have determinate effects on consciousness and politics. Seeger witnessed first-hand that some signals are allowed through the channels of mass media, and yet others can be obstructed or censored; his folksy form of "culture jamming" was not about media as such, but about transmitting as many "healthy" signals as possible. The mainstream media could either relay the messages or not: "If the radio, the press, and all the large channels of mass communication are closed to [folksingers'] songs of freedom, friendship, and peace, they must go from house to house" (Seeger, 1972, p. 155).

And yet, in the work and writings of one of Seeger's friends and contemporaries, American folklorist Alan Lomax, it is possible to find a fascinating rapprochement between folk revivalism and medium theory. Lomax thought that technology constituted a key component in his quest to document and disseminate the voices of the marginalized folk he encountered on his field trips (Filene, 2000; Szwed, 2010). He figured the centralized, corporate mass-media system of his time as a monolithic and polluting force, but he tried to effect a hybrid reversal of this unidirectional flow by recording folk music with top-of-the-line technologies (which, like Kittler, he fascinatingly fetishizes in his

writings) and then relaying the documents back to both mass audiences and the folk themselves via radio, film, and even the personal computer.

Lomax's tactical attempt to use media was perhaps most completely realizable, in theory if not in practice, when he worked with IBM (in the sixties) and then Apple tools (in the nineties) on a digital machine eventually called the "Global Jukebox." At the Library of Congress—where he worked as "Assistant in Charge" at the Archive of American Folk Song in the thirties and forties—Lomax had often been frustrated, his letters suggest, by his inability to speedily copy records for interested inquirers (see Lomax, 2010). In other words, he had an adequate storage system but poor transmission capabilities. However, the Global Jukebox was a digital-folk database that would allow schoolchildren both to visually map and to aurally access the totality of the globe's folk culture, and also potentially to upload their own voices in a cybernetic loop of authentic communion (see Lomax, 2003).

Many discussions of the folk revival, and of rock culture's incorporation of the phenomenon, have noted the genre's ideology of face-to-face and live performance and its anti-modern and anti-technological tendencies (e.g., Denisoff, 1971; Frith, 1981; Keightley, 2001). But what are we to make of Lomax's take on technology? This chapter will draw on Kittler's "McLuhanite" critical apparatus to read through the two epochs that can be demarcated across Lomax's career as a folklorist: Phonographic Lomax and Computational Lomax. This will give us a fresh angle on an important figure in the history of communications. Although the significance of sound recording to both John and Alan Lomax has been discussed recently—see Kay Kaufman Shelemay (1991), Erika Brady (1999), Benjamin Filene (2000), Marybeth Hamilton (2007), and John Szwed

(2010)—Alan Lomax's relation to medium theory and his complex understanding of digitality have not yet been considered. Filene's (2000) excellent book *Romancing the Folk* explores the modernist dimensions of American folklore, with a focus on the Lomaxes' field trips in the thirties. As he points out, their Dictaphone's seeming fidelity led Alan's father to think of their work as objective "sound photographs" (Filene, 2000, p. 56). Filene also discusses Alan's radio broadcasts into the forties, his work at the Archive of American Folk Song, and (albeit briefly) Cantometrics and the Global Jukebox. And Szwed's illuminating biography, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World*, highlights the importance of sound-recording technology as a tool for Lomax throughout his career: "Having lived through the transition from transcribing songs to recording them, he could appreciate the limitations of an audio-only medium, but also understood how these limits refocused the way music was received: the body of the singer could now be heard …" (Szwed, 2010, p. 334). Szwed's book also includes detailed if descriptive accounts of the folklorist's computer-aided projects. Still, Lomax's cybernetic and proto-posthumanist renderings of machines have yet to be analyzed, and his digital escapades have gone unnoticed by scholars of media. To what degree did the technical networks Lomax worked with come to determine the very object of his quest? To what degree is he occasionally sensitive to these connections in his writings?

A second goal, however, will be to reconsider Lomax as a forgotten thinker and practitioner of digitality. As Mark Hansen (2004) has argued, Kittler neglects embodiment in his writings on the digital, primarily through his total endorsement of Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication. A different articulation of this neglect can also be seen throughout trans-humanist and other digital-utopian rhetoric

(Hayles, 1999). Although there is much in Lomax that we would do well to leave behind—most urgently, the primitivism and Orientalism that variously run through his texts (Averill, 2003; Mullen, 2008)—what are of interest here are the ways in which he anticipates some of the claims of critics of cybernetics and information theory, such as Hansen and N. Katherine Hayles (1999), who have problematized the notion that information can be abstracted away from its material carrier. As we will see, Lomax's phonographic fascination with embodied voices interestingly carries over into his encounters with computation. Lomax's "deep digitality" is not an abstract world of sovereign code rendering particular media finally obsolete (which is how Kittler figures digital convergence); Lomax simply sought to plug the folk into informational networks, a conjunction he believed would challenge the hegemony of global media conglomerates. Thus Lomax points toward a fascinating, if "dead" or "imaginary" (see Parikka, 2012; Zielinski, 2008), assemblage of always-embodied voices and digital systems.

2.2   Phonographic Lomax

In the early twentieth century, just as the phonograph was dazzling audiences across the world with the new registers of inscription it made possible (Gitelman, 1999; Lastra, 2000), many ethnographers and collectors of American folk songs were still operating within the logics of print culture (Brady, 1999; Filene, 2000). Song collectors, after all, were looking for *songs*, which can be written down and printed, not voices or bodies; as Regina Bendix (1997) has pointed out, the text became the locus of authentication for the Romantic folklorists of the nineteenth century, a legacy that would persist. For instance, Cecil Sharp's introduction to his influential *English Folk Songs*

from the Southern Appalachians gives us a brief glimpse of the transmission model that grounds his interactions in the field: "[I was] accompanied throughout by Miss Maud Karpeles, who took down, usually in shorthand, the words of the songs we heard, while I noted the tunes" (1932, p. xxi). The speed of the musical event requires an efficient language, but nonetheless the data sought is *meaningful*. Elsewhere he writes:

> The singers displayed much interest in watching me take down their music in my note-book, and when at the conclusion of a song I hummed over the tune to test the accuracy of my transcription they were as delighted as though I had successfully performed a conjuring trick. (1932, p. xxvi)

In Kittler's (1999) view, the phonograph made it possible for the first time to conceive of documenting "the real"—sound recording allowed for the inscription of signals that the alphabet could not encode, including the noises of bodies—but Sharp seems unwilling to explore this new media landscape. Not coincidentally, Sharp was rather contemptuous of his informants, and his disregard for the singers he relied on had much to do with his class biases and his elitist fears of massification (Filene, 2000). Yet, there is also a basic contempt here for the material channel of the voice, a desire only for the information it happens to be preserving or transmitting (cf. Brady, 1999).

John and Alan Lomax too were collectors of songs, which are indeed made up of words and tunes. And yet, unlike Sharp, who was forced to hastily scribble down notes and words with his assistant, the Lomaxes had a machine do the work (Filene, 2000). The use of the phonograph in ethnographic field research goes back to the late nineteenth century (Brady, 1999; Sterne, 2003). Alan Lomax seems to have been especially sensitive, however, to what Wolfgang Ernst describes as "the (unconscious) replacement

of the vocal-alphabetic code by an electromagnetic flux of electrons" (Ernst, 2011, p. 243), for his writings relate a different kind of field trip than Sharp's.

Young Lomax figures primarily visual media, including print, as only one channel within the complex ecology of the field of folk music. Yet it is the aural channels of the voice and the singing body to which his attention seems to have been constantly drawn (Szwed, 2011). "'Sinful' Songs of the Southern Negro," one of his first publications, explores the pleasure of what Roland Barthes (1977) describes as the "grain" of the voice, the fleshy ground *beneath* the articulation of linguistic meaning:

> This woman's quartet which she herself had organized and led, was by far superior to any other group we had heard. None of them, in all likelihood, could read, and certainly none of them had had the slightest training in music; but their harmonic and rhythmic scope and pattern, their improvisations, were unusual and beautiful. Their lower lips big with snuff, they swayed back and forth, eyes closed, to the beat of their own singing, a beat accentuated by the spatter of tobacco juice on the rough pine floor. (Lomax, 2003, p. 11)

Words and notes only go so far to document "the spatter of tobacco juice on the rough pine floor" or "unusual and beautiful" improvisations. Lomax seems to struggle between that which can be represented and that which exceeds mere signifiers; his prose reaches out to document sense, sound, and place. Elsewhere in the essay he describes a performance that we can only imagine Cecil Sharp vainly trying to document:

> There was Burn-Down in the middle of the floor shouting a rhythm from which the melody had practically disappeared, beating his "box" until it seemed the thing would fly to pieces at the next stroke of his yellow hand, and literally held up by the bodies of the dancers around him, who were still shuffling with bent

knees in the monotonous and heavily rhythmic one-step. Out in the moonlit yard

again, away from the house, where the hound pup lay asleep in the dust, the

separate sounds of feet and voice and strings disappeared, and in their place was a

steady wham-wham that seemed to be the throbbing of the house itself. (Lomax,

2003, p. 14)

Lomax's informants as well as the landscape blend into a physiological gestalt. The

notion that there is something more to music than notes and words, something deeper,

would continue to interest Lomax throughout his career. In "Reels and Work Songs" he

writes, "[t]hese records are not to be listened to for text or tune so much as for the

wildness, freedom, and rhythmic beauty of their contents" (Lomax, 2003, p. 71). In "Folk

Song Style" he considers the incompleteness of Western musical notation: "The more

refined the scores, the more certainly the essence of the exotic music escapes through the

lines and spaces" (Lomax, 2003, p. 131). And, in "A New Hypothesis," he again wonders

explicitly whether Western music notation systems are suited to the study of folk music

(Szwed, 2010).

Of course, Lomax was not only interested in the non-signifying dimensions of

folklore and music. His book on Jelly Roll Morton (Lomax, 1993), for instance,

incorporates meaningful narrative. Lomax asks Morton about his personal history, which

gets written down, which circulates as interpretable texts. But there is simultaneously a

world of sense beyond or beneath the level of signification: liquid and material registers

that, à la Kittler, the recording apparatus itself seems to have a privileged capacity to

"understand." As Lomax (1993) writes of his session with Morton,

The amplifier was hot. The needle was tracing a quiet spiral on the spinning

acetate. … A gravel voice melting at the edges, not talking, but spinning out a life

in something close to song. Each sentence almost a stanza of slow blues … , each stanza flowing out of the last like the eddies of a big sleepy Southern river where the power hides below a quiet brown surface. (p. xiii)

The machine is figured as a central component of the "pre-phonographic" event, the gravel voice spinning, like a record, right along with the acetate. The edges melt, writes Lomax, and the rich discourse he records is *not just talking*. Indeed, as in his description of Morton's performance, metaphors of "the water" or "the river" often stand in as descriptors of the data Lomax was trying to capture with his machines. In a letter sent from the Bahamas to Oliver Strunk at the Library of Congress, he writes: "Here, you see, there is a live, flowing, vital folk culture and the collector lives in a continual state of confusion & exhilaration. … Songs & people pour in on us all day every day until we have to stop them in our weariness" (Lomax, 2010, pp. 10-11). With his phonographic ears, Lomax seems to have occasionally found the monstrous bandwidth of the folk to be overwhelming and in need of sorting out, somehow.

To be sure, Lomax's notion of the field-recording interaction is saturated with a racialized primitivism. As Patrick B. Mullen (2008) claims in his discussion of American folklorist Newbell Niles Puckett, the notion in American folklore that speech and sound are more authentic than writing is attributable to racialized stereotypes of African-Americans as exotic Others: "If blacks sang from the soul in an illiterate oral tradition and whites from the song books in a literate tradition, then civilization had cut whites off from the spiritual dimension of life" (p. 49). In Lomax's aesthetic valuation of folk music's channels, too, we can see evolutionism and primitivism variously articulated: "Alan Lomax definitely thought that black otherness held the secret of sensual and

spiritual renewal, and this was related to his own sense of whiteness as being incapable of experiencing pleasure" (Mullen, 2008, p. 111). And it was not only Black otherness that held this power for Lomax; like many of his contemporaries in the field of anthropology, he was drawn to those who appeared to be outside of modernity (see Fabian, 1983).

However, it is also worth pointing out that Lomax (2010) seems to have been sensitive to the fact that it was not he who was actually doing the perceiving in the field, that it was a machine inscribing the data and that this machine was not only a transparent window but also an agent of sorts: "A sound-recording machine should visit men in the camps and record the songs they have made up" (p. 210); "The department's recording machine has had an interesting time this summer" (p. 8); "The machine now walks and talks properly again" (pp. 50-51); "This work is to be done by a modern field recording machine, with the idea in mind of getting down in the most accurate fashion the folk tunes and folk styles of the region" (p. 85). Lomax's sound recorders are folkloristic automatons, workers able to infiltrate domains that had previously been unreachable to him, prosthetic extensions of the folklorist: "This machine draws its power from a set of batteries, and records electrically on aluminum or celluloid discs. Its play-back arm, which enables the singer to hear his song immediately after it has been sung, won us more songs than anything we said, more than all the cigarettes, tips, and compliments we distributed" (Lomax, 2003, p. 22). On the other hand, the human folklorist in turn occasionally comes to resemble an object in Lomax's writings, a mere component within a larger network of mediatization: "The folklorist's job is to link people who are voiceless" (2003, p. 92). And elsewhere: "I propose [we folklorists] should be two-way bridges and form a two-way inter-communication system" (2003, p. 116). When the

object of inquiry is the voice, the machine becomes the collector; meanwhile, the

folklorist becomes an interactive channel, an interface between the folk and the machine.

The idea that sound-recording inscriptions can constitute a *present* reproduction

of a sonic event has been critiqued and historically situated by several scholars (e.g.

Lastra, 2000; Sterne, 2003; Williams, 1980). According to Alan Williams, for instance,

sound recording always entails selection and representation; sound recording constructs

the object it claims to document much like in other forms of discourse: "Microphones

being more like ears than they are like rooms (they function as points and not as volume),

it is never the literal, original 'sound' that is reproduced in recording, but one perspective

on it, a *sample*, a *reading* of it" (1980, p. 53). Lomax, on the other hand, does often seem

to believe that sound recording had given him direct access to the sounds and bodies he

was documenting, which Filene (2000) and Szwed (2010) point out. And yet, folk music

also occasionally seems to be only a node distributed across the network of technological

media that have made possible its documentation. Thus, despite his Romanticism, Lomax

also exhibits what Jonathan Sterne (2003) has called a "network sensibility" (p. 226),

which is a sensitivity to the location of authenticity within media networks. The essay

"Tribal Voices in Many Tongues," for instance, begins with an anecdote about a truism

Lomax would have us reconsider:

> I suspect it was on a tourist's visit to Naples in the nineteenth century that some
> sentimental literary gentleman opined, 'Music is a universal language.' This
> absurd notion has bedevilled collectors of folk and primitive music ever since. I
> only wish I could hold the author's head firmly against the bell of my loudspeaker
> while I played him a series of albums. (Lomax, 2003, p. 107)

Truth, in this imagined scenario, is not to be found in the field, but rather in proximity to the bell of his loudspeaker; authentic originals are what he often seemed to think he was after, but he seems to have been equally drawn to machinic inscriptions—to the discs, tapes, microphones, and speakers he relied upon.[14]

Of course, evoking Michael Taussig's (1992) poetic exploration of the field-recording interaction in colonial Latin America, Lomax does appear to enjoy, through his perception of the "primitive" Other's experience with technology, his own culture's repressed enchantment with mimetic machines: "It is always a dramatic moment for any one when his own voice comes back to him undistorted from the black mouth of a loud speaker. He seems to feel the intense and absorbing pleasure that a child experiences when he first recognizes himself in a mirror" (Lomax, 2003, pp. 64-65). But which one of the three agents in this web constitutes the folk? Lomax comes to rupture the dichotomies we might wish to impose on his thought, because the folklorist's murky assemblage of technology and embodiment seems to have made who or what is inside modernity, and who or what outside, occasionally difficult to determine: "Although *my primitive tape recorder* disintegrated after that first trip, it sang the songs of my convict friends so faithfully that *it married me to tape recording*" (Lomax, 2003, p. 178; emphasis added). In anticipation of Donna Haraway's (1991) poetic explication of the cyborg body, such

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[14] Perhaps Alan Lomax inherited this fascination from his father. As Marybeth Hamilton writes of the elder song collector, "Inextricable from that sense of virile adventure was an evangelical enthusiasm for recording technology" (2007, p. 79). And, again, Filene (2000) has also identified the Lomaxes' sense of the Dictaphone as an objective tool for documentation. But I am trying to highlight how the younger Lomax's descriptions of recording occasionally tend to blur the lines dividing subject, tool, and object, entirely.

vivid renderings of Lomax's faithful coupling with technology seem to dissolve boundaries between nature and culture, machine and human, and primitive and civilized.

2.3   Computational Lomax

The "deep river of song" that Lomax sought to dam up via his role at the Library of Congress almost drowned him, and he began to experience a strain of what Jacques Derrida (1995) has called "archive fever." In the forties and fifties he recorded massive volumes of music from around the world—from Spain, Italy, Haiti, Bahamas, and elsewhere—and yet he did not have the training to understand many of the songs his machine was now capturing as he ventured further from his native United States: "When you have to sit through a half-hour song in Spanish that you can't understand … you need something else to do" (quoted in Szwed, 2010, p. 335). His archive's will-to-accumulation was spinning out of control. As he recollected in a lecture he gave in 1979 entitled "From Lead Belly to Computerized Analysis of Folk Song": "I just recorded—I figured myself as a sort of a suction pump. … But I didn't know what I was doing, really" (Lomax, 1979).

Yet Lomax's problem was not only one of comprehension. Although it seems to have subsided into the fifties with technological advances including tape-recording, the LP, and stereo (all which he welcomed with open arms), a technologically induced frustration had become apparent during his time in Washington: "We should be delighted to send you copies of everything you sang for us at once, but at the moment, we have no facilities for duplication of these records in the Library of Congress" (Lomax, 2010, p. 138). Lomax was seeking to record all of the world's authentic voices and to feed those

voices back to themselves; in the forties and fifties he hosted various programs on CBS, Mutual, and then the BBC (see Filene, 2000; Szwed, 2010). But his own analogue storage and sorting systems at the Library of Congress were cumbersome and too delicate: "The re-shelving of original records is becoming a very serious problem and I wish that you would make some arrangements about this soon to insure the originals against injury" (Lomax, 2010, p. 208).

Thus, as early as 1941, four years before Vannevar Bush's Memex, Lomax (2010) had begun to dream of a virtual realm—a stack where the corporeality of the carriers was, if not erased, at least somehow better mobilized:

> I hope that every note that is played in the United States during the next two decades, in war or in peace, in whore-houses or for Henry Ford rolls across the threshold of the music division, is catalogued, filed away in special self-liquidating cans which disappear until called for and demand constant attention from a staff of three-thousand in a building that old John's Blue Ox Babe could turn around in without scratching her tender arse. (p. 221)

Do folklorists dream of electric graphical user interfaces? Jonathan Sterne (2003) has explored how ethnographic phonography in the late nineteenth century was bound up with embalming practices and the Victorian cultures of death and remembrance. Lomax, though, sought to re-animate the archive as an interactive and dynamic database—where "special self-liquidating cans" disappear until called for—one of the purposes of which would be to connect the holdings to the very folk that constitute their source. Not surprisingly, then, the utopian discourse around personal computing would later give him cause for excitement. As he would write in a grant application for his multimedia software project: "The Global Jukebox … is not just an encyclopedia of music, dance,

and culture, but a dynamic model of the cultural universe which the user may explore, manipulate, *and expand*" (Lomax, 2003, p. 325; emphasis added). Before he could drag and drop self-liquidating cans, however, he would need to devise a system of sorting the data in his unwieldy analogue archives.

The Cantometrics project, which officially commenced in 1961 with the help of a Rockefeller grant, seems to have functioned in part as a salve for Lomax's earlier archive fever. In it he found "something else to do," and he also found what would eventually become, with his Global Jukebox software in the nineties, a way of potentially plugging life back into his sickly stacks of field recordings. If on his song-collecting journeys Lomax had occasionally found himself in the dark as a researcher, Cantometrics promised to be a sonar imaging device of sorts: "Cantometrics was designed to facilitate quick … mapping of a musical terrain" (Lomax, 1976, p. 79). Employing anthropologists, ethnographers, statisticians, and a computer programmer—not to mention Columbia University's IBM 360 mainframe (Szwed, 2010), which was a crucial component of this interdisciplinary machine—the project attempted to systematically study the singing voice and its function within traditional societies. Lomax's team devised a set of coding categories that would allow them to comparatively study the world's folk music without actually looking at music or meaning as they had traditionally been conceived in studies of musicology and folklore: "We came to focus more upon the shape than the content of the model, more upon the 'how' than on the 'what' of singing, since the 'how' is the more constant element and thus, by definition, closer to the cultural core" (Lomax, 1976, p. 13). Thus at approximately the same time that McLuhan (2003) was trying to draw our attention away from the *content* of television and radio broadcasts,

for instance, and toward media as such, so Lomax was moving toward the materiality of folk music to consider the aesthetics and social functioning of vocal channels themselves.

The Cantometrics coding process was a complex and time-consuming procedure; thirty-seven categories were to be used, each with scales of varying ranges. A few of the qualities the team considered were the degree to which the singing group did or did not seem to have a leader; the degrees of rhythmic and tonal integration and organization in the singing group; and the degrees of "raspiness" and "nasalization" (Lomax, 1968, pp. 22-23). The first meaning of "Cantometrics" is the measurement of singing style, and so the project thus sought to rationalize and to attribute discrete (and quantitative) symbols to the language-exceeding voices of the folk. Yet the term "Cantometrics" also pointed toward the fact that singing style is a measure of social structure and solidarity. After coding the approximately 3,500 songs that formed the basis of the Cantometrics data, and after mapping these results onto data taken from George Peter Murdock's (1967) *Ethnographic Atlas*, Lomax and his colleague Victor Grauer concluded that singing styles were related to "1) Productive range; 2) Political level; 3) Level of stratification of class; 4) Severity of sexual mores; 5) Balance of dominance between male and female: 6) Level of social cohesiveness" (Lomax, 1968, p. 6). By looking at the characteristics of a society, one can predict the kind of singing style that social structure would require. Conversely, by looking at singing style, one can also determine the kind of society a vocal style is helping to maintain.

Lomax's Cantometrics project clearly aspired to objectivity, and he often refers to the computer as a mere tool. For instance, he does not give the machine much credit when he acknowledges that "the computer became the helpful servitor of this project"

(Lomax, 1976, p. 4). However, just as Lomax was reliant upon his prosthetic sound recorders on his field trips, the kind of information-processing he was interested in conducting with Cantometrics—cross-cultural factor analysis of the world's recorded voices—required the IBM 360. And Lomax again found himself married to technology. As he put it in a televised interview with Robert Gardner:

> The computer is buzzing with 500 variables, cross-correlated. And out of this are emerging enormous forms, which are complex enough to satisfy almost any cultural metaphysician. I swim in them all day long, and I must say I don't feel that I understand exactly how they work. One thing I am sure of, and that is that … man is basically a master aesthetician. (Lomax in Gardner, 2005)

Lomax is not sure how the cross-correlated variables function, and yet he *swims* in them, fully immersed in his new network (cf. Helmreich, 2007). Forrestine Paulay collaborated with Lomax on a sister project called Choreometrics, which sought similarly to informationalize the filmed traditional dances of the world, and she recalls the affective excitement Lomax expressed about his new partner's power: "[Lomax would] call me and he'd say 'Look at this,' you know, and I'd see this stream of numbers and patterns. … And he'd say, 'Look what's happening here, look what this is showing!'" (Paulay, 2006). Almost like "Neo" in *The Matrix*, Lomax could finally perceive the data that had been surrounding him all along.

Yet translation issues abounded. How best to let the folk speak to the researcher and to the mainframe, and vice versa? The parameters of the scales and categories, as Lomax himself acknowledges, were defined by the size of the IBM punch-card. So the bandwidth of the folk's voice was delimited by the material structure of the computer's

storage and processing media. But there were (human) eyes and ears that also needed consideration. The visual presentation of the coding sheet was thus designed so that it could facilitate interaction between these intertwined agents:

> The number of levels was limited to thirty-seven by the size of the coding sheet, and the number of points on any line was limited by the thirteen punches available in a column on an IBM card. No more points were included on any line than we felt could be handled by an attentive listener. These thirty-seven lines, with 219 points, are set forth in a symbolic map on the right side of the coding sheet. The symbols, which are abbreviations for the distinctions made in each line, greatly facilitate learning and using the system. The listener records his judgments on the symbolic map and then transfers them to a number map on the left, which also serves as an IBM data sheet. (Lomax, 2003, p. 251).

How can the scholar of folk music comprehend the vocal varieties of the world, on one hand, and harness the computational power of the digital computer? The coding sheet was offered as a relay joining the mind of the listener, the aural (analogue) voices of humanity, and the digital processing power of the mainframe. (User-friendly symbols on the right, and digital translations on the left.)

Still, initiation into this network would take time and patience; *Cantometrics* (Lomax, 1976) came with six cassette tapes, the purpose of which were to make the listeners' ears compatible with the method established by the team. Lomax guides potential Cantometricians through dozens of clips on these hours-long cassettes, teaching us how to rate the coding categories for various samples of recorded folk music. The training tapes (the experience of which is not unlike slowly installing software) seem to work as a kind of protocol, ensuring compatibility between the listener and the

computational method: "The Cantometrics tapes allow the listener to adjust to the world ranges of many audible features of singing, arranged in scalar form" (Lomax, 1976, p. 12).

