PUNK AESTHETICS IN INDEPENDENT "NEW FOLK", 1990-2008

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

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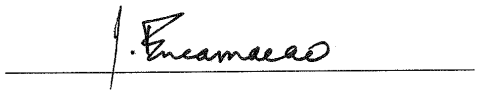

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Abstract

Various commentators on punk (e.g. Laing 1985, Frith 1986, Goshert 2000, Reynolds 2005, Webb 2007) have remarked upon an essence or attitude which is much more central to it than any aspects of musical style. Through the analysis of specific recordings as texts, this study aims to deliver on this idea by suggesting that there is an entire generation of musicians working in the independent sphere creating music that combines resonances of folk music with demonstrable punk aesthetics.

Given that the cultural formations of folk and punk share many rhetorics of authenticity – inclusivity, community, anti-establishment ideals and, to paraphrase Bannister (2006: xxvi) 'technological dystopianism' – it is perhaps not surprising that some successors of punk and hardcore, particularly in the U.S., would turn to folk after the commercialisation of grunge in the early 1990s. But beyond this, a historical survey of the roots of new folk leads us to the conclusion that the desire for spontaneity rather than perfection, for recorded artefacts which affirm music as a participatory process rather than a product to be consumed, is at least as old as recording technology itself. The 'new folk' of the last two decades often mythologises a pre-industrial past, even as it draws upon comparatively recent oppositional approaches to the recording as artefact that range from those of Bob Dylan to obscure outsider artists and lo-fi indie rockers.

This study offers a survey of new folk which is overdue – to date, new folk has been virtually ignored by the academic literature. It considers the tangled lineages that inform this indie genre, in the process suggesting new aspects of the history of rock music which stretch all the way back to Depression-era recordings in the shape of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*. At the same time, it attempts to steer a middle course between cultural studies approaches to popular music which at times fail to directly address music at all, and musicological approaches which are at times in danger of abstracting minutae until the broader frame is completely lost. By concentrating on three aspects of the recordings in question - vocal approach, a broad

consideration of sound (inclusive of production values and timbre), and structure as it pertains to both individual pieces and albums – this work hopes to offer a fresh way of reading popular music texts which deals specifically with the music without losing sight of its broader function and context.

I: Introduction

As with any field of human endeavour, there are many histories to be told regarding popular music. And although there are many ways in which the term 'popular music' might be used – it might be applied to any place, in any time – my project concerns a perceived field that spans from various permutations of folk and blues music recorded as early as the late 1920s, to a particular strain of folk-influenced, independent music of the period 1990-2008. I am interested in the ways in which rhetorics of spontaneity, inclusion, independence and oppositionality have been associated with both folk music and punk rock. These elements, many of them grounded in nineteenth century Romanticism, persist as powerful aesthetic guidelines in the making of music in the independent sector.

The 'new folk' I refer to in the title of the thesis is distributed through channels that developed through the independent business practices associated with punk, hardcore and 'indie'. However, this is not its only association with punk. Rather than tracing the origins of business practices in the independent music industry, or analysing the explicitly political orientations of either these practices or the lyrical content of particular songs, my project focuses on the ways in which punk aesthetics and folk influences have fused in certain examples of recent independent music. That is, my focus will be specifically the music as it is performed, recorded and perhaps, if the information is available, composed, though social, institutional and lyrical factors will necessarily come into play.

My first intention is to uncover what I consider to be just one of the many largely unrecognised legacies of punk – that is, the persistence of certain aesthetic tendencies in new folk. (My conception of the field of new folk will follow in outline form later in the introduction, and will be expanded upon in Chapter Three). I acknowledge that when I use the term 'punk aesthetics', the combination of tendencies so identified existed before the cultural formation of punk in the mid-seventies, and continues to proliferate

in many contexts that may or may not have a connection to punk or associated independent music practices. Punk was not the starting point of the aesthetic tendencies under discussion here, but had much to do with assembling, codifying, and amplifying them. As a result, practices that encourage participation, spontaneity, and rough-hewn and ready-made artefacts are justifiably associated with punk by the generations that have succeeded it. Additionally, all of the artists under discussion from the new folk milieu are connected to independent channels of performance, recording and distribution, and many have a history of involvement with, or interest in, punk and hardcore scenes.

The second is to outline the particular field of musical activity suggested above, which links received notions of nineteenth century folk music practices not only with recent independent folk, but with various folk and rock practices from the late fifties onwards, with punk as something of an aesthetic exemplar. Specifically, I wish to consider the complex of issues raised by these questions: why is it that a significant number of musicians for whom punk and hardcore were formative are making music most readily associated with folk music; what are the musical attributes that align this music to punk aesthetics; what are the particular aesthetic and philosophical similarities between the constructs of 'folk' and 'punk' that have made this music possible; and how do we perceive this strain of new folk in the context of the larger umbrella of rock music?

It is worth noting that the particular pool of performers I will refer to under the 'new folk' grouping have received next to no attention in academic work on popular music. Considering the international profile of artists such as Devendra Banhart, Joanna Newsom, Cat Power, Will Oldham and Bill Callahan, and a recording legacy stretching back almost two decades for Oldham and Callahan, this attention is very much overdue. Finally, in making connections between early American folk and its origins in (notions of) traditional British music, the folk revival of the fifties and sixties in Britain and England, and the aesthetic legacy of punk as seen in independent music practices world-wide, I hope to make a contribution to the way in which the history of popular music is understood.

Frames

Before going any further, I will define some terms of reference. It seems to me that the idea of 'rock music', as well as signifying a particular style or genre, also functions as something of an umbrella term that embraces many forms of popular and not-so-popular musics through a number of forms and structures. These forms and structures are fluid and contested, but include certain types of promotion, performance venues, performance practices, distribution, the institutions of albums and singles, and the labels which release these recorded works. While there are applications of the words 'punk' and 'folk' that exist outside of the discourse of rock music, for the most part these terms are used with the presumption of their situatedness within the field of rock, or in their relation to rock. For the purposes of the present work, I will use the term 'folk' to denote acoustic tendencies and the use of traditional, pre-Tin Pan Alley song forms and techniques in rock practice.[1]

This notion of rock as an umbrella term is drawn partially from Theodore Gracyk (1996: 1-13). Importantly, he urges that the distinction between songs, performances and recordings be observed in any analysis. He cites many instances where academic writing on popular music elides these distinct entities; it is commonplace for theorists to refer to 'songs' when the analysis is concerned with a particular recording and/or arrangement of a song (1996: viii-x). Gracyk prefigures his own treatise of an aesthetics of rock with this defining statement: 'Insofar as there can be a rock aesthetic, a general theory about rock music as an object of critical attention, I propose that it must focus on recorded music' (ix). While it may occasionally refer to the experience and reportage of live performances of particular artists, this study is grounded in the analysis of recordings. This seems the most reliable way to discuss similarities and differences of style and approach between musical instances that are decades apart. Recordings as texts are the instances of musical production which may be commonly referred to and accessed.

[1] This idea of folk as a sub-genre of rock is not to be confused with 'folk rock' as a style in its own right. Unterberger (2002: xiii-xiv) underlines the looseness of the use of the term folk rock as extending from 'the left-wing agitprop of the Fugs' on one hand to the poppy productions of The Mamas & The Papas on the other, with the mid-sixties recordings of The Byrds and Bob Dylan as epitomising the style. Sweers (2005) distinguishes the slightly later music of Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span and others as 'electric folk'.

The distinction between songs, performances and recordings is crucial, as much of what is prized in recording situations by the assortment of artists under study here comes down to a preference for spontaneity over studio craft. Of course, studio craft is often put to the service of delivering a product which simulates live-ness, but this only reinforces how highly prized these attributes are in rock music in general and in those recordings associated with punk and folk in particular. The pursuit of the notion of performance, rather than the creation of an ultimate version of a song-as-recorded-product may be interpreted as a response to what Adorno called 'the barbarism of perfection' (1938/2002: 301). It is difficult to discuss any notion of cultural practices as 'resistant' without slipping into the primitive/true vs refined/false dualities redolent of Romanticism – this problem, and the persistent power of Romantic tropes on the production of rock music will be explored in detail in Chapter Two – but Adorno's suggestion that 'perfection' creates an impenetrable veneer through which interpretation is impossible is very relevant to the music under consideration in this thesis. Adorno's 'barbarism of perfection' is invoked in the context of the live performance of classical music, but the basic tenets apply to notions of the importance of performance in the studio over 'slick' production. He refers to the presentation of the musical work as a 'flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus as such, in which all the cogwheels mesh so perfectly that not the slightest hole remains open for the meaning of the whole' (Adorno 1938/2002: 301). As we will see, punk aesthetics asserts the power of the flawed product, and encourages the idea that value in an artefact is often related to the ways in which it challenges what are perceived to be industry standards.

This construct is built from notions of authenticity inherited by rock music from folk and blues musics. Though there is not room here to fully explore the myriad notions of authenticity inherent in the experience of any popular music formation,[2] Connell and Gibson (2003: 27) observe that constructions of authenticity 'in relation to concepts such as "spontaneity", "grassroots" and "of the people" in opposition to their antithesis: "manipulation", "standardisation", "mass" and "commercial"' are based on an unworkable essentialism. Coyle and Dolan (1999: 17-35) consider 1990s groups such as Nirvana, Green Day and Pavement to come to the conclusion that precepts of authenticity place indie recording artists in an impossible bind, 'where bands are said to

[2]Aspects of authenticity debates relevant to this discussion are considered later in this chapter, under the heading 'Institutional Factors', as well as in Chapter Two.

have sold out even before having paid for their first records' (23). The current project seeks to find a balance between the outright dismissal of tropes of authenticity as Romantic idealisations, and a theoretical position which succumbs to that Romanticism.[3]

The idea of punk aesthetics will necessarily be attached to certain recordings as texts rather than wholesale to particular artists. The specific combination of logistics, aesthetics and musical style that result in this sort of recording often takes place early in an artist's career. For example, we might more readily find punk aesthetics in Will Oldham's recordings under variations of the Palace name (1993-96) than in his recordings as Bonnie 'Prince' Billy (1998 – present). Laurence Bell, owner of the label that licences Oldham's and Callahan's recordings for the U.K., Domino Records, responded in this way to the 'lo-fi' tag used to describe some of his releases: 'I knew those artists when they were recording really cheaply, and all they ever wanted to do was get the orchestras in!' (Gill 1999: 14). While this may be true, there is a difference between an artist who will make demonstration recordings (demos) cheaply in order to try to facilitate an entrée into the music industry, and those who make the aesthetic decision to create an official release of those recordings. Artists may also maintain aspects of punk aesthetics in recordings that have moved beyond the bare minimum of instrumentation, technology and musical technique that are its most obvious markers.

In terms of the analysis of musical texts, I will concentrate on three aspects: the use of the vocal, the way that recordings and compositions are structured, and the quality and nature of the sound itself. While certain aspects of musicological analysis are helpful – I will, for example, refer to the work of Allan Moore (2001) and David Brackett (1995) – I will eschew the use of musical notation. This is not because, as Bannister insists, it allows the discussion to necessarily stay 'within the realms of the comprehensible' (Bannister 2006: xiii) – a commonplace academic perspective which makes the unrealistic assumption that less people read musical notation than, say, Deleuze – but because folk, punk, and rock music in general are essentially oral and aural traditions. This is not to say that significant insights into these musics are not attainable with the

[3] See also Frith (1986) on the contradictions surrounding the idea of the authentic as opposed to technology, Grajeda (2002) on the phenomenon of 'lo-fi' as an example of this idea, and Thompson (2004) and Jason Middleton (2002) on authenticities in their relationship to punk scenes.

use of musical notation, but to recognise the potential for this type of analysis to get lost in the minutiae of quavers and scale degrees.

It is necessary to ground the propositions made in a project such as this one in the analysis of particular musical texts, a notion perhaps not possible in the context of certain wide-ranging cultural studies of popular music. This can take place at the level of song or album. My experience is that political and institutional factors come inevitably to bear on the reception of any text, but this does not make it necessary for any academic study to concentrate on those aspects. The notion of subculture essential to the much-cited studies of Hebdige (1979) and Thornton (1995) is not particularly relevant here; nor are texts which are concerned with the politics of consumption such as DeNora (2000) and Grossberg (1987). As worthwhile as these studies obviously are, the social orientation of the people who listen, or dance, or do housework, or shop for potential partners, to the music covered in this study is not my concern. As much as I acknowledge that it is impossible to completely dissociate recorded products with their audiences, (nor is this desirable), in the words of Martin Cloonan, my approach is largely *textual* rather than *extra-textual* (Cloonan 2005: 79-80).

There are instances of scholars that have made attempts to find some middle ground between what are sometimes perceived as the two poles of popular musicology, and its 'impenetrable' recourse to musical notation on one hand, and the cultural studies approach, in which musical texts may not figure at all. Of course, these are stereotypical polarities that hardly exist in practise; even so, if my analytical approach follows in any footsteps, it is probably those of Nadine Hubbs (2000) and Robert Fink (2002). I have also found the approach of Robert Cantwell (1991) instructive. Within a broad historical sweep, he maintains the variety of focus required to also discuss aspects of particular texts. Even more useful is the fact that these texts comprise Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952), a volume of great significance to my study. To sum up my analytical approach, my aim is to be able to study both the forest, and the individual trees, without getting lost in the detail of individual leaves.

An introduction to 'new folk' (and a mess of sub-genres)

'Avant-folk'; 'freak folk'; 'psychedelic folk'; 'neu-volk'; 'free folk'; 'progressive folk'; 'the New Weird America'; many are the categories created by the music press over the last decade to try to describe independent artists who utilise acoustic instrumentation and/or elements of 'folk' material or techniques. In a sense, I am constructing my own genre by using the term 'new folk', which is perhaps less commonly used than many of the appellations above, but for my purposes encompasses them all without the connotations, pejorative or otherwise, of qualifiers such as 'freak', 'progressive', and so on.[4] For my purposes, the early music of Will Oldham, released under variants of the 'Palace' name (Palace Music, Palace Brothers, Palace Songs etc.) marks well the beginning of new folk. It is in these records that we hear a punk aesthetic infusing musical practices that we might associate with folk.

The first Palace release, a 7" single called 'Ohio River Boat Song' (1993)[5] is an adaptation of a traditional Scottish song, 'Loch Tay Boat Song'. The debut album that followed, *There is no-one what will take care of you* (1993) was a ramshackle collection of folk and country[6] influences topped by Oldham's faltering voice. His Kentucky origins seemed a reasonable excuse for some journalists to throw the word 'Appalachian' at him (e.g. Kot 1996), despite the fact that he is from the city of Louisville. All of these things, together with the fact that Oldham's music was issued on the Chicago independent label Drag City, helped to legitimise folk/country-flavoured music making within the independent avenues of the music industry which had sprung from punk and hardcore. Other explicit links between the early Palace records and a hardcore lineage were made by the involvement of members of earlier Louisville groups Squirrel Bait and Slint.

[4] Devendra Banhart, the artist most readily associated with the 'freak folk' tag, finds it abhorrent and has suggested at least two alternatives: 'naturalismo' (Keefe 2007) and The Family (Schroeder 2005). Given his long, dark hair and hippie-ish clobber, the latter option, already used in the late sixties, seems ill-advised.

[5] Collected on *Lost Blues and Other Songs* (Drag City 1997).

[6] Oldham's work is also sometimes grouped under the genre 'alternative country', or 'alt.country' for short. Rather than further complicate the discussion here, I will write about the distinction between new folk and alt.country in Chapter Three.

Soon after these releases, the music of Smog (Bill Callahan) began to change from his early experimental releases to incorporate acoustic guitar and other elements we might associate with folk. The mid-nineties also saw the emergence of Cat Power. At the time these artists were grouped as 'slowcore' and even 'sadcore' in an attempt to at once indicate the intimacy of their work and a lineage continued from hardcore. They were also included in the field of 'lo-fi', a term that had been in use since the late 80s, for their seeming preference for home recording and minimal instrumental means. From the perspective of 2009, the early recordings of Palace, Smog and Cat Power seem like the start of something, with independent folk proliferating around the turn of the century with artists such as Charalambides[7], Devendra Banhart, Faun Fables, Six Organs of Admittance, Wooden Wand, and many others.

The music I will be referring to as new folk is necessarily in the independent sphere. It does not extend to more 'overground' 'roots' artists such as Ben Harper and Jack Johnson or, at the Australian level, John Butler Trio or The Waifs[8]. It is largely an American phenomenon, though there is something of a British equivalent, with quite a different focus, in artists described as 'folktronica', such as Tuung. On the face of it, new folk may seem as spurious a grouping as any, except for the idea that in many ways, the artists under discussion follow on from post-punk and indie musics in a way that was impossible for *rock* bands who followed Nirvana, chronologically speaking, under the mainstream category of 'alternative'. As Bannister recognises, 'the depressed economic climate of the late 1980s, the increasing incorporation of indie labels into the industry. . . the crossover success of Nirvana and grunge' all mark 1991 as 'the end of a chapter in the indie story' (Bannister 2006: xxiii). This demarcation of rock music history is pertinent here. My reading of the currents of the independent sphere at this time is that as Nirvana were making their mark upon the mainstream in 1991-2, Smog and Will Oldham were releasing their first records[9]; just as indie *rock* was largely co-opted by major labels, another underground emerged, this time with an even more back-to basics approach, with folk taking the place of rock as the vehicle of do-it-yourself

[7] As detailed in Chapter Three, Charalambides actually formed in 1991 and began releasing music soon after, but came to much wider notice towards the end of the decade.
[8] It must be acknowledged that the successes of John Butler Trio and The Waifs were achieved completely independently through the label Jarrah Hill. However, as there are no other attributes that link them to punk aesthetics or lineage, they do not fit the new folk formation.
[9] Oldham contributed to an album by the group Box of Chocolates called *Fearful Symmetry* (1990) before debuting as Palace Brothers in 1993; Bill Callahan's first cassette release as Smog was *Macrame Gunplay* (1988), and first album proper was *Sewn To The Sky* (1990).

(punk) aesthetics. A less sympathetic view might hold that the success of Nirvana made rock somewhat passé in independent circles, which would give any musics that stood in relief to 'grunge' potential to be the next cool thing. If one major slice of underground taste went towards the lo-fi folk and country of Oldham and others, another went to what was then called 'intelligent dance music' – The Orb, Aphex Twin etc.

The concept of new folk, its use for the ideas in this thesis, and a survey of artists in the field will be covered in much greater detail in Chapter Three. The artists I have chosen for the case studies in Chapter Five, along with Will Oldham, are Oakland, California-based Faun Fables and Melbourne's Kes. Each offers a different relationship to folk material. Oldham's prodigious output is varied, but also united in its relationship to Anglo/American folk, country, and singer-songwriter traditions. Faun Fables is primarily the project of Dawn McCarthy. Her practice encompasses traditional folk material (Anglo-Celtic, Nordic and Eastern European) which is often transformed by her arrangements and original lyrics; original material that draws from these reference points; elaborate theatrical presentations; and stylistic flights that at times bring to mind progressive rock of the seventies. Kes is singer-songwriter Karl E. Scullin. The press releases for his first two albums describe his style as 'autistic folk' and 'free folk', though there is nothing in the content of his songs that is readily associated with folk structures or techniques. It is really only the sparse and often acoustic instrumentation of his first album and a predilection for recorders which affords him the association. All three artists, however, demonstrate aspects of punk aesthetics in their approach to the recording as text, in the use of the voice, in their use of song structure, and in a minimalism of means with regard to instrumentation, instrumental technique and the use of technology. Not all of these elements will necessarily be present in every example, but some combination of them makes a connection to the oppositionality of punk and independent practices apparent.

Chapter Four will suggest a variety of artists which have informed new folk artists. However, it will also include a discussion of the notion of canon. Given the musical choices that new folk artists make in those recordings that encompass punk aesthetics, I will argue that these texts are intrinsically anti-canonical. Just as many early blues and folk recordings fulfilled the function of documentation rather than consisting of concerted attempts to make a unified artwork out of a collection of songs, many new

folk recordings, with their feeling of spontaneity and performance, have more in common with this approach than that of the albums which regularly feature in 'best of all time' lists. Additionally, it is not my intention to elevate the artists or recordings under discussion to the status of 'the greatest in their field'. I am aware that canonical approaches tend to present 'a reductive account of history and culture (which) masks a complex and contradictory set of values and mechanisms that have been passed down over the years' (Jones 2008: 5). Notwithstanding my inclusion of Bob Dylan as central to the account of popular music history that unfolds here, like Moore, it is my intention to 'subvert the growth of a "canon" of popular music' (Moore 2001: 7) through discussing artists seldom assayed in academic studies, not in the hope of elevating them above other artists, but simply because they seem to me to be part of a story worth telling.

Institutional factors – the independent sphere

Most, if not all of the artists that I will group under the banner of new folk record for independent record labels. If fact, I see this as often illustrative of a philosophy of independence that works in tandem with the decisions made during the recording process that we might align with punk aesthetics. However, this does not mean that I will promote a simple mainstream/independent binary where the former is bad and the latter good. Rhetorics of independence, oppositionality and autonomy are often positioned in academic writing as romantic fantasies in a context where ultimately even the most independent artist has to make money from their music. Writing about the music of the sixties counterculture, Mary Harron seems to define any recorded product as 'mass-market culture': 'Far from abandoning hype, the new counter-culture simply found different strategies for selling sincerity' (quoted in Bloomfield 1993: 17).

This position seems overly cynical to me, based on the very broad generalisation that all products are basically the same; that if a product is sold, the motivation is largely financial. Is there a threshold at which the sales of a particular product might be said to fit the description of 'mass-market culture'? The sales of an artist like Kes are modest to say the least. His second album, *The Grey Goose Wing*, was limited to 500 copies by small Melbourne label Mistletone. I can also see no reason to assume that the work of a

countercultural icon like Joni Mitchell, exactly the sort of artist I would think Harron had in mind, was insincere or manufactured simply because it was recorded for Reprise, a subsidiary of Warner Brothers. Countering Harron, Hesmondhalgh finds enough optimism to concede that perhaps independent labels who make arrangements with major capital – be it major labels or private business concerns - 'permit a space in the music industry for those uncomfortable with the slick world of the corporations . . . by forming a protective shield, whereby corporate finance and corporate culture are kept at "arm's length" distance from musicians and staff who share tastes and political backgrounds' (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 44).

As Hesmondhalgh observes, a purist position which does not countenance such mergers is often unworkable in reality. Even musicians, and the enthusiasts who run indie labels, have to eat. 'The choice to set up more permanent positions and careers, while despised by many enthusiasts, is often based on a genuinely idealistic commitment to fostering talent, and to providing an alternative' (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 45). It seems to me that there is another model for record labels little recognised by academic research. Drag City, home of Faun Fables and Will Oldham, is a good example of this type. Although independent, it has a roster which includes artists of international repute such as Oldham, Callahan and Newsom, and, as at early 2009, a catalogue of nearly 400 releases; Drag City is a well established business. Although there are differences between the vast, dispersed market of the U.S. and the relatively centralised U.K. market that Hesmondhalgh analyses, Drag City fits part of the description of the successful post-punk labels he studied:

> Rather than naively contrasting the spontaneous art of the independents with a corrupting and predatory commercial sector, some of the post-punk companies recognized that in a popular-cultural medium, independent ownership of production *and* distribution was the most effective route towards democratization of the industry. These post-punk independents proclaimed that at the heart of the politics of cultural production was the issue of how music came to its audiences, whereas rock discourse had tended to mystify and/or ignore this process. (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 37-38)

Drag City enjoys enduring relationships with its artists. At the time of writing, Will Oldham has been associated with the label for sixteen years, and Bill Callahan has been there even longer. This situation is not so unusual; other big independents such as Kill

Rock Stars, K Records, Kranky, Matador and Merge (U.S.), Domino, Mute, 4AD, Beggar's Banquet and Too Pure (U.K.) and Spunk (Aust.) – and there are many others - have similarly stable relationships with artists, which leads to the conclusion that arrangements are relatively conducive to both sides. To make the assumption that these artists work autonomously does not seem too far-fetched. One might say that these bigger independents operate in a middle ground of sorts, with international exposure and business available through well-established, independent internet and retail channels, not to mention a substantial foothold in the larger retail chains through their more successful artists. Additionally, the reputation of these labels precedes the releases of new artists.

Less optimistically, Hesmondhalgh introduces the idea of the 'pseudo-independent'. Companies such as Suede's Nude Records promote themselves as independent but are fully backed by a major label. His observation is that in Britain, it is often the case that new artists allow localised 'micro-independent' labels to release their first records, but hopefully only as a stepping stone to a pseudo-independent. It seems to me that this analysis is very much based on the situation in Britain, where a fashion-oriented music industry makes and breaks acts extremely quickly. It is an analysis that seems irrelevant to the American independent sector, where labels such as those big indies listed above are seen to promote and support artists who are unlikely to aspire to the pop mainstream. Simply put, there is enough critical mass in the US to support acts at an independent level. The other factor here is that in the ten years since Hesmondhalgh's essay, sales of CDs have been significantly eroded by downloading and file-sharing. In this period, big English indie Domino has released number one singles and albums by Arctic Monkeys and Franz Ferdinand. These acts have also brought the label considerable international success. It is quite likely that given the changing modes of promotion, delivery and consumption of popular music over the past decade, there is not that much that a major label can offer an artist that one of the big indies can't – yet the big indies provide a much more autonomous environment for artists to work within.

The situation is different again in Australia. Although there are 'psuedos', such as Modular and Eleven, there are smaller labels such as Mistletone, The Lost and Lonesome Record Co. and Spanish Magic which seem to maintain operations that are completely separate to those of the mainstream industry. Spunk, a long-running label

that made its reputation on licensing major independent artists from overseas (but increasingly adds like-minded Australian acts), operated completely independently until the unexpected chart success of Antony and the Johnsons, probably closely followed by healthy sales from Sufjan Stevens and Joanna Newsom, meant they were able to make a deal with sympathetic people at EMI in 2006 to manufacture and distribute their product without having any impact on the decisions made at the label. Neither truly a 'pseudo', nor absolutely independent, Spunk, as of the start of 2009, seems to have the best of both worlds.

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Dave Laing, in his seminal book on punk *One Chord Wonders*, writes about the idea of a 'space' opened up for punk rock in London by the earlier pub rock: 'a *space* for both performing and recording that lay outside the constraints of the mainstream music industry.' This is articulated through pubs as performance venues for punk bands, and labels such as Chiswick and Stiff, which in the first instance released music by pub rockers, but went on to release early punk records. Laing compares this to the space opened up by folk clubs in the sixties which provided a forum for a variety of musical approaches (Laing 1985: 9-10). It might be said that punk in turn opened up a space – perhaps not quite as literal a space, but a theoretical space – for a variety of independent music practices such as new folk to operate in – something which resulted in a punk diaspora (Moore 2001: 139), or we might even say, a punk virus.

My definition of punk is not restricted to what happened in London in 1976-77. There are many coordinates of time and place which can be viewed as constituting punk 'scenes' – more of this in the next chapter. Dawn McCarthy of Faun Fables, growing up in Washington State, saw her involvement in punk from a pre-teen age (in the mid-eighties) as just a part of her embrace of 'radical, alternative culture stuff'[10]. Cotton Seiler, in his paper on independent music in Louisville, Kentucky, writes about the various discursive formations in that city that might be linked to punk:

> What punk instilled in Louisville artists was a recognition of the connection between aesthetic forms and social and political formations. The assault on 1970s rock gigantism

[10] Interview with the author, 2006.

> launched by punk had amplified their awareness of conventional rock as expressing social formations of which they wanted no part. Punk registered as a refusal to sonically shill, as it were, for multinational capital, sexism, racism, and a number of other objectionable realities known more generically as "bullshit."
>
> Why, then, did those Louisville musicians radicalized by punk reject its musical aesthetics? The blunt answer is that punk song structures and arrangements ceased to *challenge* this particular group of musicians in an artistic sense . . . The Louisville Sound that was crafted in the early 1990s represented an attempt to reconstruct punk's critique and to pour the latter into a new musical vessel. (Seiler 2001: 200)

Seiler comes as close as any academic to acknowledging what is at the basis of my research: the idea that independent music practices continue to be informed by punk aesthetics irrespective of musical style. Interestingly, Seiler's grouping of artists includes Will Oldham's Palace, but to my mind, we could equally consider the experimental chamber rock of Montreal's Constellation label, or the 'outsider' music of Sydney label Dual Plover, which ranges from primitive electronics to operatic performance artists, as embodying punk aesthetics. Vannini (2003) makes the connection between Constellation and punk, though his essay is more concerned with the business practices and political messages of the label than the music it issues.

