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**'EMPIRE' RECORDS: A STUDY OF RESISTANCE AND THE
POLITICS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE NETWORK AGE**

A Dissertation in

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by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the way in which the cultural politics of popular music function as a strategy of governance by examining two case studies: Rage Against the Machine and M.I.A. The shape of musical media using a politics of resistance has fundamentally changed in recent years due to the massive influence of the rise of the network society and digital distribution. Yet this resistance, I argue, is responding to an equal change in the way that dominant institutions exert their influence through these same means. In both cases, it is the new uses of media that shift the locus of power to the everyday lives of global citizens. I use Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitical production as the primary strategy through which power is exercised as a mode of postmodern governance. Yet as the scope of this power expands to a global scale, this strategy appears to increasingly be supplanting traditional means of exercising power. Furthermore, I argue these strategies of governance have been the primary strategy of the global neoliberal project, particularly in its utilization of mediated cultural forms as a central conduit to populations.

The place of music in this arrangement is as a unique and vital site of power negotiations of these relationships. I argue that there has been a real and fundamental change in the way in which these cultural forms are politicized in the era following the introduction of digital distribution networks. Following an introductory chapter, the next three chapters of this dissertation provide a theoretical and analytical background on the ordering of power, resistance, and the global music industry, dealing respectively with the rise of globalization and global capital structures, contemporary strategies of governance, and the political economy of the global music industry. Chapter Five uses as a case study the fascinating and problematic Rage Against the Machine, perhaps the most notable musical artist representing anti cultural resistance the pre-network 1990s. Chapter Six studies M.I.A., daughter of a notable Sri Lanka resistance fighter, as an artist whose music symbolizes the cultural politics of resistance representative of the various conceptualizations of

postmodern power relations in the network age. Chapter Seven provides an in-depth conclusion to this dissertation by comparing and contrasting the structure, order, and exercise of power during these two eras. I find that new uses of global media represent an understated but great threat to human freedom as cultural forms become increasingly politicized, yet at the same time offer great promise if certain strategies of popular resistance can be cultivated. In either case, popular music serves as a media form with great influence on a global scale for the articulation of the public's values, beliefs, actions, and discourses, making it all the more important to consider as object of study in the network age.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE SPEED OF SOUND

This dissertation is one that tells a story of disruption, a cleaving from the past of not just political music but the very politics of music making. The traditional modes of musical production and distribution are surely still dominant – these structures are too firmly embedded in political and economic institutions to simply disappear – but the treatment of popular music media as secondary to societal events, as a soundtrack to other, more important happenings, is changing under a new rumbling of discontent. Yet present times are seeing a massive restructuring of the global flows of information. There is a new exercise of power that is beginning to take shape, a generalized destabilization of long-embedded structures, and even to the casual observer of the material conditions of these relationships of cultural and political resistance, it becomes quickly apparent that for a variety of reasons, the current negotiations of power are unlike any that we have seen in the past. Political action is shifting increasingly to new sites of power through new mediations of everyday life.

Among the central ways that this process occurs is through popular music forms. It clear that music has power as a cultural form able to drive political change, and while there are many vantage points to approach its various media, studying the political uses of popular music necessarily requires an examination of a broad swath of perspectives. Music is moving in multiple senses, certainly important for media scholars in the sense that it travels over space and time, but perhaps more so for critical cultural researchers is the way in which it constitutes both political culture and political change. This – the examination of the various approaches toward the global production and distribution of media content and the political potentials contained

therein – is the goal of media studies. It is up to the critical scholar to use this examination as a liberatory exercise. Taken seriously, the field’s inquiries are driven by one overarching question:

What can music do?

But why popular music? After all, “popular” has a wide variety of meanings, not all of which are entirely flattering¹. And some less so than others: In 1971, self-proclaimed ‘Dean of American Rock Critics’ and former Village Voice rock critic Robert Christgau, arguing with a “Marcuse translator just out of grad school,” was censured on this very subject: “You’re really very intelligent. Why do you waste your time on rock?” (Christgau, 1998, p. 1).

Indeed, the cultural history of popular music historically has been written as a genre of critique in the popular press, often relegated to the marginal back pages of the arts section or dismissed as a preaching-to-the-choir medium of list-making fanboys debating the nuances between screencore and deathcore, as if it made the least bit of difference. Or at best bemoaning the “egghead academics and journalists who think too much for their own good” (Middleton, 2001, p. 213).