Although human users of Cantometrics may have had trouble understanding the section of the coding sheet that was for the IBM 360 to "understand," however, the computer itself apparently had trouble, too, with the demands of the project; it needed to be taught a new language. As the team's programmer Norman Berkowitz explains, "[t]o obviate the loss of time and programming effort that would be entailed in such preparation on a problem-by-problem basis, a special language, REDODATA, was developed, during the period November, 1965, to July, 1966, to facilitate the automatic and flexible redefinition and transgeneration of data" (Berkowitz, 1968, p. 310). Only once everyone was on the same page (or punch-card) could the coding and information-processing of the world's archives of recorded folk music begin.

2.4   Cybernetic Folk

So far we have seen how the materiality of the IBM 360 registered across the project and how the boundary-blurring network that included technology, folklorist, and folk interestingly recalibrated for Lomax's digital period. But the very object of his quest interestingly morphed, too, into the Cantometrics research. In his early writings, phonographic Lomax seemed content to bask in the mystical richness he perceived in the voices and bodies of the folk, which, again, "[escaped] the lines and spaces" of Western musical notation. Cantometrics attempted to harness the voice and to make empirical sense of its variability on a social-scientific level. However, Lomax's understanding of

the materiality of traditional music, as the results began to pour in, became permeated by some of the language and concepts of the field of cybernetics, of which "the digital computer was an essential condition of possibility" (Johnston, 2008, p. x). Therefore, whereas the "truth" of the sonic event had been complicatedly distributed along the sound-recording network within which he was working (from recording automata to the bell of the loudspeaker), here again the truth of the folk was to be found alongside the (now digital) machine.

The ideas of information, bandwidth, feedback, and homeostasis pervade the Cantometrics project (so the influence of Lomax's teachers Margaret Mead and Raymond Birdwhistell, both cybernetic anthropologists, is also evident).[15] Singing style is a fruitful field of study because it is a relatively *redundant* mode of communication. Lomax thus saw in the voice, vis-à-vis the disorienting swirl of images and sounds he perceived to be part of globalization, an effective noise filter. And once the team began to rate and compare the voices that he and others had recorded with Murdock's ethnographic data, they came to figure singing style as a feedback mechanism between a variety of social, economic, and environmental factors:

> Each song style we have studied … portrays some level of human adaptation, some social style. Each performance is a symbolic re-enactment of crucial behavior patterns upon which the continuity of a culture hangs, and is thus endowed with the emotional authority of the necessary and the familiar. (Lomax, 1968, p. 8)

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[15] On cybernetics, see Wiener (1950), Ashby (1963), Hayles (1999), and Johnston (2008).

The voice both expresses and reinforces particular social and environmental relationships, a component within a machinic circuit; it is the means through which a culture commands and controls *itself*. For instance, as Lomax (1968) writes of early modern Europe: "The bard was an early information specialist, storing the traditional knowledge of his group with the help of the redundant devices of poetry" (p. 134). The particular conclusions of the Cantometrics project tended toward evolutionism; more "complex" or "information-dense" singing styles were found to belong to more highly stratified social systems. Yet Lomax also seemed to wish to approach voice and society as a strictly relational system. Andrew Pickering (2010) has explored how some British cyberneticists regarded the brain as an adaptive, performative machine, and Lomax approached the voice with a similar lens. He had finally opened up this black box, and he saw that it was after all the homeostatic regulator of each of humanity's diverse cultural systems.

The cybernetic notions of information, feedback, and homeostasis are also evident in the activist aspects of Lomax's work with digital computers. Lomax perceived the explosion of mass media in the postwar era to be a culturally homogenizing force, a process figured as negentropic. As he writes in *Folk Song Style and Culture*,

> The work was filled with a sense of urgency. To a folklorist the uprooting and destruction of traditional cultures and the consequent grey-out or disappearance of the human variety presents as serious a threat to the future happiness of mankind as poverty, overpopulation, and even war. Soon there will be nowhere to go and nothing worth staying at home for. … Meantime Telstar rises balefully on the western horizon. (Lomax, 1968, p. 4)

Lomax grapples here with the contradictions of modern cultural imperialism. On one hand there is a proliferation of communications; on the other, the informational possibilities of any given message seemed to him to be rapidly decreasing (a phenomenon he terms "cultural grey-out"). His lament is not unlike Paul Virilio's (1997) in *Open Sky*, where Virilio explores the erosion of situated horizons as a consequence of instantaneous telepresence and telecommunication. The noises of transnational industry and technology have increased to such a degree that it is no longer possible to recognize "[differences] which [make] a difference," which is how Gregory Bateson (1972, p. 315) defines information. "There will be nowhere to go and nothing worth staying at home for," Lomax puts it (1968, p. 4).

And yet, in the rich diversity of traditional singing styles, now comparable thanks to the sheer power of the IBM, Lomax saw a beautifully wide range of bandwidth and informational possibility. Further, the method of Cantometrics could be plugged into the voices of the world, he hoped, in an attempt to strengthen their functioning as relay:

> Experience teaches that … direct feedback of genuine, uncensored native art to its roots acts upon a culture like water, sunlight, and fertilizer on a barren garden; it begins to bloom and grow again. The direction, planning, and administration of this cultural feedback system will be facilitated by the recognition of style structures and style differences. (Lomax, 1968, p. 9)

The traditional voices of humanity were weakening, Lomax thought, in part because they often lacked access to mainstream channels of communication, and yet Cantometrics might serve as a meta-governor—a servomechanism through which we could regain control of our most essential informational circuits. Thus Cantometrics should not only

be for scholars of folklore. Lomax (1976) thought that schoolchildren and even "just plain folks" (p. 9) can and should learn the method, and in the process better understand the singing styles that are foundational components of our cultural ecosystems. Cantometrics and Choreometrics findings were thus disseminated not only in academic publications and papers, but also in presentations and a film series entitled *Rhythms of Earth* (Lomax & Paulay, 2008). "People are very stubborn about keeping these bodily matters going. I think the human race is going to resist this homogenization and build up new kinds of civilizations on these structures. That's what this film is for," as Lomax explained to Robert Gardner (in Gardner, 2005).

The realization of Lomax's living database seemed to become most possible with the Global Jukebox, designed to run on an Apple Macintosh IIcx (Szwed, 2010). Lomax's writing career had (slightly) slowed down by the late eighties and nineties, and so there is less material here to explicate. But the grant application Ronald D. Cohen has included in *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings* (Lomax, 2003) and a video demonstration of the prototype (Naimark, 1993) promise an interactive and dynamic archive. The multimedia interface would make it possible to place beside each other, in both visual and aural forms, all the findings of Cantometrics, and one could manipulate the data to explore new patterns. But one would also be able to plug one's own singing style into the database, making it not only a window into a static set of traditions, but a collaborative, hybrid pump or regulator: "The Global Jukebox … is not just an encyclopedia of music, dance, and culture, but a dynamic model of the cultural universe which the user may explore, manipulate, and expand" (Lomax, 2003, p. 325). The same networks that were eroding traditional cultures, then, might be put to good use in the global regeneration of

the diversity of singing styles. Unfortunately for Lomax, however, the Global Jukebox technology never made it past the prototype stages in his lifetime.

2.5   Deep Digitality

Many have criticized the thread across the history of digital culture that posits digitization as a disembodying or abstracting process (e.g. Hansen, 2006; Hayles, 1999; Munster, 2006). N. Katherine Hayles (1999) traces the notion that information can be divorced from its material carrier from cybernetics and information theory through to nineties cyberculture and transhumanist rhetoric. Contemporary images of humans uploading themselves to computers carry forward the humanist dream of disembodied consciousness, which Hayles finds influentially articulated in the work of Norbert Wiener (Hayles, 1999). But not only utopian humanists understand digitality as a condition in which the medium of the body is left behind. Mark B. Hansen (2004) critiques the anti-humanist (and decidedly dystopian) Friedrich Kittler on similar grounds. According to Kittler (1999), the modern differentiation of technological media (into gramophone, film, and typewriter—a.k.a. the real, imaginary, and symbolic) is eventually subsumed by the monolithic phenomenon of digitization:

> Before the end, something is coming to an end. The general digitization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media. Sound and image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface. … Inside the computers themselves everything becomes a number: quantity without image, sound, or voice. (pp. 1-2)

Focusing on the materiality of computational technology, Kittler emphasizes the removal of the writer/user from the process of digital inscription; according to Hansen, it is

Kittler's reliance on Claude Shannon's notion of information that leads him to an abstracted and disembodied understanding of the digital (Hansen, 2004).

But there have been other ways of conceiving of information and digitality. Hayles's book returns to less influential cybernetic theorists such as Donald Mackay, who offered an account of information that did not neglect the situated, embodied contexts in which information is necessarily received. And, drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Henri Bergson, Hansen (2004) critiques Kittler by arguing that digital code is always already framed by the "*in-formed*" users that engage with it; Hansen explicates the necessarily affective process of digital mediation by closely analyzing the work of several new media artists, including Jeffrey Shaw and Tamás Waliczky.

There are dozens of ways one could critique Cantometrics as a social-scientific methodology (see Averill, 2003). Still, I submit that Alan Lomax's strange inventions and writings also constitute an attempt to grapple with an understanding of digital data that is not abstract or disembodied but is rather situated in particular, necessarily embodied horizons. Lomax was excited by the possibilities afforded by information processing; the ability of the machine to sort and map binary data was to be appreciated: "It is exciting to realize that such a coherent and complete system, capable of accounting for world musical variation, was derived by a rigorous, mathematical procedure" (Lomax, 1976, p. 21). And yet, Lomax never seemed to discard his initial fascination with performance, which for him always seemed to exceed the notes, words, and more recently the digital bits that might be used to encode it. As he offered only a few pages after the above quotation: "Music descends from the heavenly spheres of pure ideas and mathematics, where it was put by Pythagoras and Plato. Its performance framework

clearly does not rest on mathematical abstractions, but is a human, a social thing"

(Lomax, 1976, p. 25). Lomax was sensitive to the possibilities engendered by computers,

and yet his understanding of digital culture was palimpsestic—helpful binary code and

embodied human life-worlds overlapping in an integrated mixed-reality network:

> You've got a theory of art … which is far more satisfying aesthetically,
> emotionally, intellectually … than any black/white thing of the sort that Levi-
> Strauss has foisted on us in the last twenty-five years, where everything is 'Yes or
> No.' … It's an enormously complicated web; it took the biggest computer in the
> world to make these comparisons—the whole of the mainframe was occupied
> with it for two days to get this map, because here you're comparing the actual
> process of interaction between people. … Man is essentially an aesthetic animal—
> we're not a computer that goes 'Yes/No Yes/No Yes/No,' with a tree diagram
> making sense out of what we do. Our brains and our nervous systems connect us
> with every *body* around us. We carry these very complex social and
> communications systems with us. … It is an enormously complex interconnected
> network. (Lomax, 1979)

Lomax, the poststructuralist folklorist, finds us constrained by Claude Levi-Strauss'

binary thinking. Rather, paralleling Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—for whom "[t]he

life of the nomad is the intermezzo" (1987, p. 380)—Lomax envisions an affective and

distributed folk, a web that stretches across several strata, including nervous systems,

"the biggest computer in the world," and "every body around us." Of course, by now the

rhetoric of disembodied cyberspace has all but completely died out (Hansen, 2006). Still,

Lomax was perhaps on the cutting edge of mixed reality, trying as he did to envision a

digital convergence that did not erode previous media (including the body) but rather

rejuvenated them by descending, deep, to the cultural core of our sung environments. So

at around the same time that, for example, Nicholas Negroponte (1995) was touting the

majesty of "weightless" bits, Lomax was listening for a utopia wherein digital networks are always already plugged into our fleshy voices, which richly and complexly embrace, but shall not be reduced to, code.

2.6   Conclusion

My aims in this chapter, to summarize, have been twofold. First, drawing on Kittler's approach, I tried to explore how the objects of Lomax's folkloristic desires were themselves products of the machines he employed as a field worker and as an archivist, or at least how he is often sensitive to this in his writings. This approach has allowed us to see connections between his body of work and medium theory. Second, inspired by the burgeoning field of media archeology and imaginary media research, I tried to explore how Lomax's ideas and (failed) inventions constitute a fascinating virtuality that cuts across the genealogies of cybernetics and digital culture. By excavating media—which always include diagrams and dreams—we can open ourselves to lost potentialities (Parikka, 2012; Zielinski, 2008). What would it take to trade in our narcissistic iGadgetry for the democratizing, collaborative, and embodied folk-database Lomax longed for?

Chapter 3 – Pete Seeger's Tactical Media Theory

Our general theory is to throw as many songs as we are possibly able to do out into the public air, so to speak, and let the people choose which they think are good and which they think are bad. Which method can you think of that would be more democratic than that? (Pete Seeger, 1972, p. 218)

By any media necessary. (Critical Art Ensemble, 2001, p. 2)

3.1 Introduction

Pete Seeger, who performed as a young man with Woody Guthrie in the Almanac Singers, and who would go on to a long and still-unfolding career as a singer, songwriter, journalist, activist, and general "elder statesman" of the folk field, might seem to be an excellent example of the genre's dialogic and nostalgic approach to communication. Seeger, for instance, is the one who allegedly exclaimed his desire to chop Bob Dylan's microphone cord on the evening in Newport in 1965, when the younger songwriter traded in his acoustic guitar for an electric Fender Stratocaster. Even if we believe Seeger's retrospective claim that his only problem was that the sound was poorly mixed during the set, and that Dylan's masterful lyrics were not coming through (see Scorcese, 2005), we can recognize a fear of one of rock music's characteristic messages, noise (Gracyk, 1996), which according to Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1963) is the product of every channel. Seeger's gesture evokes a fear of mediation and a desire for face-to-face communion. This longing for transparency found its way into Seeger's writings as well. The song "The Ballad of Old Monroe," for instance, begins by identifying but also defying Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's (1988) "media filters": "The papers and

the TV never told a story straight / So listen now, I will to you the honest facts relate"

(Seeger & Reynolds, 1963). Seeger often idealized the possibility of communicating

outside mass-media channels, ironically often using media such as LPs to do so.[16]

However, Seeger's understanding of communication is more complicated than his

paradoxical and apparently naïve contempt for mass media would suggest. Benjamin

Filene's (2000) *Romancing the Folk* concludes with a chapter on Dylan and Seeger,

pointing out the similarities across their respective bodies of work. Filene highlights the

pragmatism and performativity of Seeger's understanding of folk authenticity, and thus

implicitly urges us to reconsider the alleged nostalgia of his thought: "To Seeger, folk

music was not a collection of old songs but a process by which new ones were

assembled. In theory, at least, any genre of music could become 'folk'" (Filene, 2000,

195). Ronald Cohen (2002) has also recently reconsidered the relationships between pop,

commercialism, and authenticity in the folk revival, and due attention is paid to Seeger's

role.[17]

The current chapter will attempt to take a closer look at Seeger's work as an

author, broadcaster, and songwriter, focusing in particular on Seeger's understanding of

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[16] This is the kernel of the revival's ideological character, as taken up by rock culture, for Simon Frith (1981). Inspired by arguments made by folk revivalists, rock ideologues in the mid sixties made it seem as though mass-industrial society's media networks were capable of delivering "authentic," community-binding cultural products (Frith, 1981). Thus, as for Adorno (1973), authenticity is viewed as lubrication for an alienating socio-economic system.

[17] Seeger's life and career have been documented and discussed (e.g. Dunaway, 1981; Wilkinson, 2009). More focused and academic work has also been done: Minnie Bromberg and Gary Alan Fine (2002) chart the evolution of Seeger's reputation from Communist villain in the 1950s to liberal hero in the 1990s. And David Ingram (2008) looks at Seeger's "complex pastoralism," which he developed during his environmentalist stage beginning in the late sixties. Connections between Seeger's thought and medium theory have not been explored, however, which is the contribution of this chapter.

media (which neither Filene nor Cohen explore in detail). First, I will consider how, despite his impatient critique of McLuhan, Seeger himself had a working "medium theory" insofar as he was conscious of the distinctive structuring capacities of what McLuhan called "hot" and "cool" media.[18] Second, and drawing here on John Durham Peters (1999), I will consider the possibility that even when Seeger discusses "live" or "un-mass-mediated" performances (the so-called folk process), he clearly envisions a broadcasting model of dissemination. Ideal folk communication involves not the dialogic melding of souls but the casting of seeds. Seeger's thoughts on "cultural warfare," then, also warrant comparison to the field of tactical media, of which Seeger might be seen as a progenitor. Anticipating Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's machinic nomads, Seeger envisions a form of mediatized resistance in which movement, flow, heterogeneity and speed are essential qualities.

3.2   Pragmatic Medium Specificity

Before looking at Seeger, we will recall a central feature of medium theory. Harold Adams Innis explores what he terms "space-" and "time-biased" media across the history of Western civilization, from Ancient Sumeria to the contemporary United States (Innis, 1991, 2007). According to Innis, the degree to which a medium is either durable but immobile, on one hand, or easily transportable but ephemeral, on the other, has far-reaching effects on the cultures and societies in which it is deployed. Time-biased media such as pyramids or clay tablets foster tradition and decentralization; the adoption of

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[18] "Hot media are … low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience" (McLuhan, 2003, p. 39).

space-biased media, however, has tended to have disruptive effects on time-biased

"monopolies of knowledge," and has rather made possible the emergence of markets,

industry, and secularization (Innis, 2007). Thus an analysis of both political and

economic power requires a consideration of the specific material systems of

communication that ground a given social assemblage:

> Large-scale political organizations such as empires must be considered from the
> standpoint of two dimensions, those of space and time, and persist by overcoming
> the bias of media which over-emphasize either dimension. They have tended to
> flourish under conditions in which civilization reflects the influence of more than
> one medium and in which the bias of one medium towards decentralization is
> offset by the bias of another medium towards centralization. (Innis, 2007, p. 27)

It was partly the introduction of print, then, that ended the monopoly of the church and

led to the Reformation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Innis, 2007).

McLuhan's work on media takes up Innis's concern with materiality and medium

specificity. McLuhan's famous claim that "the medium is the message" (2003, p. 19)

urges us to look, not only at the content or information of a communicative situation, but

also at the particular channels grounding it. Yet, McLuhan sets aside Innis's time/space

heuristic for his own "hot" and "cool" categories (2003, p. 39). Hot media like print and

radio are characterized by high definition and by the passive mode of reception they

therefore require, and they tend to work on distinct senses (e.g. print on the eye, radio on

the ear). Cool media, on the other hand, are corporate and participatory, and they tend to

involve all of the senses simultaneously. Although print had all but eroded any trace of

oral consciousness in the West, McLuhan believed that the postwar electronic ecology—

the television-fostered "global village"—offered a potential return to a cool, interactive

culture. Despite their differences in emphasis, however, McLuhan and Innis see particular

media hybrids as crucial agents in various forms of struggle; just as print challenged the

hegemony of the *ancien régime* according to Innis, television and rock music—the media

of the sixties counter-culture—were perceived by McLuhan (and by many who read him,

including the Yippies, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and early video artists) to be threats

to the hegemony of modern bureaucratic and industrial culture.[19]

Seeger was not an academic, and he never offers as systematic a vision of

historical change as either Innis or McLuhan. Still, despite his rejection of "The

McLuhanites,"[20] Seeger's essays and aphorisms for *Sing Out!*, *Broadside* and other

publications did ruminate on the question of media. His understanding of medium

specificity was central to his thoughts on tactical media warfare. First, he often points out

the particularities of print, often considering the medium's limitations:

> A song is ever moving and changing. A folk song in a book is like a picture
> of a bird in mid-flight printed in a bird book. The bird was moving before the
> picture was taken, and continued flying afterward. It is valuable for a scientific
> record to know when and where the picture was taken, but no one is so foolish as
> to think that the picture is the bird. Thus also, the folk song in the book was
> changing for many generations before it was collected, and will keep on changing
> for many generations more, we trust. It is valuable for a scientific record to know
> when and where it was collected, but the picture of the song is not the song itself.
> If you think of folk music as a process, you know that words and melodies may

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[19] See Bodroghkozy (2001) for a discussion of how and why the counterculture appropriated various aspects of McLuhan's arguments about television.

[20] "If any McLuhanites are listening, I challenge them to let me visit their mailbox every morning for a month, and remove the contents of all their letters, presenting them only with the empty envelopes. The envelope is not the message. Just a part of it." (Pete Seeger, 1972, p. 296)

not be so important as the way they are sung, or listened to. The process includes

not only the song, but the singer and the listeners, and their situation. (1972, p.

145)

Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries in American folklore (see Bendix,

1997; Sterne, 2003), and like medium theorists (e.g. McLuhan, 2003; Ong, 1982), Seeger

sometimes privileges embodied, experiential speech over abstracting and alienating print.

The folk process is fluid and variable, and the flux of the folk stream cannot be wholly

captured by mere signifiers:

Think of folk music as a process; then the history of any folk song will show

continual change, contradictions, action and interaction of opposing influences.

Now, this might be called, in the term of my mother-in-law (a wonderful woman),

diabolical materialism. (1972, p. 145)

The community of singers and participants called into being by the act of folksinging

involves not just the passive exchange of narratives or words, for there are affective

registers to the folk process that printed texts can never quite capture: "Words, words,

words. Sometimes the most eloquent song I can sing is 'Wimoweh,' with no words at all.

Just melody, rhythm, and a great bass harmony" (1972, p. 320).

Despite his fascination with the murky material below "words, words, words,"

Seeger acknowledged that a hybrid relationship between print and folksong could prove

fruitful: "If we can force [the media] open, masses of people can learn from the printed

page" (1972, p. 428). He spearheaded *People's Songs Bulletin* in the late forties, the

mimeographed publication that would eventually become *Sing Out!* Actually, his first

calling as a teenager was to the field of journalism, which perhaps explains his penchant

for topical songs (Seeger, 1972). His experience of briefly working at the Library of Congress under Alan Lomax in the late thirties (his job was to listen to the volumes of recordings of folk music that Lomax himself did not have time for), and the influence of his father (the folk-loving and leftwing composer and musicologist Charles Seeger), seem to have broadened his media horizons beyond print. But he was sensitive to both the limitations and possibilities of chirographic and print culture, and he recognized that distinct media—including multimedia networks, which he seems to anticipate in the following quotation—might have distinct roles to play in his project of prodding the whole world to sing together:

> The printed page is a handy device, and there is value in being able to count on a certain number of pages appearing regularly with up-to-date information on a certain subject. … The basic idea would be better if we could afford to include a phonograph record with every issue. Or a roll of video tape you could play through your TV set. But this will come in time. The scientists will come to our aid if they don't blow us up first. (1972, p. 21)

Although Seeger's experience with mass-media institutions would often lead him pragmatically to privilege speech and singing, he grasps the position of these media in a hybrid and dynamic ecology, which, as we will see below, one can come to harness or wield like a weapon.

> Importantly, Seeger was not against electric instruments per se:

> Nowadays the [loud]speaker gives out more twang. But even so, I don't think the range of tone, or the flexibility, can beat a good acoustic guitar. And all that equipment to lug around! Ugg. Of course, me, I've been playing electrified music for a long time. Ever since I started using microphones. (1972, p. 288)

Seeger preferred acoustic guitars and banjos not because he wished to be "behind the times" like the pastoral folk, and he acknowledges that his own "live" performances often rely on modern technological media. Rather, it seemed to him that heavy electronic gear is simply not *fast* enough. A DIY techno-nomad, Seeger was willing to take up any tool (acoustic guitars, television programs, axes, etc.) fit for the task at hand and the situation. The hybrid assemblages called "songs" were his favourite, but only because they were able to cross so many channels and territories at such high velocity: "Songs can go places and do things and cross borders which people cannot" (1972, p. 209). This pragmatic medium specificity, this willingness to proceed "by any media necessary," is pithily articulated in one of Seeger's most well known compositions, "If I Had A Hammer," co-written with Lee Hays.

"If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning. / I'd hammer it in the evening, all over this land," Seeger sings (Seeger & Hays, 2009, p. 38). But there are other tools with which one can transmit particular effects: "If I had a bell, I'd ring it in the morning"; "If I had a song, I'd sing it in the morning" (p. 38). Each of these distinct channels is used to transmit "love between my brothers and my sisters," and thus the song's emphasis is also on content. Yet, the verses revel in the particularity of the makeshift weapons and in translation itself. The song revels in the specificity and materiality of particular acts of mediatized resistance. One sings songs, one swings hammers, and "to every thing … there is a season," as he puts it elsewhere. Or, the medium is the message.

3.3   Performance and Television

As we have already begun to see, Seeger's medium specificity is more complicated than the simple distinction between print and speech, a distinction that has been drawn many times across the histories of ethnography and American folklore (see Bendix, 1997; Brady, 1999; Sterne, 2003). For Seeger, even "live" performance is inflected by the channel; gesture and self-presentational style, but also the architecture of the performance space (or the format of documentation technology), are interrelated agents in the total communicative event of folk-singing. For instance, in 1960 he explores the features that would set the strongest folk festivals apart:

> Set up a 50-foot stage, and have 5,000 or more seated in front of it eagerly looking forward to a show—I mean a Show—and you might as well realize that a lot of America's truest folk performers could not appear successfully. From beyond the tenth row no one would see the twinkle in the old ballad singer's eye, nor the grace of gnarled fingers on the fiddle strings. So who has to take over the show—I mean, Show? The seasoned performer, who with gestures and broad smiles and stage experience can project to the back rows. (1972, p. 197)

Seeger ponders the ways in which particular media of assembly make possible varying engagements with both music and the body politic. Recalling Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (2004) critique of the eighteenth-century stage and Paris, its breeding ground, Seeger is contemptuous of the ways in which performers in "Shows" are able to externalize their symbolic expressions, for "gestures" and "broad smiles" are abstractable and repeatable

signs.[21] "The twinkle in the old ballad singer's eye," on the other hand, is not something that can be standardized, manipulated, or externalized; it is a causal index of authentic self-presence.