Whether we are talking about The Louisville Sound of the early nineties, the music being issued by Constellation, or even that collected on Harry Smith's *Anthology*, we are talking about relatively obscure music. To use Bourdieu's terminology, virtually all of the music under discussion in this paper – even that of Bob Dylan, arguably - requires specific 'cultural capital' to decode (Bourdieu 1984: 2-4). By inference, there is an absent majority in this equation, the 'great unwashed', who haven't heard A Silver Mount Zion (who record for Constellation) or the Reverend Sister Mary Nelson (included on Smith's *Anthology*), or whatever the case may be. While this binary division of taste is problematic, seemingly essentialist and in Bourdieu's mind, predicated on class (Bourdieu 1984: 11-97), it allows us to consider the irony of the idea of the legacy of punk aesthetics. Though punk purported to encourage participation from anyone, regardless of musical training or financial means, by prizing abrasive timbres and oppositional statements it produced cultural products that Bourdieu might have identified as having 'aestheticized qualities'. This contradiction is at the heart of many legacies of punk aesthetics – theoretically all-inclusive and democratic, yet

sometimes resulting in cultural products with avant-garde tendencies which are, we would assume, exclusivist, requiring specific cultural capital to decode. This is a tension that will always be in play when discussing punk's, and folk's, precepts of inclusion and community.

This goes some way towards explaining the way in which mainstream punk and 'emo' acts do not embody punk aesthetics. Through the production of music that is meant to appeal to a broad demographic, and which is marketed by multinational corporations, abrasive and oppositional qualities are manufactured as a promotional veneer rather than residing in the works as integral elements found in performance, recording and composition.[11] One is reminded of Adorno's 'barbarism of perfection'.

This is not to say that it is impossible for groups that sell millions of records to exhibit aspects of punk aesthetics. One could argue that we can find at least two examples of punk aesthetics in the work of Radiohead. The first is with the release of *Kid A* (2000), through EMI. This highly successful album was a radical timbral shift for the band, essentially sublimating their previous rock dynamics to electronic elements. While these elements were well established in more marginal musical cultures (Thom Yorke admitted to buying the entire catalogue of English electronic label Warp during the gestation of the album), their fusion with rock elements was arguably abrasive and, at times, genuinely avant-garde. With the release of this album, Radiohead operated with an autonomy usually associated with the independent sphere.[12] The second instance was the online 'pay what you will' release of *In Rainbows* (2006). While the album's content did not move radically from the models of *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* (2001) - if anything it settled on a middle-ground between the electronic content of those albums and the epic rock of earlier releases - the experimental mode of release represented a DIY (do it yourself) ethic for the group, and for its fans. It is hard to say whether the group would have made more income through a first release through more traditional channels.

[11] See Encarnacao (2007a) for a dissection of corporate punk in the form of Green Day.
[12] Hainge (2005: 62-84) discusses Radiohead's efforts to 'opt out of certain aspects of the mainstream' (70) with the release of *Kid A* and its companion album *Amnesiac* (2001). Interestingly, he points towards unconventional song structures and unorthodox approaches to vocal style and sound – two of the three parameters I use in my analyses – as particularly indicative of aspects which 'alientated certain sections of the band's long-standing fan base' (62-63), and so epitomise the anti-commerciality of this phase of the band's career.

While I acknowledge that both of these instances in Radiohead's career engendered an enormous amount of publicity, I do not think that this detracts from the independence from music industry machinery demonstrated in either instance. The cynical view is that whenever artists attract a substantial amount of publicity, it results from some kind of gimmick. It may be more realistic to consider that occasionally interest in the media is attracted by genuinely provocative actions with substantial impact on cultural production. Sometimes, as was the case with *Kid A*, the publicity might actually have to do with the musical content of the album. This example would seem to concur with Hesmondhalgh's challenge to what he sees as the assumed wisdom that 'aesthetics (is) an almost inevitable outcome of certain institutional and political positions . . . that institutional positions have traceable aesthetic outcomes' (1996: 36) Being signed to a major label does not necessarily result in a lack of autonomy – though it probably goes without saying that it is more likely that artists of the stature of Radiohead will enjoy such autonomy than new or unsuccessful artists with a major.

*

Hesmondhalgh ultimately comes to the conclusion that indie/major partnerships inevitably favour the major. He writes of 'the failure of the post-punk challenge to the structure of the music industry' (Hesmondhalgh 1999: 53). Given the British context in which he was writing, his observation seems to be that the indie sector of the eighties had by and large crumbled to make way not only for indie/major partnerships, but for pseudo-independents – the same old majors in drag. However, given the examples above, perhaps it is not too naïve to agree with Vannini: 'Escaping the basic traits of capitalism, such as trade, may be impossible, but re-asserting the meaning of what is traded and of trade itself is indeed possible and worth pursuing' (Vannini 2003: par 9).

II: Genre – Folk and Punk

> What I was getting at was the idea of flip-flopping the power structure, so every individual had some power, rather than all the power being centered on a few organizations or just one. I said . . . 'Make your own music. Pick up a guitar, or just sing a capella. We don't need professional singers. We don't need stars.' (Pete Seeger, quoted in Hajdu 2001: 8)

Seeger's quote, with its rejection of the music industry as well as the power invested in political and social structures, could easily represent a punk outlook if not for its gentility. Punk, as well as folk, is often seen as based on an idealistic presumption that power structures can be eroded and challenged, if not necessarily toppled. The fact that independent practices of all kinds still carry some essence of punk aesthetics seems to argue against punk's initial slogan of 'no future'. At the very least, this is part of the argument I am mounting – but the question that must be addressed is, to what extent are these ideas based on nineteenth-century Romantic notions of authenticity and autonomy? Furthermore, even if we are aware that idealistic notions of the power of art, the purity of the artist, the integrity of 'the people', and so on, are constructions, does this mean that they have no influence on the ways in which music is made and received?

Robert Walser defines the purpose of genre as being to 'organise the reproduction of an ideology'. He is quoted by Michael Brocken, who takes the idea further to claim that those who seek to preserve traditional folk forms in a post-industrial context are inevitably doomed to failure. He writes, 'folk music simulation – especially recordings – can only ever be an initiative that deliberately caters for those in quest of an affect and image of musical history' (Brocken 2003: 65). Willhardt agrees, arguing that 'fixing genre serves an essentially conservative agenda of attempting to recapture an absent past', and quotes Pratt's observation that 'traditional musical forms are part of that lost world, and a longing for them is a utopian impulse' (Willhardt 2006: 31). As we shall see, notions of 'the folk' and 'traditional music' are themselves constructs.

Punk is most readily thought of as musical style and sartorial style conjoined: rock music reduced to a sneering, barely competent but song-based racket, played by and to people in ripped clothing and safety pins. This cliché is largely rejected by many writers who are more interested in a punk 'essence' or 'attitude'. As Laing notes, '(T)he music which was held to retain the spirit of punk rock was not required to sound at all like the Sex Pistols or The Clash' (1985: 108). Goshert, focused more on 'punk's political activist facet' (2000: 101), insists that it is punk's refusal to conform to any stylistic formation that gives it its power.

Brackett notes that rock musicians are described in the music press as working from 'the "primitive savage" model of inspiration' which goes hand in hand with 'a Romantic notion of unmediated artistic spontaneity' (1995: 158-159). Constructions of folk and punk resonate with these ideas; each, in different ways promotes the idea of technological dystopianism (Bannister 2006: xxvi), folk through musical practices that make supposed links with a pre-pre-fabricated music of the people, and punk through a DIY aesthetic which limits technological mediation to something of a minimum. While the electric guitars that are a constant of prototypical punk rock are obviously industrial products, records of the initial punk period were made 'instantly' in comparison with the commercial product it was seen to rebel against – that of the Pink Floyds and Fleetwood Macs. This DIY approach, and the use of minimal means in terms of recording and technique is an important trigger for much new folk.

Many claims have been made by and for both folk and punk. This chapter will sift through writings on both genres[13], not only underlining the romantic constructions behind them but suggesting that these tropes still carry much power.

[13] I have decided to go with the word 'genre' as it is commonly used. That is to say, by Moore's definition (2001:3), I should more properly talk about folk and punk as styles. Following on from Byrnside, he writes 'It is those common features which are found widely pertinent to a style's practitioners which are basic to definitions of it. Genres, on the other hand, cut right across styles, such that there will be genres that intersect both rock *and* other styles of popular music. Any performance of an individual song will necessarily exemplify both. Thus, a list of genres relevant to rock styles might include the "uptempo dance number", the "anthem" and the "romantic ballad"'. However, in common usage, people talk about musical genre rather than musical style, perhaps because the word style is so easily conflated with ideas about fashion. Considering the connections that are often made between punk and fashion, which I am not concerned with in this project, referring to punk as a genre fixes my meaning more precisely than referring to a punk style.

Folk

Whatever icon of 'folk music' one thinks of, the chances are that their folk status can be easily dismantled, proved to be 'fake'. The three figures of folk music that loom the largest in the context of popular music are probably Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and Woody Guthrie. The evolution of Bob Dylan, folk singer, from Robert Zimmerman is often told, perhaps most entertainingly by Ian MacDonald (2003: 14-17), who says of the voice we hear on Dylan's 1962 self-titled debut, 'Though it may sound like it, this isn't some visionary farm boy new in town from deepest Oklahoma, but a shrewd middle-class Jewish college dropout who, a mere two and a half years back, signed off from high school, recording his Yearbook ambition as "to join Little Richard"' (14). Joan Baez, who became a figurehead of the folk revival with the phenomenal success of her debut, self-titled album in 1960, was a middle-class Californian girl inspired to become a folk singer at the age of thirteen by a concert in the gym of a local high school given by Pete Seeger. She made her name in the Cambridge, Boston folk scene after her family moved there when she was aged seventeen (Hajdu 2001: 7-9, 13-25). Woody Guthrie, we are told, was not really one of the workers he was often seen to represent. Even though he became 'a template for what an authentic folk performer has to be' (Willhardt 2006: 33), and a pivotal influence upon Bob Dylan amongst many others, 'he deliberately constructed the celebrated wise-hayseed persona, all the while expanding his role as a savvy grass-roots organizer' (Light, quoted in Willhardt 2006: 33). So who are 'the folk' anyway?

Many writers have come to the conclusion that the idea of 'the folk' is a construction that is only a couple of hundred years old. As the effects of industrialisation became apparent, a distinction was made by certain scholars between those people who subsisted in an agrarian mode of production and those who became the industrial working class. As the former vanished, they were increasingly mythologised as having the keys to a culture's identity. However, this model already objectifies 'the folk' as an 'other' which was viewed, from the perspective of scholars such as William J. Thoms, from Britain, and Johann Gottfried von Herder, an early German nationalist, with various levels of condescension:

> (F)rom the late eighteenth century onwards, 'folk' was a term associated with a scholarly, upper-class understanding of 'lower classes' or 'ordinary people', apparently depending . . . upon their 'otherness' . . . ('The folk' were perceived as) essentially those who preserved an older way of life within an urban and literate society, an unlearned, pre-industrial group of people whose customs and culture would not, and should not, change even as the dynamic, industrialising society altered around them. (Mitchell 2007: 8)[14]

Of particular interest to this project is the use of the term 'pre-industrial'. Notwithstanding the various experiments with form, technology and musical style conducted by various new folk performers, the evocation of a mythical 'pre-electric idyll' is a constant in the repertoire. This tendency might itself be seen as 'handed down' from generation to generation of popular music artists.

Just as 'the folk' was a construction of philosophers and academics – configured as an 'other' to an assumedly more urbane, sophisticated norm – folk music was something documented by folklorists in published music, and these publications froze examples which came to be seen as indicative. Sweers (2005: 45) points to the collections of Francis Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston, five volumes, 1882-92) and Cecil Sharp, *Folk Songs From Somerset* (London, five volumes, 1904-09), the latter compiled with Rev Charles L. Marson. The Child ballads were a formative source for the folk revival of the fifties and sixties, constantly referenced on the backs on record sleeves – for example, on *Joan Baez* (1960) and Judy Collins' *Golden Apples of the Sun* (1962). Both Child and Sharp exerted considerable influence on subsequent understandings of folk music. Similarly to the theories of Thoms and Herder, Sharp saw the 'common people' as agricultural workers who passed on their songs orally. Two further distinctions are made by Sweers (2005: 47-48) regarding early definitions of folk song: 'Herder and Sharp believed folk song to be communal in two ways: its authors are unknown, and it can be considered to reflect the mind of a community'.

[14] Gillian Mitchell's *The North American Folk Music Revival: Nation and Identity in the United States and Canada* is an excellent source on the origins of the music (and politics) of the folk revival of the fifties and sixties, except for the glaring omission of any reference to Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which is seen as a highly influential collection by virtually every other commentator on the revival.

Additionally, Mitchell refers to 'Wilhelm Gottfried von Herder' (2007: 8-9) when I believe she means to refer to Johann Gottfried von Herder (1774-1803). The only reference I can find to a Wilhelm is as the second author of a collection of Johann's works – perhaps he is a descendent of some kind. Mitchell refers to Johann Gottfried von Herder on page 27 of her book as if he is the same person she had referred to earlier as Wilhelm – this seems to confirm that the earlier reference is a mistake.

Sharp saw folk song as completely separate to and distinct from both art music, which contrary to the communal nature of folk music was an expression of the individual, and popular music, a commercial form which was a lamentable product of the industrial age.

The work of Child, whose theories carried the particular weight of his position as the first English Literature professor of Harvard University, 'led to the conclusion that any vernacular music of worth in America had been transplanted from Britain' (Mitchell 2007: 25). Marcus (1997: 100) perpetuates the idea that Child's collections 'catalogued a legacy that by the 1920s persisted more readily in the southern Appalachians than in the British Isles'. John Lomax challenged Anglo-centric views of folk music in America with his particular interest in 'Texas cowboy musical culture' and 'the music of Southern African-Americans' (Mitchell 2007: 25-26). His influence was marked in establishing the notion that America's folk music was to be found in its Western and Southern states, amongst both black and white communities. Just as importantly, Lomax challenged the view that the only valid approach to folk music was a quest for the preservation of ancient song forms that could not change. Many of his ideas achieved human form when he discovered Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly) in the Georgia State Penitentiary. Upon Leadbelly's release in the early 1940s, Lomax took him to New York, where he was received by an audience comprised largely of 'white, urban, middle-class intellectuals with left-wing sympathies' for whom 'Leadbelly was a hero, a walking songbook and the embodiment of their romanticised perception of the oppressed but noble Southern Blackman.'(Mitchell 2007: 34-35). Mitchell goes on to assert that Pete Seeger was inspired by Leadbelly's performances to become a folk singer himself; however, as Sweers reports (2005: 26) Seeger's father was composer Charles Seeger, who exposed him to traditional American music from an early age and with whom the seventeen-year-old Pete went on a field trip through North Carolina in 1936.

A passionate dialogue begins to emerge around the 1940s between various field workers, academic researchers, folk singers and record collectors which constantly seeks to redefine folk song and 'the folk' themselves through various tropes of authenticity. Though Woody Guthrie's 'hayseed persona' was apparently a fabrication, he was a prodigious songwriter. His songs were about his notion of 'the people' rather than learnt from them. Indeed, Frith (1981: 34) observes that Guthrie 'made his music

for an urban, educated audience rather than for the rural workers about whom he sang – none of Guthrie's songs was found among the Oakies and Arkies who fled the Dustbowl; their lives were already dominated by the commercial sounds of the radio and phonogram'.

By the fifties, there were two prominent notions of who 'the folk' were, in the context of the folk revival. As John Street tells it (2000: 305), the first formulation was of factory workers, oppressed by industrialisation, 'waiting to be organised by communism, for whom folk music is a form of social realism'. The second formulation is the one that has more generally filtered down through rock music. We can see its genesis in the pre-industrial fantasies of Child and Sharp, refracted for specifically American use in John Lomax's (and to an extent Child's) notion of the Appalachian mountains as a crucible of traditions that had fallen by the wayside elsewhere. In Cantwell's words (quoted in Street 2000: 305), these folk 'live up on the mountain, telling tales, distilling whiskey, singing ballads, salvaging old washing machine motors, and playing the fiddle'. Pattison (1987: 79-80) presents a similar image, more explicitly relating the idea to rock music:

> Rock recreates . . . the folk culture which the first age of Romanticism invented . . . noble Saxon pioneers, living in the hollows of Appalachia, where the arts of the banjo and the dulcimer are kept alive . . . (they are) proudly independent, unreservedly decent, thoroughly noble, and simply wise. They are our pure selves. Folk is our natural home to which we return from the moribund realms of the modern . . . Bob Dylan . . . is the high priest of rock's invented folk tradition not because he sings Anglo-Saxon ballads – he doesn't much – but because his satires are counterpointed against a myth of folk purity.

It's important to note that new folk descends much more from this sense of 'rock's invented folk tradition' than pre-Dylan notions of 'folk music' as traditional songs of unknown authorship which belong to a particular ethnic group. Indeed, the use of the word 'folk' in the discourse of popular music since the mid-sixties more often than not assumes a context within rock, though the older use of the word is still found.

However, the Romanticised conceptions of the folk summarised by Pattison and Cantwell were already considerably muddied by the release of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* in 1952. A collection of 84 commercial recordings from the

period 1926-34[15], it broke with, or ignored, the theory that only field recordings recorded *in situ*, of 'real people', rather than 'entertainers' who had reached a level of repute such that they were recorded for commercial release, were eligible for the distinction of being called folk music. Record producer Joe Boyd recalls Alan Lomax (John's son) as the type of folklorist who rejected Smith's collection outright due to its commercial origins. Though Boyd opines that by 1964, the ascendancy of Joan Baez and Bob Dylan to the status of folk's royal couple united the two rival camps, his delineation between the Boston and New York folk scenes[16] tells us much about various notions of authenticity in regards to folk music, and also about the reception of the *Anthology* by the folk revivalists of the fifties and sixties, so I will quote it at length:

> Everyone (in the Boston/Cambridge scene) bought the blues and country music reissue LPs emerging in the wake of Harry Smith's masterful *Anthology of American Folk Music* compilation. In cheap apartments in old wooden houses they taught themselves a particular Appalachian banjo or fiddle style, or figured out how Bukka White tuned his National steel-bodied guitar. New Yorkers like (Pete) Seeger and the Weavers gave music from all over the world – often learned from Alan Lomax's field recordings – the same chirpy strum and hearty harmonies, as if that proved all men were brothers. The Cambridge scene was drawn more to differences than similarities . . .
>
> Lomax was a bear of a man, a skirt-chaser, completely sure of himself and his theories of the inter-connectedness of music across cultures and continents. Travelling from Mississippi prison chain gang to Italian tobacco fields with his tape recorder, he had developed a thick hide and a bullying manner. Smith, on the other hand, had become a collector of records of traditional music almost by accident. He was a homosexual who made experimental films, spoke several Native American languages and smoked frequent joints . . . New York folk singers were more comfortable with the earnestness of Lomax's field recordings, while the Cambridge musicians were drawn in a context-free, almost postmodern way to the vivid personalities that shone through the commercial 78s Smith and later compilers had made available. Big Bill Broonzy, Jimmy Rodgers, the Carter Family and Blind Lemon Jefferson had been stars in the 1920s and early 1930s for good reason: the artistry of their music far surpassed that of Lomax's amateurs.

[15] Harry Smith's original notes put the range of recording dates at 1926-33. Drawing, one imagines, on research that came to light between the original 1952 issue of the *Anthology* and its reissue in 1997, Jeff Place (1997: 38-63) asserts the range of dates as 1926-34, with many dates different from Smith's citations. Cantwell (1991: 380) erroneously cites the dates 1927-32 and Marcus (1997: 102-103) perhaps draws on Cantwell in replicating the error.

[16] Another omission from Mitchell's book is any mention of the Boston/Cambridge scene. In contrasting the U.S. folk revival with that in Canada, virtually all of the folk activity in the U.S. during this time is attributed by Mitchell to New York and the Newport Folk Festival on Rhode Island.

> Lomax viewed commercial recordings as tainted by Mammon. At a dinner party in London in the late '80s, I suggested to him that folklorists and record producers were both just professionals making a living by recording music for a targeted audience. His response was to invite me outside for a fist sandwich. (Boyd 2006: 30-31)[17]

Marcus (1997: 88) reinforces the central importance of the *Anthology* to the folk revival generation, reporting that Bob Dylan studied the copy housed at the University of Minnesota in 1959-60, and quotes Dave Van Ronk as writing: 'The *Anthology* was our bible . . . We knew every word of every song on it, including the ones we hated'. Many of the artists, with the exception of a minority of well-knowns such as The Carter Family, received little identification, despite Smith's scholarly, if idiosyncratic notes. As many commentators have noted (Skinner 2006: 65, Marcus 1997: 104, Cantwell 1991: 367) the fact that it was impossible to tell whether some tracks had been made by black or white performers was highly unusual at the time. Marcus receives Smith's anthology as a nation in its own right – a construction of an 'old weird America', an alternative to the segregated America at war in Korea in the politically paranoid McCarthy era in which it was released (92). Mark Mazullo, in his 1997 critique of Marcus' *Mystery Train* , suggests that, typical of his baby boomer generation, Marcus has bought the myth of community offered by constructions of folk music and applied it wholesale to rock music – a thesis not far removed from that of Frith's (1981).

The community that was supposed to be represented by Smith's *Anthology* is itself very hard to define. To Marcus' summary of 'hillbilly classics and primitive blues made in the commercial half-light of the Jazz Age' (1997: 101), we must add Cajun music. But as guitarist and scholar John Fahey observes (1997: 8-9), Jewish-American and Conjunto musics are conspicuously absent. Fahey's reasoning for these omissions is that 'The White and Black folks found (in the *Anthology*) . . . listened to and drew from each other's musics in a landscape of musical interchange nonexistent during this same period between any other traditions to be found under the rubric of "American" music'.

If this is something that can be heard in the grooves by ears such as those of Fahey's, perhaps there is a meeting place between the romantic expectations of community that a

[17] According to Skinner (2006: 64), who interviewed Joan Baez in 2000 for a paper about the canonisation of Smith's *Anthology*, Baez claims to have never come across the *Anthology*, and learnt songs from other musicians rather than recordings.

collection like the *Anthology* seems to invite, and the reality of music as it was played. Again we come to the questions of whether folk music is a living or preservationist tradition, and whether commercial recordings can truly qualify as folk music. Cantwell (1991: 365) complicates matters further by suggesting that '(t)he music reissued on the *Anthology* was already selectively, conscientiously, and conspicuously revivalistic when it was recorded, for this was the quality that had recommended it, at the height of the Jazz Age, to its various parochial and provincial listeners.'

Whether or not the *Anthology* created the illusion of a community, of an idealised, democratic America, or of an 'old weird America' full of death and superstition, it was taken as authentic enough by the folk revivalists of the fifties and sixties. A list of the revival performers who recorded versions of the songs – though some of them might have been variants learnt independently of Smith's collection – includes Baez (seven selections), Dylan, Pete Seeger, Peggy Seeger, Rambling Jack Elliott, Spider John Koerner, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, Ewan MacColl, the Weavers, John Fahey, Tim Hardin, Tom Rush, and Odetta, not to mention later artists such as Fairport Convention, Pentangle, the Grateful Dead, Nick Cave, the Dixie Chicks, Jane's Addiction and Leo Kottke (Place 1997: 38-63). In a series of concerts curated by Hal Wilner and instigated by Nick Cave and David Sefton in 1999 and 2001, the 'Harry Smith Project' included interpretations of *Anthology* pieces that spanned a remarkable range and a couple of generations of artists.[18]

Though Skinner (2006) discusses at length the reasons behind the canonisation of the *Anthology*, its impact, as evidenced by the above list of artists, is undeniable. I would also argue that through the mainstream success of Baez, Dylan and Judy Collins, the early-to-mid sixties was the time when folk might be considered to have become a category of rock. This is not to say that folk practices ceased outside of fusions with rock, but that the success of these artists meant that in common parlance, the term folk

[18] Artists who performed at these concerts range from the folk oriented, such as the McGarrigle sisters, Richard Thompson, June Tabor and Eliza McCarthy, to iconoclasts such as Lou Reed, Marianne Faithfull, and Van Dyke Parks, avant and jazz performers such as Gary Lucas and Elliott Sharp, artists associated with punk and post-punk such as David Johansen and David Thomas, rock artists such as Wilco, Sonic Youth, Beth Orton, and electronic artists such as Howie B and DJ Spooky. See Various Artists (2006) *The Harry Smith Project: Anthology of American Folk Music Revisited*, released by Shout! Factory. Johansen, who came to fame with punk forebears New York Dolls, has performed with a group called David Johansen and the Harry Smiths since 2000.

was understood as being connected to the larger cultural formation of rock music. In a sense, this was cemented with Dylan's appearance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, an event often seen as a pivotal moment in the history of rock music and which has attained the status of myth. Did the audience boo? If so, why? Was Dylan baiting a folk audience with an electric performance, or would anyone who had been paying attention have heard *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965) and 'Like a Rolling Stone' (also 1965), and have been expecting him to play with a band as Hajdu (2001: 258-262) suggests? (see also Marcus 1997: 10-14, and Williams 2004: 156-158).

The important thing to remember is that Dylan 'going electric' was far from the first time he had challenged the expectations of his folk revival contemporaries and audience. Just the fact that he started concentrating on songwriting around the time of the release of his first album (mostly of traditional material) in 1962, was suspect – it upset those that thought that folk music was by definition traditional.

> Few of the other folksingers . . . were doing their own songs; the idea seemed anathema. How could a song written just last week by a twenty-year-old in a New York apartment qualify as a song of the folk? . . . (As) Bruce Langhorne said, 'Bobby was one of the first people to say, "Hey, I'm a folk. I can write this shit." (Hajdu 2001: 106)

The fact that he sometimes simply wrote fresh lyrics to existing folk tunes – for example, 'Masters of War' is written to the tune of 'Nottamun Town', while 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' is based on 'Lord Randall' – also got up the noses of some (see MacDonald 2003: 19-23). With his fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964), Dylan withdrew from the self-conscious protest of its predecessor, *The Times They Are A-Changing* (1964) to create a more personal and opaque set of songs that pre-figures the surreal and freewheeling work of the electric albums of 1965-66. This unhooking of Dylan's muse from worthy causes was itself seen as a kind of betrayal – his Newport festival set in 1964 prompted a backlash as reported by Hajdu (210-211), quoting Izzy Young:

> The political folkies were very black and white . . . They had all decided he was on their side – oh boy! He's one of us! Then he sings a couple of songs that aren't about some dying coal miner and now – oh no! He's not one of us! He's a traitor, and he's a hypocrite, and he's good for nothing.

The relevance of these twists and turns of Dylan's career is that not only does each challenge some precept of authenticity with regard to constructions of folk music, but in terms of the rhetoric of rock, it offers a *fresh* rhetoric of authenticity. By daring to base his career on his own material in the context of a musical movement which was, by and large, preservationist; by turning to the surreal and internal when his songwriting was regarded as the vanguard of political protest; by turning to rock instrumentation when this was seen by many folk musicians and fans as a descent to crass commercialism; through all of these decisions, Dylan virtually created the prototype of the singer-songwriter as rock auteur. From a rock perspective, the advanced nature of Dylan's lyrics and his background in folk carried an authenticity no longer granted to him in certain folk circles. However, these twists and turns have provided a template for everyone from Joni Mitchell to Will Oldham – a means through which folk music might be appropriated within the rock frame of the singer-songwriter.