Literary circles treated popular music analysis even worse. Perhaps high literature’s focus on the canon (or at least the canonical form) left the mainstream tendencies of popular

¹ Indeed, this word – ‘popular’ - is so problematic yet central to the study of culture that Raymond Williams’ landmark *Keywords* (1983b) devotes two full pages to the various meanings of the term. Some critics of mass culture may laugh on how history repeats itself: Early uses of the word were pejorative, meaning ‘base,’ ‘vulgar,’ or ‘of the common people’ before its nineteenth century meaning of first ‘widespread’ and later as a positive celebration of mass appeal. Kassabian (1999) writes that this shift was important because “the meaning of the term shifts from embracing the perspective of an elite class that looked down its collective nose at the common people to celebrating what those common people valued” (p. 114). For more on issues surrounding popular culture, see Bennett, 2005; Hebdige, 1987; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; Johnson, 2000; Marcuse, 1991; Williams, 1983a, 1983b.

music analysis for the tabloid-size newsprint rags, or, if embraced at all, as a celebration of ‘high art’ aesthetics of certain acceptable genres or neutered bohemian ideals².

Some academic circles were just as kind³. Despite popular music’s decades-long ubiquity in industrialized cultures, the scholarship on the subject is often absent from most textbooks on media studies or is addressed in the history books as a footnote to, say, the 1960s countercultural era. Even today, it rarely seems to merit more than a couple of pages: Few media studies courses were interested in the subject until its intersection with economic and political issues regarding issues such as file-sharing or the illegality of digital reproduction.

However, recent years have seen a slow but increasing respect and willingness to accept the role of popular music forms and genres in mainstream and literary circles - perhaps due to the market normalization of taste among classes⁴ - but even more important is the growing acceptance of popular music as a serious object of study in the academy. Critical scholars have realized the problems of power inherent in the politics of inclusion/exclusion, and the canonical form as a measure of artistic or political merit has become increasingly of less of importance⁵. The rigidity of positivism never suited something as complex and contradictory as the study of music from a cultural basis anyway. As Frith (1996) notes, music as a category is fundamentally unstable, contested, ever in flux.

² Much popular and scholarly work has been devoted to the study of popular music criticism (notwithstanding classical music criticism, which is a class unto itself). For an excellent compendium of scholarship on popular music criticism, see the edited volume by Lindberg (2005).

³ There are excellent scholarly histories written on academic approaches toward the study of music, popular and otherwise. Hesmondhalgh & Negus (2002a) provide a comprehensive and to-the-point review of literature of scholarship on popular music. Gronow & Saunio (1998) give an excellent history of the recording industry from an international perspective. Also see Brackett, 1999; Fenster & Swiss, 1999; Frith, 1996; Tomlinson, 2003..

⁴ For more on the normalization of taste and interests along class lines, see Bourdieu (1984).

⁵ The notion of the canon has always been problematic, and is fundamentally tied in with discussions of power and of a selective history. For more on the cultural politics of the canon in music, see Brackett, 1999; Burns, 1997.

With this in mind, today's popular music is an undeniable social institution, and if the blindness of academia - media studies in particular - to accepting the role of this media form as important in understanding social and cultural tendencies was driven by the bias of the classical roots of the academy or by a myopic constitution of media studies, then it is indeed promising that popular music has been increasingly explored from a wide variety of disciplines. Yet it is long overdue. The field of visual culture studies has existed for decades, yet sound culture studies as a discipline is barely constituted and largely unknown⁶. There isn't even a singular label in either popular or academic culture that refers collectively to the various media dealing with music (McQuail, 2005).

Cultural politics – the arrangement and exercise of power that flows through cultural forms – are particularly weighty in popular music media. But more importantly, the political constitution that exists through the musical forms that articulate meaning, the contributors to social life and identity that define cultural characteristics, provide a window into understanding the larger network of power relationships. And it is important to note that there are no communication forms (musical or otherwise) that exist as apolitical, no instances where the cultural role of communication is not intertwined as the product of forces of power relations. If the question is one of the place of music in understanding the constitution of political subjectivities, then it is of utmost importance that the academy explores the role of music in constituting culture.

⁶ Tellingly, the field was the subject of a recent review article entitled “Is There a Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does It Matter?” (Hilmes, 2005). Blake (2009) provides an excellent summation of this emerging field: “The sonic environment is fundamental to how we understand and negotiate place and identity. If culture is a site of contestation -- over meaning, access, representation -- then sound is one of the key modalities through which difference is understood and negotiated” (n.p.). For more on sound culture studies, see Pinch & Trocco, 2002; Sterne, 2003; Thompson, 2002.