Of course, many contemporary scholars of culture and media will find Seeger's faith in sincerity problematic, for even vocalizations are signifiers (Derrida, 1976), or as Erving Goffman (1959) and Judith Butler (1999) have taught us, all behavior and even identity is performative. Still, the point is that Seeger struggles here with the possibility that distinct media foster distinct kinds of aesthetic and political communities. Some modalities of communication (e.g. dissent) are not well channeled by the bourgeois concert auditorium. Indeed, there are forms of expression that such an auditorium simply cannot transmit. Thus a "good" folk festival does not only feature a certain repertoire (which concerns the level of content), but it must also be concerned with the technologies that conjoin the music to the audience and thus the audience to itself. Seeger was interested in the expression of what Deleuze and Guattari (1986) call "minor" literature; and, like Guattari (1995), Seeger recognized that the transmission of minor discourses is necessarily marked by the media ecologies in which such projects take place.

Given his interest in the minutia of performance, the twinkling eyes and gnarled hands of folksingers, and their intersection with various other architectural media, it is perhaps not surprising that Seeger was also sensitive to the question of how different performance styles might be better suited than others to television broadcasts, a question McLuhan would also explore. Beginning from the ontology of the medium ("It is not a

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[21] See Richard Sennett (1977) for a discussion of Rousseau's critique of theatricality.

photo in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning-finger" [2003, p. 418]), McLuhan (2003) claims that "hot" performances do not translate well into televisual images: "TV is a medium that rejects the sharp personality and favors the presentation of processes rather than of products" (pp. 413-414). On these grounds, he suggests that John F. Kennedy was able to beat Richard Nixon in the presidential race because the former's performative mannerisms were more compatible with the cool, participatory televisual image.

Seeger was severely critical of existing television broadcasting in the fifties and sixties. *Contra* McLuhan, for Seeger the turn to participation and DIY culture expressed by the folk revival (and by the counter-culture it helped spawn) was a *response to*, rather than a product of, the new medium: "The revival of interest in all folk music, which proceeds this year of '56 on an unprecedented scale, is simply part and parcel of a gigantic counter-trend in American life (the main trend is, of course, mass production and mass media)" (Seeger, 1956, p. 32). His own experiences as a potential (but often censored) televisual performer could only have further fuelled his contempt. Even when he was finally allowed on the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* in 1967, for instance, which ended a seventeen-year blacklisting for his involvement with the Communist Party and for his unwillingness to participate in the HUAC hearings (yet not invoke the fifth amendment), his performance of "Waste Deep in the Big Muddy" was controversially cut before the program made it to air. The clear allegory and critique of the Vietnam War was too controversial for the CBS censors, though subsequent press coverage of this censorship would eventually urge CBS to invite Seeger back on the program to perform the song (see Bodroghkozy, 2001; Wilkinson, 2009).

Nonetheless, there are glimmers of hope in his writings, even in the mid fifties, that the aesthetic potentials of television would one day be explored:

> So this summer, there may be some fine big shows—but some of the finest may not necessarily be the biggest. Unless—and it's a $100,000 unless—somebody takes the gamble of putting it on television. And this is another chapter in the story. For the TV cameras can move in close, and can give you the twinkle in the old ballad singer's eye. (1972, p. 197)

Seeger believed that television was saturated with possibility: "TV is the greatest medium. … It's a goddamned shame that nobody is presenting it right" (1972, p. 447). The dynamic and embodied folk process, though not quite documentable by the printed page (though pages have their own uses), is well suited to television, if only the political-economic structures governing the medium could be disrupted. Yet, this disruption could happen *from inside*: minor and counter-hegemonic forms of knowledge and communication could be amplified and distributed by this new medium despite the constrictions of its institutional and political contexts.

These aesthetic and political observations were put to work in Seeger's own television program, *Rainbow Quest*, which began to air in 1967 on a handful of public television stations across the country (Wilkinson, 2009). A stark minimalism, videographic slowness (only two cameras sluggishly capture the action), and a seemingly improvisatory conversation style are perhaps the series' most distinctive features. The average episode has Seeger strum a few tunes by a kitchen table on an otherwise bare set, then bring out a guest or two with whom he then swaps songs and stories in seeming absence of a script or even plan (guests included stars like Johnny Cash, Richard and

Mimi Farina, and Judy Collins, but also older and less well-known singers such as

Mississippi John Hurt, Roscoe Holcomb, and Reverend Gary Davis). Even in contrast to

other "cool" countercultural talk shows of the time, such as *The Dick Cavett Show*,

Rainbow Quest is marked by a deliberate anti-professionalism; the program is a willfully

amateurish affront to spectacular culture via the spectacle's own channel of choice.[22]

McLuhan, who claimed that TV transmitted processes, not products, would have

approved, if the transmissions had made it to him in Toronto.

Ironically, the folk revival's mainstream television debut had come a few years

earlier via a program called *Hootenanny* (ABC, 1963–1964), which took its name from

the rent parties held by the Almanac Singers in Greenwich Village in the forties, which

Seeger himself had helped plan and at which he performed. As we will explore in more

detail in chapter 5, at the original "Hootenanies" distinctions between performer and

audience (and perhaps between self and other) had been playfully and politically effaced,

but ABC's *Hootenanny* was a fast-paced "Show." Hosted by the lugubrious and

handsome Art Linklater, the program consisted of a light montage of images of pleasant

college life mixed with quaint folk and country standards. Massive college auditoriums

were filled with enthusiastic young fans, here spectators only, aside from the occasional

sing-along. Performers did not have time to speak or engage the host (or the crowd) in

discussion. One performer even drew attention to the hot rigidity of this performative

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[22] The release of the Sony Portapak in 1967 produced an excitingly utopian discourse—suddenly television, it was believed, could become a two-way medium—and in some ways Seeger's own aesthetic is very similar to that put forth in such works as *Guerilla Television* (Shamberg, 1971) and the magazine *Raindance*, which explored the interactive potentials of the new medium of video.

situation: "Hey, hey, if you guys keep clapping, they're going to cut me short," said Hoyt

Axton, as he quickly moved on to his next song (in Dietrick, 2007).

Hootenanny was denounced across the pages of *Singout!* and *Broadside* by critics

who felt that the program misrepresented the spirit of the revival. Seeger described it

recently as "a half an hour of kids clapping, fun and games" (in Brown, 2007). *Rainbow

Quest*, on the other hand, though the show largely stuck to music and did not often deal

with overtly political topics, can be read as a medium-specific affront to "hot" culture:

> June Carter and Johnny Cash, they've been touring around the world, they just got
> back from overseas, they have a whole big show. Normally, it's a little unfair to
> ask them to perform without their whole show here, because it's a wonderful
> show, but I asked them if they'd come around just the two of them, so we could
> get a chance to talk a little, and if we kind of improvise our way through a
> program, I think maybe you'll get to know them better; it won't be an act or
> anything like that. (Seeger, 2005)

Sometimes the pace of the obviously unrehearsed program would grind to a halt, with

Seeger taking almost painfully long pauses to think, and often clumsily leading the guest

through the repertoire. In this way, Seeger demonstrates an adventurous exploration and

negotiation of media hybridization. An articulation of the kind of info-war McLuhan

called "counterblasting" (McLuhan, 1969), *Rainbow Quest* was a relatively DIY attempt

to cool down the wasteland.

3.4   Folksinging as Dissemination

So far we have seen how, despite his impatient critique of "McLuhanism," Seeger

himself brought a material sensitivity to the various channels at his disposal as a

folksinger and activist, and we also considered how his pragmatic medium specificity inflected his work as a television programmer. Yet, even when he discusses the folk process (often held to be a "live" or face-to-face communicative act), he clearly has in mind a broadcasting model of communication. The dream of a face-to-face public sphere, in which rational citizens engage in dialogue (e.g. Habermas, 1989), is not to be found in Seeger's musings on media. Rather we see a field of cross-firing projectiles, pragmatically mobilized channels whose function is the scattering of signals (cf. Peters, 1999).

Seeger's theory of dissemination is worth thinking about because many medium theorists have privileged presence, immediacy, and orality in varying ways (Peters, 1999). Innis's (1991) essay "A Plea for Time" suggests that a return to the dialogic forms of Ancient Greece is just what the space-biased contemporary media ecology requires, if flexible democracy is to be achieved once again. The ephemerality of cheap newsprint, radio, and other forms of popular culture have led to the forgetting of tradition and time, and Innis thought that a rejuvenation of oral dialogue might remedy this state of affairs. Similarly, McLuhan's (2003) "global village" described the contemporary return to orality that he believed "cool" electronic media were fostering. Although he acknowledges that villages can also be nasty places, McLuhan was clearly excited by the new forms of acoustic involvement he saw emanating from television, electronics, Happenings, and rock music. McLuhan's student Walter J. Ong (1982) makes similar judgments about technology and the word; sound recording and televisual broadcasts promise a "secondary orality," not quite as integral as the first, but nonetheless closer to the human condition than modern, alienating print culture had been.

Of course, the idea that the voice is a more integral or natural channel of communication has been critiqued from numerous angles. Jacques Derrida (1976) famously deconstructed the *logophonocentrism* privileged over the history of Western philosophy by exploring how the "present" voice was always already contaminated by the writing it had tried to exclude. Poststructuralists like Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard all worked over similar ground: nothing exceeds the ideological processes of signification—power is everywhere—the map is the territory. Recent media scholarship has offered more historically grounded variations on these arguments (e.g. Auslander, 1999; Lastra, 2000). Jonathan Sterne (2003, 2011) takes on Innis and McLuhan in particular for their essentialist understandings of sound and hearing.

John Durham Peters's *Speaking into the Air* (1999) comes at the issue from a fresh angle. Peters reconsiders not orality or literacy as such, but rather the ethical frameworks that have tended to get mapped onto these models of media. Peters begins by contrasting Plato's critique of writing with Jesus's endorsement of dissemination. Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* articulates a sender-oriented defense of dialogue, whereas Jesus in the Gospels promotes a broadcasting ideal of communication, which gives more attention to the act of reception: "The sower engages in a purely one-way act: no cultivation of the fledgling plants occurs, no give-and-take, no instruction as to intended meaning" (Peters, 1999, p. 53). Once the seeds have been scattered, the disseminator has little control over which take root and which do not. Peters is not claiming that we should do away with dialogue or with the dream of dialogic transparency. Still, the notion of communication as transparent or oral/aural communion

can be just as violent and oppressive as it can be democratic (Peters, 1999). Although

cultural criticism and media scholarship over the twentieth century has often lamented the

effects of mass-media broadcasting, Peters finds redemptive potential in the point-to-

multipoint diagram: "The practice of the sower is wasteful. He lets the seeds fall where

they may, not knowing in advance who will be receptive ground, leaving the crucial

matter of choice and interpretation to the hearer, not the master" (1999, p. 55).

Despite his fascinating anticipation of McLuhan's thought, Seeger's medium

theory values not intimate communion (the "cool" dialogue promised by the "global

village") but relatively anonymous *dissemination*. He seems to have picked up the idea of

folksinging as broadcasting from Woody Guthrie, entirely appropriate given that it is not

a theory of innovation but rather of collaborative diffusion: "Since [Woody] frankly

agreed that he couldn't tell which of his songs would be good and which would soon be

forgotten, he adopted a kind of scatteration technique—that is, he'd write a lot of songs,

on the theory that at least some of them would be good" (Seeger, 1972, p. 405). The act

of folksinging is figured as the spraying of a stream, and the folksinger does not search

for face-to-face recognition, but rather wanders the earth spreading the seeds of the folk.

Which seeds are "folk," and which not, is not for the broadcaster to determine. Like a

radio or television station's transmitter, the folksinger is necessarily without knowledge

of which of her seeds will bear produce:

> For great songs to be written we must have an outpouring of topical song. What
>
> does it matter that most will be sung once and forgotten? The youthful Joe Hills,
>
> Tagores, Burnses and Shakespeares and Guthries can only thus get their training.
>
> … Time will sift the good from the bad. And perhaps centuries from now, when
>
> we are all crumbled to dust, some child in a world which has long since proceeded

to tackle other problems besides how to ban the Bomb will be singing a verse which you tossed off in a moment of inspiration. (1972, p. 399).

As in Peters's reading of Jesus as represented in the Gospels, Seeger does not mind if some signals are spilled, or if others decay, as they necessarily are when radio and television stations transmit across the ether, because he recognizes the autonomy of the receivers and their ability, indeed their need, to tackle the songs from within their own horizons of experience. In a recent documentary, Seeger even directly invokes the parable of the sower: "I look upon myself as a planter of seeds. And, like in the Bible, some of them land in the stones and they don't sprout, some land in the pathway and get stomped on, but some lay on good ground and grow and multiply a thousand-fold" (Seeger, 2007).[23]

We can consider Seeger's vision of folksinging as a complex remediation of broadcast television, radio, and even print. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) have explored the ways in which historical media change involves a "double logic." As media evolve and borrow from past forms and genres, new media either tend to borrow from other media in order to efface the process of mediation or else to emphasize it; "remediation" tends towards either immediacy or "hypermediacy" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). An example of a newer medium borrowing from an older one in order to create an effect of immediacy is television's incorporation of theatre's and radio's ontologies of "liveness" (Auslander, 2008). And yet, media do not move forward through time in a

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[23] In addition, American folk hero Johnny Appleseed, after whom Seeger would name his *Sing Out!* column, served as a model. In his first column, he makes it clear that the act of planting and spreading seeds is what attracts him to Appleseed's mythology: "This column is dedicated to Johnny Appleseed Jrs.—the thousands of boys and girls who today are using their guitars and their songs to plant the seeds of a better tomorrow" (1972, p. 155).

uniform manner, Bolter and Grusin argue. "Old" media also become repositioned within the wider ecology. Seeger's conception of folksong dissemination is a remediation of broadcasting by folksinging, where the folksinger incorporates the ontology of point-to-multipoint transmission.

Indeed, although Seeger critiques "Shows" for their lack of intimacy, his work and writings also point to a pleasure taken in the act of mediation, a pleasure in transmission for transmission's sake. We have already glimpsed this disposition in "If I Had a Hammer." Quite appropriately (as he has had many hammers), Seeger's discography constitutes an almost preposterous number of recordings—over one hundred, at this point (Dunaway, 2011).[24] In a self-review of his career, covertly published in the sixties under his wife Toshi's name, Seeger takes pride in the sheer volume of transmissions he has emitted (see Wilkinson, 2009). He acknowledges that not all of his emissions will have been successful, that some will have fallen by the wayside:

> Does a performing artist have the same right to spew out thousands of recorded performances to the commercial market, without being judged for the poor ones as well as the good ones? … If one could dub onto a tape a few songs from here and there on his many LPs, one might have quite a good one-hour tape of Pete Seeger. The trouble is, no two people would make the same selections. Therein lies his defense. (1972, p. 268).

Although he essentially began his career working as a cultural emissary of the Old Left, Seeger seems sensitive to the violence that inheres in imposing aesthetic or political

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[24] "He could be one of the most recorded American artists, along with Duke Ellington" (Dunaway, 2011, p. xii).

systems onto others. This receiver-oriented exploration of hypermediacy is also nicely

illustrated in Woody Guthrie's song "Letter to You," which Seeger often included in live

performances and which he also recorded. "I'm gonna wrap myself in paper, I'm gonna

wrap myself in glue / Stick some stamps on the top of my head / I'm gonna mail myself

to you." Seeger tried to counter McLuhan by claiming that the envelope is not the

message, but here we see that it is indeed: "I'm gonna mail myself to you." There is a

provocative selflessness in this figure of the singer as both sender and seed. The

folksinger transforms into the medium, and the conjunction becomes a gift for the

audience to open how it pleases.

Many scholars (both sympathetic and critical) of the folk revival have missed,

then, what is one of the more interesting features of the field's (or at least Seeger's) latent

theory of communication. Serge Denisoff (1971), for instance, argued that the first

generation of the proletarian folksong movement was based in face-to-face performance

situations (the Almanac Singers indeed played primarily at union rallies, etc.), whereas

the revival of the early sixties was distributed primarily through LP recordings. Even

though Robert Cantwell (1996) is much more sympathetic to the revival than Denisoff, he

still wants to distance this musical culture from the degraded and degrading medium of

television. However, Seeger's take on the folk process gives us a much more subtle

understanding of media ecology, for we can see that broadcasting and a specifically

televisual ontology were central to Seeger's deliberations on the politics of dissemination.

David Ingram (2008) articulates the general understanding of Seeger's image when he

claims that "Seeger's political values were informed more by pastoral nostalgia and

American nationalism than by the dogmatic economic materialism of the Communist

Party" (p. 25); but Ingram too misses the profoundly mediatized concept of scatteration. The concept of mobile, mediatized, and boundary-crossing seeds that Seeger has passed on challenges both nostalgia and nationalism.

3.5   Guerilla Media Warfare

Seeger's broadcasting ethic is not simply a utopianism wherein the more transmissions the better, a liberal-democratic celebration of the benevolence of the marketplace of ideas (or, it is both this naïve utopianism *and* something else besides). For Seeger, not all transmissions are created equal. The air into which one sings is a field of power in which corporate control and spectacular entertainment play a malignant role:

> For thirty years I assumed that the kind of songs I sang would be blacklisted from the mass media. I was resigned to it. I am no longer. America does not have 'all the time in the world' to solve its problems. The rulers of all our mass media must be blasted loose from their tight control; genuine controversy (not fake controversy) must be heard or there will be hell to pay. (1972, p. 481)

To sing into the air is to potentially disrupt hegemonic structures via the warfare of material media, and in these battles one must reach for the tools at one's disposal, each of which has its own particular capabilities:

> Before I leave Duke I'm going to take a stone with me, and put it in my banjo case, and if I ever meet a TV man up there who says he won't cover a story like this because there's no violence, something is going to get hurt. (1972, p. 482)

Banjos and stones are media suited to different sets of situations. However, both share in common the mobility and flexibility Seeger values in the activist's arsenal. As he writes of his years on the blacklist,

> It may seem a farfetched comparison, but for many years I figured I pursued a theory of cultural guerilla tactics. I could not hold a steady job on a single radio or TV station. But I could appear as guest on a thousand and one disc jockey shows, say a few words while they played a few records. I could not hold down a job at the average college or university, but I could appear to sing some songs, and then be on my way. (1972, p. 211)

With his light, flexible toolbox in hand, nomadic Seeger engaged in guerilla info war, quickly attacking with the help of larger media networks (local radio and television stations, universities and colleges) and then just as quickly hitting the road.

The tactics utilized here share much in common with the thought of Mao Tse-Tung (1961), Vo Nguyen Giap (1970), and Che Guevara (1997). The guerilla Communist fighter was to make use of the environment, the tools at hand, and the situation, and speed and flexibility were to reconfigure small size (a liability in more traditional kinds of modern Western war) as an asset. As Mao puts it in his influential text *On Guerilla Warfare* (1961): "Guerilla strategy must be based primarily on alertness, mobility, and attack. It must be adjusted to the enemy situation, the terrain, the existing lines of communication, the relative strengths, the weather, and the situation of the people" (p. 46). Seeger similarly sought a flexibility and dynamism in his tactical maneuverings, and a quick recap of his more famous campaigns reveals a guerilla-like attentiveness to situation. While blacklisted from television and also many live venues in the fifties and sixties, he made due by travelling the United States, playing on college campuses and

releasing recordings on independent labels like Folkways; in the seventies he sailed up and down the Hudson River on a nineteenth-century sloop he had had recreated, stopping for concerts along the way in an attempt to raise awareness of the industrial pollution that had despoiled this landscape (see Ingram, 2008); he recently joined the crowds at Occupy Wall Street for some folksinging amplified by the utterly technologized "People's Microphone"; and prior to Occupy he accompanied Bruce Springsteen at the Lincoln Memorial for Barack Obama's inauguration. The last example hardly seems like a "subversive" or tactical cultural project, at this point. Yet as Mark Pedelty (2009) has pointed out, Seeger slipped into his rendition of "This Land is Your Land" Woody Guthrie's three original ("communist") verses, which have largely been excised from the songbooks in American schools.[25] Thus, the folksinger once more sized up the situation and reached for a tool (this time grabbing his star image, which partly derives from his historical cache as someone who participated in the Civil Rights movement), meanwhile casting a few more seeds.

Seeger's ethics of reception make him a somewhat anomalous theorist and practitioner of cultural guerilla warfare, however, for Mao, Giap, and Guevara all remained firmly within the Marxist-Leninist idea of the revolutionary party who leads the proletarian. As Guevera (1997) puts it: "The guerilla band is an armed nucleus, the fighting vanguard of the people" (p. 52). But truth and meaning, for Seeger, derive not from the vanguard or even "the people" conceived as one body, but from the larger

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[25] Two of the verses go: "In the square of the city, in the shadow of a steeple; / By the relief office, I'd seen my people. / As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking, / Is this land made for you and me? / There was a big high wall there that tried to stop me; / Sign was painted, it said private property; / But on the back side it didn't say nothing; / That side was made for you and me" (quoted in Pedelty, 2009, p. 425).

multiplicity of possible ways of engaging with the world. Truth for Seeger lies in the "distribution of the sensible," to borrow a concept from Jacques Rancière (2009). Whereas the critical theory tradition has often wanted to educate "the masses" in one way or another (Rancière, 2009), Seeger sees value in the diverse horizons of experience from which his audience comes to meet his transmissions.

Seeger's theory of dissemination thus puts him much more in line with contemporary theorizations of tactical media, which have often emphasized the heterogeneity and eclecticism of cultural resistance (Raley, 2009). Groups like Electronic Disturbance Theatre, whose online protests drew international attention to the Zapatistas' struggles, or the Yes Men, who have maneuvered ironic critiques of corporate culture from within mainstream media networks, are direct descendants of Seeger insofar as they emphasize both receptivity and medium-specific pragmatism. Obviously, the reliance (and almost obsession) with *digital* media demonstrated by some tactical media theorists puts Seeger's tools in sharp historical relief. Still, David Garcia and Geert Lovink's "The ABC of Tactical Media" (2003) make the lineage clear:

> But it is above all mobility that most characterizes the tactical media practitioner. The desire and capability to combine or jump from one media to another creating a continuous supply of mutants and hybrids. To cross boarders, connecting and re-wiring a variety of disciplines and always taking full advantage of the free spaces in the media that are continually appearing because of the pace of technological change and regulatory uncertainty. (pp. 108-109)

In the sixties, power had not yet pervaded the network model, and so "rhizomatic" guerilla maneuverings could automatically appear as strikes at the heart of the system (Galloway & Thacker, 2007). Still, Seeger, like tactical media artists, understands the

necessity of fostering disturbances *within* "the system" and of making do with the tools ready to hand.

There are also differences worth noting between Seeger and the discourse of tactical media, differences that make Seeger not just a historical pit stop in a genealogy of such practices but a thinker perhaps worth returning to yet. As Mckenzie Wark (2002) has argued, tactical media discourse suffers from an insistent focus on ephemerality over time. Wark (2002) suggests that we adopt the long-view characteristic of both strategic and logistical thinking:

> Tactical media has been a productive rhetoric, stimulating a lot of interesting new work. But like all rhetorics, eventually its coherence will blur, its energy will dissipate. There's a job to do to make sure that it leaves something behind, in the archive, embedded in institutions, for those who come after.

Others have echoed Wark's observations on the limitations of tactical media discourse, which initially seemed content merely to play and experiment in the interstices of power's grip (see Dieter, 2011; Lovink & Rossiter, 2005). Seeger's eclectic writings, however, straddle both the topographic concerns of the nomadic tactician and the "time-biased" longings of a strategist. The purpose of shooting so many projectiles in the first place was that some of them, some day, might eventually bear fruit, which usually requires the setting of some kind of roots. In a move that Harold Innis (1991) would have approved of, Seeger balances the immediate (i.e. tactical) concerns of space and the more strategic dimension of time. Seeger recognizes the importance of building structures and institutions (from unions to rivers), which, one can only hope, might last.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to revisit Pete Seeger, focusing in particular on his journalistic writings and on some of his songs, as a media and communications theorist. Mass media were not something to be excluded from Seeger's toolbox; they were to play a crucial role. From the subtle slowness possible on television to the power of singing, Seeger envisioned broadcasting itself as a utopian ringing. Many of the thousands of seeds Seeger casted have by now all but wilted, probably, for we do not sing many of the songs he tried to teach us. And yet, the diagram of tactical media he helped develop itself continues to be transplanted and reimagined.

Chapter 4 – Bob Dylan, Apple, and Revolutionary Writing Machines

Ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more (Bob Dylan, 1973, p. 161)

Think different (Apple Inc.)

There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor. To hate all languages of masters. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 26)

4.1   Introduction

According to both Steve Jobs and those who were close to the late "iCEO" of Apple, Bob Dylan was a major influence on the Silicon Valley entrepreneur. A friend from his teenage years recalls the hours they spent hanging out in the late sixties: "I don't remember ever listening to anything other than Bob Dylan tapes" (in Gray & Quinn, 2011). Ironically, though the corporation he co-founded would become a key player in the still-unfolding enclosure of the internet's function as collaborative cultural commons—in part through the online music store iTunes and MP3 player iPod—young Jobs's fandom was expressed through an obsessive quest for illegal bootleg recordings of Dylan concerts (see Isaacson, 2012).