Finally, although the music Dylan was making by 1966 sometimes seemed to have little to do with the folk-oriented material with which he had risen to prominence in 1963 – in reality, it was only removed from the preservationist tendencies of some aspects of the folk revival, and often joined the dots between early folk forms and the fifties rock and roll that emerged partly from them - Dylan hinted at a kind of link to 'the old weird America' that had nothing to do with acoustic instrumentation in this quote from a 1966 interview:

> As far as folk and folk-rock are concerned, it doesn't matter what kind of nasty names people invent for the music. It could be called arsenic music, or perhaps Phaedra music . . . folk music is a word I can't use. Folk music is a bunch of fat people. I have to think of all this as traditional music. Traditional music is based on hexagrams. It comes about from legends, Bibles, plagues, and it revolves around vegetables and death. There's nobody that's going to kill traditional music. All these songs about roses growing out of people's brains and lovers who are really geese and swans that turn into angels – they're not going to die. It's all those paranoid people who think that someone's going to come and take away their toilet paper – *they're* going to die . . . But anyway, traditional music is too unreal to die. It doesn't need to be protected. Nobody's going to hurt it. In that music is the

> only true, valid death you can feel today off a record player. (Dylan quoted in Hentoff 1966: 98)[19]

I would suggest that when Dylan writes/sings lyrics such as:

> Mona tried to tell me to stay away from the train line
> She said that all the railroad men just drink up your blood like wine
> And I said 'oh, I didn't know that, but then again there's just one I've met
> And he just smoked my eyelids and punched my cigarette'
> 'Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again',
> *Blonde on Blonde* (1966)

not only is he making a direct reference to Bascom Lamar Lunsford's 'I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground' from Harry Smith's *Anthology*,[20] he maintains a link to a mythical/unconscious space in his songwriting that resonates with the material he would prefer to call traditional. It seems at least as reasonable to relate Dylan's lyrical flights of fancy from this period to the unfathomable tales in the *Anthology* as to draw parallels with surrealist poetry. Furthermore, it is this same thread of unreality, this basing of music on hexagrams, plagues, vegetables and death, which permeates the music of the likes of Will Oldham and Dawn McCarthy and other new folkers. If we cannot locate 'the folk', perhaps we might at least learn something about how a subset of a generation who grew up on punk emerged somewhat cryptic and acoustic.

Punk

The prototypical image of punk – aggressive young kids with Mohawks and safety-pins for whom three chords is more than enough musical knowledge, and negativity and

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[19] A different edit of this same passage of interview appears in Marcus 1997: 113-114.

[20] The stanza in Lunsford's performance that Dylan refers to in 'Stuck Inside of Mobile . . .' goes as follows:

'Oh I don't like a railroad man
No I don't like a railroad man
'Cause the railroad man, they'll kill you when he can
And he'll drink up your blood like wine.'

'I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground', recorded by Bascom Lamar Lunsford in 1928 and collected on *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952/1997).

mayhem sum up their relationship to society – serves to obscure what might at first seem unlikely similarities between punk and folk. To reduce the comparison to a gross generalisation, notions of folk as gentle and melodic might seem at odds with notions of punk as obnoxious and abrasive. However, folk and punk are both terms used in the context of popular music to connote resistance and authenticity. Both have been championed as musics of and for 'the people', musics in opposition to notions of 'the mainstream' and dominant social paradigms. Both underline philosophies of inclusion and independence, a do-it-yourself ethic of 'anyone can do it'. The current project is related to earlier publications of mine that have explored aspects of punk and independent music practices. These have focused on punk aesthetics embodied in the choices independent artists make during the recording process, particularly in regards to minimalism[21] and amateurism (Encarnacao 2007a); and the legacy of punk music in Australia and how it relates (or not) to the punk cliché of loud-fast-hard-snotty, as well as notions of the musician as outsider and links between post-punk practices and traditional forms such as folk and blues (Encarnacao 2008). In both cases the idea of punk aesthetics is explored as separate from, and at times contradictory to orthodox notions of punk rock.

Another aspect that needs interrogation here is the temporal and regional frames that are used for punk rock. Dave Laing makes an observation common to histories of punk and, more broadly, the place of punk within histories of rock; that punk was 'crumbling' by the heyday of its commercial success in the UK in 1977-78 (1985: 39), having really only begun with the explosion of the Sex Pistols onto the London scene in 1976. Writing two decades later, from an American perspective, Stacy Thompson spends roughly a third of his book (2004: 9-79) outlining the seven major scenes of punk[22] as:

1. The New York Scene (1974-76)
2. The English Scene (1976-78)
3. The California Hardcore Scene (1978-82)

[21] The use of the word minimalism in this context denotes musical practices involving minimal means in terms of instrumentation, technique, musical material, and recording equipment and processes. It does not suggest a link to the music of Terry Riley, LaMonte Young, Philip Glass, Steve Reich et al.
[22] In a footnote (2004: 181), Thompson asserts: 'For a material demonstration of this claim, refer to any issues from the past seven years of the punk zines with the largest circulations: *Maximum RockNRoll*, *Punk Planet* and *The Big Takeover*. The writers of most smaller punk zines understand the same succession of scenes as "punk history".'

4. The Washington D.C. Hardcore Scene (First Wave Straight Edge, 1979-1985)
5. The New York Hardcore Scene (Second Wave Straight Edge, 1986-89)
6. The Riot Grrrl Scene (1991-1995)
7. The Berkeley/Lookout! Pop-Punk Scene (1990-95).

This breakdown is of interest in several ways. It draws attention to the fact that punk was far from a strictly British phenomenon created by financial, political and social problems (see Savage 1991, and Laing 1985). It establishes punk as a lineage that extends through to the mid-nineties, rather than being a finite late-seventies phenomenon. It also affirms the idea of the 'scene' as integral to punk as a discourse. This last aspect has comparatively little relevance to my work. While I acknowledge that much of the music that we might define as punk depended on the informal collaboration and sense of community fostered by scenes such as those listed by Thompson, my focus is the legacies perpetuated through the distribution of recordings. If the American punk scenes of the eighties listed above were loci that generated musical and other codes (Thompson sees fanzines, visual style and cinema as equally definitive as music in his definition of punk: 2004: 3), the influence of the larger independent labels – I am thinking of Touch and Go, Homestead and particularly SST – is at least as significant through this period. Certainly it is through these and other labels that punk and hardcore sounds and aesthetics were distributed internationally.

While there may be a consensus about this lineage of punk scenes within communities that identify as punk, it seems to me that these scenes are predicated on a relative musical orthodoxy. Expanding on a quote given earlier, Laing notes:

> (T)he music which was held to retain the spirit of punk rock was not required to sound at all like the Sex Pistols or The Clash. This "post-punk" music continued that aspect of punk itself whose ambition had been to subvert or undo the conventions of the popular music mainstream, rather than replacing them with a new set of conventions belonging to a punk genre. (Laing 1995: 108)

Webb (2007: 60) also notes that many commentaries on punk tend to locate the end of the phenomenon in 1978, but like Laing and Reynolds he sees the transformation of Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols into John Lydon of Public Image Limited as not only

the course of punk into post-punk, but the continuation of aesthetics and ideas that were core to punk beyond the musical level. As Webb writes, '(w)here most texts on Punk end is where many of the interesting developments and trajectories of Punk began' (capitalisation in Webb's text); and from Reynolds (2005: 3), 'radical content demands radical form'.

The aspects that Thompson concentrates on are the ways in which the organisational structures of these scenes – publicity, putting on shows, and especially the release of records – challenged the hegemony of the Big Six, as he calls the major labels, as well as the socio-political structures of these scenes: did they breed violence, were they inclusive of women, what specific desires were articulated by them etc. Although these institutional and socio-political aspects will always be present in a discussion of punk – and in some sense Thompson may be right in defining these aspects as integral to the punk project – like Phillipov (2006: 383-384), I am concerned that much existing scholarship on punk focuses on these factors at the expense of a consideration of the music.[23] The actual music played in these scenes gets very little consideration by Thompson.

This idea of the 'spirit' or aesthetics of punk as something that might be separated from the prototypical loud-fast-aggressive, guitar-oriented punk sound has been offered elsewhere. Goshert (2000: 85-87) writes that trying to define punk, in relation to either musical genre or fashion, misses the point – that its very resistance to appropriation or consolidation is what makes it what it is. Ultimately, he concludes that rather than try to tie it down, to make it conform to any kind of criteria, 'punk is better seen as a series of performative traces' (102). This seems a useful position to adopt for my analyses, even though they concentrate on recordings. The nature of performance, as captured (or perhaps, at times manufactured) or the way that a process is demystified in a recording can sometimes point towards punk aesthetics.

Constructions of folk and punk are/were based on a community ethic; each purports to be a field where the boundary between performer and audience member is erased, or at

[23] Ironically, Phillipov does not follow through on this criticism with an analysis which considers the 'specific pleasure of music experience' (392), and so her own paper remains in the realm of a discussion of political aspects.

least challenged. We will see in Chapter Four that even if this idea of intimacy is a romantic myth, it is one that seems to have an almost unlimited attraction for performers and listeners alike. Bloomfield (1993: 28) was writing about the early eighties in Britain, but his remarks refer to a construction of performer-audience relations that obviously descends from punk: 'an underground culture flourished where the cult of professionalism was despised and the distinction between author-reader and performer-audience largely abolished'. Likewise, Thompson (2004: 13) sees one product of the initial punk formation in New York as the fact that music such as that of the Ramones 'could be played, recorded, and produced cheaply enough to facilitate a shift within punk from music consumption to music production'.[24] Both writers come to the conclusion that as much as these democratisations of the field of transmission and reception might be possible, it is usually fleetingly. In a context where a relative level of amateurism or technical ability, and low levels of technological mediation, are heard as signifiers of artist/listener communion, Hesmondhalgh (1999: 56-57) cautions that '(t)he logical outcome of such a view is the advocacy of an aesthetic position which only values simplicity, on the grounds that it encourages widespread participation through de-skilling.'

Counter to this is another trope of scholarship on punk – the idea that punk aspires towards or can be interpreted as avant-garde. Writing in 1986, Frith was able to see groups such as Cabaret Voltaire and Human League as products of punk. If the later products of these groups functioned as dance-floor fillers and pop hits, the early work, what I think Frith is referring to, was at the experimental end of the spectrum.

> (Punk's) ideology may have been anti-technology, but the late 1970s rush of home-made records and independent labels was dependent, in fact, on the lower cost of good quality recording equipment, on the availability of cheap but sophisticated electronic keyboards . . . Avant-garde music of all sorts has been made under the influence of punk electronics in the last decade. In the long term, it turned out that the punk challenge to established modes of stardom and authority worked more clearly musically than sociologically. Punks did not replace the pop order of stars and followers, but post-punk musicians have challenged the idea of the finished product. (Frith 1986: 87)

[24] This idea is related to Barthes' notion of the history of music as being a passage from participation to passive consumption (1977: 162-163). It is possible to identify both punk and folk as avenues through which this trend can be challenged, a notion I explore in Chapter Five.

The notion of whether a recording is 'finished', or suitable for release, is key to my notion of punk aesthetics in new folk. Frith's remarks also draw attention to a couple of other important points. Firstly, there is the friction between a text's content and its form. For Bourdieu, attention to the form of a text shows a cognisance of it at a deeper level than the mere apprehension of its content (1984: 2-4). While a questioning of the very structures of the music industry is seen to be a part of the punk project, perhaps this is nowhere better expressed than in the interrogation of the recording as text. The second point to draw from Frith is another that is central to my thesis – the idea of a legacy of punk which has nothing to do with its prototypical sound. Here we have the clear assertion that various approaches to electronic music making have a relationship to punk through their aesthetic tendencies and, I would add, the production of texts most suited to the independent sphere. Further to the examples given in the Introduction chapter – and if one was to look at independent practices not only in music, but across all manner of arts and cultural practices, the examples would be legion – Goshert offers the RE/search book publishing company as a legacy of punk. Of the company, which emerged from a San Francisco punk fanzine called *Search and Destroy*, Goshert writes '(b)oth politically and aesthetically, (it) remains one of the best examples of avant-garde practices informing the diverse work in which punks engage' (2000: 104).

This is not to suggest that the new folk artists under study are punks necessarily – that they identify as such or are identified by others as such. I would also like to make clear that it is only a subset of those artists that I group under the banner of new folk which exhibit aspects of punk aesthetics in their recordings; and that of those artists, these tendencies may be present in some of their recordings and not in others. The following tendencies manifest as aesthetic choices that have been informed by decades of practices as found in folk and punk recordings:

- a minimalism of instrumental and/or technological means;
- the absence of virtuosity – a simplicity in performance, composition or musical technique which may include the embrace of amateurism;
- the documentation of mistakes or imperfections in the name of 'the moment' or the spirit of the performance.

These tendencies have been considered by a couple of writers, though not directly in reference to punk. Tony Grajeda, in his paper on the phenomenon of lo-fi, describes it as 'not simply a case of technology, but also of technique . . . [a] dual aspect of amateurism (in terms of performance) and primitivism or minimalism (in terms of equipment and recording processes)' (Grajeda 2002: 233-4). Grajeda also contends that '(a)n initial hearing of lo-fi suggests that, in its attempt to reclaim recording processes from high-tech professional studios, it has inherited from punk the aim of demystifying rock's means of production' (248). Matthew Bannister, discussing the notion of 'indie' music of the 1980s, writes of the 'folk discourse of technological dystopianism.' This is found in punk and folk approaches that limit the deployment of music technology from amplification at one end of the spectrum to studio techniques at the other. Bannister's 'ideologies of incompetence and non-intentionality' celebrate participation over virtuosity, and show a preference for capturing 'the moment' over an ideal of sonic perfection (Bannister 2006: xxvi). The manifestation of works that embody these characteristics, and the autonomy required for works to be realised in this way is, generally speaking, anathema to the processes of the mainstream music industry; the choices new folk artists make ensure that their work remains in the independent sphere, where total artistic control can be maintained.[25]

Of course, as Frith (1986: 83) writes, 'technological developments have made the rock concept of authenticity possible'. Notably, recording 'enabled previously unreproducible aspects of performance – spontaneity, improvisation, etc – to be reproduced exactly'. Though this is undeniably true, much new folk music resonates in the spaces where this kind of logic has no place. Whether it's the mythical pre-industrial landscape mapped by the free vocals, gut-string guitars, flutes and anthropomorphism of Faun Fables, or the intimate space inscribed by the faltering vocals of Kes or Will Oldham, a suspension of disbelief is required in the reception of much new folk music, as it is in so many areas of cultural production.

[25] This idea is also pursued in Encarnacao 2007a.

III: Genre – New Folk

The origins of new folk are discussed in the Introduction chapter. An exploration of the careers of some of the major figures already mentioned will serve to illustrate terms of reference for the case studies in Chapter Five as well as to ground the idea that new folk artists move through different periods of activity with varying relationships to folk and punk elements. The current work cannot provide a comprehensive survey of what I perceive as the field of new folk – if for no other reason, the DIY aesthetic that permeates the field means that much of the work of lesser known artists often circulates in limited edition runs of vinyl and CD-Rs that reach only small, at times perhaps local, circles. By covering some of the more high profile acts in the field, the stylistic range of new folk will emerge, and this will in turn provide a context for the discussions that will follow. At this stage, I will omit an account of Will Oldham's career, as it will serve better in the context of the case study in Chapter Five.

Bill Callahan began releasing cassettes of experimental music under the name of Smog in the late 1980s. One of these, *Cow*, was reissued in 2000 as the 'b-side' of CD single 'Strayed', and demonstrates this early style as guitar based, home-recorded and instrumental, with 'noise', or attention to sound itself, outweighing melody, rhythm or harmony in terms of content. Callahan's third album proper, *Julius Caesar* (1993), was the first to consistently feature recognisable song structures. Also the first to be partially recorded in a studio, it nonetheless maintained Callahan's previous lo-fi aesthetic, with distorted vocals and out of tune instruments contributing to a punk irreverence towards the album as institution. It should be noted that Callahan has apparently asserted that his use of lo-fi recording techniques was a matter of necessity rather than an aesthetic choice.[26] Subsequent albums *Wild Love* (1995), *The Doctor Came At Dawn* (1996) and *Red Apple Falls* (1997)[27] introduced instruments such as individual strings and horns,

[26] This assertion is made in the Wikipedia entry http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smog_(band), accessed 9 January 2009. I can find no other reference for this quote, but it seems credible that Callahan would respond to being categorised as 'lo-fi' in this way, especially with the gradual addition of instrumentation and improvement in sound quality evidenced in his albums throughout the nineties.

[27] In an interview from 1995, Callahan says that 60% of *Julius Caesar* was recorded at home on 4-track (cassette, we assume), and a third of *Wild Love* was recorded at home also. (See

hurdy gurdy and keyboards, but deployed them so sparingly that Callahan's simplistic guitar and vocal are still presented in an uncomfortable intimacy. Together with his darkly poetic lyrics and slow tempos, comparisons with Leonard Cohen and Nick Cave were inevitable – 'the post-punk Leonard Cohen, a one-man acoustic Joy Division', writes Ben Thompson (1998: 239).

Notwithstanding his version of the traditional song 'In The Pines' on *A River Ain't Too Much To Love* (2005), there is little to directly connect Callahan/Smog's work with folk music, yet this association still persists at times. This is probably due to the perceived aesthetic similarity with Cohen, also a rather idiosyncratic singer-songwriter whose finger-picking nylon string guitar style made an obvious link to folk music. Callahan's contribution to the idea of new folk is perhaps that along with the work of Will Oldham and Cat Power, he established a legitimate place for singer-songwriters in the post-hardcore independent sphere.

Cat Power, (the stage name of Georgia-born Chan Marshall), was 'discovered' by Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley opening for Liz Phair in New York.[28] Together they made a punk statement of no-nonsense recording by taping her first two albums, *Dear Sir* (1995) and *Myra Lee* (1996) in a single day in December 1994. Similarly to the work of Callahan, the intimacy of her early recordings, the product of a combination of raw vocals, a premium on live performance in the studio, slow tempos, and a common recourse to the accompaniment of a sole, finger-picked guitar, proved enough for some association to be made with folk. For example, the allmusic.com review of *What Would The Community Think* (1996) describes the album as 'a fine balance between angular, angst-ridden punk and her gentler, folk-country tendencies'.[29] Her work up until 2000 maintained these hallmarks of intimacy, rawness and minimal instrumentation; on *You Are Free* (2003) there was a conscious broadening of range with both the most quiet and sparse of moments ('Names') and some comparatively rock, almost pop moments ('Free' and 'He War'). By *The Greatest* (2006), an album inspired by soul and country, she was receiving comparisons to Dusty Springfield and Top 40 chart placings around

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http://pry.com/smog/second_skin.html, accessed 9 January 2009). From the sound of it, my best guess is that parts of *The Doctor Came At Dawn* may also have been recorded at home, and that *Red Apple Falls* was probably the first of his albums recorded entirely in a proper recording studio.

[28] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat_Power, accessed 7 January 2009.

[29] Review by Heather Phares, http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:hcfuxqrhldte, accessed 7 January 2009.

the world. The points to be made here are that for a variety of reasons, Cat Power's early work is formative for the field of new folk, despite little specific connection to folk songs or techniques; and that despite a continuing association with big New York City independent Matador, her more recent material has dispensed with the minimalism of means and rawness of approach which might associate it with either folk or punk.

Perhaps the two artists associated with new folk with the highest profiles – in fact both were, for a time, the artists most associated with the tag 'freak folk' – are Joanna Newsom and Devendra Banhart. Each has displayed a similar career trajectory to that of Cat Power and Bill Callahan in that initial recordings displayed a very different approach to recording technology and performance in the studio than later ones. In the case of Devendra Banhart, his first two albums are home-recorded and sound like it. On *Oh Me Oh My . . .* (2002)[30], there is a substantial amount of hiss, and flutter (a fluctuation in tape speed resulting in a persistent wobble in pitch) is heard particularly in the guitar parts. On one track we hear a car going past in the background. The arrangements are mostly for finger-picked acoustic guitar and double-tracked vocal, though occasionally there is a second guitar part – very minimal in terms of instrumental means as well as recording technology. The pair of albums released in 2004, *Rejoicing in the Hands* and *Nino Rojo*, expand somewhat on the instrumentation while maintaining an intimate sound. With *Cripple Crow* (2005), the largely acoustic and intimate settings sometimes collide with a jam aesthetic and a variety of styles which is much more difficult to reconcile with punk than the early home-recorded albums.

Newsom's debut, *The Milk-Eyed Mender* (2004) is largely solo, her harp (and occasionally piano or harpsichord) and eccentric, squeaky voice creating a potentially pre-industrial sonic image for the listener, yet providing an abrasion, intimacy and minimal approach that is performance rather than product oriented. Most tracks feature only Newsom and the instrument she is accompanying herself with, so the idea of actual performance is at least referenced. *Ys* (2006), her second album, is a collection of five

[30] The full title of the album is *Oh Me Oh My . . . The Way the Day Goes By the Sun is Setting Dogs are Dreaming Lovesongs of the Christmas Spirit*. Given the similarity of Banhart's vocal style to the early work of Marc Bolan, it seems possible that this title, in terms of its unwieldy length, is in some way a reference to the title of the first Tyrannosaurus Rex album, *My People Were Fair and Wore Stars in their Hair, But Now They're Content to Wear Stars on their Brows* (1968).

songs that range from seven to seventeen minutes in length, and features a full orchestra and other session players. While the songs themselves might be said to have something in common with epic folk ballads, the undertaking of such a sophisticated project, utilizing studios in New York, L.A. and London over a period of eight months, as detailed in the credits, cannot be reconciled to punk aesthetics musically speaking, even if the very format of the album is a gesture of independence from market forces.

Another important current in the new folk field is the more experimental, extended work based on the drones and open tunings associated with folk practice, often labelled psychedelic folk. Among the most established of these artists are Charalambides, Espers and Six Organs of Admittance. Charalambides formed in 1991 in Houston, Texas and have been releasing music since 1992, so chronologically they are as eligible as any other artist to be seen as originators of new folk. They made a multitude of releases on small labels such as Siltbreeze and their own Wholly Other, working at a very grassroots level, until eventually coming to an arrangement with the bigger independent Kranky around 2000. The core of the group is (now ex-) husband and wife duo Tom and Christina Carter, both on guitars, with Christina also on vocals. Many of their early releases were very small runs of CD-Rs or vinyl, their output peppered by albums proper that remain in print. This practice is not unusual for new folkers and is also a modus operandi of Will Oldham and Six Organs of Admittance. In the case of the first Charalambides album, *Our Bed Is Green* (1992), not only was it recorded to cassette, that was also the format of its initial release. The relative obscurity of their early releases, combined with a minimal and hypnotic sound, at times given to melodic and somewhat song-like forms, at others to more elongated and noisy instrumental ones, meant that Charalambides did not attract as widespread attention through the nineties as Will Oldham's Palace, Callahan's Smog or Cat Power. One might say that this musical approach makes the group more explicitly oppositional to mainstream musical practices than those of the singer-songwriter model.

Espers, from Philadelphia, is a six piece group. Their sound is associated with the sub-genre of psychedelic folk due to an extended instrumental palette which includes cello, and processed electric guitar and synthesizer sounds, a predilection for drones, and a 'jamming' aesthetic. In an interview in early 2006 that took place just after the group had just done a show in a planetarium, their de-facto co-leader Greg Weeks remarked,

'we thought, wow, Pink Floyd, laser light show – that's two of our favourite things in one' (Kelly 2006, no page number). Just as many currents of folk practice discussed in Chapter Two were about preservation, on one level, Espers are a conscious revival of certain late sixties experimental tendencies within rock – for instance, the electric folk of Fairport Convention and Pentangle. This has led to Rob Young of influential English music magazine *The Wire*, to dismiss Espers as 'tedious neo-hippy acoustic rock' (2006, no page number).[31]

Espers make the most claim on folk song repertoire of all the artists so far discussed (with the exception, perhaps, of Oldham). Their covers album *The Weed Tree* (2005) features the traditional songs 'Rosemary Lane' and 'Black is the Color' (alongside tunes by Nico, the Durutti Column and less obviously, Blue Oyster Cult). Singer Meg Baird's solo album, *Dear Companion* (2007) largely just guitar and vocal, also features several traditional tunes. Further to Espers' connection to the new folk field, Baird and Weeks provided the backing for Bonnie 'Prince' Billy's (Will Oldham's) 2007 set of covers, *Ask Forgiveness*.

Six Organs of Admittance is the project of guitarist Ben Chasny. Like Charalambides, his music provides something of an intersection between a drone aesthetic which is quite experimental, and open tunings and finger picking techniques, sometimes using acoustic guitar, that at least on the surface, point towards aspects of folk. Since 1998, he has been a prolific releaser of recorded material on small independent labels, notably several albums for Holy Mountain, before joining Drag City for *School of the Flower* (2005). Chasny's releases for Drag City have each contained their share of song-based material, though they do not forsake the repetitive, mantric nature of much of his earlier work. Recent examples of these extended forms include the title track of *School*, which runs for 13:36 and is constructed on a single Dorian riff on an open D tuning (aside from one short break early in the form), and the 23-minute slow building arch form, featuring chanting, of 'River of Transfiguration' from *A Sun Awakens* (2006). In a 2008 interview (Moline: 24), Chasny offers the idea that his approach began with the intention of combining the experimental/noise approach to the guitar of Rudolph Grey and KK Null with the folk inflected playing of Nick Drake and Leo Kottke.

[31] Interestingly, the equally 'hippy'-sounding Vetiver, the project of Banhart collaborator Andy Cabic, is mentioned in the same article without slander.

In the context of this aspect of new folk, David Pajo should be mentioned. He is a Louisville, Kentucky contemporary of Oldham's who has left a swathe of contributions to and influences on both new folk and post-rock scenes. A member of the pioneering post-rock group Slint (1987-1991; their *Spiderland* [1991] is considered definitive), Pajo played on some early recordings of Oldham's Palace before joining Tortoise, notably contributing to their *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (1996). Around this time, he began releasing recordings under variations of the name 'M' – Aerial M, Papa M, etc. This music was usually instrumental, building on the minimal, lengthy and at times melodic approach already developed with Slint and Tortoise. With the introduction of his singing into the recordings, some referencing of folk aspects became apparent. His *Whatever, Mortal* (2001) is very much in the vein of the recordings of Oldham and Smog. In a recent series of CD singles, Pajo has recorded traditional tunes such as 'Black is the Color' (in a very different arrangement to that of Espers), 'The Trees Do Grow So High', and 'Wild Mountain Thyme', the last also recorded by The Byrds on *Fifth Dimension* (1965)[32]. The Byrds connection is underlined with an epic instrumental take on Pete Seeger's 'Turn Turn Turn' on *Hole of Burning Alms* (2004). This last recording is perhaps the ultimate combination of a folk legacy inherited from the folk revival generation with Pajo's post-rock history.

There are two groups that must be mentioned in this survey that, even though they do not fit neatly into the category of new folk, have been tangentially related to it. Like Charalambides and Six Organs, both Animal Collective and Akron/Family have at times used folk elements within a more wide-ranging, experimental ethos. The first releases of Animal Collective, whose members grew up in Baltimore, were largely experimental/noise affairs, a hash of electronically generated sounds and rock band instrumentation – but never the sound of a 'rock band' as such. As preserved on their more recent song-based albums, exemplified by *Strawberry Jam* (2007), there is a feeling of melodic and rhythmic material rising up through a sonic haze. Two of Animal Collective's albums in particular make something of a connection with the new folk

[32] 'Wild Mountain Thyme' has been recorded by scores of artists including Judy Collins, Joan Baez, Marianne Faithfull, Bert Jansch, Robyn Hitchcock and Van Morrison.

field. The details of the taping of *Campfire Songs* (2003)[33] are given in the release's liner notes as: 'Recorded live in November 2001 on the Baetz family's screen porch. The recording was made with 3 Sony Mini Disc players . . . A romp in the woods was added to tracks 1 and 4 in January '02'. Crucially, the sound of the album is as much comprised of environmental sounds as acoustic guitars and singing. This record can be seen as associated with the idea of the field recording of folk music – particularly with the acoustic instrumentation used, and with the electronic element of earlier AC releases notably absent – or is it? The conscious inclusion of environmental sounds connects the album with the idea of environmental music, be it Brian Eno's ambience or John Cage's *4' 33"*. At the same time, recording outdoors, live, onto a relatively lo-fi medium such as mini-disc, is easily related to a punk DIY aesthetic. And ultimately, the effect of melodic and rhythmic material being delivered through a kind of sonic gauze is evidence of an overriding aesthetic that unites all of Animal Collective's material.

On *Sung Tongs* (2004), electronics are used, but the core instrumentation is acoustic guitars and vocals. There is no stylistic link with folk techniques or material, and yet, being released at around the same time as Joanna Newsom's debut, also a time at which Devendra Banhart's profile rose considerably with the release of two acclaimed albums within a year, *Sung Tongs* was inevitably grouped under the 'freak folk' banner. The following year, Animal Collective recorded an EP, *Prospect Hummer* (2005) in collaboration with Vashti Bunyan. Bunyan, who released her first album in 1970, not to record again until this EP, is perhaps the most referenced performer by new folk artists (more of this in Chapter Four). This association further cemented perceived links between Animal Collective and new folk, although subsequent AC releases would have little association with folk, assaying instead a highly experimental approach to pop/rock.