Music, though, can often be deceptive in its ability to masquerade as something simplistic, and indeed, for many music is a relatively innocuous form of culture. Songs about love and relationships, songs about youth, or teenage rebellion - these all represent the approach of recorded music being treated as a somewhat banalized contributor to culture, often relegated to the margins while other media are thrust into the center of attention. It is as McQuail (2005) states, “Relatively little attention has been given to music as a mass medium in theory and research, perhaps because the implications for society have never been clear, and neither have there been sharp discontinuities in the possibilities offered by successive technologies of recording and reproduction/transmission” (pp. 36-7). Frith (2003) explains further and provides a justification for the importance of studying music:

The cinema, television, newspapers, magazines, and advertising are still regarded in the academy as more socially and politically significant than records. And so it needs stressing that what people listen to is more important for their sense of themselves than what they watch or read. Patterns of music use provide a better map of social life than viewing or reading habits. Music just matters more than any other medium (p. 101).

Frith’s comment seems to be particularly useful when it comes to the study of the political imperatives and possibilities of popular music. The problem for the cultural researcher studying popular music – even more so for the critical scholar – arises when the field is approached in a way that separates cultural movements from their musical components⁷. As a primary transmitter of culture that works in unique ways, the role of music and its capacity for either a

⁷ For a much more in-depth argument on the connections between social movements and musical movements (or on the embeddedness of music in social movements), see Balliger, 1999; Street, 2001.

static or dynamic negotiation of power is one embodying great potential. Few can separate the decades-long struggle for African-American rights in the U.S., for example, from the musical tradition that was a part of the movement, nor the folk music that organized labor in the 1930s United States, nor the spiritual and historical songs of Native American Indian national traditions of cultural identity in the face of oppression or discrimination.

Yet when acknowledging the role of music in the shaping of culture toward social change, it is necessary to also assume that it can work in the opposite manner. Clearly, the forces benefiting from the control of the means of musical production and distribution wish for the maintenance of the status quo. As such, music released through these means will either foster this type of ideology - the state propaganda songs of the Nazi Party or the Soviet Union both contributed to larger political projects, leading to allied popular sentiment and led to both injustice and intolerance – or will not lead to a popular questioning of the assumptions made about a way of life (Green, 1999; Toynbee, 2002). It has further been argued that in the United States with its firmly entrenched capitalistic structures, music embodying a truly radical potential is rarely, if ever, heard on commercial radio and is equally rarely found on a the release calendar of one of the so-called “Big 4” record labels (Winston, 1998). Indeed, the decisions that are made that lead to the presence or absence of certain types of music are powerful things, able to be used to cultivate the hearts and minds of a population, a resource of cultural hegemony to be fought over between those who wish to see social change and those who wish to see none⁸.

However, if the initial attraction point of music is indeed affective, and if its political uses in popular cultural can be examined theoretically, it is important to remember that its effects are

⁸ Much has been written on the uses of popular music embedded in social movements and the various nuances surrounding these issues. For a brief overview, see Boti & Guy, 2003; Burns, 1997; Fischlin, 2003; Greif, 2002; Korpe, Reitov, & Cloonan, 2006.

fundamentally material. Music's power for social change is evident in the long history of human rights movements and as threatening to those in power, a point clearly recognized by Boti & Guy (2003):

Rulers know the power of songs; they know that music and politics are a potent mix. All countries have a national anthem; it stirs patriotic sentiment, summons defense for the homeland, or calls troops to battle. Political movements of all stripes use music to reinforce their appeal and their message. Even when music seems apolitical, it still carries values – if only to reinforce the status quo by lulling minds and preventing critical thought. Cultural products are the number one export of the United States, and a crucial element contributing to American military, political, and economic hegemony (p. 68).

* * *

In studying these issues from a critical media perspective, this dissertation's approach entails an analysis of the material conditions of those living under the current system of power in the hopes of liberation, but in equal part also lies with the advancement of theoretical considerations. Problematizing theory is a fundamental part of any research process, and it is my approach to render important what Kilbourn (2006) describes in his methodological approach to qualitative studies as “usually [lying] along a continuum of theory application at one end and theory development at the other” (p. 545). But if cultural studies is “the relations between the politics of culture and the politics of politics” (Morris, 1995, in Grossberg, 1997, p. 143), then it is doubly important for the critical scholar to remember that the connection of theory to pragmatic goals is a fundamentally political process.