There is more of interest here than that a love for Dylan fits neatly into Jobs's star image as a "countercultural" businessman, though that too is part of the story (see Turner, 2006). Dylan's particular articulation of cool—which one can consider across songs, performances, star texts, and other writings—has been mobilized by both Jobs and Apple on key occasions. At the unveiling to shareholders of Apple's Macintosh in 1984, Jobs

quotes from "The Times They Are A-Changing"; Dylan is included, along with Albert

Einstein, John Lennon and Gandhi, in the "Think Different" television ad of 1997; and an

early iPod commercial also features the bard. Below these overt synergies between Apple

and Dylan run profound affinities, too, notions of what exactly it is that creative people

do with machines. Across the discourse enveloping these brands and products we find

likenesses of the Romantically expressive, directly transmitting artist-individual. The

medium is not the message for Dylan fans, it has often seemed, or for Apple fans; great

minds *think*, and transparent *tools* (be they pens, typewriters, electric guitars, personal

computers, or even mobile music players) are conduits for self-possessive monads of

creative production (or, ironically, consumption).[26]

Drawing on Friedrich Kittler's concept of "discourse networks" (1990, 1999) and

Félix Guattari's concept of "faciality" (2011), this paper explores Dylan and Apple as

machines of subjectivation—as assemblages which both represent and make possible

particular ways of understanding the materialities of self, society, and technology. Into

what shape is the model of communication voiced by these iconic brands? I explore how

one reading of Dylan, the one Jobs and Apple have incorporated, constitutes a re-

articulation of Romantic authorship: the contributions of writing machines are effaced,

and expression is framed as an aesthetic act of pure intention. Drawing also on Félix

Guattari will help us to grasp a political edge latent in Kittler's work. As I aim to show,

the baby faces of Dylan, Jobs, and the Mac's Graphical User Interface can be read

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[26] My understanding of Romantic authenticity has been informed by M. H. Abrams (1953), Friedrich
Kittler (1992), Charles Guignon (2004), and Charles Taylor (1989, 1992).

themselves as mis-readings and as ideological obfuscations of the deep materiality underlying what Félix Guattari (2011) has termed "capitalist facialization."

In the latter section of the chapter I refocus my emphasis, returning to Dylan's work (mostly his mid-sixties "turn" both to rock'n'roll and to typewriting) to consider aspects of his star text and writings that contradict Apple's rhetoric of the channelization of creativity. I will thus position Dylan at a new metaphorical crossroads. On one side of Bob Dylan is the Romantic immediacy valued by Apple and mainstream digital culture, but on the other are the machinic assemblages taken up more recently by hackers and tactical media artists: individualized, privatized creativity (which disavows its indebtedness to living but also to dead labour) versus an aesthetic acknowledgement of the rhizomatic criss-crossings of creativity, communication, and machines.[27] Which side are you on?

In addition to the readings of Dylan and Apple, at two points throughout the chapter, as a way of enacting the noisiness that is part of my subject matter, I interject in the form of "Feedback Squeals." Inspired by Michel Serres's (2007) book about the parasite, these sections of theoretical inquiry—exploring "discourse networks" and

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[27] Gilles Deleuze himself was aware of some of the connections I want to make. As Jason Demers (2011) has pointed out, Deleuze and Guattari actually met Dylan and Joan Baez backstage in 1975, and Deleuze would come to cite Dylan's lyrics in an essay: "[A]s a teacher I should like to be able to give a course as Dylan organizes a song, as astonishing producer rather than author" (Deleuze quoted in Demers, 2011). Todd Kennedy (2009) has also interpreted Dylan using Deleuzian concepts, and his study focuses on images of the hobo and the nomad. Interestingly, however, I am arguing the exact opposite of Kennedy, who claims that "Dylan has consistently merged aspects of blues, country, and literary traditions, to invoke images of mobility that examine individual freedom in a world where technology, fragmentation, and homogeneity seem to result in a destructive dehumanizing of individuals" (2009, p. 37).

"faciality"—are meant to intrude, perhaps like a rolling stone, upon my charting of Dylan's and Apple's connections and divergences.

4.2   Situating the Research

Much has already been written on Dylan. In fact, he has probably received more popular and academic attention alike than any other figure in the history of American popular music. Some good work has stood out, to be sure, particular attention having been paid to Dylan's mastery as a lyricist and as a proto-performance artist (e.g. Boucher & Browning, 2004; Day, 1988; Dettmar, 2009; Marcus, 2005, 2011; Ricks, 2003; Williams, 1994). The objective of Lee Marshall's (2007) *Bob Dylan: The Never-Ending Star* is perhaps closest to the current chapter's mission, however, because Marshall tries to think historically about Dylan's broader star text rather than simply amplifying the legend of his genius. Miller explores how Dylan's work and Romantic star image has evolved alongside broader socio-cultural transformations, including intergenerational stratification and the formation of the counterculture. And Karl Hagstrom Miller's cheeky piece "How to Write About Bob Dylan: A Step-by-Step Guide" (2011) is a call to arms for anyone interested in moving away from pure praise and towards writing about Dylan as a social and historical phenomenon. Particularly provocative is Miller's suggestion that we connect Dylan's turn from solidarity and towards individuality with the neoliberal turn that would follow on the heels of the sixties (Miller, 2011). In a sense, tying Dylan to Apple, as I do here, is one way of making this connection. Neither Marshall nor Miller pays attention to the place of *media* in Dylan's work and star text, however, or to the influence he has had on mainstream digital culture, which will be my contribution.

Apple and its brand's connotations of rebellion and individuality have also been explored. Fred Turner has traced the changing meaning of computation in the wake of the "New Communalists," the strand of the broader sixties counterculture that was more concerned with aesthetics than with political solidarity and class struggle, a story involving Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Catalogue*, and Apple (Turner, 2006). And Thomas Streeter (2011) has explored the historical ties of Romanticism to contemporary digital culture. Although his primary focus is the Internet, he also discusses the microcomputer "revolution," in which Apple played a key role (Streeter, 2011). The story I tell here overlaps with those told by Turner and Streeter. However, looking to media theory and to Guattari's post-humanist aesthetics, and to Dylan, will give us a different way into this cultural-technological sediment. Both Turner and Streeter see technological determinism as part of the ideological dimension of personal computing (which conceals social structures and forces). Here, on the other hand, we will explore the "ideological" consequences of not being technologically determinist enough! Following John Durham Peters (2011), we will offer "two cheers for technological determinism."

4.3 "Folk" Dylan and his Media

Bob Dylan grew up in Hibbing, Minnesota, worshipping rock'n'roll stars and Hollywood rebels like Marlon Brando and James Dean. It was not until shortly before he briefly attended the University of Minnesota that he discovered folk music, quickly immersing himself in the genre's conventions and canon. Drawn to the burgeoning folk scene in Greenwich Village, in 1961 Dylan dropped out of college and made his way to New York City, where he received a favourable review in the *New York Times*, which in

turn led to a record deal with Columbia. His first three LPs (*Bob Dylan*, *The Freewheeling Bob Dylan*, and *The Times They Are A-Changing*) drew heavily on aspects of the American folksong canon, and by his third album he had become known as a leading "topical" songwriter, who borrowed traditional chord patterns and harmonies but sang about contemporary political issues (Civil Rights in particular). Joan Baez, Peter Paul and Mary, and Pete Seeger all covered his material, and he was invited onto the Ed Sullivan show but refused to play (like a good protest singer) when they censored his song choice ("Talkin' John Birch Society Blues"). Although the 1964 release *Another Side of Bob Dylan* irked many of the folk field's Old Guard (Irwin Silber lambasted Dylan publicly for the apolitical direction he seemed to be taking), it was in 1965 that he most dramatically severed ties with folk and protest culture: he famously went "electric" at the Newport Folk Festival, where he had previously been hailed as the next Woody Guthrie, and as a writer he was increasingly working towards a more surrealist and "inner-directed" poetic vision. At least, these are a few of the signposts and events often discussed and repeated—*ad nauseum*, as Miller (2011) bitingly indicates—in both popular and academic accounts of Dylan's career in the sixties. This is the story of Dylan that Jobs would come to love.[28]

According to Lee Marshall (2007), young Dylan's songs already articulated an individualism that was at odds with the earlier proletarian folksong movement: "In Dylan's work individual experiences have always been the most important thing" (p. 67).

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[28] On Dylan's life and myriad transformations, see Cossu, 2011; Dylan, 2004; Heylin, 2001, 2009; Shelton, 1997.

The point that Dylan constitutes a turn to individualism in the folk revival is also made by Hampton (1986), who is more moralistic in his evaluation:

> After the 1960s, certainty gave way to ambivalence. In the lyrics of some of Bob Dylan's songs from this period the problems are buried in deep symbolism and dark imagery. The answers were no longer obvious; they were merely 'blowing in the wind.' The motives of the protest singer had become increasingly ignoble. … The protest singer came to value his career and artistic integrity above the utopian One. (p. 55)

However, it seems to me that in the nascent star discourse enveloping the singer across his "folk" phase (c. 1962–1964), and in his own work during this time, Dylan himself seems variously positioned as both folk mouthpiece and individual stylist, roles and functions interestingly in conflict. In a *Sing Out!* feature published in 1962, Gil Turner discusses Dylan's indebtedness to tradition, and his tendency to write new words but deploy old chord progressions and melodies. Turner (1972) quotes Dylan himself, who is modest in taking credit for his own work as an author: "The songs are there. They exist all by themselves just waiting for someone to write them down. I just put them down on paper. If I didn't do it, somebody else would" (p. 25). Dylan seems to be more of a mere *writer*—or anamneusis (see Wershler-Henry, 2005)—than an author; he is a medium (the nineteenth-century spiritualist variety) for the anonymous contributions of a reservoir of prior creators. Dylan the inscription mechanism is without consciousness or agency ("If I didn't do it, somebody else would"). He merely "[puts the songs] down on paper." The folksinger seems to flirt here with Karl Marx's notion of the general intellect—itself perhaps a materialist spin on the Grimm Brothers' earlier conception of the anonymous "folk"—which spans generations and is a collective production. Dylan is the general

intellect's secretary or paper machine. In a similar vein, one of his first compositions, "Song to Woody," acknowledges that both the experiences of the poet, and his mode of representing them, have preceded him:

> Hey, hey Woody Guthrie, I wrote you a song
> 'Bout a funny ol' world that's a-comin' along.
> Seems sick an' it's hungry, it's tired an' it's torn,
> It looks like it's a-dyin' an it's hardly been born.
> Hey, Woody Guthrie, but I know that you know
> All the things that I'm a-sayin' an' a-many times more. (Dylan, 1973, p. 5)

According to this homage, the voice through which Dylan sings and the world it sings about have already been occupied and understood. Dylan's might be a privileged position (though Woody "knows," it is possible that the audience does not yet "know"), but it is nonetheless one that has been taken up before. The task of the writer and singer is explicitly to *revive* something that has already been, to channel a pre- or trans-individual awareness.

Of course, already waiting in the wings was the individual and his personal style. Dylan might draw on folk resources, and acknowledge these debts, but his reception seems to have been immediately split between this fact and the allegedly individual creativity and personal charisma of the rising star.[29] The aforementioned Gil Turner article of 1962 is titled "Bob Dylan—A New Voice Singing New Songs." A Robert Shelton piece in the *New York Times* from the same period, "Bob Dylan Sings His

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[29] Marshall explores Dylan's individualization as the work of the star system in general: "While Woody embodied the spirit of the folk, a personification of the multitudes, stardom offers something different. It utilizes stars as embodiments of social groups and types but it also valorizes the specific individuality of the star" (2007, p. 78).

Compositions," remarks at how Dylan "breaks all the rules of song writing" (1972, p. 28). Comparisons are drawn to Rimbaud and Yevtushenko, but the unique vision of Dylan is the primary theme: "Mr. Dylan's words and melodies sparkle with the light of an inspired poet" (p. 28). Similarly, Sidney Fields (1972) in the *New York Mirror* explains that Dylan was once indebted entirely to his folk forbears, but that he now writes from within himself: "His songs always start as stories. When he was on the road he became a fine teller of other people's stories. But he quit that. 'Because Dickens and Dostoievski and Woody Guthrie were telling their stories much better than I ever could,' Bob Dylan says, 'I decided to stick to my own mind'" (p. 35).

It was not only journalists and folk gatekeepers who seemed variously to position Dylan in the antithetical modes described above. Dylan's prose, pseudo-autobiographical piece "My Life in A Stolen Moment," which was included in the program for a concert in 1963, also seems conflicted. Recalling Jack Kerouac's travelogues, the narrative follows a mythologized version of Dylan from his home in Minnesota through hitchhiking journeys across the United States; also recalling Guthrie, the text presents Dylan as a rugged individual in search of unique experiences (Marshall, 2007). But in the midst of the rugged individualist's self-mythologizing he pauses to speak of his sources:

> I can't tell you the influences 'cause there's too many
> to mention an' I might leave one out
> An' that wouldn't be fair
> Woody Guthrie, sure
> Big Joe Wiliams, yeah
> It's easy to remember those names
> But what about the faces you can't find again

> What about the curves an' corners an' cut-offs
>
> That drop out a sight an' fall behind
>
> What about the records you hear but one time
>
> What about the coyote's call an' the bulldog's bark
>
> What about the tomcat's meow an' milk cow's moo
>
> An the train whistle's moan
>
> Open up yer eyes an' ears an' yer influenced
>
> An' there's nothing you can do about it (Dylan, 1973, p. 51)

Dylan again frames himself as a transparent channel. The messages and the codes alike are derived not from his own inner genius, however, but rather from the complexities of modern life, made up of fleeting social experiences ("the faces you can't find again"), ephemeral consumer culture ("the records you hear but once"), industry and technology ("the train whistle's moan"), and even the non-human world ("the tomcat's meow"). Dylan's muse is an overflowing phylum of becoming-animal and becoming-machine, to which one needs only to open one's eyes and ears in order to be "influenced." *There's nothing you can do about it*, he writes. Again, the folk poet is not the source but merely the sender.

These competing diagrams—collective reservoir versus individual rebel-genius— would be subjected to varying degrees of tension in "folk" Dylan's star discourse. Mainstream critics emphasized his eccentricities as a performer and his talent as a poet. On the other hand, the folk revival's gatekeepers (Newport Folk Fest organizers, *Broadside*, *Sing Out!*) often preferred to emphasize his status as a mouthpiece of a larger cultural movement and tradition of protest. Consider Ronnie Gilbert's introduction of Dylan at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, a year prior to his "electrification":

They tell me that every period, every time, has its heroes, every need has a solution and an answer. Some people—the press, magazines—sometimes think that the heroes that young people choose lead the way. I tend to think that they happen because they grow out of a need. This is a young man who grew out of a need. He came here, he came to be as he is, because things needed saying, and the young people were the ones who wanted to say them, and they wanted to say them in their own way. He somehow had an ear on his generation. I don't have to tell you, you know him, he's yours, Bob Dylan. (in Lerner, 2007)

Dylan's face and ears hover above, but only slightly above, an entire generation, which itself has written the poet into existence. Dylan's very being is attributed to a *collective* need to speak in a new way. Somewhat paradoxically, Gilbert grants credence to a modernist reading of Dylan (this is a "new" way of speaking) while simultaneously locating his very innovativeness within social and cultural forces.

Despite the conflicted nature of his status as a writer in his early star discourse, as a performer "folk" Dylan's relationship with *media* would remain relatively consistent. Much like many other stars across the history of American folk music, from Aunt Molly Jackson to Joan Baez (see Denisoff, 1971; Frith, 1981, 1986), "folk" Dylan c. 1962–1964 was framed as dressed down, unaccustomed to the ways of the studio or to technology. For instance, a televised performance shot in Toronto in 1964 stages Dylan in a rustic cabin setting, performing (microphone not visible) to the card-playing lumberjacks and workers around him (see Wolman, 2012). Dylan seems to express his songs directly back to the people from which they have been derived. Tracking shots of the audience are interspersed with close-ups of Dylan's pale visage, which is framed as the clear interface between the folk and their cultural heritage revisited.

Similarly, at the beginning of his performance of "When the Ship Comes In" at Dr. Martin Luther King's March on Washington in 1963, which was televised across the nation and a significant moment in "folk" Dylan's star narrative (Hampton, 1986), a man in a grey flannel suit hurries over to adjust Dylan's mike (see bbaaeezz, 2011). The technological apparatus and the "squares" that facilitate it seem to strain to capture Dylan's sincere message. The performer himself seems unconcerned, however, with the medium. He appears not to notice the older soundman, focusing only on his ("direct") communication with the audience. Voice of the folk or not, this is a face that does not need any tools. "[They] just happened to be there, that's all."

Of course, even "unplugged" Dylan was in fact reliant on a massive arsenal of machines as a creative worker, for since the advent of electric-amplification technology in the 1920s musicians have gone "electric" (Theberge, 2001). And yet, the mis-en-scene described above seems to lend the singer an uncanny ability to shoot through the techno-infrastructures of studio recording and "live" performance alike. Thus "folk" Dylan can indeed be read with Simon Frith's critique of folk ideology in mind. Frith (1981) saw an impoverished notion of immediacy in the folk revival, and here indeed the mediating effects of technology, industry, the star system, and consumer culture more generally are effaced from the presentation. It appears as though Dylan presents his voice in a face-to-face, intimate setting for those about and for which he sings. And yet, he is a star, a commodity, recorded and transmitted by a massive and thoroughly industrialized and commercialized apparatus (Frith, 1981).[30]

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[30] On the lubricating effects of authenticity in popular music, see also Frith (1986) and Keightley (2001).

4.4 "Poet-God" Dylan and His New Tools

As already mentioned, Dylan famously moved away from his role as a voice of protest, which caused a furor with some of his earlier fans and friends (e.g. Joan Baez, Phil Ochs, and Pete Seeger, to name a few). Dylan's turn was from broader social issues and towards the personal experiences of alienation and longing, from universal questions (e.g. "How many rows must a man walk down before you call him a man?") to individualized and increasingly abstract experiences and perceptions (e.g. "Hey Mr. Tambourine Man, play a song for me").[31] The hopefulness that marked both the revival and Dylan's early work was traded in for a more apocalyptic and tragic sensibility. "How does it feel to be on your own, no direction home, like a complete unknown?" he howls in "Like a Rolling Stone." Or, "Let me forget about today until tomorrow," he apathetically crows on "Mr. Tambourine Man." It is more than coincidence that the Weathermen, who were part of the broader move in late-sixties activist circles towards violence and anarchism, took their name from a mid-sixties Dylan song: "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows" (Marquesee, 2003).

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[31] Silber's (1972) early critique of Dylan emphasized his turn to individualism and cryptic imagery, which I echo in this paragraph. But this understanding of Dylan's "turn" has become both a rallying point for rock critics who defended him and for literature scholars more recently.

Irwin Silber (1972) called out Dylan early in an open letter (published in 1964, before his "electrification" at Newport), complaining not only that the singer who now travelled with an entourage had noticeably begun to remove himself from his listeners at concerts and festivals (which is what *pop stars* do, not folksingers), but also that his lyrics had abandoned themes of social protest in favour of an absurdist, existentialist philosophy. Silber (1972) echoes aesthetic debates in Western Marxism begun decades earlier (e.g. Adorno's modernism versus Lukács's social realism): "Your new songs seem to be all inner-directed now, inner-probing, self-conscious—maybe even a little maudlin or a little cruel on occasion" (p. 67).[32] But those who defended Dylan's changes did not fundamentally disagree with Silber's observations. Paul Nelson, for instance, also in *Sing Out!*, lauded *Highway 61 Revisited*: "It is a highly personal style-vision: Dylan's unyielding and poetic point of view represents a total commitment to the subjective over the objective, the microcosm over the macrocosm, man rather than Man, problems not Problems" (1972, p. 104). The disagreement was over whether or not existentialist-absurdist poetry was itself of value, and over whether the songwriter was obliged (and able) to represent the world or only his self.

The transition from topical protest songs to surrealist poetry, and from acoustic to electric guitar, involves marked media-ecological shifts as well. As Simon Frith (1986) puts it: "By 'going electric' Bob Dylan embraced all those qualities of mass culture that the folk movement had rejected—stardom, commerce and manipulation" (p. 265). Dylan

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[32] Lawrence Wilde (2004) has fascinatingly explicated Dylan's "expressionist" period using the thought of Ernst Bloch and Adorno. See the edited collection *The Political Art of Bob Dylan* (Boucher & Browning, 2004) for this and other interesting attempts to reconsider the political aspects of Dylan's "anti-political" work.

traded in his folksy acoustic for electric Fender guitars; and, for the fogies at *Sing Out!*

and *Broadside*, the problem of *mediation* was part of Dylan's lamentable mid-sixties turn.

As Dylan powered through his electric set at Newport '65, Seeger cried for an axe so that

he could cut the microphone cord (see Scorsese, 2005). In this distaste for Dylan's new

direction (the sheer noise, the indiscernibility of the linguistic articulation) we see an

acknowledgment of, if also a wish to conceal, the materiality of technological media. The

fuzzy weight of the medium was drowning out the first responsibility of the protest

singer, that being the delivery of simple, comprehensible, and politically engaged

messages (Ingram, 2008). Dylan was not paying enough attention to the receiving end in

his new system.

For rock critics and fans—including Steve Jobs, who listened mostly to bootlegs

of Dylan's *electric* concerts c. 1965–1966, we are told (Isaacson, 2012)—noise was not a

problem; it was just another signal.[33] It too could be hermeneutically interpreted as the

willful expression of the poet. As Nelson (1972) writes of Dylan's new direction:

> To put it as simply as possible, the tradition that Dylan represents is that of all
> great artists: that of projecting, with the highest possible degree of honesty and
> craftsmanship, a unique personal vision of the world we live in, knowing full well
> that unless the personal is achieved, the universal cannot follow. (p. 104)

The original ambiguity with respect to source (collective reservoir versus individual

genius) seems here to be resolved. The source is Dylan, not the folk (Marshall, 2007).

However, his relationship to his tools seems relatively unchanged. That is, they are mere

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[33] According to Gracyk (1996), noise is a characteristic feature of rock aesthetics in general.

interfaces between the creator and the created, vessels of authenticity.[34] Thus in 1965, when asked how he composes, he responds much differently than he had in his work shirt and jeans a few years prior: "Well, I just sit down and the next thing I know it's there" (quoted in Shelton, 1997, p. 285). Although Dylan's mid-sixties turn is often summed up as "plugging in" or "going electric"—both phrases which highlight a marked leveling-up of mediation—the electrified machines wielded by the artist are figured as extraneous extensions of his will. Whether Dylan is onstage with a shiny telecaster, or hunched over his typewriter (as he is seen doing in a memorable scene in the 1967 documentary *Don't Look Back*), he seems to be transparently emitting his "uniquely personal vision." "Think different," as Apple will encourage us, *ex nihilo*.

Feedback Squeal #1: "Discourse Networks" and "Faciality"

In *Discourse Networks*, Friedrich Kittler (1990) explores the Romantic literary culture on which Dylan's mid-sixties image greatly draws (the lone innovator, who creates out of nothing but himself). Whereas in the "Republic of Scholars" texts endlessly referred to a circuit of other legitimated texts, the "Age of Goethe" was marked by novel relationships between inscriptions, souls, and voices (Kittler, 1990). Emergent Romanticism in the early nineteenth century tended to elide the materiality of the signifier; readers and authors were disciplined into understanding inscriptions as communing with the *signified*, as thus communing with *content*, the signified here often being the soul of the poet (Kittler, 1990). According to Kittler, this was a complex

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[34] Here Dylan taps in to a larger discourse of electric guitar as sincere tool. According to Simon Frith (1986): "The guitarist became a symbol of rock because he (masculinity is a necessary part of the argument) communicates physically on stage even more obviously than the singer" (p. 268).

hallucination effected by a host of media and institutions. Via the process of universal alphabetization, readers were taught to interpret printed matter as the continuous, sensual handwriting of sensitive poets: "The great metaphysical unities invented in the age of Goethe—the developmental process of Bildung, autobiography, world history—could be seen as the flow of the continuous and the organic simply because they were supported by flowing, cursive handwriting" (1990, p. 83). Others have critiqued and historically situated the Romantic "author-function" (e.g. Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1980), but Kittler emphasizes the role of media within historical configurations of authorship, in addition to institutions and practices: "The term *discourse network* … can also designate the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data" (1990, p. 369).

This way of approaching media's relationship to subjectivity is a contribution to the now centuries-old tradition of post-humanist thought. Karl Marx (1998) and Georg Lukács (1971) showed how liberal individualism was both created by and in the service of capitalist power structures. Freud (2002) analogously unseated the conscious subject by claiming that the ego is only a medium in the midst of a technically unknowable field of drives and traumas. In Kittler's case, it is the technologies we use to record and transmit ourselves that have always already disrobed transcendental consciousness and self-presence. Subjectivity is a product of exterior others such as pens, phonographs, typewriters, film, and fiber-optic data streams. Indeed, Kittler's periodization of media change since the Enlightenment is a narrative of increasing fragmentation and erasure, a tale of increasing post-humanization (which, despite the apocalyptic overtones, he seems

to take great pleasure in telling). The smooth handwriting of Romantic individuals is exploded by the new media of the late-nineteenth century:

> Typewriters do not store individuals; their letters do not communicate a beyond that perfectly alphabetized readers can subsequently hallucinate as meaning. Everything that has been taken over by technological media since Edison's inventions disappears from typescripts. The dream of a real visible or audible world arising from words has come to an end. (1999, p. 14)

Digital convergence altogether erodes the distinctions between technological media; we cease even to be able to perceive the apparatuses that inscribe our histories, oblivious to all but the "surface effects" offered by the interface (Kittler, 1999). Yet, much like the Romantic author who obscures the reach and complexity of the discourse network that made him possible (which includes mothers, university professors, and literary pedagogies), our easy-to-use pointing and clicking that seems to command our operating systems obscures the underling material structures of the digital condition.[35] We speak of software and of users, but there is only hardware, to paraphrase Kittler (1997).