Akron/Family released their debut self-titled album in 2005. A sticker on the front cover, obviously having fun with the idea of categorising their sprawling fusion of styles, described them as 'Avant-Rock-Mystic-Folk-Electric-Fire-Swallowing-

[33] *Spirit* was originally credited to Avey Tare and Panda Bear; *Danse* was originally credited to Avey Tare, Panda Bear and Geologist; *Campfire Songs* (2003) was, in practice a self-titled release. The first album to actually use the name Animal Collective was their fifth, *Here Comes The Indian* (2003). However all of these, and their other albums feature various combinations of the same four people: Avey (David Portner), Panda (Noah Lennox), Geologist (Brian Weitz) and Deakin (Josh Dibb). Reissues of the first two albums, *Spirit They're Gone, Spirit They've Vanished* (2000) and *Danse Manatee* (2001), as a 2-CD set on Fatcat in 2003, and of their third album *Hollinndagain* (2002) on their own label Paw Tracks in 2006, are all credited to Animal Collective.

Hermetic-Hearthrob-Hirsute-Savants'. Although they sound nothing like Animal Collective – the basis of their sound is guitars, percussion and harmony singing, with folk-ish acoustic finger-picking often at the fore. They share with Animal Collective the integration of electronic elements into their sound[34], and cherish improvisation – free improvisation, as well as extemporisation - as central to their practice. Their debut was largely recorded at home. This is a common feature of much new folk material, interpretable as a DIY practice that separates punk-derived notions of autonomy from the model where recordings are made along music-industry approved parameters in studios. The emergence of Akron/Family in the independent sphere in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, together with some of the stylistic aspects discussed here, meant that an association with new folk (usually 'freak folk') was inevitable.

New Folk in Australia and elsewhere

A diverse array of performers worldwide is making music in the independent sector related to the new folk field. The seminal and most representative artists, discussed above, are from the U.S. I will give a summary of this sort of activity in Australia in order to put the case study of Kes into perspective, but first I will mention a couple of artists from other countries. This is not necessarily to suggest that they are the best outside of the U.S., but simply as an indication of how wide-spread these practices are. French-Canadian singer-songwriter Geneviève Castrée performs and records under the name Woelv. Like many artists in the field, on *Tout Seul Dans la Forêt en Plein Jour* (2007), Castrée uses instrumentation associated with rock music – guitars, keyboards and drums mainly – but never in configurations that suggest a rock band or rock music. The sparseness of the recordings, together with the recurring sound of finger-picked, nylon-string guitar, is enough for her work to be associated with the new folk field. Japan's Maher Shalal Hash Baz is described by their Australian label Chapter as 'psychedelic folk-pop', but on *Blues du Jour* (2003), the overall aesthetic seems closer to the DIY 'twee' pop associated with the K Records label from Olympia, Washington. The album contains 41 brief tracks, all of which display a 'non-professional' ethos with

[34] Animal Collective's electronic element has usually been the result of synthesizers and effects pedals, while Akron/Family employ some computer manipulation of sounds in their recordings.

first take vocals, lumpy rhythms, and arrangements held together largely with hope. Influences on individual tracks, which sometimes involve an aspect of pastiche, range from Sousa to Kevin Ayers, from bossa nova to the Velvet Underground, all delivered in such a way that the effect is of a couple of friends informally mucking around on instruments in the living room, rather than of an 'album', and that word's connotations of a finished and unified work.

The Fonal Records label from Finland releases quite a variety of music, but its emphasis is on the local and the intimate. Thus, though the sounds on a recent promotional compilation, *Summer and Smiles of Finland* (2006) range from post-rock to experimental semi-electronic approaches to pop, to more overtly folk-oriented examples from Islaja and Kiila, a notion of the domestic prevails. The liner notes contain many references to found objects and barely-functioning instruments – a general thrift-store/home-recorded aesthetic of which the folkier artists are but one expression. The liner notes and quoted reviews in the accompanying booklet describe the work of Islaja as 'beautifully-phased acid folk . . . (which) draws heavily from the Syd Barrett-Jandek axis' and that of Kiila as 'free folk played by seven'.[35]

The English sub-genre of folktronica – again a music press term not embraced by the artists it is used to describe – brings electronic and folk elements together, as the term suggests. The best known of these artists take very different approaches. Fourtet, a.k.a. Kieran Hebden, used a turntable, a pile of old records, and an old Atari computer to create *Rounds* (2003). It is a record stitched together from samples of rippling harps, acoustic guitars and folk rock grooves which, through Hebden's deft editing and sampling aesthetic, sounds fresh and contemporary.[36] As a rejection of the folktronica tag, the next Fourtet album *Everything Ecstatic* (2005) is comparatively brash and percussive and makes few perceptible links to folk material of any kind. Rather than working from a cut-and-paste approach which we might associate with a hip-hop/turntablist aesthetic as Hebden does, the core of Tuung is a pair of singer-songwriters, Martin Smith and Sam Genders, who incorporate samples and other computer generated sounds into their recordings and live performances, which both

[35] The first quote is from David Keenan's review of Islaja's *Meritie* (2004) for *The Wire* ; the second is from the undisclosed author of the artist summaries included in the booklet accompanying the CD.
[36] Interestingly, very little has been made of the fact that Hebden credits none of the sources sampled.

heavily feature acoustic guitars. Neither Tuung nor Fourtet have much to do with the lineage I will discuss in the following chapter.

Peter Webb (2007: 60-105) discusses the subgenre of neo-folk, also known as apocalyptic folk, post-industrial and by other names. An assortment of independent groups from Britain who are nominally associated with folk, they would seem relevant to this thesis. However, temporally and stylistically they are almost entirely disconnected from the new folk artists at the centre of this study. The key artists of neo-folk are Death In June, Current 93, Sol Invictus, Sixth Comm, Coil and Nurse With Wound. Death In June spearheaded the movement, and has been active since the early eighties. From Webb's description, the only aspect which connects these artists with the idea of folk music is the recurrent use of acoustic guitar, along with lyrical themes which often 'evoke a pre-modern world' (66), particularly pagan ideas and philosophies. One palpable connection between neo-folk and what I am calling new folk is the contribution of Ben Chasny (Six Organs of Admittance) to the recordings of David Tibet (Current 93). This underlines a possible flow of influence from neo-folk to the drone-laden and extended forms of artists like Six Organs and Charalambides.

There are many independent artists in Australia who might be included under the banner of new folk. The most high-profile of these are Sydney's Holly Throsby and Melbourne-based Laura Jean. There is a home-recorded ambience and rawness in the vocal delivery in Throsby's debut *On Night* (2004) which might be associated with punk aesthetics. However, her third album, *A Loud Call* (2008), demonstrates a smooth transition to the work of an accomplished singer-songwriter with regards to both vocal performances and production values. There is a simplicity to the material itself, a minimalism or restraint, which is still able to be associated with a D.I.Y. approach, underlined by Throsby's beginner-piano (generally she self-accompanies on guitar). Will Oldham sings on the album; Throsby has toured with both Oldham and David Pajo. Although Laura Jean's songwriting is highly individualistic and idiosyncratic, the effortless beauty of her voice and her tendency towards the integration of classical instruments – woodwinds and strings – into acoustic guitar based arrangements, takes her away from any notion of punk aesthetics.

Grand Salvo is the performance name of Melbourne's Paddy Mann. Like Laura Jean, he begins from an acoustic guitar and vocal base to incorporate instruments not usually associated with rock music – strings, percussion, melodica. Rather than the chamber music-type settings of Jean, with Grand Salvo there is a feeling of 'little sounds' tinkling and hooting which creates a feeling of domesticity, particularly on the album *The Temporal Wheel* (2005). It is not a coincidence that this album was recorded by Tony Dupè, also responsible for the home-made sound of the first two Holly Throsby albums. The idea of home-made sounds is self-consciously worn as a badge of indie honour by Brisbane's Ambitious Lovers. The promotion for their album *Stranger, Can I Touch You*? (2006) describes them as a 'junk-freak-folk duo featuring kitchen-utensil percussion, [distorted] ukulele and singing/screaming'. The credits on the package, itself a piece of folk art constructed from bits of thick cardboard, glue and paint and tied together with string, detail the bedrooms and bathrooms in which it was recorded. Some songs seem fully-formed, while others are more fragmentary. As may be expected, the performances prize immediacy over accuracy, and squeals of feedback from the distorted uke are a common feature.

The work of indigenous singer-songwriters Kev Carmody, Archie Roach, and Ruby Hunter, with its basis in acoustic guitar and political and social narratives, has made a marked contribution to folk music in Australia, and perhaps draws attention to the fact that the post-punk field of new folk that is the focus of this study is exclusively white. Certainly, there is no real connection of Carmody, Hunter and Roach to punk aesthetics. Given the importance of the messages these artists bring, the support of major labels (Festival and EMI for Carmody, Mushroom for Roach) is entirely appropriate. A recent album featuring covers of Carmody's songs, *Cannot Buy My Soul* (2007) is comprised of artists that suggest ways in which folk idioms have impacted on Australia's mainstream music industry, with more explicit connections to pop forms and sounds than are found in the new folk of the independent sector – Tex Perkins, Clare Bowditch, Paul Kelly, Missy Higgins, the Waifs, Dan Kelly, John Butler Trio, as well as indigenous artists more explicitly performing in hip hop (The Last Kinection) and country/folk (Troy Cassar-Daley, The Pigram Brothers) idioms. Perhaps the only artist present which connects with the idea of new folk and its punk lineage is The Drones,

whose own releases range from noisy post-punk country and blues to starker folk-inflected tracks.[37]

The unusual song structures, wayward vocals and minimal arrangements of Melbourne's Kes, particularly in his early recordings, make him the Australian artist most suited to this study. His work will be covered in detail in Chapter Five.

New folk formations – a brief literature review

As previously stated, the field of new folk artists has not been much acknowledged in academic literature, although various formations around the ideas of 'freak folk', 'psychedelic folk' etc have been presented in the independent music press. In the academic sphere, some attention has been paid to 'lo-fi' and discourses around local scenes. Seiler combines these two tropes in his consideration of the scene in Louisville, Kentucky, proposing a Louisville Sound. While Seiler (2001) makes it clear that what constitutes the Louisville Sound has more to do with an attitude and aesthetics inherited from punk than an actual sound – from the chamber rock of Rachel's[38] to the cracked folk and country of early Palace is quite a distance – this piece of research was perhaps conducted too early to identify the field of new folk. Like Seiler, Hibbett sees lo-fi as an outcome of punk's oppositional approach to the recording as artefact; it contributes to 'a kind of revisionary folk movement – something in the "bad voice" tradition of Bob Dylan and Neil Young, though less politically charged and more self-deprecating, attaining through lyrical depth and minimal production a sound that is conscientiously "backwoods" or "bedroom."' (Hibbett 2005: 59) The artists that Hibbett groups together include Will Oldham, Smog, and the Drag City label in general.

Ultimately, Hibbett's paper concentrates on the recordings of Sebadoh, as exemplars of lo-fi, and the large-scale forms of post-rock groups such as Godspeed You Black Emperor! and Iceland's Sigur Ros as demanding attention to form rather than function in their punk-derived protest at the commercialisation of music products.[39] The focus on

[37] For more on The Drones, see Encarnacao 2008.
[38] This is not a typo – the name of the group is Rachel's, with the apostrophe.
[39] Bourdieu is the central theorist in Hibbett's paper, and this notion of an attention to form rather than function is key to Bourdieu's conception of the exclusivity of the avant garde: 'It is as if the "popular

Godspeed and Sigur Ros underlines another aspect that Hibbett's paper has in common with Seiler (and Frith, 1986), and which is central to my work: that the influence of punk transcends genre.

Aside from a passing mention of Smog in Grajeda's paper on lo-fi (2002), and my own study of Smog (Encarnacao 2007a), these are the only academic references I can find to the independent folk artists of the last couple of decades. In a relatively journalistic article for *Popular Music and Society*, Peterson and Beal (2001) present an outline of the genre of alternative country (or alt. country). Uncle Tupelo, active 1987-1994, is given as originators of the genre, and interestingly the authors make a connection between the group's mining of old folk songs – in particular The Carter Family's 'No Depression' – and its origins in punk rock. There is some resonance with my project in Peterson and Beal's profile of alternative country's 'devotees' (235-236; it's hard to know if by this they mean the musicians specifically or their fans – most likely both): 'Nurtured as teens in the protest and despair of punk and grunge, they gravitated with ease to the "no depression" escape from contemporary urban problems through embracing the supposedly simpler problems and joys of imagined past small town and rural ways of life.' This romantic construction of a simpler past is, of course, just another wave of authenticity rhetoric, the likes of which were discussed in the previous chapter, which serves to justify a particular musical orientation. In this case we see the fusion of a rhetoric of the new as authentic – punk as a rejection of commercial values – and the old as authentic – a return to pre-rock music 'roots' which could otherwise be interpreted as conservative.

With the Appalachian associations accorded to Will Oldham's work, especially in the early Palace years, he is sometimes categorised as an alt. country artist. As much as demarcations between country and folk music can be clearly made, especially in regard to music which resonates somewhat with that on Harry Smith's *Anthology*, it might be said that some of Oldham's early material has more stylistic similarity to the southern American music championed by John Lomax than, say, the more British orientation of the Child ballads as inherited by folk revivalists such as (early) Joan Baez and the electric folk of Fairport Convention. However, it seems to me that artists such as Uncle Tupelo, Gillian Welch, Ryan Adams, Wilco, Neko Case and Lucinda Williams, whom I

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aesthetic" . . . (is) based on the affirmation of the continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function' (Bourdieu 1984: 4).

would associate with alt. country rather than new folk, have comparatively less to do with the post-hardcore diaspora that I have described as part of the new folk lineage. Broadly speaking, despite an embrace of raw, performance-driven recordings at times, alt. country artists tend to produce more professional recordings than the new folkers in that the DIY perspective of wilful amateurism is absent. Related to this is a much lower, perhaps negligible incidence of home recording/lo-fi approaches to released recordings by alt. country artists than by new folk artists. It is a thin and at times hard to trace line, but for my purposes, I am prepared to put Oldham's aesthetic tendencies on the new folk side of it.[40]

A representative survey of perceived sub-genres of new folk from the music press follows. Schroeder (2005)[41] writes of the 'new generation of indie-folk musicians' as including 'Joanna Newsom's wood-nymph pluckings, Sufjan Stevens's jubilant road stories and Iron and Wine's Appalachian wanderings. Barefoot at the top of the heap is (Devendra) Banhart'. Ben Thompson (1998: 89-93) borrows a phrase from the credits of a Lambchop album to christen the Woodchuck Nation, including Smog, Palace, Vic Chesnutt, Lambchop, Beck and Freakwater. This prompted academic writer John Street (2001: 301) to suggest that 'Sparklehorse, Smog, Freakwater and Lambchop . . . play music that is a ramshackle, stumbling amalgam of country and rock, in which eerie voices whisper about lost souls and dark secrets'. Like Thompson, Street sees a connection between the approaches of these artists and Harry Smith's *Anthology*. Thompson describes Freakwater as 'the nearest thing we are ever likely to get to a post-punk Carter Family' (91), and insists that if a listener has heard the *Anthology*, the sound of Smog, Palace and Freakwater will be 'strangely familiar' (93).

Young (2006) groups Newsom, Banhart, Vetiver and Brightblack Morning Light as 'what's become unsatisfyingly labelled "freak-folk".' Teague (2005) suggests that were Grand Salvo CDs given a 'sounds-like' sticker in a music chain-store, it would

[40] In a summary of 'ten best acts' of the 2009 Big Day Out in a free Brisbane music weekly, this is written about Neil Young: 'catch arguably the greatest North American troubadour of our time for 90 minutes of alt-country bliss.' The word 'troubadour' points to a travelling singer-with-guitar (folk?), which is easily conflated for the purpose of a soundbite with the sub-genre of alt. country. *Scene* issue 777, January 14, 2009, p. 15, no author given.

[41] In the following paragraph, to prevent the inclusion of cumbersome web addresses to reference quotes, please refer to the bibliography. Where quotes are taken from hard copy, page numbers are included.

reference Will Oldham, Iron and Wine, Smog and Cat Power. The myspace page of Ambitious Lovers lists artists they have shared bills with as including Calvin Johnson, Woelv, Holly Throsby, Laura Jean and Kes. Each of these groupings is obviously a product of the time of writing as much as the particular aesthetic viewpoint of each writer. Each suggests a group of artists that are seen to subsist together in an immediate frame; in a sense I would include many of them under the broader banner of new folk and draw attention to the punk aesthetics to be found in some of them. Taken as a whole, these and other ideas about groupings of independent artists with folk aspects seem to indicate that there are similarities and scenes perceived by academics, journalists, listeners and artists.

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The D.I.Y. impulse is central to new folk practices, and is expressed in a variety of ways. It extends to the self-release of limited runs of vinyl and CD-Rs, and to the association of all of these artists to independent labels. Many of the initial releases of these artists are home-recorded, and while this may have been out of necessity because of the prohibitive cost of recording in professional studios, an aesthetic choice is made by an artist when she/he releases home-recorded material to the public. Home recording carries with it associations of domesticity, accessibility and community. Intimacy, rawness and a sense of performance are generally prized by these artists. These attributes might be enhanced or exaggerated by technologically modest recording environments, but often also permeate more professional recordings made by these artists. Along with minimal recording technology, or the minimal use of the recording studio as compositional device, these artists often use minimal instrumental means and minimal musical material. Instruments of a basic rock music line-up – guitars, keyboards, bass, drums – are often used in isolation from each other, minimising associations with rock music as a form and the rock group as a default institutional setting for song accompaniment. Finally, finger-picked, often acoustic guitar is very common to many forms of popular music, but in the context of new folk, its alignment with the other characteristics listed here takes associations with Romantic notions of pre-industrial times much further than in other musical contexts. Taken together, these attitudes towards performance, recording, composition and musical arrangement often

conspire to create the impression that musical technique is irrelevant; at times this might extend to a wilful amateurism.

In the next chapter, I will outline the ways in which these characteristics have been developed from, or perhaps more appropriately, free-associated from, various recordings and artists from throughout the twentieth century.

IV: The Broader Field

the best band will never get signed
the Kay-Settes starring Butchers Blind
so good you won't ever know
they never even played a show
can't hear 'em on the radio

'The Late Greats', by Jeff Tweedy
recorded by Wilco, *A Ghost is Born* (2004)

The Writing of History

In considering the broader field of artists and works that informs new folk artists directly or indirectly, the notion of what history is being written in the process must be addressed. As this thesis proposes a selection of works from the huge number related to the domain of popular music, the idea of canon formation is at the forefront of a consideration of this history. The crux of my argument here is that new folk texts which exhibit punk aesthetics, and many of the recordings which have historically created a context in which this work is made, are inherently anti-canonical. There is an inevitable contradiction here, in that even as I would hope that the consideration of a range of obscure recordings might counter traditional notions of canonicity in rock music, the importance of Bob Dylan to the discussion, and the positioning of Will Oldham as the start of a new tradition, are each easily read as commonplace canonical gestures on my part.

This is inevitable because any attempt to understand the present necessitates a consideration of the past that led to that present. Indeed, as Jonathan Friedman notes:

> The construction of a past . . . is a project that selectively organizes events in a relation of continuity with a contemporary subject, thereby creating an appropriated representation of a life leading up to the present . . . The construction of a history is the construction of a meaningful universe of events and narratives for an individual or collectively defined subject. And since the motivation of this process of construction emanates from a construction inhabiting a specific social world, we must say that history is an imprinting of the present on to the past (Friedman 1994: 117-118).

While acknowledging that this process is unavoidable, I wish to deviate from Friedman's outline inasmuch as to present a reading of pop/rock history that is not strictly linear. Individual lineages cross paths. Certain artists influence their peers directly, while attention to others skips a generation or more. Certain sounds seem to resonate in certain communities or with certain ideologies in particular times and not in others. The total mass of historical 'facts', or perspectives, in any broad field, be it popular music, soccer or carpentry, is unknowable by any individual. In a study such as this, all one can hope to do is to shed light on a chosen field that illuminates angles hitherto unforeseen. I present the broader field of artists and recordings that have some bearing on the recent field of new folk as but one of an infinite number of possible histories of popular musics that might be told, and state that my intention is not to canonise certain works and artists in favour of others, but merely to facilitate a fuller understanding of this aspect of recent independent music making and how it fits in the broader context of rock music.

If this project betrays certain biases that result from my own particular tastes, this too is inevitable. As my discussion of institutional factors in the first chapter makes plain, there is no simple binary of mainstream/independent. Yet my concentration on independent artists seems to implicate a political agenda. 'Dai Griffiths' argument that popular music writing "is best understood as a certain literature of the left during the late twentieth century" is highly persuasive' (Cloonan 2005: 86). Just as a concentration on independent artists and largely acoustic music making seems to fall into the 'trap' of aligning the 'natural', 'unmediated', 'small' and 'informal' with notions of the authentic which underlie many discussions of popular music, I hope that this study makes clear that these notions are still remarkably powerful in the ways in which they influence the aesthetic choices made by musicians – and these inevitably influence modes of consumption, for which there is little room for discussion here. To underline this: to

acknowledge these constructions of authenticity for what they are does not make them vanish or diminish their power. Any discussion of folk or punk must simultaneously acknowledge these constructions *and* their continuing power.

Greil Marcus quotes Richard Candida Smith in his book *Invisible Republic*: 'Historical "facts" served hierarchy, while tradition was liberating because it grew from a voluntary personal response to the repertory of the past.'(Marcus 1997: 100) The suggestion that history is not merely to be found in the 'facts' is useful in a consideration of the new folk repertoire, even if much of it is not strictly traditional. A return to largely acoustic music making does seem to refuse historical facts; the rejection of an increasing technical proficiency, or facility with technology is also easily associated with the precepts of the punk movement. New folk performers consciously negotiate their relationship with tradition, perhaps several traditions, among them folk music, rock music, independent recording practices post punk, and the recording as art work. To make sense of music repertoires, theoretical work must undertake a similar negotiation. As Street (2000: 300) writes, 'music, like any form of historical evidence, does not simply document the past; that past has to be reconstructed and interpreted via an appreciation of the form and character of the document.'

Canonicity

The problem of canonicity is that it is virtually impossible to discuss a selection of texts from any discipline without seeming to elevate some above others. In the field of music, there are books which consciously set out to confront this problem. Toop's *Ocean of Sound* (1995) is such a wide ranging, non-sequential trawl through his record collection, from Debussy to Sun Ra to Aphex Twin and beyond to various natural and man-made sonic environments, that canonicity seems to be avoided. The only recognisable field, really, is sound which by and large avoids the three-minute pop song structure, though even this is occasionally present in the form of artists such as Kate Bush and the Beach Boys. McClary's *Conventional Wisdom* (2000) jumps from Philip Glass to John Zorn to Public Enemy to k.d. lang in a single essay (139-169), with earlier parts of the book devoted to a Beethoven string quartet (118-135) and the blues (32-62). As previously noted, Moore (2001) analyses a wide variety of texts and artists in a conscious effort to

avoid further cementing a limited number of them in a popular music canon; one might say his focus is more on the analytical frameworks than the texts themselves. Even so, we may ask ourselves: why has McClary chosen a piece by Public Enemy rather than one by, say, N.W.A.? Why Glass rather than Reich? Why does Terry Riley get a guernsey from Toop, but Glass and Reich do not? It is easy to come to the conclusion that Public Enemy is elevated above other rap artists by McClary, and Glass above other minimalists, and so on. A closer look at these texts would most likely uncover specific reasons why particular pieces are relevant to the threads of particular discussions.

Other studies present histories which elaborate upon given fields; the process of canonisation may or may not be present. An example of this approach is Sweers' *Electric Folk*. In this study, Fairport Convention, Pentangle and Steeleye Span are the definitive groups, along with prominent earlier folk revivalists such as Davey Graham and Shirley and Dolly Collins. While these artists are elevated, the focus is equally on the broader field. This includes the history of English folk song, the folk revival of the fifties and sixties, and groups that have explored similar terrain to Fairport et al., in more recent decades. This approach has similarities to my own. I am interested in the broader field of musical activities which have led to the formation of new folk. While Will Oldham, Kes and Faun Fables are seemingly elevated by my choice of them for case studies, it is not necessarily because I think they are the best in the field, but because they seem to me to provide an interesting cross-section of the ways in which punk aesthetics is expressed through folk-inflected independent music. My interest, not unlike Sweers', is the suggestion of the broader field which is articulated in more detail through specific case studies. In the case of the present work, I would hope that this is of particular value as I propose a collection of artists which have not been grouped together before.

It is instructive to demarcate the idea of canon from that of field. Drawing on several sources, Skinner (2006: 58) says that '(a)esthetic classification systems emerge when people collectively agree that certain cultural texts belong together in fields, that these fields have differing degrees of cultural significance, and that particular cultural texts within each field are superior to others'. The idea that different fields have 'different degrees of cultural significance' is a problematic one. I would not suggest that the field of artists presented in this chapter is more or less significant than any other field, be it a

particular development in hip hop and its foundational documents, or a recent school of art music composition and its lineage. It seems unlikely to me that there really can be consensus on the relative validity of different fields of cultural activity. Then again, the simple idea of the field proposed by Skinner is attractive; the brief survey in the previous chapter encourages me to suggest that there is some consensus regarding a field of new folk, even if there is a fragmentation of that understanding. Hibbett (2005: 57) is more prescriptive, defining a field as 'a structured but dynamic space with internal rulers and power relations'. Rather than simply a sphere of classification, Hibbett's idea of the field includes canonisation as a defining element, in the idea of a hierarchy amongst texts. I prefer the idea that we might place texts together for the purpose of understanding more about them, without necessarily having to observe or construct power relations between them.

More useful to this project is Hibbett's idea of indie rock as a field of restricted production (57). If in Hesmondhalgh's assessment (1999), the era of indie as a generic marker passed sometime in the nineties, for the purposes of Hibbett's essay it remains shorthand for musical activity in the independent sector. For our purposes, we might see new folk as an aspect or example of that activity when Hibbett writes that '(o)bscurity becomes a positive feature, while exclusion is embraced as the necessary consequence of the majority's lack of "taste"' (57). In this statement we see the germ of the idea of anti-canonicity. Rather than seeking to produce work which stands 'the test of time', value is accorded to obscurity. However, as Jones notes (2008: 20-21), the notion of a canon calls into existence its Other, the non-canonical. This might include all recordings which, for any of several reasons, are seen not to achieve the values required for entry into the canon. The category of non-canonical may also 'refer to texts that are created in full awareness of the canon and actively undermine it (in this case more anti-canonical than non-canonical)'. While this might be true in some cases, and certain new folk texts may be products of aesthetic choices that consciously flout the industry standards that have resulted at least in part from the canonisation of particular works, my notion of anti-canonicity goes further. Many of these works refuse common assumptions of what constitutes a finished recording, or a finished song, or an acceptable performance. They seek not to undermine the canon but to work oblivious to the parameters by which recordings are conventionally judged.

Elsewhere (2008: 8), Jones writes that '(t)he guiding narrative of the canon is . . . usually one of evolution and progress made visible in the progression of its key works'. While the idea of progression infers a history of rock music in which works that achieve canonisation exhibit qualities of originality and newness, the idea of the 'timelessness' of canonic texts persists. Much new folk material seems to strive for an out-of-time-ness rather than the 'timelessness' associated with the canon. Although albums that are widely acknowledged as part of The Rock Canon are considered to have achieved timelessness in their appeal, paradoxically they tend to encapsulate a particular zeitgeist. Just as The Beatles' *Revolver* (1966) and *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (1966) and Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) evoke a 'coming of age' for rock music and in various ways represent the 'state of the art' of popular music of the mid-sixties, Nirvana's *Nevermind* (1991) is associated with 'the year punk broke'[42] in America; Sex Pistols' *Never Mind The Bollocks* (1977) enshrines the idea of punk rock as a late seventies phenomenon; Radiohead's *OK Computer* (1997) is an evocation of a dystopian present in the shadow of the end of the millenium. Although it is possible that some new folk recordings may also be read as indicative of their times, it is arguable that the artists that make up the field under discussion here place an uncommon, at times unconscious premium on operating outside of contemporary values. This is as true of the 'back to nature' aspect of Vashti Bunyan and The Incredible String Band as it is of Faun Fables and Bonnie 'Prince' Billy. This out-of-time-ness is different to what Walser refers to when he writes of the perception of the timelessness of canonic texts resulting in their being 'dehistoricized'. The recordings in the field being constructed here are not placed 'outside history by crediting them with universal appeal across cultural boundaries' (1993: 569). They tend to negotiate a space where the time of recording is not attributable to the sound, but nor are the style and sound preservationist or nostalgic in respect to a previous time, sound or style in particular. These recordings might be described as liminal, existing in an in-

[42] *1991: The Year Punk Broke* is the title of the Dave Markey film which covered a European tour of Sonic Youth, Nirvana and others. Though widely seen as a reference to punk rock entering the American mainstream through the success of *Nevermind*, Markey says the title of the film is misunderstood, having been coined during filming, before Nirvana's breakthrough: 'As far as I knew, punk was all over. Mötley Crüe covering "Anarchy in the U.K."? I don't know what else you would need for punk rock to be officially declared dead at that point' (quoted in Chick 2007: 189).

between place of the artist's own making, oblivious to the music trends of the time, yet not subscribing particularly to any other time.[43]

Von Appen and Doehring are right, in their paper which distils dozens of 'best of' lists to construct an ultimate canon of pop and rock, to bemoan the lack of diversity in the list with respect to ethnicity, gender and genre (2006: 34), although it does extend from Fleetwood Mac to the Sex Pistols. My field is also largely of white artists, but includes a greater percentage of female artists than that collected by Von Appen and Doehring. This is probably due to a combination of generic associations between female singers and folk, and the fact that the do-it-yourself ethos of punk effected at least a partial dismantling of barriers to the participation of women in popular music.

While I have tried to maintain some notion of putting this field of artists and recordings together purely out of a search for precedents to a recent musical phenomenon, there is one way in which a traditional notion of canonicity is unavoidably present. By incorporating artists acknowledged by new folkers in interviews and through cover versions, stylistic similarities and collaborations, a certain sifting of the field is evident. Interestingly though, the championing of relatively obscure artists such as Vashti Bunyan and Michael Hurley is symptomatic of a rejection of the traditional pop-rock canon as outlined by Von Appen and Doehring. Of course, as Skinner (2006: 58) reminds us, this type of canonicity becomes a display of specific cultural capital; that in fact the creation of alternate canons is an unavoidable consequence of a rejection of The Canon.

Webb's 'milieu cultures'

The work of Peter Webb (2007) bears some similarities to my own project. One of the case studies through which Webb expands upon his notion of milieu cultures is the neo-folk movement discussed in the previous chapter. Similar to my study, he posits a musical movement of the relative present as the focus of a study which then casts back

[43] Of course, it is possible to map a historical context for all of the records discussed here, both in terms of the ideological currents of the places and times of their creation, and in terms of their relationship to mainstream and independent orthodoxies. Many thanks to Kim Poole for this observation.

to a field of predecessors. In this case, the foreground/present of neo-folk is discussed in close readings of the careers and ideas of Death in June, Current 93, Sol Invictus and Sixth Comm, and their main protagonists. The broader field consists of six particularly important forbears: The Velvet Underground, but also the solo work of the vocalist Nico who performed with them on their first album; Scott Walker; Love; Shirley and Dolly Collins; Throbbing Gristle; and Joy Division, all of whom are discussed in some detail; and thence a long list of names, most of them post-punk and industrial groups (Webb 2007: 60-70). Though my survey of recordings and approaches reaches further back into the pre-rock past, I will do something similar with the field proposed below. The difference between our projects is most evident in the ways in which we think about this broader field, although we are both wary of the notion of canon.

Webb seemingly uses the term 'milieu' in a couple of different ways. One is to indicate a like-minded group of artists who know and work with each other. An example of this is his description of a particular house in Tuffnel Park, North London which several musicians moved in and out of, making it a hive of neo-folk activity. This is the milieu in its most localised realisation. At another level, the word 'milieu' seems to indicate the world-wide community of like-minded individuals who are interested in the music of these and other artists, as well as associated literary and philosophical figures. As Webb (105) writes: '(T)he milieu acts as a source of pathways into a set of literatures, ideas, and music that give the audience and the artists a sense of worth that is based on being challenged and stretched by the art in question.' Webb is referring here specifically to the neo-folk milieu; the inference is that different milieus may encourage different modes of response and consumption. My conception of new folk is not nearly as wide-ranging in this sense, as it does not seek to include audience response to this degree, or to specifically target philosophical or political perspectives beyond the anti-capitalist gesture of creating cultural products that do not seek a place in the mainstream.

It is significant to acknowledge the actual working relationships between musicians which result in hybrids of styles or collaborations that influence the direction of one artist or another. Within the field of my interest, there are three localised milieus that come to mind as significant (and of course, there are more). Firstly, there is the clutch of U.K. artists from the late sixties and early seventies produced by Joe Boyd: Fairport

Convention, The Incredible String Band, Shirley and Dolly Collins, Vashti Bunyan, Nick Drake, and their various collaborations. Then there are the various collaborations of Will Oldham with Dawn McCarthy of Faun Fables, Ben Chasny of Six Organs of Admittance, David Pajo, members of Espers, Tortoise and so on. Finally, we might look to an Australian new folk milieu, where there are crossovers of personnel between the recordings and bands of Laura Jean, Kes, Grand Salvo and Jen Cloher. However, my idea of new folk is wide-ranging enough that whether the artists know each other is not always relevant. I am not sure that Webb's idea of the neo-folk milieu stretches back to the artists he lists as predecessors to it, whereas the impact of the sound and delivery of the recordings collected in Smith's *Anthology* on new folkers is sometimes as significant as the close working relationships between them.

Perhaps most significantly, Webb very much sees the milieu as including any networks which foster or develop its particular philosophy or aesthetic. My study consistently acknowledges the importance of independent networks to the existence of new folk. There is a symbiotic relationship between the artists that produce work which embodies punk aesthetics and the independent networks which make the publication and dissemination of this work possible. The difference between my study and Webb's is that my focus does not extend to the business contexts themselves. The summaries of genre which have already been delivered and the case studies which follow draw insight principally from the recordings themselves.

What follows is a brief analysis of three loci of musical activity that I believe are of particular significance to new folk. Within the scope of this study, it is impossible to be exhaustive with respect to independent, post-punk folk artists. For example, the early recordings of The Pogues, Billy Bragg and Michelle Shocked might fit very well the parameters set out for punk aesthetics, while also exhibiting a tangible relationship to folk music. The early work of Throwing Muses, described by their leader Kristin Hersh as a combination of Appalachian folk song and punk rock (Encarnacao 2007b), would also seem to qualify, as might the rough-hewn independent folk of Sydney's Roaring Jack. Many of Tom Waits' recordings from 1983 onwards evoke various aspects of early twentieth-century musics, from cabaret to rustic folk and blues. However, none of these musics provide specific sonic templates for new folk artists, so, in the interests of space, they will be set aside.

The *Anthology of American Folk Music*

The significance of this volume to the new folk generation has a range of aspects. Very little discussed in other literature is the sound of these recordings, which one might argue inadvertently provides a template for lo-fi and new folk artists. The structures of the pieces often conform to relatively simple exterior shapes which conceal complex internal workings. The timbre of the vocals on *Anthology* performances may in some senses supply inspiration, and the personas represented might also be regarded as formative.

As John Street (2000: 299) argues, '(t)he same cultural artefact assumes entirely different meanings in different circumstances'. This is very much the case with Harry Smith's *Anthology*. Seen from different historical perspectives, very different associations have been made both between the recordings within it, and with movements decades removed from those recordings. Cantwell (1991: 364-365) claims that the very use of LP records for the release of the *Anthology*, in 1952 a format mostly associated with classical music

> legitimized its material, investing it with the cultural authority both of its advanced technology and its rarified sociopolitical connections. What had been, to the men who originally recorded it, essentially the music of poor, isolated and uneducated people – and hence an avowedly inferior music, primitive, parochial, or merely amateur – was thus reframed as a kind of *avant garde* art.

Interestingly, this sounds very like Dave Laing's (1985: 108) framing of punk as a kind of vernacular experimentalism, a cultural moment where there was the potential for the fusing of 'the dirty proletariat and the daring avant-garde'. What the aesthetics or philosophy of punk adds to the formulation suggested by Cantwell is a *celebration* of the primitive, parochial and amateur, and of course, this has resonances with the folk revivalists as well. Music produced in the independent sphere, despite its potential for international success as evidenced in the reception of Newsom, Oldham and Banhart, is

a celebration of the parochial and the personal which defines itself through differentiation from mainstream products that aspire towards universal appeal.

Following its original compilation in 1952, the *Anthology* became a touchstone for the folk revival, as has been noted. Marcus (1997) has written extensively on the connections he perceives between the *Anthology* and Bob Dylan's recordings from 1966-67 with the soon-to-be-named The Band, some of which were eventually released as *The Basement Tapes*. An interest in folk material, acoustic instrumentation and, sometimes, a lack of concern for recording quality has made some writers draw connections between the *Anthology* and new folk artists, as noted above.[44] Skinner argues that the reputation of the *Anthology* is overstated and due more to the persuasion of commentators such as Marcus rather than anything intrinsic to the music itself. Cantwell (1991: 365) suggests that the *Anthology* 'converts a commercial music fashioned in the 1920s out of various cultural emplacements and historical displacements into the "folk" music of the folk revival.'

Sound

Perhaps the most radical of perspectives on the *Anthology*, though straightforward in its own way, is from Keenan (writing about the 2000 issue of the long-lost Volume 4 of the *Anthology*):

> (M)any consumers of self-consciously avant garde music are drawn to these rough-edged recordings as much for the sonic experience as for the historical perspective or any notion of authenticity. Decades of crackle and fuzz have become inextricable parts of these songs, ghost channels that seem to be calling directly over time, a little ruptured window onto another world. We can literally hear the sound of a world that's slowly retreating into the murk of history (Keenan 2000, no page number).

While this kind of sonic voyeurism is also reflected in the recent British musical phenomenon of 'hauntology'[45], it leads us to the connection between the sound of the

[44] Kot (1995) in fact compares Palace/Oldham's debut album *There is no-one what will take care of you* to *The Basement Tapes*.
[45] See Stout (2007). Thanks to Tony Mitchell for bringing the phenomenon of hauntology to my attention.

Anthology and that of new folk artists, and whatever mediating steps there may be in-between. The minimalism of recording means we regard as something of an aesthetic choice for the new folkers and, to an extent, lo-fi and outsider artists might also be heard in what were no doubt state of the art recordings of the twenties and thirties. Part of what has led Marcus and others to draw a line between Dylan's *Basement Tapes* and the *Anthology* is the fact that the former were recorded in less than professional circumstances in the homes of the musicians. Combined with Dylan and The Band's predilection for 'old-timey' songs and forms, the result was recordings that Marcus (1997: xvi-xvii) claims 'could carry the date 1932 and it would be as convincing, as one listens, as 1967, if not more so – as would, say, the dates 1881, 1954, 1992, 1993.' I would argue, also, that the fact that an artist of the calibre of Dylan released an album in this sound quality – even if the recordings were available only as bootlegs and publisher's acetates until an official release of some two dozen of them in 1975 – legitimised the practice. *The Basement Tapes* might easily be seen as the first lo-fi album[46], and as such, an obvious link between the *Anthology* and other recordings of that time, and new folk, even if it is hipper to drop the name of Vashti Bunyan.[47] All of the selections on the *Anthology* are products of the sonic limitations of the recording technology of the time, and there are times where one can hear the balance of instruments change as the players seemingly jostle around a single microphone. This is the case with 'Home Sweet Home' by The Breaux Freres (1934), where the small band of guitar, accordion and fiddle is squeezed out of the sonic picture whenever the singer steps up to the microphone. As I will discuss in the following chapter, a similar compromise is heard on 'Come A Little Dog' by Palace Brothers (1994).

[46] From what is related by Griffin (2007: 291-305), the more one finds out about the official 1975 release called *The Basement Tapes*, the more one has to suspend disbelief when actually listening to it. Available information leads us to think that three of the 24 selections ('Bessie Smith', 'Ain't No More Cane' and 'Don't Ya Tell Henry') were in fact recorded in 1975 during the sessions for The Band's *Northern Lights-Southern Cross* and several others included overdubs recorded while *The Basement Tapes* was being compiled (around the same time). Two further cuts ('Ruben Remus' and 'Long Distance Operator') are suspected of being recorded during the sessions for The Band's *Music From Big Pink* (1968). Additionally, the wide separation of the original bootlegged mixes is generally remixed to a 'collapsed mono' which perhaps adds to a feeling of home-recorded authenticity.

[47] It is an interesting coincidence that at the same time as Will Oldham was releasing his first records under the Palace name, Bob Dylan made two albums of old folk and blues tunes, *Good As I Been To You* (1992) and *World Gone Wrong* (1993). Oldham covered 'Going To Acapulco', a song from *The Basement Tapes*, as a b-side in 2007, though the significance of this must be viewed in the context that he has covered songs by everyone from Mariah Carey and Merle Haggard to Bjork and the Misfits. Even amongst the handful of Dylan songs Oldham has covered, several of them have been from Dylan's 1978 album *Street Legal*.

Structure

While Marcus (1997: 104-112) and Cantwell (199: 378-382) each go to some trouble to uncover what they perceive as internal narratives in the sequencing of the 84 selections in the *Anthology* – positing Harry Smith as the collection's author as much as I do by referring to it consistently as 'Smith's *Anthology*' – lack of space and the frame at hand leads me to isolate a few recordings for analysis, rather than to consider the structure of the *Anthology* as a six-volume 'album'. It is probably very hopeful on my part to think that that these choices will be representative of tendencies embodied in the collection as a whole, but still, there are resonances between these recordings and the work of new folk artists which are worth pointing out.

It is very significant that the high number of solo recordings, and the fact that even group recordings are live, means that there is often an elasticity to the structures of individual songs/recordings in the *Anthology* which is anathema to the layering and overdubbing of standard rock and pop studio practice since the mid-sixties. This elasticity and live-ness is also often found in new folk recordings. Any live recording enables a solo performer to allow an arrangement to 'breathe' in a different way in each performance, and for a group to follow the lead of a singer or soloist in the moment. One result of this spontaneity is that despite the simplicity of aspects normally foregrounded in musicological analysis – particularly harmony and mode - there are internal aspects of these structures which are highly complex. This complexity may be the consequence of learnt irregularities in the forms themselves, or the result of spontaneous choices made for practical reasons, such as a singer needing a breath. Nevertheless, the result is often pieces that seem very simple on the surface, yet harbour internal complexities. This process contributes to the creation of recordings which remain unfathomable, perhaps cryptic in a sense which complements the strange allusions to cannibalistic railway men and frogs courting mice.

Clarence Ashley's 'House Carpenter' is an excellent example of this two-layered structure. Harmonically and modally, the recording could not be simpler, sung in a natural minor mode which never touches on the sixth scale degree, over a drone in G, with the upper voice of the banjo accompaniment mimicking the vocal melody line in a

heterophonic texture common to folk practice. The lyric is related in a strictly strophic construction, with ten stanzas each following the same melody. The internal structure is semi-improvised, shifting slightly with each iteration to accommodate different line lengths in the lyric, resulting in stanza lengths of 44-47 beats in duration. My analysis (see Appendix 1, figures 1 and 2)[48] might be seen as placing too much emphasis on the internal structure, when, of course, the point of the recording is the narrative. However, I would argue that the dynamism of the storytelling relies in no small part on the irregularity of the stanza lengths, which keep the ear/brain connection more active than if the internal structure slipped into a predictable or symmetrical pattern.

A similar result is achieved by Buster Carter and Preston Young on 'A Lazy Farmer Boy' (1931) through different internal machinations. The form alternates between instrumental stanzas, which are 22 beats in duration, and vocal stanzas, which are 21 (see Appendix 1, figure 3). Again, the harmony is very simple, in this case, two chords throughout. Although each vocal stanza is structured in the same way, the instruments and the vocal each have a separate layer of metrical organisation (see Appendix 1, figure 4). The vocal lines begin and end in different places to the chord changes in quite a jarring way. Creating even further complexity is the fact that in a five line structure, there is a repetition of a line of melody, and a repetition of a line of text, but these happen in different parts of the form (see Appendix 1, figure 5).

Blind Lemon Jefferson's 'Rabbit Foot Blues' (1926) is another semi-improvised form, with the underlying twelve-bar AAB form somewhat obscured by ambiguous links between the stanzas. The performance captured in this recording sounds quite spontaneous, with in-the-moment expression much more important than any feeling of motor rhythm that we might expect of a blues, inspiring arrangements for each stanza that vary in voicings, register and tempo. This practice of obscuring an underlying standardised structure, either through liberties taken in the performative moment, or by additional material which complicates the basic structure, will be seen in the case studies in the next chapter. In the cases of Kes and Faun Fables, these are developed into what I will refer to as labyrinth forms, at times a kind of through-composition

[48] My approach to the construction of charts to explain aspects of recordings, as found in the Appendix in relation to works included in the *Anthology*, and in Chapter Five in relation to the work of Kes, owes a debt to Hubbs (2000, 2008: 225-229).

which solidifies an improvised structure into an unusual song/recording structure, at others a result of the spontaneity of live performance.

Vocal approach

> The *Folkways Anthology* has taken a sounding of American culture at a time when its forces had worked the human voice into timbres which are now mostly strange to us . . . One is tempted to apply the old epithets to them – to say that the voices on the anthology are "untutored", "rustic", "primitive", "barbaric", and so on. Of course they are these things, from the viewpoint of our own art music; but as the sheer fact of recording suggests, they are exotic in other ways as well. With certain important exceptions, most of the male voices, black and white . . . sound, in a certain way, aged, even when the singers are young . . . The anthology balladeers all sing with a pinched, nasal tone quite accurately associated with farmers; many of the singers were in fact farmers. (Cantwell 1991: 375)

The nasal quality that Cantwell writes of cuts through the limitations of the recording quality. It is not a product of the recording, but faithfully reproduced through those limitations. It is indicative of the fact that many of these singers are not trained; there is no evidence of the full tone or control that we associate with trained singers. While this is also true of many singers in the pop/rock field, this idea of the amateur singing voice is accentuated in the field of new folk, whether it be in the squeaky tones of Joanna Newsom or the broken ones of the early recordings of Will Oldham. This nasal delivery is evident in 'A Lazy Farmer Boy' and 'House Carpenter'. Present in some recordings is the declamatory style that I associate with well-rounded performers of the folk revival era such as Baez and Judy Collins.[49] Clifford Breaux, for example, fronting the Breaux Freres, projects a cultured parlour voice straining at the leash which occasionally breaks into broken notes and spontaneous whoops.

[49] Bob Dylan refers to the orthodoxy of this refined delivery of folk music in the revival era through a comical verse on a folk café booker's reaction to his (equally studied, of course) comparatively guttural delivery:

'I get on the stage, sing and play
The man there say "come back some other day
You sound like a hillbilly
We want folk singers here."'
'Talkin' New York', *Bob Dylan* (1962)

Just as the spontaneous delivery on the *Anthology* recordings results in idiosyncratic internal structures, the impact of live recording and untrained vocal techniques is also found in approaches to pitch. In 'Home Sweet Home', Breaux's vocal often lurches sharp. This approximation is reflected in the instrumental performances, where there are many momentary clashes created by the alignment of sliding ornamentations on the fiddle and notes hit cleanly by the accordion. While the Middle Georgia Singing Convention No. 1's a capella gospel performance of 'This Song of Love' features rhythmically tight and tuneful singing, the performance does creep up a semitone over the course of its three minutes. Though these observations may seem like irrelevant trainspotting in recordings where feeling and spontaneity are much more the point than technical correctness, these aspects are pointed out not as criticisms of the performances, but as rough edges and traces of liveness that we also encounter in the new folk repertoire.

In discussing the female voices on the *Anthology*, Cantwell (1991: 377) observes that there are 'no sultry Bessie Smiths, no demure Billie Holidays, and emphatically no pure Joan Baezes to be found'. The female voices are as strained as the male voices, he finds, 'piercingly high-pitched, warbling, sometimes wailing'; this last description could have been conjured to describe aspects of certain performances by Joanna Newsom and Faun Fables' Dawn McCarthy.

Finally, Street draws our attention to the characters presented by these imperfect voices, and their influence on subsequent generations:

> The voices and songs on the *Anthology* legitimated a kind of musical personality and perspective. Dylan used those songs and characters, not just to produce his own cover versions, but to establish his own artistic persona. Dylan's use of the *Anthology* can be detected from his first recordings, through to the *Basement Tapes* . . . to *World Gone Wrong* (1993) (Street 2000: 301).

> (T)he *Anthology* provided a way of seeing the world which Dylan, Nick Cave, Beck and others have, self-consciously or not, borrowed. What they have taken is the outsider's perspective that the songs constantly evoke (the poor, the criminal) and the extremes of experience that they articulate (the rage, the lust). (ibid.: 307)

Beyond the portability, economy and directness of instrumental means which link the *Anthology* performances, the folk revivalists, some singer-songwriters of the late sixties/early seventies, lo-fi and outsider artists, and new folkers, perhaps there is a lineage of this world view which is also perceptible. Certainly one might say that aspects of these characters and voices might be found in the work of Oldham, Smog, Cat Power and others. However, the work of Nick Cave, as much as it draws from old folk and blues resources, even to the point of recordings based on *Anthology* material,[50] and as much as his influence is noticeable in the work of Oldham, Smog and Cat Power in particular, also projects an outlaw image that is perhaps more 'rock-ist' than that of the hermits and bedroom philosophers of new folk. As much as the wayward voices of the *Anthology* are sometimes heard reflected in new folk, so is the declamatory lineage defined by Joan Baez, Judy Collins, the Incredible String Band and Pentangle's Jacqui McShee, and the moulding of that idiom into the intimate or confessional, often poetic tones of Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Vashti Bunyan, Nick Drake and others. It is to this generation that rejected the excesses of their psychedelic peers that I will now turn.

The psych-folk and singer-songwriter material of the late sixties and early seventies.

Ian MacDonald (1995: 172-173) credits The Beatles' 'Strawberry Fields Forever', released in February of 1967, as

> . . . effectively inaugurat(ing) the pop-pastoral mood explored in the late Sixties by groups like Pink Floyd, Traffic, Family and Fairport Convention. More significant, though, was the song's child's-eye view – for the true subject of English psychedelia was neither love nor drugs, but nostalgia for the innocent vision of the child.

This child-like perspective fuses with an interest in the animistic and anthropomorphic which is seminal to the new folk generation, and which makes a clear connection to the

[50] 'Stagger Lee' and 'Henry Lee', both from *Murder Ballads* (1996), each use aspects of the lyrics of these traditional songs for new compositions rather than cover the versions from the *Anthology*. 'King Kong Kitchie Kitchie Ki-Mi-O' (a b-side from 1996, collected on *B-Sides and Rarities*, 2005) and both 'John The Revelator' and 'Shine on Me', from *The Harry Smith Project: Anthology of American Folk Music Revisited* (2006) bear more resemblance to the recordings found on the original *Anthology*, if only structurally.

mythical and sometimes surreal content of the recordings collected in Smith's *Anthology*. Rob Young (2007: 38) thinks the promotional film which accompanied 'Strawberry Fields' was also highly influential; it finds 'the group shivering in the pre-dawn glimmer by a gnarly tree, dancing backwards around a weird cobwebbed harmonium'. He cites the cover of The Incredible String Band's *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* (1968) as a good example of this 'outdoor aesthetic'. Having released their debut album in 1966, Scots the ISB were at the forefront of this pastoral moment. They shared with Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd (and others) the whimsical lyrical bent that exemplified the back to Eden/childhood atmosphere associated with 'Strawberry Fields' by Young and MacDonald. *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* is their best-known and most influential work. Though the instrumentation on this album is varied – acoustic guitar, sitar, organ, piano, harpsichord, harmonica, percussion, flutes and recorders – the elements of the rock rhythm section (drum kit or bass guitar) are avoided. Because of this, an imagined 'pre-electric idyll' is evoked; as we have seen, many new folkers have followed this lead. There is a disavowal of studio technology and vogue-ish equipment such as guitar effects and synthesizers which sets groups such as the ISB and Tyrannosaurus Rex, and the singer-songwriters in the discussion to follow, apart from their iconic counter-cultural contemporaries such as Jimi Hendrix and the Beatles.

Traditional elements of British folk music may be discerned in the melodic contours and declamatory vocal style of the ISB, but the idiosyncrasy of the songwriting points towards the personal idiom of rock created by Dylan. This is important to note, as it places the ISB and similar artists in a *rock* context rather than that of a conservationist folk one, despite the use of elements associable with folk. Producer of the ISB's early albums, Joe Boyd, described their approach as 'completely original, influenced by American folk and Scottish ballads, but full of flavours from the Balkans, ragtime, North Africa, music hall and William Blake' (Boyd 2006: 121-122). Charles Ford (1995: 480) also discerns a complex brew of musics in the ISB. His list includes 'the Celtic backbone of the first album', 'pre-war styles from the Southern states' of America such as spiritual and jug band music, Indian classical music, hymnody and psalmody, and nursery rhyme. In both Boyd's and Ford's lists, the wide variety of musical origins evoked by the ISB is easily aligned with fantasies of pre-industrial times.

1968 also saw the release of the debut album by Tyrannosaurus Rex. While the title makes a self-conscious claim to psychedelic whimsy, *My People Were Fair and Wore Stars in Their Hair . . . But Now They're Content to Wear Stars on Their Brows*, the instrumentation is limited to acoustic guitar, percussion and vocals. The London duo made four albums from 1968-1970 before shortening their name to T-Rex. Though the fourth album *A Beard of Stars* (1970) includes some electric guitar, it also continues on from previous releases to exemplify many characteristics that at once boil down the exotic flavours of the ISB to an essence while embracing a raggedness of performance that allows us to make connections with a punk aesthetic. The limitations of Marc Bolan's musical technique, as guitarist and singer, do not limit his enthusiasm. His vocal is at times quite flat of the mark pitch-wise, and double-tracked to strengthen the tone. An excessive vibrato is a hallmark of the singing on these early albums; John Peel called Bolan 'Larry the Lamb' due to his 'bleating'. This vocal style is appropriated wholesale by new folk artist Devendra Banhart on his early albums.

Tyrannosaurus Rex and The Incredible String Band each combined minimal, largely acoustic instrumentation with distinctly folk-ish inflections – lyrical, rhythmic and instrumental – to present original material. Singer-songwriter Vashti Bunyan provides the most tangible link between the late sixties/early seventies generation of singer-songwriters and the generation of new folkers, having collaborated with Animal Collective on the EP *Prospect Hummer* (2005) and sung backing vocals on Devendra Banhart's *Rejoicing in the Hands* (2004). She recorded a second album, *Lookaftering* (2005) with guest spots from Banhart, Joanna Newsom, Adem and Mice Parade 35 years after her oft-cited debut *Another Diamond Day*, largely as a result of renewed interest in her work by the new folk generation.

Similarly to the ISB, *Another Diamond Day* is notable for acoustic instrumentation, the absence of a rock rhythm section and a clear, declamatory singing style associated, at least by rock audiences, with folk music. This singing style is worth remarking on because it seems to descend from Joan Baez and Judy Collins, both Americans, who sang much repertoire early in their careers that was specifically British in origin. This seems to have left traces on their respective vocal deliveries. Similar observations (in general terms) might be made of Nick Drake's *Five Leaves Left* (1969) and *Pink Moon*

(1972), Leonard Cohen's debut *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1968) and *Parallelograms* (1970) by Linda Perhacs.[51]

As well as mentioning his interest in 'a lot of revolutionary South American music' in a 2007 interview (Edmonds 2007), Banhart described singer Karen Dalton and singer-songwriter Fred Neil as his 'bedrock'. Neil's 'Dolphins' has become a folk-rock standard, though his forceful folk blues are not as much a template for new folk work as the more interior, intimate sounds of Drake, Bunyan and Perhacs. In some ways, Karen Dalton presents an archetype for new folk. Certainly her phrasing is wilful, and the sound of her voice is unusual, almost like a female equivalent of early Palace, with cracking and an ornery timbre. Her first album was recorded live in first takes in a single evening, in best folk practice. Even though her second, *In My Own Time* was pieced together over six months, and producer/bassist Harvey Brooks took recording verse by verse at times, Brooks asserts that '(s)he was not a recording artist, she didn't come from that place'.[52] She only managed to record these two albums, in 1968 and 1971, and the first, seemingly recorded during the downtime of a Fred Neil session, was really a case of serendipity. It seems that Dalton was not at all focused on recording or commercial success, which is one reason why her cachet is so high today. One needs considerable cultural capital to have even heard of her. And so her reputation is infused with authenticity and integrity. The same is obviously true of Vashti Bunyan, who recorded a clutch of singles in the mid sixties, an album in 1970, and then vanished from the face of the earth until being tracked down by new folkers early in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Michael Hurley is another obscure artist championed by new folk artists, having been covered by Espers and Cat Power. Although the promotional material for the reissue of Dalton's 1971 album *In My Own Time* proclaimed it an 'acid folk masterpiece', much of the music has more in common with country, soul and blues. 'Katie Cruel', a traditional song arranged by Dalton with the very 'trad' instrumentation of violin and banjo, stands out as the 'folk' moment. Dalton, with a keening edge to her voice on this track, sounds not unlike Joanna Newsom.