If the discourse network of 1900 has consigned the Romantic author to the dustbin of history, as Kittler claims, what are we to make of its persistence in American culture, from the Beats, into the sixties counterculture, on through to contemporary digital consumer culture? Félix Guattari offers a concept which is compatible with Kittler's "discourse networks" and which highlights the political stakes of materialist orientations towards media (which Kittler somewhat stubbornly refuses to pursue or even

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[35] On the history and aesthetics of the Graphical User Interface, see Galloway (2012), Johnson (1997), and Munster (2006). Munster (2006) also uses Deleuze and Guattari to explore "interfacial" media art, though connections to Kittler are not made.

acknowledge). According to Deleuze and Guattari, "faciality" exists at the intersection of "subjectification" and "significance" in modern capitalist social formations (1987, p.167).[36] It is a point of convergence, in a sense, between linguistic systems of order and the more embodied processes of discipline that Louis Althusser (2001) calls "interpellation." Bundles of sensation and desire, widely varying strata of meaning and possibility, are crystallized via the constitution of individuated identities, which appear to us focused through the face. For the Marxist-Nietzschean Guattari, all is becoming and flux, but systems, signifiers, and disciplinary apparatuses pin down this anarchical, immanent movement—the face being one such marker of disciplinary inscription. Not false but not true either, neither natural nor inevitable, faciality is the condition of being marked as a being with a face, as an individual.

To think of the artifice of faciality is not to say that some groups do not have eyes or noses for organs, for example, but merely to think about the historicity of these markers: "*Certain assemblages of power (pouvoir) require the production of a face*, others do not" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 175; emphasis in original). Technologies of subjectivation go to work on heterogeneous strata of becoming, infecting not just faces per se but entire realms of code, from the couple to the family to private property: "Concrete faces cannot be assumed to come ready-made. They are engendered by an *abstract machine of faciality (visagéité)*, which produces them at the same time as it gives the signifier its white wall and subjectivity its black hole" (1987, p. 168; emphasis

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[36] As Genosko (2002) points out, Guattari explored the concept of faciality in *The Machinic Unconscious* (2011) before the idea was further developed in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). However, I agree with Genosko on the point that worrying about which author came up with which idea is contrary to the spirit of their work.

in original). Thus the face for Deleuze and Guattari is a crucial focalization of power. Faces are not only regions of our flesh made to appear a certain way (i.e. ways of "reading" the self). They constitute arbitrary and contingent windows or ports: into "the soul" (or "unconscious") and out onto an apparently ordered world.

In his excellent book on Guattari, Gary Genosko (2002) describes faciality as "a fundamental category of redundancy of the machinic unconscious" (p. 47), and we too can think of the concept in terms of information theory. If the entropic quality of group subjectivity pushes out and beyond individuals and their discrete bodies and minds, capitalistic faciality is the negentropic force that pushes back by cancelling noise and making meaning of our selves. In other words, faciality is the difference that makes a difference right between your eyes. And, just as cybernetic and information theorists Claude Shannon (1963) and Norbert Wiener (1950) sought to minimize the noisiness of channels, capitalist faciality abhors the parasitical hunger of the medium and the materiality of message-transmissions:

> The investigation of the concrete role of faciality in capitalistic pragmatic fields will only further highlight the absurdity of the path that consists in reducing speech and language to a simple transmission of messages. This essay began with the question: 'how do we escape from language?' But it is primarily through its facial substance that language escapes itself, fleeing in all directions. Every proposition only receives its social weight of truth insofar as a 'service' faciality takes charge of it. Every segment of signifying discourse is a tributary of faciality traits that 'manages' its morphemes, that supports them in relation with dominant significations or deprives them of their sense (Guattari, 2011, pp. 83-84).

By reducing immanence to discrete, exchangeable units of expressivity, faciality presupposes a disavowal of material infrastructures (including our writing machines).[37] Faciality shores up the deep eyes of our sensitive poets, whose souls seem to pour out onto their blank pages or screens.

Although media make possible various modalities of capitalist faciality (Deleuze and Guattari cite the filmic close-up, but think also of the Facebook profile pic, or the smooth pens of the Romantic era explored by Kittler), for Guattari the disciplining of subjects is always an unstable affair. Technology is a key tool in the breaking-apart of molar subjectivations. On this point, Guattari parts ways with the airtight rigidity of Kittler's framework (indeed, it could be said that the late German media theorist makes Althusser sound like Timothy Leary). For Guattari, faciality is a site of struggle:

> Faciality then generates an optional micropolitical subject constantly moving between two states: –that of facializing, globalizing, binarizing, phallicizing forms in constant resonance with social roles and the capitalistic Imaginary; –that of singular faciality traits which, on the contrary, are likely to interact with machinic redundancies conveying new quanta of the possible while crossing the faces, being connected to other singularity traits of all kinds, circumventing micro black holes of anxiety and culpability. (2011, p. 77)

Faces float like tethered balloons above heterogenous battlefields of hardware and data. But there are many faces, some of which, with the help of machines like performance and sound art, tactical media, or folk music, break past that individualizing triangle of nose,

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[37] See Michel Serres (2007) for an exploration of noise and parasites that, like Guattari's concept of machinic faciality, both borrows from and breaks beyond the paradigms of cybernetics and information theory.

eyes, and mouth (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).[38] Literature and music for Guattari are important fields of possibility in the reclamation or generation of machinic facialities, which we will further explore below when we take on Dylan from another angle. But now for something completely the same.

4.5 Steve Jobs and Capitalist Faciality

Jobs saw Dylan as a hero. According to his high-school girlfriend Chrisann Brennan, Jobs even spent time with a typewriter in a cabin in his late teens, rapturously pounding out his own versions of Dylan lyrics (Brennan, 2011).[39] But his fan-boy love was not only about the music; he was also drawn to the artist's image and brand. Jobs admired the way he appeared to move only in the opposite direction of the crowd:

> One of my role models is Bob Dylan. As I grew up, I learned the lyrics to all his songs and watched him never stand still. If you look at the artists, if they get really good, it always occurs to them at some point that they can do this one thing for the rest of their lives, and they can be really successful to the outside world but not really be successful to themselves. That's the moment that an artist really decides who he or she is. If they keep on risking failure, they're still artists. Dylan and Picasso were always risking failure. This Apple thing is that way for me. I don't want to fail, of course. But even thought I didn't know how bad things really were, I still had a lot to think about before I said yes. I had to consider the implications for Pixar, for my family, for my reputation. I decided that I didn't

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[38] As Gary Genosko (2002) puts it, "There are different kinds of subjectivity, but they are always of the group" (p. 75).

[39] His desire to be like Dylan even reached pathologically creepy proportions in the 80s, when he dated Joan Baez for two years (see Isaacson, 2012).

really care, because this is what I want to do. If I try my best and fail, well, I tried my best. (Jobs, 2011, p. 91)

There are several clichés and truisms of the American entrepreneurial spirit running through Jobs's self-mythologization. But the nugget that interests us here is the thoroughly modern distinction between the will of the artist and the will of all others ("the outside world"). Fans and followers and critics ("who prophesize with their *pens*") are of no account in Jobs's understanding of the creative self, and neither are the networks of techniques and technologies that cut across it. Jobs's role model is *not* the highly differentiated recording industry that made Dylan's mass reach possible, or Edison's cylinder phonograph and its ancestors, or the noisy amps Dylan overdrove at Newport, or the typewriters he clacked away on in cars and above cafés (which might not have been surprising, given that Jobs was in the writing machines business), or the soundmen, or the groupies. It's Dylan. "That's *Bob* Dylan," as he reminded his shareholders in 1984.

As if following a script written by Jobs, the outpouring of obituaries following his death in 2011 sought to understand the entrepreneur's contributions in a Dylanesque, Romantic light. At the same time that Occupy Wall Street gathered momentum (which we will think more about in the next chapter), Jobs was admired for his talent, for his eccentric *je ne sais quoi*, and for his determination to change the world using only his gut as guide. In one of the more sycophantic remembrances, Michael Malone in *The Wall Street Journal* writes:

Every generation produces a few individuals whose will to restructure the world in their own image is so powerful that they seem to distort reality itself. They

change the world, not always for the better—and that in the U.S. they often

choose to pursue entrepreneurship and industry rather than politics is one of the

uncelebrated blessings of American capitalism. Mr. Jobs—who emerged from an

uncertain childhood brilliant, charismatic and charged with an ambition that

would make most mortals blush—is one of those figures, a fact recognized even

before he reached adulthood. As his fame and power grew, so did the reach of his

will. … He began that arc by willing the modern personal computer into

existence. (Malone, 2011, n.p.)

The original Macintosh team consisted of dozens of artists, engineers and programmers,

and at the time of Jobs's death Apple employed thousands of collaborating thinkers,

which is all aside from the fact that Apple definitely did not single-handedly "[will] the

modern personal computer into existence" (see Friedman, 2005; Streeter, 2011). This is

only to scratch the surface of a digital discourse network also involving coltan mining in

the Democratic Republic of Congo, manufacturing in the notorious Foxconn factory in

China, the intellectual work of ad agencies, and the affective labour of sales and service

representatives.[40] Underneath the smooth handwriting that Jobs is thought to have

scribbled across the IT industry we might consider the high-speed algorithms that motor

trade and speculation (including of Apple stock) at lightning speeds; as Geert Lovink

(2011) writes, "The autonomous western individual is delegating skills and knowledge to

what Clay Shirky terms the 'Algorithmic Authority,' and instead of gaining power, this

act of outsourcing only further weakens the subject'" (pp. 33-34). And yet, Jobs's

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[40] On the exploitative nature of global ICT production from various perspectives, see Taffel (2012), Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter (2009), Gabrys (2011), Nest (2011), and Pasquinelli (2008). The serious game company Molleindustria (2011) has also explored these various levels of the digital discourse network in their game *Phone Story*.

individualized, Romantic face is the "black hole" through which these complex systems are recognized as the simple expression of one talented man—a brilliant demigod who is encumbered neither by machines nor by trends but who pushes through his own will onto the noise of reality. As Jobs put it in the "famous" commencement speech he gave at Stanford, "don't be trapped by dogma—which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the *noise* of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice." A new T-shirt with this poetry emblazoned across the front is only a click away.

It is not only Jobs who can write in this noise-cancelling manner. We can become like Dylan too with the transparent vessels of creativity Apple offers. The Romanticism of American computing does not begin with Jobs or Apple, as Thomas Streeter (2011) has explained in detail.[41] But Apple has made particularly synergistic use of Romanticism, framing both the corporation itself and the tools it produces as conduits of immediacy (the former serving the artist Jobs, the latter serving the consumer). As far back as the original Apple logo, though it was soon abandoned in favour of the minimalist fruit image, we find an inscription by the Romantic poet William Wordsworth. The forgotten co-founder of Apple Ronald Wayne recalls:

> They had hit upon using the name of Apple … And around the border I put in the philosophical comment: 'A mind forever voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.' Which of course comes from the Wordsworth sonnet. And that line seemed to fit perfectly with the whole concept of this wonderful new product. (in *Welcome to Macintosh*, 2008)

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[41] Streeter fascinatingly connects the ideologies of Romanticism to the neoliberalist market fundamentalism of the 1980s. Yet, again, for Streeter Romanticism's "blind spots concern social relations and historical context" (2011, p. 178), whereas I am moving here towards a more post-humanist and media-theoretical consideration of communication and subjectivity.

A mind thinking alone must be without collaborators or material agents of inscription, and this claim to transparency cuts across the whole history of their marketing campaigns, from the famous "1984" ad which frames the Mac as intuitive guerrilla weapon,[42] to the "*Think* Different" ads, to the recent campaign featuring cool Mac Guy versus dully bureaucratic Windows Guy, through to recent product names (e.g. iGadgets). In addition to thought, however, we now voyage through the strange seas of sound and information alone, as Michael Bull's (2007) fascinating study of the individualizing and isolating dimensions of iPod culture has made clear, and it is entirely appropriate that Dylan be called upon to appear in an iPod add, being Jobs' appointed patron saint of solipsistic individualization. A television spot in 2002 nicely sums up this long legacy: "Mac OS10 gets out of your way, whereas Windows wants to constantly be in your face all the time" (EveryAppleAds, 2012). The Mac and its little cousins get out of your way so you can just be, voyaging alone, unencumbered by others or by anything: "I can't hear you anymore."

Apple's extensive product-placement strategies and marketing campaigns over the past three decades make a complete account of the various meanings attached to their brand unwieldy; immediacy, individuality, and usability are recurring tropes. The Showtime comedy series *Californication* (2007–present) is worth brief consideration, however, because it takes writing and creativity as its primary themes and in many ways offers an exemplary representation of Apple products as vessels of authenticity. The

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[42] It has not often been noted that the screen in the 1984 Macintosh ad is "hyper-mediated" (cf. Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Opaque data and numbers crowd the interface between the mindless crowd and the "Big Brother" character. The hammer wielded by the colourful nomad, however, appears as sincere, immediate expression.

show's protagonist Hank Moody (played by David Duchovny) is a successful writer, whose first novel *God Hates Us All* was a darkly existentialist and erotic look at postmodern American life. He seems modeled after his Beat forebears, a television-ready pastiche of Kerouac, Dylan, and Archie Bunker. Like some of his antecedents, Hank drinks and fornicates excessively (though his "spiritual" connection with his daughter's mother seems inviolable), pastimes which make writing difficult yet also constitute the necessary raw material for his inspired writing sessions. However, though the series follows the life of a creative labourer, we see Moody compose only a handful of times. He first breaks past his writer's block on a trip back to New York City, which we do not witness, as he simply returns to L.A. with a manuscript completed over a two-week burst. In the second season, Hank agrees to write a biography of a record producer, which he seems to complete in a single sitting. The artist needs only to live authentically, which for Hank involves exceedingly heteronormative sexual adventures, and then it will all pour forth.

What kind of tool can facilitate this explosive reservoir of expressivity? On one hand, he seems decidedly analog. Hank complains of his daughter's frequent cell-phone usage, throwing her device against the wall in a rage in one episode, and he finishes the rock producer's biography on a typewriter. He offends a girlfriend by criticizing her use of IRC jargon ("BRB," etc.), and in a flashback to the nineties, the time during which he was working on the novel for which he would become successful and famous, we see that he was working with an electric typewriter. He even composes a crucial bit of text on this machine: a love letter to Karen, who he has just learned is pregnant. Moody takes himself as a craftsman, and the mechanical sound and feel of the typewriter seems suited to this

self-image (see Wershler-Henry, 2005). The typewriter is between a tool and a machine, according to Martin Heidegger (see Kittler, 1999), but Hank's vigorous and passionate clacking of keys seems to push the scales towards the former.

On the other hand, when he does need a digital channel for his irrepressible will-to-expression, he is an Apple man. Hank reluctantly agrees to begin writing a blog about life in Los Angeles in season one, and he heads to an Apple Store to get suited up (an image of which is included in the show's intro sequence). We see him lounging around, hung-over, in several scenes with his Macbook, and when his lover Karen moves back to New York it is through Apple products that they stay in touch. Alan Liu (2004) has explored the contemporary culture of "cool" in the immaterial workplace, and Hank fits right in: he is a constant critic of Hollywood filmmaking, he self-identifies as a vestige of integrity in America's symbolic cultural wasteland, and yet we are happy to watch him grumpily sell his writings so that he can further fund his comic, hedonistic escapades. The crystal interface of the Mac makes it the exemplary writing tool for this author-persona.

Ironically, when Hank's literary agent and sidekick Charlie Runkle is digitally surveilled masturbating at work while surfing the internet (which leads to his humiliation and termination), Runkle's Mac-like personal computer, with its smooth white curves, serves as his portal to the World Wide Web. But the Apple logo is nowhere to be seen. Real Macs are for being artists and perhaps for videophone pillow talk with loved ones. Aspects of the dark underbelly of digital culture (e.g. compulsive connection [Turkle, 2011], circulation without communication [Dean, 2009], pornography [Pasquinelli, 2008], and workplace surveillance [Dyer-Witheford, 1999]), are included because of the

comedic possibilities, but product placement seeks to escape such moments because they call Apple's diagram of clear expressivity into question.

Feedback Squeal #2: "Chaosmosis" and Machinic Faciality

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) observe that "[d]esiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down" (p. 8). Creativity is corralled by molar sinkholes like capitalist faciality but constantly de- and re-territorialized by competing blocs and forces. The Cartesian ego, the Lockean labourer and communicator, and the Romantic author, for instance, are abstract machines of subjectivity that still persist in various discourses and fields but which are necessarily and constantly under threat. Cybernetics, anonymity, hacktivism, and tactical media are just a few domains wherein their ability to self-replicate has become compromised. Guattari emphasizes the role that material media theory can play in such micro-political processes of de- and re-subjectivation:

> Just as social machines can be grouped under the general title of Collective Equipment, technological machines of information and communication operate at the heart of human subjectivity, not only within its memory and intelligence, but within its sensibility, affects and unconscious fantasms. Recognition of these machinic dimensions of subjectivation leads us to insist, in our attempt at redefinition, on the heterogeneity of the components leading to the production of subjectivity. (1995, p. 4)

Guattari revels in the multiplicity of ways and possibilities of being. But his theoretical project is not about cancelling out false subjectivities in favour of the truest ones. Rather, the ethico-aesthetic projectiles he launches across his solo work aim to amplify and cross-

pollinate our limits. Guattari's theory is a bandwidth boost for collective forms of co-existence and praxis.

Thus faciality (which we have seen function as an imprint of capitalist, serial individualities) is always already disintegrating. An "ethico-aesthetic" apprehension of the face, and the messages it sends, would look straight into the eyes of our sincere poets but see beyond them, straight down to the heterogenous, medial ground upon which the self can only seem to stand: "Neither the symbolic entry into the order of faciality nor transcendent symbolic facialities exist. Faciality can oscillate to the side of serial identification, but it can also operate on behalf of desiring machines" (2011, p. 76). In this spirit we can consider how Dylan, although he did so much, perhaps unwittingly, for our Macs' GUIs, also helps us to "think different" for real. At least, let us give it a shot.

4.6   Dylan's Channels

One of the Mac's key marketable features was usability: if you can point, you can use a Mac, some early ads said. The machine would not get in the way of your need to transmit. When Dylan turned away from protest songs his move was also away from meaning, and away from pointing. "There are no finger-pointing songs in here," he said of *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. And, in 1965, he lampooned artists who would serve only as *informational* relays, a practice he had seemed to take pride in only a few years earlier: "Message songs, as everybody knows, are a drag. … What I'm going to do is rent Town Hall and put about thirty Western Union boys on the bill. I mean, then there'll really be some messages" (quoted in Shelton, 1997, p. 287).

Dylan's mid-sixties songs indeed moved away from content (which both Dylan and McLuhan agreed was a drag) and towards the media that might carry them. We are repeatedly drawn to communication diagrams in which messages do not arrive, in which they joyously (sometimes anxiously) morph or mutate over the course of transmission. Machines of various sorts get in the way. In "Black Crow Blues" (1973) the speaker listens to billboards flapping in the breeze, his wrist without a watch but his nerves "kickin', tickin' like a clock" (p. 124). In "Chimes of Freedom" (1973) he is again tuned in to unlikely frequencies, shadows emerging from sounds and ringing chimes exploding into flashing lights. There seems to be no decipherable meaning in these synesthetic signals, however: "Through the wild cathedral evening the rain unraveled tales / For the disrobed faceless forms of no position / Tolling for the tongues with no place to bring their thoughts" (1973, p. 126). Dylan had championed the down-and-out in earlier songs; here he seems rather to champion the "faceless" and "disrobed" materialities of communication—the "tongues with no place to bring their thoughts" (tongues which must not have access to a Mac).

Similar images of channels, noise, and translation run through the three rock albums. In "Mr. Tambourine Man" (1973) laughter, spinning, and swinging are broadcasted but "not aimed at anyone" (p. 167) in particular. Tambourines, of course, are not the best conduits for *songs*; the speaker seems drawn rather to the thing itself, its jingle-jangle, which comes to pervade the entire landscape, even time (e.g. "your jingle-jangle morning"). In "It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry" the narrator "went to tell everybody, but … could not get across" (1973, p. 188). And in "Visions of Johanna":

> Lights flicker from the opposite loft
>
> In this room the heat pipes just cough
>
> The country music station plays soft
>
> But there's nothing, really nothing to turn off (1973, p. 207)

The song as a whole is an appropriately obscure meditation on interpretation. How are we to receive information? It is clear that to focus on the sending of signals from point A to point B is sometimes to veil the possibilities of becoming, because there's nothing to turn off—no signal, only the medium itself, coughing, flickering, getting in the middle. In the strange but stunning final stanza, "the harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain / and these visions of Johanna are now all that remain" (1973, p. 208). Thinking back to "folk" Dylan's "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall," his poetic voice was once in self-present control: "And I'll tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it" (1973, p. 39).[43] By 1966's *Blonde on Blonde*, however, the poet's Romantic face and voice seems to have splintered out into a constellation of sources and secret channels.

Sending, receiving, and noise are frequent motifs throughout Dylan's mid-sixties period. In terms of general stylistic shift, we can also consider how the typewriter imprinted itself across his work.[44] Darren Wershler-Henry (2005) has explored typewriting as a modern technological assemblage. Connecting typewriting discourse to

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[43] When poet Allan Ginsburg recalled hearing Dylan for the first time, he remembered this line in particular; he claims to have cried because he recognized that a younger generation was carrying on the torch of the Beats (in Scorsese, 2007).

[44] I have found varying accounts as to how Dylan composed into his rock period. Clinton Heylin (2009) claims that Dylan would continue to write primarily with a pen or pencil, using a typewriter only to revise. This does not seem supportable to me, going by the first-hand accounts of Baez and Robertson cited below. Regardless, images of Dylan at a typewriter began to circulate increasingly into his rock/"poet-genius" period, and his work clearly begins to explore a "typewritten" aesthetic, no matter how he actually composed.

Paul Virilio's thoughts of modernity as a "dromocratic revolution," he explores how

authors like Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs explored new registers of both

discipline and play—the will-to-speed being a central feature of typewriting culture

(Wershler-Henry, 2005). The speed of typing runs wild through Dylan's rock work as

well. His folksy syntax famously explodes into often-illogical jumbles of images and

rhymes, a move for which we might give the typewriter equal credit. Indeed, Truman

Capote's snide description of Kerouac's work ("That's not writing, it's typing") applies

equally to Dylan's "electrified" material; one can almost picture the keys clacking along

with the raucous opener of *Bringing it All Back Home*:

> Johnny's in the basement
> Mixing up the medicine
> I'm on the pavement
> Thinking about the government
> The man in the trench coat
> Badge out, laid off
> Says he's got a bad cough
> Wants to get it paid off
> Look out kid
> It's somethin' you did
> God knows when
> But you're doin' it again
> You better duck down the alley way
> Lookin' for a new friend
> The man in the coon-skip cap
> In the big pen
> Wants eleven dollar bills
> You only got ten (1973, p. 160)

The machinic propulsion of Dylan's cadence pulls us away from any referents and towards the signifiers themselves, which is the mark of the typewriter according to Kittler (1999) and Wershler-Henry (2005). Rather than the individual poet reaching into his genius to express a poem, the song seems to be written (and sung) by a machine, the poet in turn having become only a typist.

The face of the typewriter looks a bit different than the face of the Romantic poet. Whereas "folk" Dylan claimed to have used a pencil to take down the songs already waiting for him, consider Joan Baez's description of Dylan's new assemblage:

> Bob stood at the typewriter in the corner of his room, drinking red wine and smoking and tapping away relentlessly for hours. And in the dead of night, he would wake up, grunt, grab a cigarette, and stumble over to the typewriter again. *He was turning out songs like ticker tape*. (quoted in Heylin, 2001, p. 169; emphasis added)

The integrity of the finished poem is discarded here in favour of an endless reel of letters on pages: "i will nail my words to this paper, an fly them on to you. an forget about them…thank you for the time. youre kind" (p. 11), as he puts it in his "novel" *Tarantula* (1971), which was written in the mid sixties but not published until 1971. As has often been the case in typewriting culture, this machinic process makes who or what is actually writing difficult to discern (Wershler-Henry, 2005). As the liner notes of *Highway 61 Revisited* conclude:

> I cannot say the word eye any more. . . . when I speak this word eye, it is as if I am speaking of somebody's eye that I faintly remember. . . . there is no eye— there is only a series of mouths—long live the mouths—your rooftop—if you don't already know—has been demolished. . . . eye is plasma & you are right

about that too—you are lucky—you don't have to think about such things as eyes & rooftops & quazimodo. (1973, p. 182)

The integrity of the singular subject, who reaches into his soul for his poems, is shattered at the hand of this new appendage. No longer just one voice, he now seems to be a hydra-headed many, with no use for "I"/eyes any longer (which is fitting given that, as Kittler [1999] has explained, typewriters were initially designed for the blind). It is also fitting that Dylan describes his de-territorialized subjectivity as "a series of mouths": he would also refer to the draft typescript of "Like a Rolling Stone" as "a long piece of vomit" (quoted in Heylin, 2009, p. 240).