[51] Kim Poole, in private correspondence with the author, suggests Anne Briggs as an influence on Bunyan, and Sheila McDonald as another who should be counted amongst this generation of declamatory folk singers. My thanks to him.
[52] Brooks is quoted in Kaye (2006), no page numbers.

Neil Young's name has cropped up several times in this essay already. Along strictly generic lines, his work is more easily grouped as 'rock', or with country music than folk. He is most associated with the counter-cultural circles related to his groups Buffalo Springfield (folk rock) and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, superstars of the Woodstock era whose close-harmony singing bred the West Coast sound of the Eagles and others so antithetical to the punk era. However, along with Bob Dylan, Young is the best known artist in rock music to make performance, rather than more elaborate studio processes, central to much of his recorded work. This, in combination with his common recourse to the acoustic guitar, makes certain of his records inescapable as referents to new folk, particularly the trilogy of albums which followed the mainstream success of *Harvest* (1972). *Time Fades Away* (1973) is an extremely ragged live album of what was at the time all new material. Young's voice is clearly in distress on some tracks. Most of *Tonight's The Night* (1975) was recorded live over a couple of drug-fuelled, late night/early morning sessions that functioned as a kind of extended wake for some fallen comrades; its release was held over from 1973 to 1975 due to his record company's reservations. While slightly more polished, there is also much that is spontaneous and performative about *On The Beach* (1974). It's not hard to draw a thread from these loose and informal sets through to *Meat Puppets II* (1984), with its amateurish stew of country, punk and hardcore, and on to the early Palace material.[53] These Young albums, along with the Dylan albums already discussed and the 'outsider' and lo-fi artists below, set influential precedents as recordings that celebrate live performance and the imperfection of music as performed and spontaneous rather than closely planned and layered.

The work of Neil Young is often talked about in context with that of Joni Mitchell. My feeling is that the influence of Mitchell's work is often ignored in favour of that of more obscure artists; somehow it carries negative connotations of the hippie era that do not cling to her obscure contemporaries such as Perhacs, Dalton, Hurley and Bunyan, or even Drake and Cohen. Certainly she is a very accomplished musician, and one cannot speak of amateurism or limited technique with her recordings. Mitchell's music matured through gigging in folk cafes from 1964-67. Her first fame was as a songwriter, with

[53] Listen to 'Riding', from the Palace Music collection *Lost Blues and Other Songs* (1997) for a good example of the collision of country music and punk performance practice which was also definitive of the musical style of *Meat Puppets II*. This is but one of the links we might make between American hardcore and the work of Oldham – more of this in the following chapter.

songs covered by Tom Rush, Judy Collins and Fairport Convention before she had a recording contract. Her use of acoustic guitar in open and alternate tunings aligned her more with folk music than rock. Then there is the transparency, the minimal means, the focus on actual performance on her first four albums. Mitchell is quoted in Hinton (1996: 71) as saying that there was no overdubbing on her first album because she was unable to separate playing from singing. This is a good example of how the accent on liveness becomes a hallmark of folk recordings in a rock context – something that is easily elided with the instantaneity of punk in the new folkers. I would also argue that the raw exposition of emotion on *Blue* (1971) finds its counterpart in equally naked work by Smog and Cat Power.

Lo-fi and outsider artists

Discussing the character of the female voices on Smith's *Anthology*, Cantwell (1991: 377) hits on a point that is particularly relevant to lo-fi, outsider and new folk artists. He writes that the intimacy of some of these performances, or the intensity of the emotion offered at times, is such that 'though we have access to them through recorded sound, (they) seem not to have been created with us, or any audience, in mind.' Of course, there are very few recordings made in which the performers can be completely oblivious to the fact that they are likely to be heard by someone; Dylan's *Basement Tapes*, apparently recorded for the fun of it and not released for years, is one of the few instances that springs to mind. If an artist has any following at all, they would have an awareness that whatever they record stands a good chance of being heard. But this is not the same as creating a recording *with an audience in mind*. Part of the joy of listening to artists in the overlapping fields of lo-fi, outsider and new folk is the feeling that you're not being marketed to.[54] There does not seem to be a machine on the other side of the speakers trying to figure out who the listener is, what demographic they fit into. Though an artist like Jandek seems to have manufactured his mystique to a degree, with his apparent anonymity and the consistent amateur-photography cover art which graces his 50+ albums, the sounds themselves seem to have been made from some inner need, or for the hell of it, rather than as part of a career or economic plan.

[54] Of course, fans of new folk are marketed to on occasion. Imagine my excitement when I learnt that the vinyl edition of Bonnie 'Prince' Billy's *Is It The Sea?* (2009) featured two unlisted bonus tracks.

As outlined in previous chapters, this line of reasoning – that here are sub-genres untainted by commercialism – is easily dismissed as just another instance of the Romantic myth of art that has been with us since at least the nineteenth century. And yet these tropes of authenticity retain their power. One cannot listen to Daniel Johnston's *Hi, How Are You* (1983), recorded at home with a chord organ, piano and acoustic guitar onto a ghetto-blaster, and receive it in the same way as, say, Madonna's self-titled debut, released in the same year. Through the first, we receive the image of a loner recording with, one must imagine, little hope of being widely heard. Indeed as Sarig (1998: 87) and many others have reported, Johnston would hand out home-dubbed cassettes of his albums on the streets of Austin, Texas to anyone who would take them. One might say that the lyric of 'I'll Never Marry': 'I'll never marry, I'll never wed / Nobody wants to kiss you when you're dead / Nobody wants to lie in bed with you / When your flesh is rotting', does not have the same broad appeal as Madonna's 'If we took a holiday / Some time to celebrate / Just one day out of life / It would be so nice' ('Holiday', *Madonna*, 1983). Other parameters follow suit: Johnston's record sounds muffled, as if it was recorded in a closet; the tape speed wobbles slightly; his voice is thin and reedy; loud clicks tell us exactly where Johnston pressed 'record' or 'stop'; the songs speed up and slow down, or end abruptly as the beginning of one song is recorded over the end of another; it is not music for dancing or partying. Sonically speaking, the early Banhart records are not dissimilar. Though not as glossy as her later releases, *Madonna* is a dance record with the production values one would expect of a major release. The subject matter runs from sex and love affairs to the escapism of dancing.

Much has already been covered in the preceding chapters in regard to lo-fi, and various elements of outsider music are best included in the case studies that follow in the next chapter.

V: Case Studies

Phonographic Art

If recordings are central to rock music as a cultural practice, then a consideration of a recording's relationship to the idea of the album-as-object is crucial to an understanding of the aesthetics that informed the recording. Additionally, I would argue that the two main elements that attract or repel us from a recording are its overall sound and, if it includes singing, how we relate to the disposition of the voice. As Laing (1985: 54) writes, '(p)unk voices . . . seem to want to refuse the perfection of the "amplified voice". In many instances, the homogeneity of the singing voice is replaced by a mixture of speech, recitative, chanting, wordless cries and mutterings'. As we will see, vocal performances preserved in the recordings in this study are often conspicuously imperfect. Those of Kes and Dawn McCarthy create a distinct style at least partly from the integration of a variety of utterances similar to the ones Laing hears in punk. The sound of the recording, (and the indications of genre and mood that often follow), invites the listener to construct an environment in which a consideration of its content might unfold.[55] This can amount to levels of familiarity and unfamiliarity with elements of musical style, but is also concerned with sound 'quality'. That is, certain listeners might dismiss certain recordings out of hand as amateurish or simply 'crap' if they do not reach a certain benchmark of production, whereas a different mindset might reject any recording that sounds too polished as of little interest due to what is interpreted as the interference of aspects of the music industry. Similar modes of subconscious filtering occur in the way a listener receives the vocal performance on a recording.

At the next level of dissemination is the structure of individual pieces and, in some cases, of an album as a whole.[56] The ways in which recordings adhere to, or break from

[55]Although, of course, the separation of content from form is problematic if not impossible.
[56] Most song-based albums will feature 8-14 songs that vary from 2-5 minutes in length. I would argue that within these parameters, the structure of a pop/rock album is largely taken for granted. Beyond this sphere of possibilities, the structure of an album begins to draw attention to itself. This is why the

variations on familiar permutations of verse-bridge-chorus structure may provide a sense of familiarity or cause a sense of alienation.[57] A consideration of these three parameters - sound, vocal approach and structure (applied to either single song recordings or albums as works) - is the basis of the analyses that follow.

The idea of the recording as a work of art in its own right is relatively new. Indeed, writing in 1934, at a time when the first movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony could not 'unfold without interruption' because of the limitations of the 78 rpm disc,[58] Adorno (1934/2002: 278) asserted that 'there has been no development of phonographic composers'. While one might pinpoint the advent of the recording as art work to the *musique concrète* experiments of Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry in the late forties and early fifties, as developed in the early electronic works of Stockhausen, Varèse and others in the second half of the fifties (Hall 1996: 100-113), these works are more properly seen as the use of magnetic tape and electronics as creative media. It is with the self-contained works of The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (1966), The Mothers of Invention's (Frank Zappa's) *Freak Out* (1966), The Velvet Underground's *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967), and The Beatles' *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) that the recording as artefact was consciously embraced as a forum for art. Rock music is arguably the cultural formation through which Adorno's phonographic composer was born,[59] even if Adorno might have dismissed all of the above works as irredeemable products of the culture industry.

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dimensions of Joanna Newsom's *Ys* (2006, 5 tracks, 55:42) are a challenge to industry standards and carry with them connotations of art music; these dimensions are not unlike those of a Romantic symphony.

[57] There are two song forms which carry strong associations with pre-rock and roll song structures and, by association, the most obvious resonances with 'folk' music: the 12-bar (AAB) blues form, and the strophic ballad form, where a refrain often ends each iteration.

[58] See Griffiths (2004: 4-20) for the relationship between different generations of technology used to distribute musical product – 78s, 33 and 45rpm vinyl, cassette, compact disc – and the shape and structure of musical works.

[59] It could also be argued that the productions on individual tracks for 45rpm records by auteurs such as Phil Spector and Joe Meek in the late fifties and early sixties constituted the use of the phonograph record as artistic medium. This is not as widely recognised as 'the coming of age' of rock music of the mid-sixties, and certainly canon formation in popular music centres on albums rather than singles. Another argument might be that James Brown's *Live at the Apollo* (1962) constitutes an earlier example of a self-contained album. To me, the delineation here is that Brown's album is the documentation of a live performance, and therefore very different to the studio craft applied to the works listed above which defines them as phonographic art. Others may also suggest Frank Sinatra's unified song suite *In The Wee Small Hours* (1955), or jazz albums conceived as such, like Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* (1959) and *Sketches of Spain* (1960) or John Coltrane's *Africa/Brass* (1961) as earlier instances of phonographic art. In all cases, the issue of who the author is – composer, performer, producer, arranger, a combination of these – is also open to discussion.

Despite the recognition given to *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) and *Blonde on Blonde* (1966), the construction of these albums as unified or sequential works, and their importance to the rhetorics of rock's 'coming of age', Bob Dylan maintained a distance from phonographic art. There is a liveness to these recordings which is a holdover from the performance ethic of folk at the same time as it looks forward to the rejection of studio craft proffered by the DIY ethos of punk. Listen, for example, to 'Pledging My Time' from *Blonde on Blonde* – it sounds very much like Dylan is punctuating his vocal lines with wheezy bursts of harmonica *live*. In 1966, four track machines were still state of the art, so there may have been a level of practicality in this arrangement; yet artists such as The Beach Boys, The Beatles and The Byrds were already taking full advantage of the possibilities of overdubbing. The cleanest way of making a harmonica/vocal recording would be to record one and then overdub the other. Dylan seems to instinctively understand that there is an excitement to be captured by live recording. This is also very much evident in 'Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35' (also from *Blonde*), constructed perhaps, but still representative of an aesthetic choice.

Once noticed in these Dylan albums, it is easy to hear indications of actual performance in these and other of his albums frequently[60]; in fact, performance, rather than the recording process, is paramount. Unlike most of his peers in the mid-late sixties, Dylan never made a record that was a studio construction in the manner of *Sgt. Pepper* or The Rolling Stones' *Their Satanic Majesties' Request* (1967). One could say that, along with the pastoral, pre-electric idyll already projected by the first two albums of The Incredible String Band, Dylan's austere *John Wesley Harding*, released in the final days of 1967, led a rejection of psychedelic excess in favour of more stripped back releases. In 1968, this direction was also adopted in such albums as *The Beatles* (White Album), *Beggar's Banquet* (The Rolling Stones), *Joni Mitchell*, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, the Old Weird America reflected by the early albums of The Band, Creedence Clearwater Revival's basic, bluesy rock, and also, of course, by the trio of punk forebears the

[60] Williams' books (2004a and 2004b) are notable and unusual in focussing on Dylan as a performing artist rather than as a songwriter.

Velvet Underground, the MC5 and the Stooges, all of whom recorded seminal documents in the late sixties[61] which rejected the psychedelic zeitgeist.

Perhaps ironically, given its iconic status in the lineage of punk, Bruce Russell (2007: 98) reports that 'the gauzy bottom end murk' of *The Velvet Underground and Nico* is due to too much overdubbing. Of course, there are other punk criteria which are established by the album, even if it is not full of literal performances. One might see the history of rock recordings as a constant tension between the art of studio production and an aesthetic preference for the documentation of performance – or at the very least the semblance of liveness achieved with very subtle smoke and mirrors. Folk and punk are arguably the most visible manifestations of this latter aesthetic, and new folk the logical outcome of their combination in the independent sphere.

Will Oldham

Since 1993, Will Oldham has released a mass of material under various names. From 1993-1996, this was mostly under variations on the Palace name, while from 1998, most releases have been under the name Bonnie 'Prince' Billy. There have been a few releases over the years credited to Will Oldham, and there have been other names also. Up to 2008, (by my count) there have been fourteen studio albums, three compilations of singles and rarities, three live albums and six stand-alone EPs - an average of two significant releases a year. Additionally, there is a wealth of limited edition 7-inch singles, album related EPs with non-album b-sides, and contributions to various artists collections that are not covered by this assessment. The importance of these statistics to this study is that it underlines a release schedule that is possible in the independent sphere, particularly in regards to the larger independent labels. Artists signed to major labels are frequently seen to release an album every three to four years with a variety of promotional gambits – singles, videos, DVDs, repackaging the album with a bonus disc etc – designed to milk every last sale out of an album before the release of more new

[61] The Velvet Underground: *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967), *White Light, White Heat* (1968), *The Velvet Underground* (1969); The MC5: *Kick Out The Jams* (1969), *Back in the USA* (1970); The Stooges: *The Stooges* (1969), *Fun House* (1970).

material will be considered. Oldham's release schedule stands in absolute contrast to this.

Part of what makes this constant outpour of material possible is Oldham's preferred method of recording. Oft-quoted is this summary by hardcore icon and recording engineer Steve Albini, who worked on the Palace releases *Viva Last Blues* (1995) and *Arise Therefore* (1996):

> He doesn't like to rehearse, and he often chooses the people he's going to be playing with only shortly before a session. So everyone is playing by the seat of their pants, and the music is at constant risk, subject to the weaknesses of whoever's in the room. But he gets absolutely spontaneous moments of greatness you couldn't rehearse (quoted in Kot 1996: 26).

Even though some of the more recent Bonnie 'Prince' Billy albums have included more elaborate instrumentation and some evidence of studio enhancements the likes of which were not found on early Palace releases, some essence of this performance-based approach remains. Dawn McCarthy is here talking about the preparation and sessions for *The Letting Go* (2006), the album in which she contributed the female vocal counterpart - a role filled by a variety of performers in different albums since 2003's *Master and Everyone*:

> (Oldham) had a very fresh, instinctive way of working with musicians.We all came together and hadn't really ever worked together before. And he sent people different things, I think he even sent different versions of the songs to different people. And one of the guys, Emmett Kelly, he apparently sent a recording of traditional Yugoslavian music (laughs) – hear this, this is kind of what I'm thinking of!
>
> His thing is very much, ok, we'll be in the right setting, it'll be the right mood, the right combination of people, and it's just going to happen, and we had like 10 days to record 14 songs. And there was a few days where it was a little uncertain, like, was the magic there? Was it going to happen? (interview with the author, 2006).

It is so important for Oldham to keep this freshness in his music that each recording situation and each tour is done with a different group[62]. Members do recur from project

[62] 'The Royal Stable' website is an excellent resource for everything about the career of Oldham. It is found at http://users.bart.nl/~lmeijer/oldham. Material on Oldham's various live bands is at the page http://users.bart.nl/~lmeijer/oldham/bands.htm, and was accessed on 25 January 2009.

to project, and it is not uncommon for Oldham's brother Paul to play bass, but the composition of each group is different. It may be stretching things somewhat to relate this to punk aesthetics, but it is certainly counter to the idea of honing a working relationship with a small group that stays constant. The latter, more common arrangement seems to line up with ideas of 'professionalism', with the ability to replicate specific arrangements or studio versions of songs. For Oldham, the constantly changing feast of musicians also carries with it connotations of community, even an extended family. Along with the appearances of Oldham brothers Paul and Ned, various Sweeneys and Stiths have drifted in and out, not to mention the contribution of long-term Louisville colleagues such as David Pajo.

It is interesting to note that Bob Dylan places a similar premium on this kind of spontaneity. Williams relates this information about the recording of Dylan's *Desire* (1976):

> Monday, July 28, [1975] with a studio jammed with people who had no idea what was expected of them (and Dylan wasn't about to tell them), Dylan tried out songs and musicians, listening to see what might come together . . . [Eric] Clapton and most of the other musicians disappeared into the aether . . . and on Wednesday July 30 most of the album was completed in a long, inspired session (Williams 2004b: 41).

This premium on spontaneity is expressed in both artists through the constant reinvention of songs in the live arena. For Oldham, this is partially a function of never having the same group for very long, but interestingly both Oldham and Dylan seem to consider the lyric and chord progression of a song much more central to its identity than its melody. This is borne out by the live performances and recordings of both artists and bears resemblance to Sharp's observation that variation in folk song interpretation 'occurred predominantly on a musical level . . . folksingers . . . set more importance on the words than on the tune' (Sweers 2005: 47). Oldham, as Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, has released three live albums in recent years which bear witness to this reinvention. The melodies presented on the 'original' versions of the songs in studio recordings are disregarded as a matter of course in favour of a spontaneous interpretation of the lyric. The personnel at hand determines much about the sound; the blistering country rock of *Summer in the Southeast* (2005) is a long way from the flutes, whistles, fiddles,

melodicas and close harmony singing of the folk-ish arrangements on *Is It The Sea* (2008), where Scottish all-female folk group Harem Scarem are given co-billing along with percussionist Alex Nielson. Typically, this last line-up was convened for a short tour of Ireland and Scotland only. Frith asserted in 1986 that '(t)he continuing core of rock ideology is that raw sounds' - for our purposes here under-rehearsed and spontaneous realisations of repertoire - 'are more authentic than cooked sounds' (80), and in the work of Oldham and other new folk, this ideology is often continued not just with respect to live performance but to the approach to technology in the process of recording.

Wilding in the West (2007), the third of these live albums, brings to mind another aspect of Oldham's approach which can be received as a contrary-ness. Three tracks on this otherwise live album are collages made by producer Neil Michael Hegarty from the available recordings used for this particular album – a series of coastal Californian shows. As a fan of Oldham's work, I find these collages of little interest; in fact, they ruin the album, especially as one of them is sequenced as the second track. [63] Additionally, some of the performances on the album are so ragged as to be borderline-indecipherable. Another case in point is the controversial release *Sings Greatest Palace Music* (2004). Not only does this album see Oldham apparently canonising his own early work, the arrangements are comparatively glossy Nashville-style realisations of songs originally recorded in typically tentative and ramshackle versions. The record was dismissed out of hand by many long-term fans. Some reviewers even interpreted the album as an elaborate prank.[64] As Oldham noted in an interview at the time of the record's release (Gill 2004: 14-15) that he spent $30,000 of his own money on it, this seems unlikely. Still, it's hard to imagine that the honky tonkin' of 'I Am A Cinematographer' and 'I Send My Love to You' were not conceived with tongue-in-cheek. Oldham's vocal performances are reliably erratic.

Oldham's approach to his public persona warrants mention. While it is no longer relevant to speak of many public aliases – Oldham has traded mostly as Bonnie 'Prince' Billy since 1998 –the way in which his recordings have been credited is unusual and

[63] Of course, I am aware that this is yet another case of 'cooked' sounds usurping 'raw' ones, no matter that this live Bonnie 'Prince' Billy disc is very much full of *electrified* rock band performances.
[64] For an example, see the review at: http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/article/record_review/15439-bonnie-prince-billy-greatest-palace-music, accessed 26 January 2009.

plays into many of the notions of folk and punk authenticity that have already been discussed. Just as the cryptic nature of Harry Smith's notes for the *Anthology of American Folk Music* obscured the ethnic origins of the artists, encouraging the idea of a community of artists (even if we know this is exaggerated at best, fabricated at worst), Oldham has consistently obfuscated his status on the recordings he has released. There is nothing to indicate on early Palace releases that Oldham is the singer, songwriter or leader, though early press gives us an indication that in some circles there was little doubt that this was the case.[65] In fact, on some releases, Oldham is not named at all. This is the case on *Days in the Wake* (1994), the second Palace album, which is virtually a Will Oldham solo effort. His name is but one in a long list on *There is No-one . . .* (1993) and *Lost Blues . . .* (1997), encouraging a similar sense of community to that given by the *AAFM*. You could say that Oldham wanted to be considered 'one of the folk' rather than 'the star'. This approach carries through into the Bonnie 'Prince' Billy years, where Oldham is virtually never given songwriting credits, or performing credits. His stage-name-as-artist-name becomes a catch-all for singing and whatever assumptions we wish to make about the origins of the material. In recent releases, the credit given to writers whose work Oldham covers has been made clearer. All these aspects contribute to a folk-ish notion of authenticity, where Oldham is seen to recoil from star status. As we have already seen (via Sweers 2005: 47-48), early conceptions of folk were based on notions of communality in which the authorship of musical works was unknown.

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The importance of American punk and hardcore to Oldham's formative years is well documented. He started attending local punk shows in his hometown of Louisville in his early teens: 'I was 13 years old. My older brother Ned was in lots of bands, art punk things, didn't make any records . . . When I started going to shows, people were still pogoing. In Louisville at least. It was awesome' (Neset 2003: 21). Members of Louisville's Squirrel Bait contributed to early Palace recordings. In the same article, Oldham recounts travelling to New York City to see Dinosaur[66] and meeting Lydia

[65] See Kot and Hainley for examples.
[66] Oldham notes that this was before the addition of the 'Jr' suffix to Dinosaur's name, an indication of insider knowledge of, and immersion in, punk/hardcore/indie lore.

Lunch, with whom he struck up an inspiring correspondence.[67] Ben Thompson (1998: 93) writes that 'Oldham remembers, only half joking, the Xs on his hands that signalled allegiance to hardcore punk inspirations Minor Threat.'[68] Oldham's association with Steve Albini has been noted; Albini led Big Black, perhaps the first group to mix a hardcore guitar approach with a drum machine. The credits of Oldham's *Arise Therefore* (1996) feature an homage to Big Black in that the drum machine is credited as if a human band member (Sarig 1998: 195). Hüsker Dü was also important: '*New Day Rising* was one of those records where I called the store every day for three weeks waiting for it to come out' (Sarig 1998: 248). Sanneh (2009) reports that Oldham sent Glenn Danzig of the Misfits an elaborate fan package, in return receiving a rare 7".

This is more than a shopping list of Oldham's teen music taste. It shows a deep immersion in independent networks. Hüsker Dü and Dinosaur both recorded for influential indie SST; the rare Misfits 7" was prized; Minor Threat were instigators of the Washington D.C. 'straightedge' scene and Dischord label – the latter has a reputation for being the most resolutely independent of labels. It seems reasonable to assume that some of the philosophical and aesthetic notions of these groups and labels, especially in regard to the corporate music industry, continue to inform Oldham's choices, especially considering the fact that he remains with Drag City despite considerable international success.[69]

***Days in the Wake* (1994)**

Oldham's second album, originally released simply as *Palace Brothers*, then as *Days in the Wake*, sounds home recorded. Extended notes on Oldham's acoustic guitar wobble slightly, betraying the likely origin of the recording as four-track cassette. Together with the fact that most of the tracks seem to be Oldham solo, it is not hard to make the association with folk field recordings, or the intimacy and happenstance of the hotel

[67] Also referenced in Sarig 1998: 222-223

[68] The Xs were a voluntary signification that a gig goer was underage and would not drink alcohol. For more on Minor Threat and the 'straight-edge' punk movement, see Jason Middleton (2002).

[69] An offhand remark in an interview that probably took place in late 2002 (True 2003: 22) leads one to think that by this time, the main albums released as Bonnie 'Prince' Billy were selling in the low hundreds of thousands: 'I don't want to make a million records because I don't think a million people would like this music right now. And then there'd be 600,000 records, at least, that would end up in used bins or landfill.'

room recordings of Robert Johnson of the 1930s. The cover, a very blurry shot of (we assume) Oldham in a room with curtains behind him, is commonly assumed to reference similar covers by outsider artist Jandek.

The warts-and-all character of this album is perhaps only challenged by Palace's even more rickety *Hope* EP (1994). Of the *Days* tracks, 'I Send My Love To You' is perhaps the most conspicuous in this regard, as it is a beautiful and accessible song. Oldham's voice cracks often; towards the end of the song there is what sounds like a 'good save' as the guitar lurches through a couple of chords to stay within negotiable realms. '(Thou Without) Partner' has a similar 'save' towards its end. These preserved mistakes, as much as they present music as a process rather than a product, bring to mind not just Jandek but outsider recordings such as Syd Barrett's *The Madcap Laughs* (1969), Alexander (Skip) Spence's *Oar* (1969), and any of the early, cassette recorded works of Daniel Johnston. These recordings, along with the prolific 1981-1986 run of releases of New Zealand's Tall Dwarfs[70], set the template for the lo-fi generation, where stumbling performances and variable sound quality became aspects of interest rather than impediments to listening pleasure.

Barthes (1977: 162-163) notes three stages in musical history, in terms of the relationship of people to the production of music. In the first, the playing of music is virtually indistinguishable from listening to it, as the majority of people do both simultaneously. Perhaps this is close to the myths of 'the folk' discussed in Chapter Two. The second stage is where the interpretations of expert musicians are appreciated by an audience, of which a large number are amateur musicians, notably domestic piano players. Playing is delegated by the amateur to the professional, but the connection to playing is not lost completely. In the third stage, the transition is complete, and there is a clear distinction between professional musicians and the passive consumers who receive the work. Will Oldham exemplifies punk's initiative for individuals to go beyond passive consumption to active involvement, and this is very much bound up in

[70] It is worth noting that Chris Knox of Tall Dwarfs disdains the term 'lo-fi', preferring 'low-tech'. His argument is that modern 'hi-tech' recording processes take the sound of, say, a drum, far away from its original sound through compression, reverb etc. Therefore, state-of-the-art recordings may be 'hi-tech' but also of low fidelity – not true to the original sounds recorded; whereas 'low-tech' recording may be more faithful to the sounds recorded (literally hi-fidelity). See the liner note included on the insert of Tall Dwarfs' *Louis Likes His Daily Dip* (1982).

the elements of performance in his recordings. Especially in the early Palace material, the 'mistakes' preserved in the released recordings are an invitation for the listener to do it themselves. Certainly the level of technical musicianship displayed on *Days in the Wake* is not in any way intimidating, and the cassette recording quality suggests that the process of recording is not anything to be afraid of either. Several tracks on *Viva Last Blues* (1995) end in disarray despite the fact that they were recorded in an actual studio.

Days in the Wake is a challenge to the listener in each of the three categories I have laid out as helping to locate punk aesthetics – sound, vocal approach and structure. The sound of the record has a thinness and other attributes that identify it as an amateur recording. One of the most obvious attributes of outsider and other lo-fi recordings is their ambience. The trick of the recording studio achieved by most professional pop/rock recordings is the neutralisation of the space that was used for recording. It is generally assumed that the dimensions of the room in which the musicians played is not of interest to the listener; and yet in an actual performance, these dimensions can have a formative effect. On Jandek's *Telegraph Melts* (1986), the drums - in fact all of the sounds, but this aspect is particularly marked in the drum sound – are soaked in the natural reverberation of the room. The guitar is often virtually inaudible. The vocals are at times very distorted. It sounds like a cheap microphone and cheap recording equipment are being abused. Daniel Johnston's early, cassette recorded releases sound claustrophobic. The recordings are shrouded in murky hiss and a slight speed flutter; at times Johnston's voice sounds a bit too high and thin, as if the recording speed was a little slow and thus the playback is a little fast, slightly chipmunk-y. The aural image of a young Daniel recording straight to cassette in his bedroom contributes very much to our reception of his 'songs of pain'[71], as discussed in the previous chapter. Neither Johnston's nor Jandek's recording gambits, regardless of whether they are the results of aesthetic decisions or necessity, have any place in mainstream music, where, paradoxically, a glossy sheen of production allows the listener to completely forget the machinations by which the recording was brought into existence.

The sound quality of *Days in the Wake* is not nearly as confrontational as that of *Telegraph Melts* or as lo-fi as those of early Daniel Johnston. But the brittleness of the

[71] *Songs of Pain* was the title of one of Daniel Johnston's early cassette releases.

guitar sound brings attention to itself. In 'No More Workhorse Blues' we hear thunder rolling, and it sounds like it was recorded by chance rather than design. The dynamic range of the recording confronts, as the hush of the first half of the song gives way to an uncomfortably close and 'loud' climax, the likes of which are generally flattened out by conventional CD mastering. The spirited, but menacing fragment of 'Come A Little Dog' sounds like three or four young men clustered around a single microphone (which distorts as the result of a hearty 'woof woof' at one point) jostling for space with barely tuned guitars. In all of these and many other phenomena, we are made keenly aware of the recording device and process. The lo-fi recording and imperfect performances can be received as an endearing intimacy which simultaneously give the (false) perception that anyone could do this.

The form of the album as a whole is nothing unusual in that it presents ten tracks of moderate length, mostly in the two-to-four minute range, though at a total length of 27 minutes, the album might be considered by some a 'rip-off', especially at the time of release (1994), where the 80 minute capacity of the CD format encouraged many to make longer albums.[72] The structures of the songs as presented in these recordings conform less to expectations.[73] 'Pushkin' 'Meaulnes' and 'I Am A Cinematographer' present relatively clear chorus-verse (the choruses in these songs always precede the verses) structures, and '(Thou Without) Partner' alternates verses and bridges. The other six songs are more problematic. 'I Send My Love To You' and 'You Will Miss Me When I Burn' are each in two section forms (verse-bridge, and chorus-verse respectively), that are obscured by compositional elements and the vagaries of the performances. In each, the chord progressions for each section are quite similar, making the changes of section less than obvious. In 'Send My Love', the first time the chords

[72] It seems that since the late nineties, there has been a general recognition that the length of the old vinyl LP format, generally 35-45 minutes, often works better than a 70-80 minute album. At the very least, people no longer think of a 40-minute album as short, or a waste of the CD medium, as seemed to sometimes be the case in the first decade of the CD as a commercial format. Again, see Griffiths (2004: 4-30), who admits that for a time he 'felt *diddled* before the music even started if the figure on the clock came in under 40 minutes. Following that brief, but parsimonious phase, it didn't take me long to revalue albums which *got it over with* in a shorter time . . . These lissom, finely-tuned sprinters became exceptions, though, as lumbering fatties, sweating around the park, became the pop-music norm' (12).

[73] Harking back to Gracyk's distinction between recordings and songs in the Introduction, I think it valid to discuss the structure of the *songs as presented in the recordings*, especially when the recordings are so transparently based in real-time performance. There are many instances where to speak of the structure of a *recording* would be more appropriate, especially where recordings are more manifestly studio constructions than documentations of performances.

vary, which would signal the change of section, the new chord is lunged at in a way that makes it sound like a possible mistake.

In many of these songs, contrasts between sections are further reduced through a lack of change in harmonic rhythm – that is the pace of chord changes remains constant from section to section. Though this is not uncommon, when this is combined with the initial chords of the verse sequence being the same as those of the preceding chorus, as is the case with 'You Will Miss Me', there is a seamlessness to the presentation of the song which obscures its form. Adding further to this is that for most of the songs on *Days*, only the most common of chordal combinations is used.

Aside from the ambiguous structures of 'Send My Love' and 'You Will Miss Me', the four remaining songs have unusual shapes which sound at times through-composed; like someone who has just learnt a few chords on the guitar rambling through a few thoughts. Of course, on closer inspection, this is not the case, but the casualness of the delivery, with Oldham's voice cracking all over the place and the acoustic guitar at times squeaking and delivering pinched, half-sounding notes, reinforces the impression that some of these song structures are found in the moment rather than devised as compositions. 'Come A Little Dog' is seemingly a one-chord ad lib/joke, though one of the players changes from the prevailing E minor to B minor at a point near the end unbeknownst to the others. In the manner of Jandek, or some of the wilder moments on Skip Spence's *Oar*, the track comes across as a spontaneous riff upon a simple idea. The sudden end and brief duration (1:27) of 'Whither Thou Goest' gives the track the sense of being a fragment, despite a succession of verses with one diversion to a bridge. The bridge itself features erratic bar lengths (bars of 4, 6 and 3), further contributing to the impression that the song is being made up on the spot. This bridge brings to mind the chopping and changing of bar lengths in selections from Smith's *Anthology* such as Clarence Ashley's 'House Carpenter', where an ongoing motor rhythm follows sub-divisions determined by the singer/accompanist's narrative whim and breathing requirements.

'No More Workhorse Blues' has perhaps the most unusual structure on the album, along with the most unusual chord progression, which sustains most of the song's

duration: F maj 7 – Bm – E.[74] That the F chord is so clearly from another key area sticks out particularly in the context of an album where most of the songs use combinations of I, IV and V, the rudiments of functional harmony, or the rock/blues alternative of I, flat-VII and IV. This first progression repeats without pause, save for the odd extra bar or two on the final chord to delineate sections. The only change of progression is for the song's climax: 'I am a racing horse/ I am a grazing horse / I am your favourite horse', which occurs in the final 30 seconds. The effect is something of a dirge, with the closing affirmations declared fiercely. The song is very effective, but does not adhere to any known form.

The cracking of Oldham's voice, which happens throughout the record, contributes to a sense of amateurism or, possibly communality, through the listener's possible perception of the singer as an 'every-person'. The singer we hear is not a rock star, but someone trying out some songs at home with the tape recorder running. As stated earlier, the home-made sound of the record and the uncertainty of the vocal delivery are easily rejected as sub-professional, or alternatively embraced as genuine, authentic and intimate. This is part of the challenge of punk aesthetics. Though Oldham generally pitches quite well, it is not unusual for his voice to surge beyond its target, as in the climax to 'Workhorse'. In 'Whither Thou Goest', there are a couple of notes in each verse that seem too low; Oldham simply casts his voice down vaguely like a fishing net, hoping to catch the note. This happens in each of the five verses. Again, this is possibly terribly annoying and unprofessional to some, endearingly human to others. On 'I Send My Love To You' Oldham's vocal performance sounds like a teenage boy whose voice is breaking, which suits playful lines such as 'I send my nose to you' and 'My head is bleeding, and I'm a duck'. This sense of play is present throughout the album, notwithstanding the more serious moods of 'Workhorse' and 'You Will Miss Me'. Music is delivered as something one does for entertainment and diversion, something that might be a part of one's every day life, rather than as a Work Of Art that has been laboured over towards perfection, or a well rendered product that is guaranteed to hold its own in a competitive market. Though by 1994, Oldham was already receiving attention for earlier Palace releases, there is still a sense on *Days in the Wake* that the music being made here does not require an audience – it is its own reward.

[74] The first iteration of this sequence goes to D rather than E; this may be another preserved error, as no other versions I have heard of the song do this.

Kes

While playing bass in Melbourne's 'famously self-destructive' Bird Blobs (Gook 2007: 27), Karl E. Scullin began recording as Kes.[75] He released three EPs between 1999 and 2002 which defined a sparse, intimate sound-world based on acoustic guitar and fractured forms. These attributes, and particularly Scullin's vocal eccentricities, were fully realised on the debut album *The Jellys in the Pot*[76] (2005), which will be discussed at length below. The most immediate reference points are outsiders such as Jandek[77] and Syd Barrett, due mostly to the fact that the delivery of the vocal and the structures of the songs as presented in the recordings are unusual; untrained, non-conformist. Though the second album, *The Grey Goose Wing* (2006), introduces a rock band formation into some tracks, it also revisits the predominantly acoustic aesthetic of its predecessor; it too, will be discussed at length. *Kes Band* (2008), while preserving the hallmarks of Scullin's wandering structures and eccentric vocals, uses a rock band formation throughout, and so comes across as somewhat more 'normal' or familiar sounding than the earlier works. While it is still the product of an independent and idiosyncratic approach, sonically it has less to do with notions of folk or punk aesthetics.

The Jellys in the Pot (2005)

Like *Days in the Wake*, the first Kes album presents the general contours of a pop record – 11 songs of moderate length – but is quite brief in total duration (30:07). One way of looking at this is that both albums are brief because of a tendency towards the bare bones of song form; there are few extended instrumental passages and not as much repetition of material as is sometimes found in pop-rock recordings.

[75] One might draw a parallel with Elliott Smith who, while playing in the indie rock band Heatmiser in the early nineties, began making intimate solo recordings at home which before long became his main focus.
[76] There is no apostrophe in the title: 'Jellys', not 'Jelly's'.
[77] As with the cover of *Days in the Wake*, the artwork of the first three Kes EPs is reminiscent of Jandek's sleeves: imprecise, black-and-white portraits and still-life photographs with no identifying text.

The sound of the album is not lo-fi. The acoustic guitars are beautifully recorded and the vocal is clear and crisp. Subtle keyboard and percussion elements nestle in the mix occasionally but Scullin's spidery acoustic guitar, elemental slide work and elfin voice are constant features, making up the bulk of the sounds that we hear. There are no drums or bass guitar – nothing that connotes rock music except the basic dimensions of the record and the tradition of the idiosyncratic singer-songwriter. The skeletal, primarily acoustic sound of *Jelly* is as easily related to the field of new folk as it is to outsider music. The wilful forms and vocal performances take place beyond the sphere of musical training or institutional regulation. It is these attributes that recommend the album to us, that at once distinguish it from 'pop music' and place it in another context – that of new folk – in which it makes sense.

While the form of the album is brief but not particularly unusual, the structures of individual pieces go even further than those on *Days in the Wake* in obscuring what verse/chorus/bridge structures there are in favour of the labyrinth forms that are a hallmark of Scullin's style. Highlighting the unusual song-forms is a tendency within the recordings to shift in tempo, even within a section. This occurs in 'In The Ditch', 'I'm OK' and 'Evil Twins', the last of which features a long, quiet, rubato introduction that arrives eventually at the tempo of the song proper.

Three recordings – 'Treasure', 'What Do You Feed It' and 'My Side of the Mountain' - present forms that reconcile in a reasonably straightforward way with familiar verse/chorus/bridge approaches. This leaves the majority of tracks, which are more complex. 'Who Knows' includes six distinct sections within its 3:41 length. The form, with each letter indicating a distinct musical idea, might be described as[78]:

[78] The breakdowns that follow, and indeed the analyses of songs from *Days in the Wake*, are based on the orthodox notion that in tonal (related to the institutions of major and minor keys) song formations, discrete sections of musical material are most easily identified by harmonic progressions. These sectional divisions are traditionally accentuated through other parameters, particularly instrumentation, timbre, dynamics, register etc. In other 'popular' styles, such as types of electronic/dance music, hip-hop and experimental rock, these other parameters may be more important as signifiers of structure, and harmonic progressions may not figure.

Intro (A + B + A, where A is based on a drone on the open B string of an acoustic guitar, and B is a four chord pattern played twice and never heard again)
Verse 1 (A + C)
Verse 2 (A + C)
Recorder melody – new material, never heard again (D)
Repeat of first part of intro (A)
Vocal bridge (E – a new three chord pattern played four times)
Guitar melody – new material (F)

Fig. V.i: 'Who Knows' formal plan

Despite the apparent variety in musical ideas, the material is well united by a consistency of key and modality (B Aeolian/natural minor) as well as a constant slow tempo. As with Smith *Anthology* examples 'House Carpenter', 'A Lazy Farmer Boy' and 'Home Sweet Home', an inner complexity is hidden by a surface homogeneity. The opposite might be said to occur in 'In The Ditch', where the basic elements of verse-chorus-bridge form are obscured by a change of tempo from the introduction to the verse, and the fact that the chorus itself is in two halves, the first presented rubato, the second returning to the tempo of the verse. Not unusually for Scullin's labyrinth forms, two layers of organisation are juxtaposed, as we hear formal divisions as a product of harmonic progressions at one level, and the organisation of tempo at another. The fact that the material of the introduction is never heard again is another red herring which obscures the form – it is much more common for the introduction of a recording to feature material based on a section heard later in the recording (see formal plan below).

Intro – four bar phrase x2, never heard again
Verse 1
Chorus: In two halves – part one rubato, part two returns to verse tempo
Verse 2
Chorus
Bridge – instrumental keyboard solo (melodica?)
Coda – a single short, bluesy gesture

Fig V.ii: 'In The Ditch' formal plan.

‘I’m OK’ is a recording in which three distinct rhythmic feels are used within the short duration of 2:10. The rhythmic gesture associated with the title of the song has a stop/start feeling which creates a kind of subtle abrasion, a gentle irruption to the expectations of popular song. There are two levels to this sensation: not only the stop/start of the main rhythmic motive but the challenge to assumptions of continuity thrown up by constant changes of feel.

Kes’ vocal performances often inhabit a middle-ground between speaking and singing. Melodic contours include low register dips into speaking voice and long scoops up to the actual melody note. Despite this, much of the singing is true to pitch. This incorporation of speaking sounds and sliding pitches combines with the frail timbre to create a distinctive style which contains none of the prototypical macho bluster of rock music. Kes is not imitating Mick Jagger imitating blues singers, or any other stereotype of pop or rock singing. It is perhaps lazy to relate this vocal approach to outsider artists, but it has more in common with the eccentric delivery of, say, Daniel Johnston, Bill Callahan, Will Oldham or The Shaggs than anything commonly heard in pop and rock.

‘Three’ is a good example of the lack of service to literal meaning inherent in much of Kes’ material. Despite some recurring motifs, the track represents the album’s most impenetrable form, which only further distracts the listener from the gleaning of distinct verbage. Individual words do break through: ‘Once there were three who had a monopoly’; the use of ‘monogamy’ later in the song; but essentially the listener’s reaction is a visceral one to Scullin’s voice and to the sound overall. The songs, as presented in these recordings, do not easily reconcile to types. They are not transparently love songs, or political songs, or songs about partying – three not-discrete types which in one way or another cover a large portion of songs in the pop-rock field. This is not to say that they are meaningless, but merely to recognise that just one of the ways in which *Jelly* defies commodification, arguably assuming an independent stance descended from punk, is by denying the easy categorisation or literal interpretation of these recordings.

In tandem with his ideas about a culture in which participation in music has been supplanted by passive consumption, Barthes (1977: 185) asserts that this ‘average’ culture ‘wants art, wants music, provided they be clear, that they “translate” an emotion

and represent a signified (the "meaning" of a poem): an art that inoculates pleasure (by reducing it to a known, coded emotion)'. While I will not go so far as to adopt wholesale Barthes' delineation of *pheno-song* and *geno-song*[79], I do not think it too far-fetched to suggest that even if all music communicates on non-literal levels, Scullin's vocal performances on this record refuse easy translation in a way that draws attention to the voice as sonic object. They contribute to a triumph of sound over meaning. I am not saying that an obscure approach to vocalising automatically indicates punk aesthetics, or removes recordings from the problems of commodification. However, combined with Kes' labyrinth song structures, his predilection for arrangements in which tempos change erratically, and an intimate sound which rejects basic tenets of rock arrangement without subscribing to orthodoxies of folk arrangement, the picture emerges of an artist whose range of aesthetic choices places him irrevocably in the independent sphere. That is to say that there is nothing in the recordings to suggest that decisions made in the recording process aspire in any way to incorporation into the larger music industry.

'My Side of the Mountain' is the clearest verse/chorus form on the album, both in terms of the distinction made between sections and in terms of the listener being able to understand the lyric content. It seems to be a story of a couple having to save the people of the mainland, who are 'in need', who 'have a disease'; the protagonist offers to get into his costume 'at great speed'. However, in the second verse, he changes his mind, fleeing so he doesn't 'change into a monkey or a chimpanzee'. It would be easy to read into this lyric, inconclusive as it is, an acknowledgement of outsider status. The people on the mainland (the main*stream*?) are in need (of non-corporate culture?). The singer seems afraid of devolving if he comes into contact with these mainland people. This recording may not actually constitute a veiled championing of outsider art; perhaps anything but the most concentrated listening would glean little more than that the singer claims 'our side of the mountain', and that there's something about chimpanzees and disease. Ultimately, the meaning of the song is far from transparent, and arguably still subordinate to the communication of the sound (intimate, melancholy and eccentric).

[79] See Laing's discussion (1985: 55) of Johnny Rotten's vocal delivery in the Sex Pistols' 'God Save The Queen'.

The Grey Goose Wing (2006)

Kes' second album features a combination of the intimate, rhythm-section free arrangements of the first album and some rock arrangements. This is but one layer of organisation. Amongst its sixteen tracks are six instrumentals, and within these are two versions each of 'One Seventeen' and 'The Grey Goose Wing'. Most, but not all, of the vocal tracks feature the rhythm section. Thus, the album plays with standard album structure through relative extremes of instrumentation and variety in the physicality of the sound. The high number of tracks, the contrasts between comparatively intimate and bombastic spaces, and the fragmentation within individual tracks all contribute to the album having an 'epic' feel despite a moderate length (43:43) which falls (just) within the boundaries of a vinyl LP. However, the material is very much united by the hallmarks of Scullin's style. His electric slide guitar and vocal stylings are highly distinctive, wild in the sense of being unfettered by conventional technique. Even with the presence of a rock rhythm section on several tracks, the evocation of the pre-industrial still occurs, particularly in the recurring wood-reed-breath timbres of Laura Jean's recorders, Oliver Mann's harmonicas, and Scullin's nylon-string acoustic guitar. This pastoral sense is self-consciously underlined by the vocal imitations of animal and bird noises in the second half of the opening track, 'One Seventeen (recorder and band)', the first half of which consists of melodic turns taken by Jean's recorder and Scullin's raw slide guitar.

The rock instrumentation seems to embolden Scullin to more fully and freely realise his personal palette of vocal techniques. Although the lyrics are generally easier to understand on this album than on *Jelly*, their literal meaning is secondary to the stretching of rock music as a form achieved by Kes' shrieks, cackles and yelps. The listener is prompted to ask: is this unmediated vocal expression an attack on civility itself? The effect of playing the record is something like letting a wild, but essentially genial, beast into the house. There is a sense of mutual invasion – of the beast into one's living area, and of our ears into the performer's subconscious at a level deeper than what might be imagined with more controlled vocalising. This same sense of potentially uncomfortable intimacy is evoked by outsider artists such as Jandek, The Shaggs and Daniel Johnston, and also independent performers such as Kristin Hersh, particularly in the early Throwing Muses days, and Bill Callahan. The sense is that these artists lack

the professional ‘armour’ that traditionally insulates the true core of a performer from the emotional terrain assayed; or that a choice has been made to ignore the level of mediation afforded by technique in favour of a more ‘direct’ connection with the emotional states striven for.

I’m reminded here of Hibbett’s assertion that some new folk artists follow in the ‘bad voice’ tradition of Bob Dylan and Neil Young. While I think this is true, that Dylan particularly showed the way for rock vocalists to exist beyond the frames exemplified by, say, Elvis Presley’s range of blues-ish grunt to Sinatra-ish croon, artists such as Jandek and Kes apply this principle to the form of the recordings themselves. Of course, this is commonly achieved by recordings in the electronic and hip hop fields; it is more unusual in formats that signify traditional songcraft through a basis of guitar and vocal. This is what we hear in *The Grey Goose Wing*. As with songs from *Jelly*, tracks such as ‘Paper and Pen’ explode the verse and chorus basis of their forms with more than the expected number of sections, yet without assuming the elaborate and grandiose structures mapped on from classical forms as seen in the worst excesses of seventies progressive rock. Likewise, ‘Only When Asked’ introduces four distinct sections before returning to the first. ‘The Recipe’ and ‘One Seventeen’ are pieces of highly contrasting halves. ‘The Grey Goose Wing (Recorders)’, ‘Olivers Harmonicas’ (sic) and ‘Into My Gate’ are fragments, the latter with a vocal distinguished by a kind of childish play.

At every level, the listener is challenged to receive this collection of pieces on its own terms. There are reference points to ‘the known’: the rock band arrangements, the folk-ish combinations of acoustic guitar and vocals, some use of verse-chorus form (itself usually broken down or extended in some way); but, as Barthes (1977: 182) would have it, the listener is asked to travel far beyond ‘the composer’s idiolect, the style of interpretation; in short, everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression’. The challenges mounted to the conventions of song structure and pop/rock vocal performance demand a constant recalibration of what an album is. They invite a closer participation in the work. They deny the easy assimilation into the background possible of more generic musical products. And finally, in their denial of conventionally professional standards of structure and performance, these recordings at once limit the possibility of their incorporation into the mainstream of the music industry, while they invite imaginative amateurs to make their

own statements, using inspiration rather than technique as a springboard. The press release for the album name-checks free folk and psyche-folk (sic), and while the pastoral implications of the recorders, acoustic guitars and unrestrained vocals, as well as the album's release in the independent sphere, allow us to easily receive it under the umbrella of new folk, all of the elements that make *The Grey Goose Wing* a distinctive statement may also be related to punk aesthetics, with the premium on amateurism, DIY practices, the rejection of mainstream values, and the preservation of rough edges rather than the smoothing over of them.

Faun Fables

Faun Fables is the project name for the music and performances created by Dawn McCarthy since 1997. The group's publicity material describes them as 'a crossroads where ancient ballad, art song, physical theatre and rock music meet.' McCarthy's nylon string guitar and singing is generally at the core of the arrangements. Her chief collaborator is Nils Frykdahl, also a singer and guitarist who contributes flute (often) and original songs (occasionally). Across four albums (up until 2008), the project has adapted traditional Norwegian, Swiss and Anglo-Saxon material and recorded covers of two songs by Polish songwriter Zygmunt Konieczny, as well as being the prime outlet for McCarthy's original songs. The original material draws from various British, American and European folk forms as well as progressive rock and singer-songwriters of the late sixties-early seventies. The way in which Faun Fables' material is largely original but draws on a diverse array of traditional musics in arrangements which are predominantly acoustic makes them comparable with sixties folk experimentalists The Incredible String Band. Like ISB, Faun Fables doesn't simply inflect time-honoured musical approaches with a contemporary sensibility in the lyrics and vocal stylings, but creates a novel blend of existing musical styles.

The first two albums, *Early Song* (1999) and *Mother Twilight* (2001), not uncommonly for the earlier albums in an artist's history, reflect a lean aesthetic, and will be the focus of my attention. *Family Album* (2004) and *The Transit Rider* (2006) are much more ambitious undertakings in terms of instrumentation, though all of the albums were recorded at home. Grajeda (2002: 258) draws our attention to the significance of home

recording in that it brings the making of records into the domestic sphere. One of the threads of his argument is that not only do lo-fi recording approaches 'inherit . . . from punk the aim of demystifying rock's means of production', but that the home environment constitutes a feminine zone of activity which is opposed to the male-dominated mainstream music industry, and the history of male expertise and claim on domestic space that is associated with notions of hi-fi. McCarthy and Frykdahl's notion of the domestic has explicitly spilt over from their working methods into their subject matter with the 2008 release of an EP called *A Table Forgotten*. While there is little space here for a discussion of gender aspects, in performance and photographs Frykdahl mixes and matches dresses, bonnets, lace, ribbons and facial hair in such a way that the word 'drag' is entirely beside the point. Suffice to say that in every sense, Faun Fables at once foregrounds notions of domesticity, family and community, whilst conducting their careers in an independent sphere which allows them artistic freedom. The project is concerned with the conservation of lost values and traditional melodies on one level, yet shows no deference to indie orthodoxies, performing with theatrical flair and with some aspects of virtuosity. Obviously, not all of these attributes are instantly reconcilable to punk aesthetics.

While each Faun Fables album features a wide range of instrumentation, overall there is a prevalence of flutes, nylon string guitar, voices and percussion. Instrumentation beyond the bedrock of guitar and vocal tends to be used in an 'elemental' way; whether cello or autoharp, vibraphone or 'gamelan', piccolo or recorder, there is generally an avoidance of sounds that are transparently electronic in favour of those that evoke wood, air, water and metal. The arrangements sometimes rise to extraordinary climaxes which have the feeling of ritual (a good example of this is 'Eyes of a Bird' from *Family Album*). Together with lyrics that are often anthropomorphic or evocative of old-fashioned superstitions, the pre-industrial age and a fascination with the power of nature are ever-present as conceptual backdrops.

The original material on *Family Album* draws from Faun Fables' extended network of family and friends, with poems and tunes submitted by various relatives, a song performed by a seven year old ('Nop of Time'), one based on a recitation from a ghost given to them by a friend ('Poem 2'), and a setting of a poem written by a local shop-owner about her deceased son ('Joshua'). Together with the occasional use of archival

domestic recordings of the McCarthy family (also present on *Mother Twilight*) there is an interesting relationship between the artistic constructions stitched together from these disparate elements, and folk and punk notions of community and inclusion that are intimated through this unusual scope for access to the compositional process. It's also worth noting that guest musicians on the album 'accepted the payment of a home-cooked meal and conversation' according to the liner notes. Further to this idea of community and inclusion, and resonating with a punk ethic of finding alternatives to the usual pathways of dissemination in popular music, Faun Fables avoided alcohol-centred venues on their Australian tour of 2004, instead opting for cafes, bookstores, galleries and public halls.

Some of the compositions on *Family Album* are quite dense. Despite instrumental arrangements that by and large remain 'elemental', the complex structures of pieces are sometimes mirrored by highly layered recordings - for example, 'A Mother and a Piano', 'Lucy Belle', 'Fear March', and 'Carousel with Madonnas'. 'Eternal', a song originally made famous in French by Brigitte Fontaine, assumes the dimensions of an earthy folk-pop song. In general, considerable instrumental forces and compositional ingenuity are brought to bear on the recordings on *Family Album*, at times coming close to the 'progressive' music of the seventies, but with the 'rock' element of the traditional rhythm section of bass guitar and drums replaced by Fauns' usual array of stringed instruments, winds and percussion.

The Transit Rider is an adaptation of a full-scale theatrical show devised by McCarthy and originally mounted in 2002.[80] Perhaps even more so than on than *Family Album*, McCarthy and Frykdahl amass instrumental combinations and recording techniques that go beyond the punk aesthetics outlined in this study, despite a recording credit that reads 'All songs recorded at home on 8-track cassette'. The sole traditional song on *The Transit Rider* is the oft-recorded 'House Carpenter.[81] Like *Family Album*, the album draws on material from McCarthy's family, with a song adapted from a melody by

[80] See http://www.faunfables.net/recordings.html

[81] Aside from Clarence Ashley's recording for Smith's *Anthology* discussed in the previous chapter, the song has also been recorded by Joan Baez (*Joan Baez in Concert*, 1962), Bob Dylan (*The Bootleg Series*, 1991, recorded during the sessions for *The Freewheeling Bob Dylan* in 1963), Pentangle (*Basket of Light*, 1969), and many others. The liner notes on *Joan Baez in Concert* refer to the song as 'Child 243' – referring to the collections published by Francis Child.