Some descriptions of Dylan typing manage to position the machine as just another tool. Consider Robbie Robertson's (2004) description of Dylan's writing process:

When he and I went to Nashville in 1966, to work on *Blonde on Blonde*, it was the first time I'd ever seen a songwriter writing songs on a typewriter. We'd go to the studio, and he'd be finishing up the lyrics to some of the songs we were going to do. I could hear this typewriter—click, click, click, ring, really fast. He was typing these things out so fast; there was so much to be said. (p. 66)

Like Hank Moody or Kerouac or Steve Jobs, Dylan's integrity as discrete and soulful subject above remains intact, the typewriter being only a spigot hanging off his wellspring of creativity. But one of Dylan's most iconic performances on film interestingly problematizes this model, lending credence to my reading of him as typist. In D. A. Pennebaker's cinéma vérité documentary *Don't Look Back* (1967), the film opens with a proto-music video of "Subterranean Homesick Blues." Dylan appears in the middle of an alleyway holding a stack of cue cards (Allen Ginsberg and Bobby Neuwirth

appearing to chant to the side, behind a garbage bin). The white cards contain text of nouns and phrases delivered over the course of the song (but not the entire work, and not always accurately transcribed). As the music plays, Dylan silently drops the cards, struggling to keep up with the beat, often falling behind. This ghostly presentation of material textuality and speed emasculates the poet of both his voice and hand. The song seems to write itself, the phrases and lines interchangeable just like any one key or inscription surface on a typewriter. Dylan's cool face seems cloudy and impenetrable here; he is only plugged into a series of mouths and machines, along for the ride.[45]

4.7   Conclusion

We have seen a few different versions of Dylan: the folk channel of collaborative ancestors, the expressive individual, and the media-materialist schizoid assemblage. Steve Jobs understood Dylan's face as a window between Dylan's own brilliance and a public struggling to catch up. This Dylan's connection with transparent vessels of creativity was translated (even if it was not the only source) into Apple's rhetoric of microcomputers as tools of personal liberation. Yet, by putting Kittler and Guattari to work on some perhaps unlikely texts, we have seen that there are other ways of downloading Dylan's output in the sixties. Dylan the typist's ego seeped out towards the margins of the page, revealing his other faces to be only glitches.

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[45] Others have discussed Dylan's theatricality as a star and as an artist (see Cossu, 2012; Marshall, 2007; Shank, 2002; Williams, 1994). Indeed, his current popular image—as articulated in Todd Haynes's film *I'm Not There* (2007)—is of a consummate performance artist. But "machinic faciality" moves us away from these dramaturgical readings. As Guattari (2011) puts it, "it is not legitimate to bring faciality back to a theatrical mask, as the Etruscan etymology of 'persona' would wrongfully result in doing. This would suppose that a profound, authentic, originary, inalienable faciality would continue to exist behind this superimposed masks" (p. 81).

So aside from Jobs and his smooth white gadgets, we could consider other descendants of Dylan and his typewriter. Perhaps reminding us of Dylan's poor reception in Newport's garden of the folk (he was booed there, after all) Molleindustria's highly critical app *Phone Story* (2011) was banned from the App Store within a few hours of its posting. "Let me tell you the story of this phone while I provide you with quality entertainment," the game begins. The player gets to: point semi-automatics at children toiling in a coltan mine; save suicidal Chinese factory workers, who have jumped from the top of the Foxconn factory to their deaths, with a trampoline; launch shiny commodities at zombie-like consumers who charge your store; and, finally, recycle the materials on a dangerous assembly line before it all plays over again on account of built-in obsolescence. Pete Seeger only cried out for an axe. Apple, on the other hand, had one ready, and they cut the cord. But there are deeper parallels between Dylan and Molleindustria, for *Phone Story* too refocuses our attention away from clear transmissions and towards the meat and grime on the thing itself, including manufacturing and marketing work, but also the algorithmic pleasures we derive from digital games. Molleindustria's tactical media interventions are much more overtly political than Dylan's rock records (these games are akin to what Dylan called "finger-pointing songs"). Still, both Dylan and *Phone Story* foreground the channel and the desiring-machines below our only apparently clear interfaces. This in itself is often worth doing, if only because it gives that other faciality a fat lip or three.

Chapter 5 – The Hootenanny, Smule Apps, and the Folk 3.0

Our planet is full of singing people. (Pete Seeger, 1972, p. 149)

Smule's mission is to connect the world through music. (Smule, 2012a)

The best song, you don't even have to yell it—you just double up your fists, roll up your sleeves, and thump it out on any convenient silk hat. (Woody Guthrie, 1975, p. 139)

5.1 Introduction

It has been tempting, for fans of folk music, to celebrate the creative possibilities afforded by Web 2.0 as a sign of the resurgence of something like a folk revival. Despite Google's monstrous position in the global information industries, the collaborative and DIY aesthetic of some corners of YouTube seem to hearken back to the authorless folk body as influentially articulated by Johann Gottfried Herder or the Brothers Grimm in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Burgess & Green, 2009). Some American folklorists in the early twentieth century were interested in the aspects of performance that cannot be documented by writing or by print—Alan Lomax, as I have explored above, prophetically envisioned folk music as an embodied and multi-media experience—and digital networks would also seem to be an ideal channel for the interactive folk process Lomax described. At long last, after the false start that was

television, we have Marshall McLuhan's (2003) "global village" for real: folkloristic authenticity as a byproduct of digital convergence culture.[46]

Many scholars and journalists have taken the bait.[47] David Dunaway (2010), for instance, has divided the history of folk revivalism in the United States into three periods. His first wave lumps together a wide range of collectors, researchers, and activists, from ethnographers who documented Aboriginal languages and cultures with their cylinder phonographs in the late-nineteenth century to the more overtly political and propagandizing efforts of Alan Lomax, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger in the thirties and forties. Next is the "folk boom," which featured the mass-commercial success in the fifties of the Weavers and then the Kingston Trio, which then blossomed in the early to mid sixties with the national coverage of the Greenwich Village scene, the Newport Folk Festival, and the folksong-fueled Civil Rights movement (Dunaway, 2010). Happily, the folk revival has returned again, according to Dunaway, beginning in the late eighties and early nineties, and the World Wide Web has been a key source of the new varieties of folk expression recently on offer: "They are pulling out songbooks or warped records from their parents' folk revival, learning to play an instrument or two, and then performing for their Myspace friends or the virtual audience" (2010, p. 4). Dunaway (2010) cites a *Rolling Stone* article from 2007 that dubs this the "YouTube Folk Revival"

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[46] Indeed, understandings of digital media as somehow fostering a return to a participatory or folk culture have become cliché. More famous examples of such positions include the work of Henry Jenkins, Howard Rheingold, and Lawrence Lessig.

[47] And, amazing if we consider the vicious debates over the meaning of authenticity that have unfolded across its pages (see Bendix, 1997), the *Journal of American Folklore* has recently begun to publish work on video games and net culture as objects of folklore. Kiri Miller (2008) has recently explored the folkloristic qualities of the game *Grand Theft Auto*, and Robert Glenn Howard (2008) has pondered the vernacular aspects of digital networks, taking blogging as a case study.

(p. 4), which is defined by a reliance on networked personal computers. With guitar and social media in hand, anyone (at least anyone with a webcam, computer, and internet connection) can interpret any song they like and contribute to an ongoing and apparently organic process.

One could consider the developer Smule's popular line of iPhone apps as part of this neo-folk media constellation. Their products—including *Ocarina*, *Ocarina 2*, *Magic Piano*, *IAMTPAIN*, and *Sing!*—allow users to transform their sleek gadgets into expressive and simple instruments, ironically using complex algorithms and Artificial Intelligence to do so, often foregrounding the voice of the user as a key component of recombinant musical texts. Smule apps seem to answer Woody Guthrie's call to his fellow citizens that they must, and inevitably will, soon remember how to sing; they allow us to join together in song by fostering digitalized reincarnations of our most "organic" and "timeless" instruments of all, our voices.

I want both to problematize and to more deeply explore the narrative that Dunaway and others have constructed of the digital return of the folk. By travelling from the late thirties to the present, this chapter is going to excavate a couple of different models of communication that can be found littered across the long, intertwining histories of folk revivalism and digital culture in the United States. First we will examine the Hootenanny, initially a form of rent party made popular in New York City in the 1940s by the group the Almanac Singers. We will see that the Hootenanny (and the ideals that were attached to the concert format) constituted a complex site of *convergence* of a range of interests, styles, media, and performance genres. However, for the Almanacs there were explicitly political aspirations at stake as well; the Hootenanny constituted a

machinic, networked body through which bourgeois distinctions, it was believed, were challenged. Second, I will explore how the utopian vision of a community joined in song has also been taken up recently by *Ocarina*, *Sing!*, and other Smule iPhone apps. Drawing on the critical literature on "prosumption" as a novel form of exploitation, however, as well as Jodi Dean's work on politics in an age of "communicative capitalism," I will ultimately consider how the techno-authentic mediation idealized by the Almanacs has trickled down to a narcissistic will-to-be-"in touch" in mainstream digital culture.

This will not only be a tragic story of incorporation, however, or a lament for the good old days of the "face-to-face" folk revival. In the third and final section, I will draw connections between the Hootenannies of the Almanacs and the more recent "People's Microphone" of the Occupy movement. Because public address systems were banned in Zuccotti Park, New York City, where thousands gathered in the fall of 2011 to protest skyrocketing political and economic inequalities in the United States, occupiers utilized a collective means of amplification that involved the repetition by a crowd of individual statements (and, sometimes, songs). I read the People's Microphone as a site where the communicative dreams of the folk revival have been reimagined and repurposed. Building on but slightly departing from other scholars who have argued that the popularity of the People's Mic marks a return to orality in our contemporary media ecology (King, 2012; Ruby, 2011), I will attempt to read the performance insofar as it both engages with and critiques the logics of distributed digital networks.

5.2   The Hootenanny

The word "Hootenanny" came to Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie in the late thirties, when the two were touring the country together, playing union rallies and anywhere else they could get a quarter or two. The trip is often cited (by himself, and by critics and biographers) as an important educational experience for Seeger, who was the younger and more inexperienced of the two; this is where Seeger is thought to have learned how to win over potentially hostile audiences, which anticipated his ceaseless drive to perform for all who would listen (see Dunaway, 1981; Seeger, 1972). But there was another important discovery to be made on this tour: in Seattle they found themselves playing a monthly political fundraiser that their hosts called the "Hootenanny." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Hootenanny's pre-revival meaning was "thing-u-ma-jing" or "gadget"—a playfully pragmatic catchall with technological connotations. Thus even in this early incarnation in Seattle, the word prefigures elements of digital networks. All sorts of practices and activities could be transmitted through an all-encompassing frame of celebration: food, music, camaraderie, causes, etc. The Hootenanny was a "downhome" channel of convergence.

The connection of "Hootenanny" with folk and leftwing musical expression was somewhat accidental, as we can perhaps imagine Guthrie and Seeger finding any number of other semi-archaic terms to employ, such as "pod," which shares a similar etymology.[48] But nonetheless the word would soon become attached to parties and

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[48] According to Apple folklore, the "pod" of "iPod" was inspired by Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (which in its time also expressed an anti-IBM theme). But one of pod's archaic meanings is "the

concerts held at the "Almanac House" in Greenwich Village, New York City. The residents there, which included Guthrie and Seeger, began to hold "Hootenannies" on Sundays when they were short on rent, and the events soon became popular, festive events where many notable folksingers and performers might drop by on any given weekend, such as Alan Lomax, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Lead Belly. But the "Almanac Singers" who lived there were perhaps the mainstays. Featuring a revolving membership that included Guthrie, Seeger, Sis Cunningham, Lee Hays, Gordon Friesen, and Millard Lampell, the Almanac Singers embodied the turn to nativism in left-wing American cultural politics in the mid to late thirties (Cohen, 2002; Denisoff, 1971; Reuss, 2000). As both Serge Denisoff (1971) and Ronald D. Cohen (2002) have recounted, the Composers Collective had earlier in the thirties tried to prod "the masses" into class-consciousness using European avant-garde forms; but in the wake of the Lomaxes's efforts, and broader shifts in Soviet cultural policy, we have the Almanacs, who were committed to using the language and music of the American "folk" (as they saw it) to spread their gospels of solidarity and class warfare.[49] As Robert Cantwell describes their style: "None was a trained singer. Accents, phrasing, vocal timbre, and range, all mixed, both among the

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socket of a brace into which the end of a bit is inserted" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Fascinatingly, Gordon Friesen's recollection of the original usage of "Hootenanny" points in a similar direction: "Hootenanny had been in use in rural America from way back to designate something you didn't know the exact name of. Say, for example, a couple of farm boys in Oklahoma might be overhauling a 'T-bone Ford' out behind the barn with pieces spread all around, and in fitting them back together one might say to the other, 'that thing-a-ma-jig goes here and that hootenanny goes there'" (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999, p. 211).

[49] They did, however, abandon this pacifist commitment in the latter stages of their existence, after Adolf Hitler broke his non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union. Many on the left in the United States decided to come together and join in the struggle against fascism—the idea being that they would deal with class struggle after the war (Denisoff, 1971; Reuss, 2000).

singers and with each individually, with a disarmingly unprofessional heterogeneity that

drew on a number of flatly incompatible traditions" (1996, p. 140). The Almanac

Singers' Hootenannies, then, were embodiments and extensions of this eclectic,

heterogeneous performance ideal. Folksingers, comedians, activists, and storytellers were

all welcome, and the audience too was expected to join in on the choruses or even take a

turn leading the group.

But what exactly happened at these parties? What did they signify? How did they

feel? Scholars of the folksong movement such as Cantwell are working with unreliable

remembrances and a long-simmering process of mythologization when they write about

the Almanac's Hootenannies, because the fleeting events went mostly undocumented. In

the fifties, Folkways did release two LPs of "Hootenannies," but these live recordings

were made long after the disintegration of the Almanac House in the mid forties, after

which "Hootenanny" concerts in New York had begun to grow in size and had become

more of a brand associated with a particular group of performers and friends than a

distinctly participatory concert format (Roy, 2010). Eventually the word "Hootenanny"

found its way to magazine covers, Hollywood teen films, and an ABC television series;

as Ronald D. Cohen (2002) describes the craze: "'Hootenanny' became attached not only

to a show and countless records, but also sweat shirts, pinball machines, shoes, paper

dolls, even vacations and Ford dealerships; the New Jersey's Palisades Amusement Park

had a Miss Hootenanny contest" (p. 200). But even if the original Almanac Hootenannies

are misremembered or idealized, and even if the signifier eventually all but emptied

itself, we can take the Almanac-era utopian idea as a ritualized model of communication:

knowledge and culture not as a point-to-multipoint transmission (which is the

characteristic process of the mass-media industries, as the Almanacs themselves were well aware) but as a multipoint-to-multipoint interaction.[50] For instance, in the liner notes to the Folkways record *Hootenanny at Carnegie Hall*, *Sing Out!* editor Irwin Silber (1960) lists essential features of the performance form: "(1) Audience participation; (2) Topicality; (3) Variety; (4) New performers; (5) The audience" (pp. 2-4). Silber's descriptive topography of the Hootenanny posits a diverse, collaborative, self-replicating structure ("authentic" but also sensitive to new historical events and new generations, as is evinced by "topicality" and "variety"). The Hootenanny was a distributed network that involved the dynamic circulation of knowledge and affect across audience members, performers, and songs. The Almanacs have been critiqued for effectively "preaching to the choir" (Denisoff, 1971; Roy, 2010), but in theory anyone could plug into the circuit. Indeed, as is the case with more recent digital networks, the more connections the better.

5.3   Voices as Machines: weHootenanny Technology

I want now to think more deeply about the media ecology within which the Hootenannies were situated. Was this a garden of intimacy, a face-to-face homage to the already-eroding public sphere? Popular music scholars have pointed to the valuation of "live" performance by the mid-century revivalists (e.g. Frith, 1981; Keightley, 2001). As I have explored above, however, there are interesting moments where the long revival's

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[50] In his book *When We Were Good*, Robert Cantwell (1996) approaches similarly Bakhtinian territory: "It was a music of symbolic social leveling but not, as the federal agent supposed, one of social control. Quite the contrary: the audience had in effect been invited to one of the Almanacs singing hootenannies or rent parties, where people often widely divergent socially—upper class and working class, Jewish and gentile, black and white, easterner, southerner, and westerner—put these distinctions aside in a spirit of festive mutuality in a space apart from the quotidian world of social mistrust, suspicion, resentment, and conflict. This was a manifestly *popular* or people's music …" (p. 142).

ideals of immediacy and "liveness" disintegrate. Alan Lomax fetishizes his sound-recording machines (and the mainframe computers he worked with later in his career) at times richly and provocatively in his writings. He even works towards a productive yet anomalous understanding of digitalization in the context of early-nineties cyberculture. And Pete Seeger's understanding of the folk process is grounded in a media ontology that John Durham Peters (1999) has described as *dissemination*: folk-musical expression involves not the intimate fostering of dialogue, in other words, but the broadcasting of the mediatized seeds of the folk.

The Almanac Singers too, as well as the topical songwriting movement more broadly, considered singing to be a hybrid media form. The "Almanac" in the group's name refers to the only book, aside from the Bible, that rural Southern families were said to have kept in the house (Wilkinson, 2009).[51] The group was a living text, then, a remediation of collective, singing struggle with the printed word. As well, Phil Ochs's (1964) formulation "all the news that's fit to sing"—which sums up the broader topical songwriting movement of the sixties, inspired by the Almanacs—figures oral expression through the parameters of print and writing.[52] Topical songwriters were aiming their voices (qua newsprint, qua radio broadcasts) at the noises emanating from states and corporations. In this light, the voice is not a pre-modern relic of nature, then, but a wired,

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[51] As the group themselves put it, "a farmhouse would have two books in the house, a Bible and an Almanac. One helped us to the next world, the other helped us make it through this one" (quoted in Farell, 1997).

[52] *Broadside* was spearheaded by former Almanac Singers Agnes "Sis" Cunningham and Gordon Friesen, who believed that *Sing Out!* was not giving enough attention to the burgeoning topical songwriting phenomenon ("topical" songs used folk melodies and chord structures but lyrically explored contemporary, often political, issues). To name just a few, the magazine amplified the pens of Malvina Reynolds, Phil Ochs, and Bob Dylan, whose anthem "Blowing in the Wind" found its first audience through *Broadside's* pages.

greased, loaded gun. As Woody Guthrie put it, "a song will shoot straighter than a long bore 32-20, and do more damage than the biggest cannon" (1990, p. 83).

A closer consideration of Guthrie, co-founder of and frequent participant in the Almanacs' Hootenannies, can further extend our image of the early Hootenanny participants' complex understandings of media. Although the photographs we have of him portray a wandering field worker, and though he tended towards Luddite sentiments in some of his early writings,[53] Guthrie also occasionally explored the remediation of folk instruments within distinctly modern media ecologies.[54] In keeping with the progressive spirit of the times, he famously labeled his acoustic guitar a fascist-killing *machine*. But the voice and the body also occasionally seem to be components within a larger system. For instance, in his "Car Song" Guthrie revels in the experience of speed that derives from plugging into an automobile, his voice even playfully mimicking a motor in the chorus:

> Take me ridin' in the car, car
> Take me ridin' in the car, car
> Take you ridin' in the car, car
> I'll take you ridin' in the car

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[53] When wearing his Luddite hat, it is usually deskilling and the unemployment stemming from automation that are Guthrie's biggest problems with technology. As he writes of film and sound recording, for instance: "One or two preferred folks get on the screen or on wax or on the air—and hole flocks go without" (1975, p. 126).

[54] Billy Bragg and Wilco's *Mermaid Avenue* collection, which involved the artists reimagining unrecorded Guthrie lyrics composed during the fifties primarily in New York City, has allowed for a reconsideration of Guthrie's far-ranging interests as a writer (see Fischer, 1999). Initiated by Guthrie's daughter Nora Guthrie, who oversees the Guthrie archive in New York City, the albums include work that would perhaps have surprised an earlier generation of Guthrie fans (Fischer, 1999). In "Ingrid Bergman," for instance, he uses thinly veiled metaphor to probe his sexual desires for the famous film star: "Ingrid Bergman, you're so purty / You'd make any mountain quiver / You'd make fire fly from the crater, Ingrid Bergman" (Guthrie, 1998). Guthrie here perhaps anticipates audience studies and reception theory.

> Vroom vroom vroom vroom vroom vroom
>
> Vroom vroom vroom vroom vroom vroom (Guthrie, 1999)

The "natural," "organic" voice of Guthrie seems to rev and idle, in between the verses, evoking the larger American desire for gasoline-fueled adventures and experiences.[55] And, although Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" probably still connotes images of rural pastures of plenty, the song is also full of machines and speed:

> As I was walking a ribbon of highway
>
> I saw above me an endless skyway
>
> I saw below me a golden valley
>
> This land was made for you and me
>
> … I've roamed and rambled and I've followed my footsteps
>
> To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts
>
> And all around me a voice was sounding
>
> This land was made for you and me (Guthrie, 1999)

The voice of the song does refer to his feet, as if he is walking across the United States of his own volition. But Guthrie also gestures towards "that ribbon of highway," which was relatively new at the time; as Robert Cantwell sensitively describes it, "the 'ribbon of highway' and 'endless skyway' owe much to Firestone Tires, Pan American Airways, and *Life* magazine, during a period when America's celebration of itself could include, without contradiction, its technological and commercial monuments" (1996, pp. 137-138). We must also wonder if the voice "sounding" all around him is a face-to-face Hootenanny or rather the radio broadcasts bouncing their way across the nation.

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[55] Although he does not discuss "Car Song," Cantwell (1996) also identifies the importance of the car in the Almanac Singers' work and image: "The most important instrument in this effort was the automobile—the Almanacs travelled in a '31 Buick—and after it the portable recording machine" (p. 144).

Guthrie's friend Alan Lomax hosted his own programs on a handful of networks

beginning in the late thirties, and Guthrie too performed on dozens of radio programs in

the thirties and forties, both with the Almanacs and as a solo performer, including on

Norman Corwin's famous *We the People* (see Cray, 2011). "A voice was sounding"

perhaps refers to both the live and the mediated. Or, perhaps here the distinction does not

matter.

Considering the range of technological connotations attributed to the voice in

Guthrie's writings, it is perhaps worthwhile to approach the Hootenanny as a

"diagrammatic" or "abstract machine" as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have

described it: "The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even

something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality"

(1987, p. 142). Machines for Deleuze and Guattari include technical practices and

devices, but also anything that works; recalling the original meanings of both "pod" and

"hootenanny," dynamic and adaptive abstract machines can be plucked from one

structure and inserted into another. They can harmonize with a set of strata or break

through them entirely:

> Either the abstract machines remain prisoner to stratifications, are enveloped in a
> certain specific stratum whose program or unity of composition they define (the
> abstract Animal, the abstract chemical Body, Energy in itself) and whose
> movements of relative deterritorialization they regulate, Or, on the contrary, the
> abstract machine cuts across all stratifications, develops alone and in its own right
> on the plane of consistency whose diagram it constitutes. (1987, p. 56)

Abstract machines are assemblages that help account for change and revolution in

Deleuze and Guattari's framework. Whereas the "flows" of history can be drawn into any

number of striations and sedimentations, abstract machines can disconnect and make themselves available for other uses.

There is a similarity between Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "machinic faciality" and the more general abstract machine. The diagrammatic machine, in particular, is not a clear channel directly transmitting disembodied content, nor is it an immediate conveyor of unmediated authenticity. Diagrammatic or abstract machines are rather an affront to the cybernetic dream of homeostatic, noise-free informational circuits: "transformations that blow apart semiotics systems or regimes of signs on the plane of consistency of a positive absolute deterritorialization are called diagrammatic" (1987, p. 136). Wrenches in the structures of the present, diagrammatic machines produce glitches and noises that point towards new ways of being (cf. Serres, 2007).

Anticipating Deleuze and Guattari's concept of diagrammatic machines, Guthrie vividly represents the machinic character of group singing in his pseudo-autobiographical novel *Bound for Glory* (1968), which he largely pounded out—on a typewriter, letting the pages fall where they may—at the kitchen table of the Almanac House during the period that the Hootenannies were first held in New York. The novel is a *Kunstleroman* of sorts about a folksinger who makes his way out of the Oklahoma dustbowl during the Depression, on the way discovering the power of song in social struggle. "Good" communality is not simply distinguished from "bad" structures of commerce or individuality, however, for Guthrie portrays a complex social and cultural battlefield. Across the opening pages, for instance, we see a violent and chaotic form of collectivity. Bodies and the train cars that carry them seem to mingle together, and yet the wanderers and ramblers have not yet found a connection:

We looked like a gang of lost corpses heading back to the boneyard. Hot in the September heat, tired, mean and mad, cussing and sweating, raving and preaching. Part of us waved our hands in the cloud of dust and hollered out to the whole crowd. Others was too weak, too sick, too hungry or too drunk even to stand up. The train was a highball and had the right of way. (1968, p. 9)

Guthrie vividly portrays a latent mass not yet sensitive to its collective potency and without a common language or channel. Hands wave into the dust and voices "holler," useless, into the crowd; seeds scatter but none seem to find their way to fertile ground. In a striking passage later in the book, we are offered a performance of collectivity and connectivity that sharply contrasts with this earlier representation of pre-political virtuality, and it is the establishment of a common channel and code that is the transformational catalyst. A group of anti-racists confronts thugs and tormenters by standing and singing together:

So as the last car of the train went on down the middle of the street, everybody was singing like church bells ringing up and down the grand canyon of the old Skid Row:

Just like
A treeeee
Standing by
The waterrr
We
Shall not
Be
Mooooooved!

The whole bunch of thugs made a big run at us sailing cuss words of a million filthy, low-down, ratty kind. Gritting their teeth and biting their cigar butts

and frothing at the mouth. Everybody on our side kept singing. They made a dive

to bust into our line. Everyone stood there singing as loud and as clear and as

rough-sounding as a war factory hammering. (p. 356)

Thus the machine that kills fascists is much more than the exterior "axe" that is the

acoustic guitar. Voices and bodies can meld and conjoin, too, forming a throbbing and

propulsive "war machine" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), a steely rhizome of sonic

solidarity.

The performance of Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" carries a similar

affective weight. "All around me a voice is sounding," when sung by a mass of people, is

a performative statement (Austin, 1962)—one hears and sings, and thereby propels into

being, a collective voice.[56] Some sound scholars have suggested that there is no such

thing as an "original" sound, because sounds always also include the material in which

they resonate (e.g. a room, an open space), and materials are always experienced

differently depending on one's point of view (Altman, 1992; Lastra, 2000). In other

words, because we are all stuck in our own, individualized cages of audition, there can be

no "original" sound to speak of but only an endless variety of interpretations, of which

sound *recordings* too can only ever be an interpretation or reading (Lastra, 2000).[57] But

Guthrie imagines a different kind of singing and hearing, whereby it is possible, if even

for a moment, for everyone to hear and sing more or less the same thing. Sounds are

indexical imprints, in Guthrie's utopian model of sending and receiving, they are circuits

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[56] I am indebted here to Homay King's (2012) article on the People's Mic, which he also describes using Austin.

[57] Drawing on a Derridean logic, sound scholar James Lastra (1992) rhetorically asks, "Is it ever possible to be present at the original event, fully?" (p. 82). Lastra has never been to a Hootenanny.

that can wrap together "a gang of lost corpses" into a collective agent. It is the diagrammatic machine called the Hootenanny that makes real this "impossible" way of hearing and singing. "All around me, a voice was sounding."

The Hootenanny was not just a machine of pure and undivided union, however, for the form constitutes a utopian voice marked by both solidarity and multiplicity. Obviously the harmony of group singing was a key feature of political folk performance (see Roy, 2010), but variety and even conflict also marked the Hootenanny as practiced by the Almanacs and as taken up by *Broadside* and *Sing Out!* Both folksong magazines positioned themselves as purveyors of the tradition begun by the Almanacs, but both often emphasized their commitment to the publication of writers and singers whose views conflicted with those of their editorial boards. As issue no. 2 of *Broadside* declaimed: "Our policy is to let each songwriter speak freely—even though we may not freely agree with the sentiments expressed—and let each song cut its own trail" (*Broadside*, 1962, p. 7). Thus the Hootenanny form, which was indeed translatable from performance to print, involved both solidarity and multiplicity. Indeed, you might have to sing along to something you do not like. To do so, for the folkies, seemed important in and of itself.

5.4   Smule Apps

We turn now to some of the revival's unlikely heirs. Jeff Smith and Dr. Ge Wang founded the mobile apps developer Smule in 2008. Their objectives hearken back to the participatory and DIY ethos of the long American folk revival, which, starting with the small Hootenannies at the Almanac House's basement, tried to encourage the whole world to sing. According to the company's homepage:

> Smule's mission is to connect the world through music. With the premise that everyone is creative, Smule uses the magic of technology to liberate the expressive musician in everyone. Smule's award-winning applications include Magic Piano™, I Am™ T-Pain, and Ocarina. (Smule, 2012a)

Anyone can sing or play music. At least, we should all try. Indeed, with Smule software and iPhone in hand, many have done just that, for as of January 2013 Smule claims to have 15 million active users (Caplan, 2013). The revival's mimeographed publications like *Sing Out!* and *Broadside* tried to make folk knowledge accessible (the magazines offered sparse chord charts for the most recent batch of topical songs, and often published the compositions of amateurs and unknowns), but Smule goes one step further by eliminating technique insofar as it is possible to do so without compromising the feelings of expressivity and virtuosity that can come from playing music. As Anthony Ha (2012) has described Wang's vision: "When someone opens a Smule app, he says they shouldn't ask themselves, 'Am I a musician?' because the answer is usually no. Instead, the goal is to draw people in, then by the time they realize they're making music, 'it's too late — they're already having fun.'"

Indeed, their programs are responsive and intuitive. The *Ocarina* and *Ocarina 2* apps turn your phone into something akin to a medieval pipe. The user blows into the microphone, directing the pitch by pressing various combinations of fingerings on a four-button touchpad. *Magic Piano* works similarly but with obvious differences in sound samples and interface. The user touches falling notes on the screen (a cascading visual which matches the song's rhythm, not unlike musical games such as *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band*) to recreate the central melodies of well-known hits. And *Sing!* harnesses the voice, allowing you to sing along to contemporary chart-toppers, pop and rock classics, and

even public domain "folk" songs. Traditional numbers like "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" are free, but you need to pay to participate in the folk process of material such as Justin Bieber's "Girlfriend."

The clear expressivity of Smule apps hearkens back to certain aspects of the folk revival, but so too does the machine-like quality of some of the programs. *IAMTPAIN, Songify, and Autorap* all deploy the encoding device "Autotune," which has increasingly been used since the late nineties to foreground the digital ground of contemporary popular music. Users can record observational monologue or improvisational singing (you could even recite Guthrie lyrics), and *IAMTPAIN, Songify,* or *Autorap* will carve up and manipulate the recorded speech or song into rhythmically and harmonically pleasing (and often humorous) music, foregrounding the computational motor of the process.[58] A new app called *Mad Pad* even blends this recombinant mashup aesthetic with the art of field recording as pioneered by Alan Lomax: "Remix your life with MadPad! Turn everyday sights and sounds like your car, an empty soda can, or your friends into the ultimate percussive instrument. Who would have thought everyday life could be so musical?" (Smule, 2012b). Field recordings become samples to be remixed at the discretion of the folklorist-cum-deejay. Guthrie sang like a car, echoing the delirious proclamations of Tomas Marinetti and other Futurists but from within a Marxist framework, and Smule's folk revival also allows us both to sing into, and as, the machine.

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[58] The technology behind Autotune has a fascinating source in the military-industrial complex, in particular the oil industry, as Dave Tompkins's (2010) history of the vocoder has recently highlighted. Jonathan Sterne (2013) has also recently presented work on this strange history.

In addition to sound and feel, though, a key connection between the Hootenannies and Smule apps are the latter's various sharing functions. *Ocarina* allows you to drop in on anyone on the planet currently logged in and jamming in real time. You are given a visualization of their current location, and also the opportunity to "love" their performance, which is as easy as clicking on a heart-shaped icon. The accumulated total of "love" is then tabulated and displayed. On the theme of "social" music, Wang boasts of the revolutionary potentialities of his instrument:

> We use location to geo-tag people who have recently played the Ocarina; we can actually send that anonymously to the Smule cloud, as it were, and it's the first instrument that we know of in history that allows its players to hear one another from around the world. … We believe this is just the beginning of a new revolution, where people will relate to one another differently and people will express themselves differently, all facilitated by what we can do on this device. (in Kirn, 2009)

And more recent Smule apps do not just allow you to toot your own horn or merely admire the tooting of others; you can now play with other anonymous folk through collaborative cloud networks. *Sing Karaoke*, for instance, allows multiple vocalists each to contribute a line or even just a phrase to their favourite tune, and the collaborative product can then be enjoyed and shared by all. On Smule's Facebook page, where an enthusiastic virtual community gathers to like and respond to recent promotions and contests, users have shared and commented on *Sing!* recordings featuring up to twenty collaborators. Each individual contribution recorded on the way to work, perhaps, in bedrooms, at recess: "All around me, [voices] sounding."

As we have begun to see, there are obvious echoes of the Hootenanny in the music-making mobile software of Smule. But Pete Seeger's (1972) observation, "our planet is full of singing people" (p. 149), was for Seeger an implicitly political remark. To reclaim individual and collective voices would be to reject the "phoniness" churned out by the military-industrial-entertainment complex. Smule apps might seem to rekindle the promise of the original Hootenannies, at which distinctions between observer and participant were cast off, but we will now consider a few different ways in which Smule apps are an effect rather than a revolutionary cause—an articulation of a relatively new form of work, and of the degradation of political culture, in the era of cognitive capitalism.

5.5   Composition or Repetition?

In his book *Noise*, political economist Jacques Attali (1985) explores the overdetermined relationship between our historical understandings of music and noise, on one hand, and social and economic change and revolution, on the other. Music for Attali is not just a reflection of particular socio-economic forces, though it is in some senses that as well; music—and more importantly, what a musical culture excludes as *noise*—also signals towards new social potentialities. The emergent bourgeois notion of the hermetically sealed work helped to prepare the ground from which the ancient regime would eventually be toppled (Attali, 1985). And the "stockpiling" of labour time in the twentieth century, which is how Attali figures sound recording, pushed capital towards new horizons of surveillance and commodification (Attali, 1985). The concluding and

ambiguously utopian chapter explores what Attali terms the age of "composition," which he describes as:

> Doing solely for the sake of doing, without trying artificially to recreate the old codes in order to reinsert communication into them. Inventing new codes, inventing the message at the same time as the language. Playing for one's own pleasure, which alone can create the conditions for new communication. (1985, p. 134)

We might be reminded of Smule apps and the "YouTube folk revival" in general when we read Attali's utopian prognosis. Although self-branding and promotional culture pervade social networking sites and platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or Academia.edu (Hearn, 2008), many of Smule's virtual communities seem to be forums of anonymous folk creation. Faceless flutists and singers going by the names of prem, fatsausage, pimpflute, Link, (anonymous), montreal, Marco, Emelie, PBMike15, sword, Thanatos, unicorngiggle, RIPLeRoiMoore, and PressTheHeart are just a few of the nodes that cut across this rhizome. They do not seem to be playing for recognition, but because they enjoy being creative for its own sake, or "doing for the sake of doing."

But the hardware underneath the magical music-making *Ocarina* and its phylum-mates is always ready for more (or perhaps less) than "composition": iPhones are only ever a swipe or a click away from becoming once again the tethering gateways to a 24/7 immaterial workplace, as some neo-Marxist scholars have described it.[59] As the modern disciplinary boundaries between factory and home, public and private erode, exploitation

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[59] Vince Manzerolle (2013) has also recently explored the complex dynamics of mobile "smart" phones in the post-Fordist workplace, though from more of an Innisian perspective.

reaches beyond the assembly line to subsume virtually all corners of social life (Dyer-Witheford, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Franco "Bifo" Berardi (2009) has aptly described this confluence of exploitation and creativity with his term "cognitariat," and mobile communications are important vectors across which "cognitariat" subjects generate and share the affects and knowledges captured by cognitive capitalism:

> Labor is the cellular activity where the network activates an endless recombination. Cellular phones are the instruments making this recombination possible. Every info-worker has the capacity to elaborate a specific semiotic segment that must meet and match innumerable other semiotic fragments in order to compose the frame of a combinatory entity that is info-commodity, Semiocapital. (Berardi, 2009, p. 89)

From this angle, Smule apps appear as merely the folksy mask of the larger mobile interface keeping us in constant contact to the endless streams of data many are required to sort through in order to be valuable contributors on the informational labour market. Guthrie's machine killed fascists, and Seeger's surrounded hate and forced it to surrender. Now, the mobile, individualized pods carrying *Ocarina* and *Sing!* circulate value-generating affects, symbols, codes, and communication.

However, these instruments are not only happy distractions to keep flexible immaterial labourers amused in between calls or jobs. Like many applications and platforms that make up Web 2.0, Smule apps can also be considered as sites of value extraction. As Christian Fuchs (2010) has put it, "[c]apitalist produsage is an extreme form of exploitation of labour that the producers perform completely for free" (p. 48), and the uncountable hours anonymous users have spent building and sustaining Smule's

network would be an example of the "produser" exploitation Fuchs describes.[60] As the

Smule privacy agreement makes plain:

> Smule shares demographic, profile and other general information about you and
> our other customers with our partners on an aggregate basis. This means that we
> tell our advertisers general information about the characteristics of our customer
> base. … Smule may share your unique device ID with advertisers or your
> location (based on opt-in location-based services, which rely upon a device's GPS
> coordinates). (Smule, 2012c)

Smule apps are part of the broader cultural industry of social networking, where

creativity, communication, and collaboration are all surveyed and mined for aggregate

data. The song collectors John and Alan Lomax shared in Leadbelly's copyrights, and

took two thirds of his haul at concerts (Filene, 2000; Miller, 2010). Thus Smule

participates in a long tradition of American song collectors' exploitation of the folk.

"YouTube Folk Revival" indeed.

5.6   The Politics of the Chorus

We could say that the Almanacs' Hootenannies actually anticipated the

contemporary "prosumer": the audience was expected both to pay and to sing along, to

plug into a participatory network and derive pleasure both from the network itself and

from their own contribution. And, again, both the Hootenanny and the iPod share similar

etymologies. But clearer differences emerge when we go back to the idea of singing as a

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[60] Fuchs is pointing to the term "prosumer," which was coined by the futurist Alvin Toffler (1981).

diagrammatic machine, for the Hootenanny and Smule apps constitute materializations of very different utopian visions.

In *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, Jodi Dean (2009) describes "communicative capitalism" as "the materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism" (p. 2). Of particular interest is Dean's discussion of technological fetishism and the transition of communication from the sending of messages (with destinations) to the endless circulation of "contributions." Political action is as easy as pointing and clicking, liking and sharing, but these activities are harnessed by capital and in turn reconsolidate the grip of neoliberal policies, according to Dean. As Geert Lovink (2011) more simply puts it in his similarly sobering account of social media: "When everyone broadcasts, no one is listening" (p. 7).

Eavesdropping on a live "jam" by an *Ocarina* user nicely highlights some of the claims Dean makes. We are confronted with a clean, pixelated image of planet Earth (perhaps recalling the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, whose cover ported an image of the "whole wide world"). Glowing in the background are all the other active users, tiny dots scattered across the planet; we audition one performer at a time, whose live musical expressions are visualized as waving streams (think *Ghostbusters*) shot straight out through the atmosphere and into space. Yet, the colourful stream of "social" music emitted by each *Ocarina* player is not intended for the other nodes in this strangely solipsistic network, it seems, or even for the eavesdropper. (*Ocarina 2* has removed the other nodes from view entirely.) Its target is the process of contributing as such, and in the visual representation of this folk machine we see the peculiar synthesis that is

networked communication and narcissistic individualism. "All around me, voices

sounding / Away from each other / *Directly up into outer space*!" Ocarina players are

hyper-connected to an online community boasting 15 million users: a virtual Hootenanny

to end all Hootenannies. But it is not possible for their broadcasts to take root, which is

the ideal end of the folk process, according to Seeger and Guthrie. It is not possible for

their broadcasts to be translated into other forms of embodied solidarity, which the

program itself fascinatingly narrates. *Ocarina* players' contributions are by and for the

medium—folksongs by and for spectacle itself.

5.7   The People's Microphone

Jodi Dean's description of communicative capitalism posits an apathetic political

culture constrained by the very circuits and networks that capture and transmit value

across the globe; the ability to resist or revolt is disarmed by the informational

apparatuses of communication and consumption. But some Autonomist Marxists—

though their analysis of the ability of "Empire" to biopolitically control and capture

laboring subjects parallels Dean's—prefer simultaneously to emphasize the potentialities

of new media to push beyond the logics and axioms of high-tech capital. For instance,

inspired in part by the anti-globalization movements that swelled in the late nineties, Nick

Dyer-Witheford's (1999) *Cyber-Marx* explores two sides of our digital ecology. On one

hand, informational networks enable capital to more flexibly mobilize and surveil

resources and labour in the interests of further surpluses (Dyer-Witheford, 1999).

Drawing on Antonio Negri's work, however, Dyer-Witheford identifies another tendency

in new media cultures. Because capital in the post-Fordist epoch of "immaterial labour"

goes to greater and greater lengths to capture human sociality and creativity, alienation and political action are productively (if unpredictably) mashed together in an emergent subject: "Surveying the scope of … dissident media activity, it appears that capital, in developing its media apparatus, has let the genie out of the bottle. … On occasion corporate control can be interrupted and spaces opened within which a multiplicity of social movements, all in different ways contesting the dominance of the market, can be connected and made visible to each other" (p. 121). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) describe this political body as "multitude": a networked, carnivalesque machine that necessarily contests and spills over the ways in which globalized capital tries to deploy it.

The Occupy Wall Street Movement was seen by some to be an excellent example of the wired multitude in action (e.g. Dean, 2011; Hardt & Negri, 2011). Edged on by knowledge of the revolts that made up the "Arab Spring," and by the Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*, a group assembled in New York City on September 17, 2011, to protest Wall Street as the symbolic center of twenty-first century capitalism run amok. After being diverted by the NYPD to the privately owned Zuccotti Park, protesters set up camp, and news of the occupation began to spread via social networking sites, mobile phones, and word of mouth. Soon this brief intentional community began to erect makeshift institutions, including a library, health clinic, the famous "general assembly," and a drum circle (see Taylor & Gessen, 2011). Within weeks, most of the United States' major networks and newspapers were covering the occupation, which eventually began to spread across North America to other cities, even to London, Ontario.

One aspect of Occupy Wall Street's political structure that received media attention was the "People's Microphone." A pragmatic response to restrictions on P.A. equipment in Zuccotti Park, the People's Mic involved a group of people joining together to relay a message from one speaker to the surrounding audience. The closest audience members would chant a repetition of the message, which would then echo outwards to other circles, an active process which continued depending on the size of the group. According to Ryan Ruby (2012), this performance of communicative solidarity marks a willful return to orality as famously explored by Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan:

> These are not merely strategic responses to a contingent situation (laws prohibiting amplified sound) or tactics retrofitted to a particular geography (NYC's financial district), they are indicative of developments in something much larger, the history of communication itself. The People's Mic and the Occupy hand signals will one day come to be regarded as paradigms of politics in a post-literate age.

In addition to the People's Mic, Ruby lists SMS, Twitter, and live streaming as articulations of the integrated, wholesome "post-literate" paradigm of communication that Occupy embodies. Focusing on the experiential and sonic dimensions of the performance, Homay King (2012) has also explored the solidarity-engendering properties of the People's Microphone as a form of performative communication: "Through collective speech, the people's mic shifts away from sovereign, solitary personhood" (p. 239). King does not rely on Havelock or Ong, as does Ruby, but he nonetheless traces this way of speaking back to the Ancient Greek chorus. King recognizes the intersection of the People's Mic with digital and broadcast media: "To be sure, state-of-the-art

technology can help move things along" (p. 239). Still, there is something wholesome and primordial about the act of speaking together, according to King.

King and Ruby identify aspects of the People's Microphone that have resonated for both journalists and academics. We have already begun to see connections, too, with the Hootenanny, in particular the foregrounding of interconnection and solidarity via performative ritual. But the approach offered by McLuhan's and Ong's work on "post-literacy" misses, perhaps, a dimension of the diagrammatic structure of the People's Mic, which is its function as an abstract machine. According to Friedrich Kittler (1999), the digital epoch involves not a humanistic return to orality but rather the end of media as such; Jodi Dean (2010) runs with this idea in her description of blog and online-discussion culture as an "endless loop." Much commentary on the People's Mic, however, has failed to confront these insights. Ruby and King both emphasize the "old" quality of the medium; it hearkens back to the pre-literate poets of Ancient Greece, harmoniously transplanting healthy democracy onto our networked culture. Conversely, others have imported an unsubtle digital utopianism into their analysis. Douglas Kellner, for instance, sees the Occupy movement as a whole as a mirror reflection of potentially liberating digital technologies: "In using new media and social networking, the Occupy movements had the same decentralized structure as the computer networks they were using" (2012, p. 240). Either the People's Mic constitutes a longing for embodied orality, or else it is part of a virtual, "decentralized" triumph. My question is: How does the

performance called "The People's Mic" both mimic and break beyond the circuits Jodi Dean describes?[61]

The People's Microphone of Occupy is not just an example of decentralized resistance or a promising expression of post-literate awareness. It is an abstract machine that imagines a circuit in which endless circulation, contribution for contribution's sake, is not the telos of communication. Thus in addition to the social dreaming that fruitfully emerged from the broader Occupy event, we can perhaps also see the emergence of a different way of conceiving of signs and signals, channels and faces. In particular, the Mic's ritualized way of speaking revels in the *indexical* relationship between both sources and destinations; speakers bound up with the circuit experience reception at the same time that they are obliged to retransmit the broadcast. The endless circulations of communicative capitalism momentarily find an efficient and functional end in the analogue machinations of multitude. Whereas the "endless loops" of communicative capitalism echo upwards and away, the transductive punch of the People's Mic rather moves across and *down*—into both the bodies and the throats of the nodes that must momentarily lend themselves to the distribution, which have a decidedly narrow bandwidth.

This reimagining of the relationships joining words, bodies, and social realities (which should also remind us of Guthrie's vivid portrayal of singing struggle) also was interestingly articulated on the "We Are the 99 Percent" Tumblr blog. The site featured

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[61] Dean has not written much about the People's Microphone in particular (although she did make a speech through it [see Taylor & Gessen, 2011], or anything about the connections between Occupy and the folk revival, but she has recently written on Occupy's rupturing of communicative capital (see Dean, 2011).

an almost endless array of photos of individuals holding hand-written signs explaining

their particular situations. On November 23, 2011, for instance, an image was posted of a

middle-aged man in glasses and black tee-shirt holding a sign that reads: "I AM

DISABLED AND LIVING ON SOCIAL SECURITY, FOOD STAMPS, and

MEDICAID. I AM THE 99%" (We Are The 99 Percent, 2011). To date, five hundred

and thirteen notes (i.e. "likes," re-bloggings, and comments) have been posted in

response to this single image. Of course, the "We Are the 99 %" blog currently occupies

the same digital networks as Smule's fun-loving flutists. Still, in these images of people

testifying (via digitizations of their own writings and prints and profiles), and in the

digital traces of all those who have "liked" the testimonies, I see a productively utopian

longing for a new relationship between messages and networked subjects. Contra

Derrida, the Occupy bloggers hold their signs, often staring directly at the camera almost

like the Depression-era photographs for which Guthrie's songs were the soundtrack; they

plead with us to read their writings as *present* inscriptions of the real. Dean (2009, 2010)

draws on Žižek and Lacan to claim that digital comment culture suffers from a decline in

"symbolic efficiency." But, on the Occupy Tumblr blog, signs and symbols enjoy a

renewed capability. Occupy the signifier! On one hand, the site is indeed part of the

fabric of endless circulation and a deflated symbolic efficiency; on the other, the images

implore us to have faith that they are connected to something beyond other links or

signifiers (that they are connected to desire and commonality, for instance).

The analog, transductive process of the People's Mic—similarly explored on the

Occupy Tumblr blog—contrasts sharply with the abstracted, recombinant cycles of our

digital datascapes. This reading is not Luddite or Romantic, however, but purely

pragmatic. Dean herself has perhaps been too nostalgic in her own promotion of the

significance of Occupy:

> In dramatic contrast to communicative capitalism's promise of easy action, of a
>
> politics of pointing and clicking and linking and forwarding, Occupy Wall Street
>
> says No! It's not so easy. You can't change the world isolated behind your screen.
>
> You have to show up, work together, and collectively confront the capitalist class.
>
> Protest requires living bodies in the streets. (Dean, 2012)

The People's Mic indeed challenges the ubiquitous narcissism that defines iGadget

culture, for it required interlocutors to set aside their unique personalities, to sacrifice

their individual voices momentarily to the larger channel, which King (2012) also points

out. This is not a rejection of networking or of digitality per se, however, but a living

dream of a different way of being networked. Just as the Hootenanny reimagined the acts

of singing and listening in the 1940s, the transductive People's Mic reimagines what it

could mean to become digital.

A final connection to the revival's utopianism I would like to highlight is the

negotiation of difference. For, plugged into the People's Mic, one could disagree. There

is room for difference in the sense that one can signal dissatisfaction through the Mic's

hand gestures. But the contributor who disagrees is for the moment expected to

nonetheless remain conjoined with the channel (Smule flutists, on the other hand, would

perhaps just move on to the next song or performer or app). This feature too rubs up

against practices under communicative capitalism, and the self-sacrificial conjoining

performed by those People's Microphone contributors momentarily in disagreement also

hearkens back to the Hootenanny. The folk forum was to be inclusive of performers of all types: seasoned vets, amateurish beginners, comedians, those singing serious political anthems and didactic protest songs but also everything in between. You might have to sing along, or publish (in the case of *Broadside*), songs you do not like. But struggling through differences is made into a common cause: the establishment of channels that are able to transmit difference is envisioned as a collective and durational project.