Dawn's mother ('Earth's Kiss') and the setting of an anti-corporate poem by Dawn's father ('I No Longer Wish To').

Again, *The Transit Rider* underlines the fact that Faun Fables' cosmology has nature very much at its centre. The rider of the work's title is trying to find her ultimate destination. In the original stage show, this was a picnic stop, which might stand as a metaphor for some kind of salvation or promised land. While McCarthy agreed this was a valid reading, she also suggested that it might refer to 'a kind of coming home to . . . a relationship with nature that us humans used to have, and some people still do have. So there is a kind of industrial era commentary too'.[82]

*

It would seem that the first two Faun Fables albums were self-released to be sold at shows until their re-issue on Drag City in 2004. In line with the other attitudes described above, these albums were originally produced in as independent a context as possible. In fact, McCarthy responded very positively to the idea of a connection between recent independent folk-based music and aesthetics descended from punk rock:

> Definitely, yes, absolutely. I'm someone who was definitely influenced by radical, alternative culture stuff. I was a punk, a total young 11-year old, the young kid at all the shows. I remember seeing people doing that and being very inspired. Like, wow, you don't have to wait for someone to give you permission? So I'm totally a result of that culture (interview with the author, 2006).

As with other recordings already discussed, this punk aesthetics is reflected not only in the practice of home recording and the economy of instrumentation used, but in the spontaneity of the performances – their imperfection and at times fragility – and the challenges these present to the traditions of vocal delivery and song structure in the broader sphere of rock music.

[82] Interview with the author, 2006.

Early Song (1999)

Of all of Faun Fables' albums, *Early Song* conforms the most closely to the expected dimensions of the album in the pop/rock era, with 11 songs and a running time of roughly 40 minutes. 'Old Village Churchyard' is one of the traditional tunes which accounts for nearly half of the tracks on the album. There are two short breaks in the form for voice and flute, but otherwise the track is seamless, following the flow of the singer's seemingly spontaneous phrasing. An eerie metallic rattling (chamberlin?) accompanies the acoustic guitar, which drones on a single minor chord, and McCarthy's voice, which sketches out the traditional melody but regularly takes improvisatory, wraith-like explorations into her upper register. The vocal is at once strong and fragile; a strident tone that quavers occasionally with the imperfections of actual performance laid bare by the sparse arrangement. These characteristics of the vocal delivery (and its exposure) are to be found throughout Faun Fables' recorded catalogue, and most particularly on the first two albums. In these arrangements, with their foregrounding of performance, we find a minimalism of means which (as we have already seen) can be seen to reconcile the practices of folk and punk.

Dawn's voice wails like a theremin at times, for example at the end of 'Sometimes I Pray'. 'Honey Babe Blues' (a variant of 'Sugar Baby' as recorded by Dock Boggs on Smith's *Anthology*), 'Bliss' (a traditional Swiss melody with words by McCarthy) and 'Ode to Rejection' all feature yodelling, a vocal technique seldom heard in the independent sphere. 'Lullaby for Consciousness' features a kind of wordless keening, perhaps an evocation of howling wind. The virtuosity of McCarthy's vocalisms is undercut by the modest instrumental means and perfunctory recording quality of the first two records. She is at once the mythical 'Dawn the Faun' and obviously a flesh-and-blood human being, the filigree of improvisation balanced by the sharp timbre and clarity of Joan Baez at her most stentorian.

In his analysis of the singing style of Hank Williams, David Brackett writes of the importance of swing and syncopation not only to Williams' style, but also to his expression of subjectivity (1995: 90-96). If we combine this sense of swing and syncopation with the gravelly timbre associated with blues singers such as Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker, we can easily see a through-line to the generation of Little

Richard and Elvis Presley, to Dylan and Mick Jagger, and on to the orthodoxy of rock singers in general. I would suggest that McCarthy, consciously or not, is part of a lineage that is directly opposed to this lineage; that is, to the impersonation of black southern accents that constitutes the orthodoxy of rock singing. Instead, we hear in her clear, even shrill tones the correctness of pronunciation and influence of British folksong in the voices of Joan Baez and Judy Collins, preserved in the hippie generation through Vashti Bunyan and The Incredible String Band. In the case of Baez's generation, this opposition to rock modes of singing was a stance against commercialism (as we see from the interpretation of Dylan's move into rock as a betrayal); for McCarthy's generation, it is not so different, casting much generic punk as a continuation of rock orthodoxy.

Mother Twilight **(2001)**

The second Faun Fables album carries over from the first a challengingly broad array of vocal techniques and a sense of the pre-industrial borne by the predominantly acoustic instrumentation and anthropomorphic, animistic and often non-narrative lyrics. The album is also full of structures that are experimental in the context of popular music. The structure of the album itself is sprawling, with fourteen tracks and a playing time of over an hour. In truth, this is not so unusual, but together with other aspects of the album which might be construed as challenging, contributes to a work that is not easily digestible. The form of the album as a whole is disrupted by the motor-rhythmic instrumental 'Train' (track 6), the a capella 'Beautiful Blade' (track 7) and the lo-fi, live recording of 'Washington Square' (track 12). Certainly, there would be a greater homogeneity of sound and a running length that would conform more closely to our expectations of the album as a form with these tracks' excision; but rather than come to the conclusion that the removal of these tracks would make a 'better' album, we can see their inclusion as symptomatic of a lack of regard for prevailing standards and ideas of cultural production. Furthermore, the choice to include these tracks and the way in which they are incorporated into the running order may be seen as another anti-canonic choice, the likes of which are often found in new folk.

In the a capella ‘Beautiful Blade’, Frykdahl and McCarthy have created a recording of (roughly) six voices which slither and slide from pitch to pitch, while also presenting a full complement of sighs, whispers and wails. There is something of an arch form, with the last couple of lines set to a melody similar to that heard in the first few. Though not as complex as it sounds at first – there is a recurring vocal riff which gives the piece some continuity – ‘Beautiful Blade’ comes across as more of an avant-garde piece than a ‘song’ as such. Sound, structure and vocal approach combine here to interrogate pop/rock norms, suggesting the punk aesthetics routinely found in new folk.

Using the term I introduced for a couple of the Kes analyses, ‘Hela’ is truly a labyrinth form. A constant rhythmic motif in the accompaniment, and three iterations of a refrain (‘There’s a Hela in the underworld’) hold the recording together. Outside of these elements, there are six discernible sections, with the track careering through the key centres of A minor, E flat major, D major and E minor to arrive back at A minor to finish. Aside from the refrain – which itself appears in A minor, then E flat, then A minor again – there is nothing in particular you might call verse, chorus or bridge, just differing sections, some of which reappear and some of which don’t. As in the Kes recording ‘Who Knows’, with not much to hang on to formally, the listener is directed towards momentary vocal and instrumental traces. These include dissonances in the nylon-string guitar accompaniment, fragments of text and melody in the vocal, McCarthy’s occasional range-hopping vocal flights (with elements of yodel), and the somewhat chromatic jig/reel melody for doubled flute and electric guitar which occurs as the song is thrust abruptly into E flat. As with some of Kes’s material, this refiguring of song-form demands close attention to the sounds themselves. The text, declaimed quite clearly, is not received in terms of narrative, but in fragments that contribute to the mood-setting: ‘underworld’, ‘bones and skin’, ‘blackness’. In this dual refusal of sensible song-form and narrative lyric construction, again we see that the commercial prerogatives that prevail in more readily apprehended rock and pop, and which to some extent inform canonic works, is often irrelevant to music produced in the independent sphere informed by punk aesthetics.

The notion of a kind of orthodox approach to folk singing, invoked in my analyses of performances on *Early Song*, is subjected to McCarthy’s more experimental vocal tendencies during the track ‘Mother Twilight’. The song is in the arch form also present

in ‘Beautiful Blade’, but presented even more starkly. Two long stanzas (at 0:19 – 2:10 and 5:00 – 6:20), the form of which, together with the clear vocal delivery, represent the folk ballad, are separated by a lengthy section of free vocalisation which includes sighs, shrill, broken timbres, mumbling, and notes that make dissonant clashes with the flute part. In terms of punk aesthetics, we might again recall Laing’s list of attributes which ‘refuse the perfection of the amplified voice’ (1985: 54) and Bannister’s notion of non-intentionality (2006: xxvi), given that the section sounds improvised. There are nearly two minutes of amorphous sound-play for voice and flute (2:30 – 4:18) before the reappearance of the two-note drone motive signals a return to the ballad form.

Within an instrumental arrangement which is typically evocative of air and wood (voice, nylon-string guitar and flute, with some distorted electric guitar supplying an extra layer of drone), the mythical character of Mother Twilight is brought forth by sonic suggestion. A fractured form is created by a vocal part that sets up a clear declamatory style only to deconstruct it in the song’s central statement. In what almost seems a contradiction, ‘Mother Twilight’ is a powerful exercise in the painting of ideas with sound, even as experimentation with singing and structure that we might associate with punk aesthetics challenges the linearity and possibility of literal interpretation of the recording itself.

VI: Conclusion: Punk Rock is Bunk Squawk

I am listening to a 2007 release by Castings entitled *Punk Rock Is Bunk Squawk*. The group and their label/distribution collective Spanish Magic (mentioned in Chapter One) are based in Newcastle, NSW, Australia. The group produces a semi- (perhaps wholly) improvised melange of acoustic and electronic sounds which originates from synthesizers, guitars and drums, voices and found objects. Certainly the live performance I witnessed of the group in 2008 in a makeshift warehouse venue featured all these ingredients, with members shifting between various noise-making stations to create 30-odd minutes of fluid sound which ventured from mantric Krautrock-ish pulse to manic rhythmic thrash. The climax of the piece was several members of the group beating upon an amplified piece of corrugated plastic, if memory serves. The sound, as well as bringing to mind free improvisation and the gnarlier side of avant garde electronics, encompasses the core of rock music's instrumentation, though this evidence is often buried in layers of sonic rubble.

Castings' musical approach cannot be accurately described by a genre label. Sonically, they seem to reference the lo-fi electronic experimentalism of post-punk groups Throbbing Gristle, early Cabaret Voltaire, Severed Heads and SPK[83], but the legacy of punk aesthetics goes beyond the music. *Punk Rock is Bunk Squawk* is presented as a CD-R. The packaging consists of one piece of black and white photocopied artwork folded within another. Each is a homemade collage. The outer takes as its departure point a portrait, possibly early nineteenth century, onto which is superimposed all manner of faces and human forms from photographs and films. The inner is more abstract, arranging various grainy textures along with the titles of the tracks, album and group, minimal credits (no group members' names or instrumentation) and characters from non-Latin alphabets. The disc itself features a coloured splash of paint as artwork,

[83] See Frith's 'punk electronics' as referenced in my Chapter Two, as well as Andrews and Blades (2009). Interestingly, John Nixon of the cassette label Anti-Music, active 1979-83, described the label's prolific release of spontaneous longue-room music-making, sometimes containing pre-taped elements, as 'a kind of primitive industrial folk music' (Anderson and Blades 2009: 39-40).

a kind of instant gesture towards making each number of this limited edition unique and palpably handmade. The contents are folded neatly into a plastic sleeve – perhaps the one concession to the orthodox demands of 'product'.

The collage materials immediately bring to mind similar efforts from the punk era, particularly iconic cover images for Sex Pistols and Buzzcocks records; cut-and-paste is an obvious DIY prerogative. I ordered the CD through Spanish Magic's website, and so presume that the very modest price went directly to the producers of the work. All of these aspects are easily reconcilable to punk aesthetics as outlined in the foregoing chapters. The duration and format of the recording – four tracks at a total running time of 35:38 – fit obliquely between the standardised structures of EP and album proper, perhaps closer to the latter. Comprised of two long and two short tracks, the long ones each feature two distinct titles, blurring their distinction as unified pieces while drawing attention to their progression as suites of a sort. Beyond this consideration of the recording's overall structure, two of the three parameters used for the preceding analyses – form (as in song form), and vocal approach – are not relevant here, as Castings do not present their work as in any way related to song formats. There is nothing that might be described as a lead vocal throughout the recording, and very little that would even answer to the name of melody. The third parameter – the nature of the sound – is very relevant and at once yields punk aesthetics, somewhat 'unprofessional' in its traces of homemade ambience, and also abrasive enough to constitute a challenge to all but the most resilient or experienced ears (Bourdieu's cultural capital). And yet this experimentalism is not imbued with the rarefied air of contemplation of an institutionalised avant garde. No-one has given Castings approval, or as Dawn McCarthy would have it, permission, to make these successions of sounds. Reaching back through time to the rough-hewn performances of Harry Smith's *Anthology*, Marcus notes similarly that in its compilation, Smith 'ignored . . . anything validated only by scholarship or carrying the must of the museum' (1997: 102).

Like the outsider music of Daniel Johnston or Jandek, like the performative traces that are foregrounded in certain recordings of the new folkers, Castings' music is presented not as a product, but a process. The well-negotiated transitions of the thirteen minutes of

'i'm in my war face (-) steelwork/catwalk'[84] – from consonant electro-rock waltz, to xeroxed hum, blur, bash and shimmer, to beer-bottle-xylophone melody, to mechanical delay loop – would seem to signal a play with, and of, elements in real time. The folk music forms of Smith's *Anthology* are in a sense also improvisational frames, and the relatively instant recordings of some new folk recordings share these attributes of spontaneity.

All this talk of Castings is meant to underline the broader frame of my thesis. What I am presenting as punk aesthetics is really an approach to the making of culture which existed long before 1976, but which was brought to bear on rock music with particular force in the cultural formation of punk. In terms of the legacy of punk in popular, and not-so popular musics, I believe it may be found wherever independent music making, and culture making, is taking place. For example, in Scott Hicks' recent film about him, Philip Glass uses the same idea I have related from Dawn McCarthy, saying he formed his own ensemble in the 1960s so that he wouldn't need anyone's *permission* – here rock's traditional gatekeepers of record labels and venues are replaced by art music chamber groups and funding structures – to have his music performed. In an echo of folk and punk rhetorics of community, a colleague remembers the Glass ensemble sitting on the floor when performing in gallery spaces, the audience and performers all similarly immersed in the sound coming from speakers in the corners of the room, all 'on the same level'.[85]

My survey of new folk is just one of a myriad of possible studies of the ongoing vitality of punk aesthetics. It seems to me no coincidence that hip hop and punk emerged at the same time in the mid-seventies. Each was a grass roots response to a perception of the resources of music making becoming increasingly remote to everyday people.[86] Equally, there are many musical movements that exhibit punk aesthetics that have occurred post-punk, which have nothing to do with the generic sound of punk rock. In a sense, McKay's *DIY Culture* begins to make a link between certain aspects of dance

[84] Lower case is used consistently in the artwork save for the group's name, not displayed prominently or in larger font, but in capitals (and only on the inner artwork, nowhere on the outer). The use of the word 'font' is itself misleading as the text seems to have been produced with an actual typewriter. The effect is all very anti-computer; visually lo-fi.
[85] *Glass: A Portrait of Philip in Twelve Parts* (2007), directed by Scott Hicks. Finishing his depiction of the Glass ensemble's early shows, the observer notes, 'of course, everyone was high'.
[86] Who are these everyday people? See the first half of Chapter Two for my discussion of 'the folk'.

party culture in eighties and nineties Britain and the idea of protest. My thesis might serve as an example of a way in which to consider how the *music* of this era, rather than just the ideologies, embraced punk aesthetics. Studies of the music of, say, Australia's Clan Analogue collective[87], or the music issued by Sheffield's Warp label in the nineties (to offer just two of many possible examples), might also bring forth interesting new insights into pop and rock history if analysed from the perspective of punk aesthetics.

*

Within the broader frame of 'punk beyond genre' this thesis offers an introduction to new folk, a cultural formation of nearly two decades standing which has so far been virtually ignored by the academic literature. Though my work places new folk in historical perspective by considering several generations of music that might be seen to have informed it – Smith's *Anthology*, the folk revival of the fifties and sixties, the singer-songwriters who rejected the excesses of psychedelic and progressive rock, and outsider and lo-fi artists – a non-linear track has been attempted which focuses on sonic attributes, aesthetics and ideologies which suggest hithterto unglimpsed connections and, potentially, new aspects of the history of rock music, particularly its highly influential fringes.

There is much more work that might be done on the new folk repertoire which could go in several different directions A more long-form review of the career of Will Oldham and the perseverance of gestures of spontaneity through a catalogue which does not limit itself to the most minimal of approaches, and a study of the collision between folk forms and noise aesthetics as found in the work of Akron/Family, Animal Collective, Charalambides and Six Organs of Admittance, are two of many projects that might be pursued within a longer framework.

One of the most inspiring aspects of this research is the realisation that access to cultural production is always being renegotiated, and by the evidence of the myriad legacies of punk aesthetics, can never be controlled. The tension between the desire for professional

[87] Daley (2009) offers an historical account of Clan Analogue as an organisation with some broad references to its stylistic reach, but no detailed regard of musical examples.

practitioners for whom an audience is groomed, and the desire for cultural production as a part of life itself, as seen in the relatively spontaneous and performative artefacts that are the basis of this study, seems to result in regular eruptions of new hybrids. The study of these hybrids inevitably sheds new light on what has come before. History is made by the present, as the work of artists such as the new folkers puts together pieces which were otherwise temporally disconnected. If history, as Friedman has it, can only serve a personalised vision of the present, the refusal of historical facts which is offered by fresh appropriations of tradition such as those of the new folkers puts a much more optimistic spin on such subjectivity.

Appendix 1

Formal irregularities in recordings from the *Anthology of American Folk Music*

Clarence Ashley – 'House Carpenter' (1930) (Selection 3, Ballads)

In Figure 2, each number indicates a unit of metric organisation (a 'bar' so to speak) within a sung stanza. Figure 1 offers a full rhythmic counting of the first stanza. The lines of singing are separated by a forward slash to indicate that the first note/word of each line often anticipates the first beat of a 'bar'.

Fig. 1: Phrase/bar structure, 'House Carpenter', stanza 1.

1. Well | met __, well | met said an old true | love _____
(4) | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2

Well / met __, well | met said | he ___
3 / 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 | 1 2 3 4

I'm / just returning from the | salt, salt sea and it's | all for the love of | thee __
5 / 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4 | 1 2

2. (Come / in . . .)
3 4 / 1 etc

The chart below demonstrates the elasticity of the internal metric structure of the recording. Subtle additions and subtractions are made, always from the same parts of

the stanza – the end of the first line, the start of the second, and the bar that ends the form, anticipating the entry of the next stanza.

Fig. 2: Shifting phrase/bar structure, 'House Carpenter'

Beats per section	**Line 1**	**Line 2**	**Line 3**	**Line 1 total**	**Line 2 total**	**Line 3 total**	**Stanza total**
Intro: 4 beats							
Stanza 1	4-4-4-3	4-2-5	4-4-4-4-4	15	11	20	46
Stanza 2	4-4-4-3	3-2-5	4-4-4-4-3	15	10	19	44
Stanza 3	4-4-4-3	4-2-5	4-4-4-4-3	15	11	19	45
Stanza 4	4-4-4-3	4-2-5	4-4-4-4-4	15	11	20	46
Stanza 5	4-4-4-3	3-2-5	4-4-4-4-5	15	10	21	46
Stanza 6	4-4-4-4	3-2-5	4-4-4-4-5	16	10	21	47
Stanza 7	4-4-4-4	3-2-5	4-4-4-4-3	16	10	19	45
Stanza 8	4-4-4-2	4-2-5	4-4-4-4-3	14	11	19	44
Stanza 9	4-4-4-2	3-2-5	4-4-4-4-4	14	10	20	44
Stanza 10	4-4-4-3	3-2-5	4-4-4-4-4	15	10	20	45
Coda				(4-4-1)			

Buster Carter and Preston Young – 'A Lazy Farmer Boy' (1931)
(Selection 11, Ballads)

Fig. 3: Comparison of harmonic structure – instrumental and vocal stanzas, 'A Lazy Farmer Boy'.

('D' and 'A' here identify chords rather than units of text or melody. The numbers refer to the number of beats which are spent on each chord.)

22 beat structure: 4 x D - 6 x A - 3 x D - 2 x A - 4 x D - 1 x A - 2 x D – instrumental
21 beat structure: 4 x D - 5 x A - 3 x D - 2 x A - 4 x D – 1 x A – 2 x D - vocal

Fig. 4: Two layers of phrasing in vocal stanzas

chordal structure	D 2 3 4	A 2 3 4 5	D 2 3	A 2	D 2 3 4	A	D 2
Lines of singing	Ist line (4 beats)	2nd line (4 beats)	3rd line (4 beats)	4th line (4 beats)	5th line (5 beats)		

Fig. 5: Two layers of organisation in vocal stanzas

(The letters here refer to units of melody or text)

Melodic structure:	A - B - A - C1 - C2	Third line of melody repeats first.
Lyric structure:	A - B - C - D - D	Fifth line of text repeats fourth.

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Akron/Family (2006) *Meek Warrior* Young God

Akron/Family (2007) *Love is Simple* Spunk/Young God

Ambitious Lovers (2006) *Stranger, Can I Touch You?* Warren Street Youth

Aerial M (1997) *Aerial M* Drag City

Animal Collective (2000, 2001) *Spirit They're Gone, Spirit They've Vanished*/*Danse Manatee* (Fatcat reissue, 2003)

Animal Collective with Vashti Bunyan (2005) *Prospect Hummer* EP, Fatcat

Animal Collective (2003) *Campfire Songs* Catsup Plate (N.B.: technically this is a self-titled release by Campfire Songs, but it is universally acknowledged as part of the AC discography)

Animal Collective (2004) *Sung Tongs* Fatcat

Animal Collective (2007) *Strawberry Jam* Domino

Joan Baez (1960) *Joan Baez* Vanguard

Joan Baez (1962) *Joan Baez in Concert* Vanguard

Meg Baird (2007) *Dear Companion* Spunk/Drag City

Devendra Banhart (2002) *Oh Me Oh My . . . The Way the Day Goes By the Sun is Setting Dogs are Dreaming Lovesongs of the Christmas Spirit* Young God

Devendra Banhart (2004) *Rejoicing in the Hands* Young God

Devendra Banhart (2004) *Nino Rojo* Young God

Devendra Banhart (2005) *Cripple Crow* XL Recordings

Syd Barrett (1969) *The Madcap Laughs* Harvest

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy (2004) *Sings Greatest Palace Music* Spunk/Drag City

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy (2005) *Summer in the Southeast* Sea Note

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy (2007) *Wilding in the West* Spunk

Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy (2007) *Ask Forgiveness* Spunk/Drag City

Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy, with Harem Scarem and Alex Nielsen (2008) *Is It The Sea* Domino

Vashti Bunyan (1970) *Just Another Diamond Day* Phillips (DiCristina reissue, 2005)

The Byrds (1965) *Fifth Dimension* Columbia

Castings (2007) *Punk Rock is Bunk Squawk* Spanish Magic

Cat Power (1996) *What Would the Community Think?* Matador

Cat Power (1998) *Moon Pix* Matador

Cat Power (2000) *The Covers Record* Matador

Cat Power (2003) *You Are Free* Matador

Cat Power (2006) *The Greatest* Matador

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds (1996) *Murder Ballads* Mute

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds (2005) *B-Sides and Rarities* Mute

Charalambides (1992, 2001) *Our Bed Is Green* Kranky

Charalambides (2006) *A Vintage Burden* Kranky

Leonard Cohen (1968) *Songs of Leonard Cohen* Columbia

Judy Collins (1962) *Golden apples of the sun* Elektra

Karen Dalton (1971) *In My Own Time* Paramount (Light in the Attic reissue, 2006)

Nick Drake (1970) *Five Leaves Left* Island

Nick Drake (1972) *Pink Moon* Island

Bob Dylan (1962) *Bob Dylan* Columbia

Bob Dylan (1964) *The times they are a-changing* Columbia

Bob Dylan (1964) *Another side of Bob Dylan* Columbia

Bob Dylan (1965) *Bringing it all back home* Columbia

Bob Dylan (1965) *Highway 61 revisited* Columbia

Bob Dylan (1966) *Blonde on blonde* Columbia

Bob Dylan and The Band (1975) *The Basement Tapes* Columbia

Bob Dylan (1991) *The Bootleg Series volumes 1-3 (rare and unreleased) 1961-1991* Columbia

Espers (2005) *The Weed Tree* Locust

Espers (2006) *Espers II* Spunk/Drag City

Faun Fables (1999, 2004) *Early Song* Drag City

Faun Fables (2001, 2004) *Mother Twilight* Drag City

Faun Fables (2004) *Family Album* Drag City

Faun Fables (2006) *The Transit Rider* Drag City

Fourtet (2003) *Rounds* Spunk/Domino

Fourtet (2005) *Everything Ecstatic* Domino

Grand Salvo (2005) *The Temporal Wheel* Preservation

The Incredible String Band (1968) *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* Elektra

Jandek (1986) *Telegraph Melts* Corwood

Laura Jean (2008) *Eden Land* Scotland Yard

Daniel Johnston (1983) *Hi, How Are You* Stress cassettes (Homestead reissue, 1988)

Daniel Johnston (2004) *The Late Great Daniel Johnston* Gammon/Rogue. Disc one is covers; disc two features Johnston's original versions.

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Kes (2005) *The Jellys in the Pot* Unstable Ape

Kes (2006) *The Grey Goose Wing* Mistletone

Kes Band (2008) *Kes Band* Mistletone

Madonna (1983) *Madonna* Sire

Maher Shalal Hash Baz (2003) *Blues du Jour* Geographic/Domino

Meat Puppets (1984) *Meat Puppets II* SST

Joni Mitchell (1968) *Joni Mitchell* Reprise

Joni Mitchell (1971) *Blue* Reprise

Joanna Newsom (2004) *The Milk-Eyed Mender* Spunk/Drag City

Joanna Newsom (2006) *Ys* Spunk/Drag City

Pajo (2005) *Pajo* Spunk/Drag City

Palace Brothers (1993) *There is no-one what will take care of you* Drag City

Palace Brothers (1994) *Days in the Wake* Drag City

Palace Songs (1994) *Hope* EP Drag City

Palace Music (1995) *Viva Last Blues* Drag City

Palace Music (1997) *Lost blues and other songs* Drag City

Papa M (2001) *Whatever Mortal* Drag City

Papa M (2003) *Two* EP Drag City

Papa M (2003) *Three* EP Drag City

Papa M (2004) *Six* EP Drag City

Papa M (2004) *Hole of Burning Alms* Drag City

Linda Perhacs (1970) *Parallelograms* Kapp (Wild Places reissue, 2005)

Radiohead (2000) *Kid A* Parlophone/EMI

Radiohead (2001) *Amnesiac* Parlophone/EMI

Six Organs of Admittance (2005) *School of the Flower* Spunk/Drag City

Six Organs of Admittance (2006) *A Sun Awakens* Spunk/Drag City

Slint (1991) *Spiderland* Touch and Go

Smog (1993) *Julius Caesar* Drag City

Smog (1995) *Wild Love* Drag City

Smog (1996) *The Doctor Came at Dawn* Drag City

Smog (1997) *Red Apple Falls* Drag City

Smog (2000) *Strayed* EP Drag City

Smog (2005) *A River Ain't Too Much To Love* Spunk/Drag City

Alexander Spence (1969) *Oar* Columbia (Sundazed reissue, 1999)

Tall Dwarfs (1982) *Louis Likes His Daily Dip* Flying Nun

Holly Throsby (2004) *On Night* Spunk

Holly Throsby (2008) *A Loud Call* Spunk

Tortoise (1996) *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* Thrill Jockey

Tuung (2004) *Mother's Daughter and Other Songs* Feral Media

Tyrannosaurus Rex (1970) *A Beard of Stars* Fly

Various Artists (1952, 1997) *Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith, Smithosonian Folkways Recordings.

Various Artists (2006) *Summer and Smiles of Finland* Fonal (promo only release)

Various Artists (2006) *The Harry Smith Project: Anthology of American Folk Music Revisited* Shout! Factory.

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Wilco (2004) *A Ghost is Born* Nonesuch

Woelv (2007) *Tout Seul Dans la Forêt en Plein Jour* Chapter/K

Neil Young (1973) *Time Fades Away* Reprise

Neil Young (1974) *On The Beach* Reprise

Neil Young (1975) *Tonight's The Night* Reprise

Filmography

Glass: A Portrait of Philip in Twelve Parts (2007), directed by Scott Hicks.