5.8   Conclusion

This chapter has explored the echoes of one particular performance model, the Hootenanny, in contemporary digital culture. The dream of a non-hierarchical space in which each voice maintains its individual integrity but is simultaneously able to meld as one with the whole remains a potent one in the twenty-first century. And yet, we can see its articulation take on varying forms, with varying kinds of baggage. Apple iPhones, and Smule apps in particular, borrow many of the aesthetic features of the Hootenany. Pete Seeger's (1972) claim that "our planet is full of singing people" (p. 149) is perhaps the central theme of these devices. The question of solidarity, however, is cast aside in this most recent round of DIY revivalism, and these instruments even seem to make passivity and narcissism a part of their very design and aesthetic. The People's Microphone phenomenon, on the other hand, a focal point of the Occupy Movement, offers perhaps another example of the Hootenany's continued relevance. Pete Seeger (who seems to show up everywhere) even stopped by Zuccotti to take a turn. After he prodded the People's Mic to collectively hush itself, he fed into it "The River that Runs Both Ways," an environmentalist song but also perhaps a metaphor for participatory media. Running

"both ways" like Seeger's river, singers and speakers plugged their voices together in Zuccoti Park and around the world, melding distinctions between self and other at the same time that they lent their selves to the hybrid transmission of dissent, which has a destination.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion: Authenticity, Utopia, and a Mediatized Folk

6.1   Introduction

The reverberations moving across the histories of American folk music, digital culture, and media theory particularly congeal in a few of the iconic moments that have appeared above: Dylan going electric, Alan Lomax plugging in his soon-to-be-forgotten "Global Jukebox" for the first time, Woody and Seeger casting their seeds, and thousands plugging into *themselves* as the "People's Microphone." In these "dialectical images," to borrow a term from the Frankfurt School (see Benjamin, 1999), conflicting desires and anxieties, tendencies and contingencies, have played out. What is authentic mediation and how can one attempt it, despite all the noise in capital's various channels? How can one plug "the folk" (or "the nomad," as tactical media artists inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have preferred to put it) into the network? What kinds of utopian visions might such a connection evoke? How can we deploy voices—whether conceived as fleshy, grainy instruments or mediated pseudo-events or elegant algorithms—against the "unopposed rule of money over human beings" (Peter Lamborn Wilson quoted in Garcia & Lovink, 2003, p. 108) and for peace and non-captive creativity? Lomax, Seeger, Dylan, and Guthrie all took a stab at answering these questions.

Yet, authenticity and utopia have often been dismissed as simplistically Romantic concepts. The mid-sixties critique of the folk revival offers an excellent example of how such criticisms can become intertwined. When Pete Seeger allegedly tried to swing an

axe through Bob Dylan's electric guitar cable at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, he seemed to sum up for his critics the totalitarian tendencies of both utopia and authenticity. *Whose utopia? Whose authenticity?* The concepts, it increasingly seemed, are necessarily tainted with power or with a totalitarian desire for a centre, as Jacques Derrida (1976) and Michel Foucault (1986) would put it in their own respective critiques. Paradigms within which authenticity and utopia make sense do not have sufficiently sophisticated understandings of discourse, textuality, or mediation, it was becoming increasingly apparent to many. Thus Bob Dylan was and is celebrated by non- and anti-folkies alike (e.g. by the influential rock critic Greil Marcus, or by the *New Sandy Review's* Paul Williams) for resisting puritanical "Old Left" obligations and for going his own technologized and performative ways, when he turned to distortion and rock music (see Miller, 2012).

And yet, narratives such as the one of Dylan's electric "emancipation"—from "authentic" but totalitarian solidarity and towards individualized, de-territorialized performativity—leave out the subtle understanding of media, utopia and authenticity that can be extracted from the writings and performances of Lomax, Seeger, Dylan, or the recent phenomenon of the "People's Microphone" of the Occupy movement. As I have tried to show, authenticity and utopia were always already plugged in. By using the theoretical foundations of tactical media to revisit organic communication theorists like Lomax, Seeger, and Dylan, we have come closer to a more productive and sympathetic understanding of what may be the most valuable concepts we could yet try to re-imagine:

authenticity (the ideal of being or becoming what we "really" are) and utopia (a better place which does not exist but which might yet).[62]

In this concluding chapter, then, it seems an opportune moment to take stock of these concepts. Although authenticity and utopia fell out of favour with the ascendancy of postmodernism in the eighties and nineties, they have resurfaced in critical and activist discourses as of late. After briefly sketching out the recent histories of authenticity and utopia, I will examine a theoretical approach, "Autonomist" Marxism, whose reimagining of these concepts has also involved a medium-theoretical angle. Although the aesthetic that emerges from neo-Marxist thinkers like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Franco "Bifo" Berardi might seem to be best applied within cultural fields like cyberpunk literature, hacktivism, video games, or new media and web art, we will discover that aspects of their theories have all along been anticipated by the strange work of certain folk revivalists.

6.2   Understanding Utopia and Authenticity

"Utopia" was coined by Thomas More (2011), whose sixteenth-century text *Utopia* (a novelistic prototype) explored what must have seemed in many ways to be a "good" model for English society. More fused two theretofore distinct concepts in his novel term: *outopia* (good place) and *eutopia* (no place) became a pun denoting "a good place which does not exist" (Sargent, 1994, p. 5). Might utopia one day exist? Is it

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[62] My understanding of utopia is greatly informed by Zygmunt Bauman (1976), Ernst Bloch (1986), and Ruth Levitas (1990), and my understanding of authenticity by Charles Taylor (1992), all who we will explore in more detail below.

perfect, or just better than the society within which the reader currently toils? These questions are ultimately left unanswered by many utopias. Utopias merely offer a virtual mirror through which present and future possibilities can be imaginatively worked out (Bloch, 1986).

However, utopia does come to mean "static, perfect place" over the course of the twentieth century (Bauman, 1976, p. 10). This pejorative re-orientation of utopia was effected from both the Left and the Right. Indeed, Engels (1978) even played a part here, lambasting Fourier, Owen, and other utopians for their undialectical attempts to escape the reach of industrial capitalism. And yet, utopia is both "good" and not (yet) existent; it is not necessarily perfect, nor is it necessarily static. In his attempt to salvage utopia from the dustbin of history, Zygmunt Bauman (1976) outlines four unique functions of the concept. It is an image of a future and better world that is:

> (1) felt as still unfulfilled and requiring an additional effort to be brought about;
> (2) perceived as desirable, as a world not so much bound to come as one which should come;
> (3) critical of the existing society; in fact a system of ideas remains utopian and thus able to boost human activity only in so far as it is perceived as representing a system essentially different from, if not antithetical to, the existing one;
> (4) involving a measure of hazard; for an image of the future to possess the qualities of utopia, it must be ascertained that it will not come to pass unless fostered by a deliberate collective action. (p. 17)

In Bauman's description, we see both the functionality of utopia and its location within the structure of the present; utopia is constituted by the collaboration of desire, will, creativity, and collective action. Similarly, Ruth Levitas (1990) defines utopia (and here

we begin to see the importance of *authenticity* within recent articulations of utopia) simply as "the expression of the desire for a better way of being" (p. 8). Utopian dreaming is about filling in the lacks of the present's version of the future with the potent virtualities of the "Now" (Bloch, 1986).

Both Bauman and Levitas perhaps owe much to Ernst Bloch, one of the first to point out that utopia is not just a fanciful vision of an impossible place, but a lack paradoxically constituted by the plenitude of the present as it explodes towards a future:

> Thinking means venturing beyond. But in such a way that what already exists is not kept under or skated over. Not in its deprivation, let alone in moving out of it. Not in the causes of deprivation, let alone in the first signs of the change which is ripening within it. That is why real venturing beyond never goes into the mere vacuum of an In-Front-of-Us, merely visualizing abstractions. Instead, it grasps the New as something that is mediated in what exists and is in motion, although to be revealed the New demands the most extreme effort of will. (Bloch, 1986, p. 4)

Utopia for Bloch is not a fanciful realm of impossibility. To be a utopian is just to be a thinking, desiring being. Further, as Bloch highlights, to fully embrace the potentialities of the utopian, we need to attempt authenticity, as "the New demands the most extreme effort of will." Bauman, Levitas, and Bloch all return to More's originally ambiguous term. Utopia is not impossible or necessarily static; it is a critical and immanent way of engaging with the future insofar as it exists within the present.

Like utopia, early articulations of authenticity begin to emerge in the West in the sixteenth century. Yet, as Lionel Trilling has pointed out, Polonius's advice to Laertes in Hamlet, for instance—"to thine own self be true"—is not yet an example of authenticity

but of sincerity; Laertes should be true to himself so that he cannot be false to anyone else (Trilling, 1971, p. 3). Authenticity, on the other hand, avoids such instrumentality; to strive for authenticity, to be or become what one is, is by definition its own end (Trilling, 1971). Authenticity proper begins to germinate in the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, perhaps fully flowering in the Romanticism of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Hölderlin, on through to existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Yet, as Charles Guignon (2004) has shown, though Romantic conceptions of authenticity have been pervasive and influential, the concept has had a much wider reach. Martin Heidegger and even postmodernists such as Richard Rorty work with various permutations of authenticity, even if at the same time certain features of modernist authenticity are problematized by postmodernist assumptions (Guignon, 2004).

Like utopia, authenticity is not a single, natural, or ideal essence, according to Charles Taylor (1992). Taylor argues that the project of authenticity is best approached as a centuries-long discussion about what it means to be "fully, really" human. Authenticity is a process and a struggle, and (like utopia) authenticity involves asking critical questions about present ways of being (Taylor, 1992). According to Taylor, we need to reconsider the rich dialectical history of the concept:

> What we ought to be doing is fighting over the meaning of authenticity, and from the standpoint developed here, we ought to be trying to persuade people that self-fulfillment, so far from excluding unconditional relationships and moral demands beyond the self, actually requires these in some form. The struggle ought not to be over authenticity, for or against, but about it, defining its proper meaning. We ought to be trying to lift the culture [of authenticity] back up, closer to its motivating ideal. (1992, pp. 72-3)

Authenticity, like utopia as articulated by Bauman or Bloch, might involve any way of being. Yet it is precisely the activity of collaboratively discussing and attempting authenticity in which Taylor is primarily interested. Taylor himself is perhaps too committed to holding on to the "rational," discrete self, but nonetheless we could translate his argument onto a more rhizomatic ontology. The "motivating ideal" of authenticity described by Taylor might push us past the need to "fulfill" individual selves as such.

6.3   No Authenticity, No Utopia, No Future

How are we to become ourselves together, and what might it look like on a broader social scale when we get closer to it than we are now? Authenticity is a utopian concept, and vice versa. In cultural studies, however, authenticity has more often been an object of critique than utopia. From Bloch and Walter Benjamin (1999) to Richard Dyer (2002) to Frederic Jameson (2005), the pleasures deriving from the numerous non-places of phantasmagoric consumer culture have been sympathetically considered as important features of everyday life, and as potentially transformative sites. On the other hand, "authenticity" has been considered primarily as an essentialization of human being, which generations of scholars, Marxists and postmodernists alike, have been taught to avoid. To posit an essential human nature is unscientific and ideological (Althusser, 2003) or a violent quest for a "centre" (Derrida, 1976).

To be clear, literary and cultural studies' critiques of various articulations of authenticity, in particular racialized articulations, remain extremely valuable (e.g. Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 1997; Miller, 2010). By wanting to reimagine the concept, I am not

suggesting that John Lomax's idea, for instance, that black prisoners were more authentic than the rest of the African American population because they were closer to their pre-modern roots (as prisoners!) is worth dusting off.[63] As well, the sociological and star studies traditions that have followed from Erving Goffman (1959, 1974), or gender studies stemming from Judith Butler (1999), still ask and explore urgent questions. Our identities are indeed made in the processes of interaction and performance, and celebrity and star culture's promotion of the Romantic notion of authenticity, for example, is worthy of critical and historically-grounded scrutiny.[64] Adorno (1973) too has critiqued authenticity, the existentialist variety, for its undialectical shrinking from the broader social totality, and his remains an indispensable starting point:

> No elevation of the concept of Man has any power in the face of his actual degradation into a bundle of functions. The only help lies in changing the conditions which brought the state of affairs to this point—conditions which uninterruptedly reproduce themselves on a larger scale. (p. 69)

Many authenticities, like many utopias, deserve to be dismantled.

However, the work of magazine editor and Philosophy Ph.D. Andrew Potter illuminates some of the pitfalls of wholesale rejections of authenticity (and utopia). Potter's first bestseller, *The Rebel Sell* (Heath & Potter, 2004), was co-authored with Joseph Heath, and the book takes aim at *Adbusters*, Naomi Klein, and the broader "anti-globalization" movement of the late nineties. Heath and Potter see in the idea of

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[63] For a highly critical reading of Alan's father John Lomax's racialized understanding of authenticity on these grounds, see Miller, 2010.

[64] I have even tried to contribute to these discussions in my own work on Method acting and country rock (see Svec, 2010, 2012).

counterculture (a label for them which encapsulates an epic range of "leftist" cultural practices and political theories) a means of distinguishing oneself from others. Taking their cue from Thorstein Veblen, Potter and Heath explore notions like "ideology" and "repressive tolerance" as nonsensical weapons with which educated Marxists have tried to chastise the working peoples of the world who, according to Potter and Heath, may have very much enjoyed industrial capitalism (the enclosure movement is not mentioned by the authors) and consumer culture.

Potter mobilizes a similar critique in *The Authenticity Hoax* (2010). Going back further than the sixties this time, back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the eighteenth century, he explores how Western culture's pervasive and insatiable desire for "real," "homespun," and "authentic" goods and experiences is fundamentally misguided and even violent. Again drawing on Veblen, Potter claims that authenticity and its pursuit is a sham, a means of distinguishing oneself from other consumers. The free market is a benevolent force that authenticity-seekers have tried to pretend to avoid, all the while looking to the market for the solution to their ailments (whether the solution be jeans, rock music, or anti-globalization magazines). According to Potter, our problem is not the alienating social system we live in but our very desire to escape from it through the mirage known as "authenticity."

Heath and Potter point to important shortcomings in certain strands of leftist thought (in particular the notion that oppression is so totalizing that any movement for reform must be looked at with suspicion), and they demonstrate a keen, critical eye in their readings of the logical contradictions within the more rarefied and "highbrow" strata of Western consumer culture. Yet, both *The Rebel Sell* and *The Authenticity Hoax* tend to

flatten important categories and to avoid what are crucial distinctions (not to mention the authors' superficial readings of Marx and critical theory). Authenticity is only considered as a relational signifier:

> Absent from our lives is any sense of the world as a place of intrinsic value, within which each of us can lead a purposeful existence. And so we seek the authentic in a multitude of ways, looking for a connection to something deeper in the jeans we buy, the food we eat, the vacations we take, the music we listen to, and the politicians we elect. In each case, we are trying to find at least one sliver of the world, one fragment of experience, that is innocent, spontaneous, genuine, and creative, and not tainted by commercialization, calculation, and self-interest (Potter, 2010, p. 264).

Potter is only willing to see authenticity within the structures and systems of distinction that mark consumer culture. But, with respect to the difficult task of collaboratively discussing the potentialities of Becoming, are blue jeans and "getaway" vacations the best we can come up with? Although it is true that many communes in the sixties did not last, and that "authenticity" has been evoked by many *ressentiment*-filled angry young people and corporations alike (Frank, 1997), there are richer traditions of utopianism (e.g. Bloch, 1986; Adorno, 1984; Levitas, 1990), and richer engagements with authenticity (e.g. Heidegger, 1977; Kierkegaard, 1987; Marx, 1961), that go entirely ignored by Potter. We now turn to one particular body of thought that has dared to think our social being beyond the present.

6.4 Multitude, Species-Being, and the Conjunction of Authenticity and Utopia

In contemporary articulations of "Autonomist" Marxism—we will look in particular at the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and Nick Dyer-Witheford—authenticity and utopia are resurgent and understood in relation to media. In Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's "Empire" trilogy (2000, 2005, 2009), we find a Marxian-Deleuzian synthesis; the authors posit history as a dance between the immanent and constitutive powers of "multitude" and the various structures and disciplinary orders that have sought to capture its energies, from transcendent absolutism to modernist colonialism and industrial discipline through to the contemporary, global system they term "Empire" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2009). The multitude is defined by its simultaneous negotiation of alterity and solidarity: "[The plural multitude's productive, creative subjectivities] are in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual global reconfigurations on the system" (2000, p. 60). The (non-dialectical) battle between human potential and the various structures of transcendence that have attempted to capture its productive capacities posits a resistant, networked subject that is always already outside, and in opposition to, power. Contra Althusser's (1971) analysis of interpellation, then, whereby subjects are hailed by disciplinary institutions before they even enter the world, Hardt and Negri emphasize the necessity of struggle by recourse to a network of autonomous desiring-production.

Hardt and Negri's multitude is no natural nation or folk. They distinguish between the various levels of organization by which the multitude has been constructed and

negotiated—in a manner recalling Benedict Anderson's (1983) suggestion that modern

nation-states have been "imagined"—and technology is a key component of these

processes. It is the convergence of the workers of the world with informational

technologies that has calibrated and armed the multitude for conflict with its newest

opponent, the imperial capitalist order: "In the passage to the informational economy, the

assembly line has been replaced by the network as the organizational model of

production, transforming the forms of cooperation and communication within each

productive site and among productive sites" (2000, p. 295). The transition to immaterial

labour as the paradigmatic sector of capitalist production has put creativity,

communication, and knowledge at the centre of exploitation, which has been made

possible by high-speed networks and digital media (Hardt & Negri, 2000). Yet, this

machinic territorialization has simultaneously planted the seeds of a mobile, "hydra-

headed," global smart mob of sorts.[65] Recalling McLuhan, they describe tools as "poietic

prostheses" (2000, p. 217)—integral components of our being and our creative capacities.

Hardt and Negri do not use the word "authenticity" in their descriptions of

"multitude," but their concept nonetheless explores the potentiality of humanity to

redirect its creative energies towards that which it "really" is: "The flesh of the multitude

is pure potential, an unformed life force, and in this sense an element of social being,

aimed constantly at the fullness of life" (2004, p. 192). The multitude constitutes

authenticity in motion: a becoming-autonomous that is already here. Similarly, Hardt and

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[65] "Smart mob" is a term coined by Howard Rheingold (2002), who views technology from more of a liberal perspective. Still, the concept somewhat similarly tries to grasp the relationship between embodied struggle and mobile, digital media.

Negri do not seem much concerned with the reclamation of the word "utopia" per se. The social productivity of the multitude is not an impossible elsewhere to be aimed at but rather an immanent fact. Still, if we remember Ruth Levitas's (1990) understanding of utopia as "a desire for a better way of being," we can easily consider Hardt and Negri as theorists of utopia, which appears as an immanent, wired, already-authentic elsewhere that is more like a virtual potency lying within the structure of Bloch's "Not-Yet."

Working along lines parallel to Hardt and Negri is Nick Dyer-Witheford, who has managed a more detailed and empirical account of laboring subjects in relation to digital media. Dyer-Witheford's *Cyber-Marx* (1999) explores the potentialities latent within the media networks of high-technology, post-Fordist capitalism. Taking to task a wide range of thinkers on the postmodern condition, from celebrators of "post-industrial" society (such as Daniel Bell) to cynics who emphasize the overbearing hegemony of global media conglomerates (such as Herbert Schiller), Dyer-Witheford explores how contemporary media technologies are both dominating as well as potentially liberating. This strategy considers Marx's oeuvre as a conflicted, dialectical whole, as technologies both embody dominating social relations and, because the substance of labour power precedes and is in opposition to capital, offer the working class channels of resistance.

Cyber-Marx's analysis parallels Bloch's attempt to locate utopia within the structure of the present. A chapter on "Alternatives" unabashedly introduces the category of utopia into sociological and media analysis. Dyer-Witheford sketches a utopian "commonwealth" which is in many ways similar to the glimpse of utopia found in *The German Ideology* (Marx & Engels, 1998), or to Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1995), albeit within a high-technological and postmodern horizon. The difference is that Dyer-

Witheford's proposals are not yet post-capitalist. They are virtual utopias that are already here in the present.

Dyer-Witheford puts forth four proposals which are attainable possibilities: "the institution of a guaranteed annual income, the creation of universal communications networks, the use of these networks in decentralized, participatory counterplanning, and the democratic control of decisions about technoscientific development" (1999, p. 193). In his description of each of these utopian proposals, the self- and society-creating powers of human beings are seen re-calibrated away from capital's law of exchange and toward socially-directed means. The guaranteed annual income might dismantle the stratification of waged and non-waged forms of labour; it might also allow for more satisfying modes of life (Dyer-Witheford, 1999). As well, uncommodified and universally accessible media channels would help to create a communicative commons where the society's fate could be planned and organized by those who constitute it (Dyer-Witheford, 1999). This would make utopian discussion a very fabric of the proposed utopia: a utopia that yet desires utopia.

The actualizable configuration sketched by Dyer-Witheford is one made possible by the remarkable technologies and practical knowledges engendered by late capitalism (and indeed the focus is the technological); but it is also made possible by the immanent creative capacities of human life, which can be distinguished from capital's power over it. Indeed, there is a profound tension throughout *Cyber-Marx* between the ways in which capital has directed labour and the immanent (and potentially "authentic") capacities of the working class:

Capital attempts to incorporate labour as an object, a component in its cycle of value extraction, so much labour power. But this inclusion is always partial, never fully achieved. Labouring subjects resist capital's reduction. Labour is for capital always a problematic "other" that must constantly be controlled and subdued, and that, as persistently, circumvents or challenges this command. Rather than being organized by capital, workers struggle against it. It is this struggle that constitutes the working class. (1999, p. 65)

The working class, although always struggling to realize its freedom, is directed away from its self-creating substance by capital. And yet, even if the working class loses itself, it always and already has the ability to rediscover its locus as the source of value. Rediscovering and acting within its self-constituting powers would mean that labouring humanity has become what it "really" is—that it has become authentic.

At the background of this discussion is young Marx's articulation of "species-being," which is referred to in *Cyber-Marx*, and which Dyer-Witheford has given more explicit attention in recent work (see 2010). Species-being, Feuerbach's concept which Marx deploys in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1961), is a dialectical version of authenticity. The power to transform is estranged from humans under capital, but it is a power that persists, latent: "[T]he proposition that man's species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature. The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realized and expressed in the relationship in which a man stands to other men" (Marx, 1961, pp. 77-8). Although Romanticism may have influenced Marx in his articulation of "species-being," alienation and authenticity for Marx are strictly relational: vectors of struggle. Humans create themselves, their

relationships, and their world, but they can create them in a myriad of ways. Under capitalism, however, where creativity is alienated, humans are not. Under exploitative social relations, humanity is deprived of the ability to direct its own essence (the capability which is its "essence").

In a more recent discussion of "species-being," Dyer-Witheford via Marx emphasizes this paradoxically unessential essence of humanity (the essence to make its own essence): "In the Manuscripts, its discussion is cryptic, fugitive, tantalizing. It is, however, clear that Marx did not mean simply human existence as a biologically reproductive group. Species-being is rather the capacity to collectively transform this natural basis" (2010, p. 485). Species-being thus has little to do with heroic individuals getting in touch with their inner natures. "To be authentic," from this point of view, is to be against structures of power and domination which contradict or divert the creative energies of labour: "[Species-being] might really better termed 'species-becoming,' the activity of a species whose only 'essence' is its historical plasticity. It has no eternal, universal content, but it is in opposition to both the laws of exchange and to instrumental efficiency" (2010, p. 487). The utopian dimension of "species-being" points towards the reclamation of both "the self"—considered inter-subjectively—and productive life. The authenticity aimed for exists not apart from but within and along the media ecologies humans have made for and with themselves.

6.5   Species-Being and The Folk

Of all the folkies covered in this dissertation, Lomax was probably the closest we get to a scholar. He studied philosophy as an undergraduate at the University of Texas,

his favourite thinkers being Plato and Hegel, and he did pursue graduate work in anthropology at Columbia University, though he would not finish a degree (Szwed, 2010). For their part, the Almanac Singers did have an academic come to their house for weekly lessons on dialectical materialism, but it remains uncertain what and how much they read (see Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). It is safe to say that the concept of "species-being" is not explicitly referenced in many of the folksongs I have heard.[66] Although the folk revivalists were not primarily philosophers or historians or political economists, however, they put their ideas into motion by building, doing, and singing. And by looking at the post-humanist tendencies and medium-specific tactics of the American folk revival, which this dissertation has tried to do, we also see a fascinating articulation of young Marx's species-being, in spirit if not in letter.

We can turn back to Pete Seeger for a terse crystallization of this disposition. Seeger liked to quote "Big" Bill Broonzy's famous saying: "All songs is folk songs: I ain't never heard a horse sing one." "Folk" has no inner essence here, as it merely the open process by which people come together and sing. The folk might sing (or make) anything, and they might do it in collaboration with any number of other machinic organisms. Via Broonzy, Seeger nods to the infinite and immanent potentiality of "the folk." Elsewhere in his writings, however, we are often reminded that, though all songs can be folk songs, it is possible for people to stop singing altogether, or to have this capacity captured. As young Marx approached labour, so Seeger sees in our faculty for

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[66] I thank Nick Dyer-Witheford for drawing my attention to the experimental rock band Species Being, however, who will perhaps be explored in future research.

sharing songs the condition of our species in a nutshell (the condition whereby we make our own condition), which can be diverted or atrophied.

In Lomax's work with technology, too, we see a hybrid folk in process. The authentic locus of folksinging was both out in the field *and* inside the apparatus—the object of Lomax's anthropological quests was bound up with the very tools he was supposed to have been mastering. The Global Jukebox he built in the late eighties and early nineties was a particularly dialectic crystallization of his folk-becoming. The archive would make accessible the totality of his and others' recordings amassed over the twentieth century. Yet this was not a stable archive, a mere copy of the folk. Users would be able to upload and to contribute to the database: folklore-in-motion.

In the folkies' persistent if fragmentary conceptualizations of media-machines, and in their simultaneous insistence on the concepts of both utopia and authenticity, we see perhaps one response to Martin Heidegger's (1977) suggestion that a renewal of our relationship to technology would offer a "saving power." At its best, tactical media and media theory more broadly has also managed this tripartite negotiation between authenticity, utopia, and media. The Invisible Committee, for instance, recently encouraged would-be revolutionaries to "attach yourself to what you feel to be true. Begin there" (2009, p. 97). Yet, it has taken tactical media theorists almost a decade of disembodied cyber-rhetoric to return to the body and to time, when all along there was an archive of American folk revivalism at their fingertips, some of it surprisingly well suited for twenty-first century battles and wars alike.

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