With this in mind, I approach the use of music by standing on the shoulders of Jacques Attali, whose sometimes problematic but always visionary theories on music in *Noise* (1985) approach the subject by not theorizing specifically *about* music so much as *through* it. Attali's comment reminds us that music has certainly been examined on aesthetic grounds, explored in terms of its form and structure, harmonies and melodies, its lyrical verse, its sonic or production qualities. Yet while the study of acoustical aesthetics is important to any reasonable examination of music (and will, to a degree, be important to this one), exclusive examinations based solely upon aesthetics are perhaps analyses best left to music scholars whose interest is in music theory and composition.

Instead, the question I am more interested in is to ask how to rethink the role, place, and influence of popular music from a political and sociological perspective, looking at case studies in order to gain insight into larger systems of social processes, cultural functions, and political and economic inequities. Or alternately, my goal is to ask how to explore the larger social functioning of power relationships – locally, nationally, globally – by utilizing a popular media form such as music as a window into such systems. The issue here is to connect the theoretical to the empirical as a method of addressing this dissertation's central goal of *understanding the role of popular music in determining the political constitution of the everyday lives of global citizens*.

* * *

Yet if this is the question that is prescient for this dissertation, it is first important to explore the issue of what is at stake in this study. There is much to be understood: The recent history of political thought is one of conceptualizing the scale, composition, and arrangement of power structures in the present era of globalization and global capitalism - no small task.

Identifying material forms of power is at times easily manifest, at other times a process obscured by the practices and conditions that we take for granted in the daily exercise of influence and structures, the subtext of the hegemonic practices that we rarely, if ever, see in our day-to-day lives⁹

This, then, raises the question of scope. Political theorists (and indeed music scholars) have addressed the tendencies of power in both historical and predictive examinations of its material exercise and all that this entails with multi-level explorations of political economic and cultural structures. Developing scale-appropriate models of these flows of power is a always somewhat of a thorny undertaking when taking into account the many vectors of forces directed to even the smallest social phenomenon. But one thing is certain: The study of the arrangement and tensions that exist between different forces in the everyday life experience of individuals – including the production of subjectivities via popular music - has become central to the study of the constitution of political life¹⁰

And cultural life as well. This is an important point: Perhaps most telling in the emergent conditions of postmodernity, the recent history of cultural thought tackles many of the same currents as the formerly sequestered disciplines studying the politics of power¹¹. Yet as another telltale heralding the eroding boundaries between disciplines, critical cultural studies has always dealt with the flows of power that exist both as transparent and as opaque undercurrents in its study of the ordinary culture of everyday life. It operates under the assumption that cultural

⁹ While an in-depth discussion of popular music and everyday lived experience takes place in Chapter Two, a brief overview and introduction on these subjects can be found in Frith, 2001; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Street, 2001.

¹⁰ See Frith, 2003; Hesmondhalgh & Negus, 2002b.

¹¹ For more on the interdisciplinary nature of the study of culture and the break in history characterized by postmodernity, see Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 2007; Poster, 2007.

life is fundamentally and by necessity political, existing within a fluid context of relationships of power.

However, if cultural life is the point to be studied, it is necessary to make subjective limits on the scope of one's study. The rise of globalization and new communication technology has forced the discipline to drastically rethink the scale of its considerations, not just in terms of the available objects of study but also in regard to the complexity of forces that are exerted upon culture, identity, national sovereignty, and global citizenship as they extend, retract, and morph different chains of influence over time and space (Castells, 1996; Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004). This is of especial interest with new flows of information and the corresponding questions surrounding the emergence of mass, global, mediated culture come new complications about the exercise of power dynamics that result in cultural forms. Yet in the global era, there is still much disagreement over what it actually means to produce or consume culture, and for whose benefit these processes occur, principally in the understanding of the forces guiding the political construction of personal and cultural subjectivities¹².

In terms of more structural arguments regarding music, these considerations are reflected in the traditional modes of distribution - retail, radio, television – and the consolidation and conglomeration of these channels under powerful enterprises¹³. When we acknowledge the role of music in the shaping of culture toward social change, we must also assume that it can work the other way around, that those who benefit from the conditions and practices of the global music industry wish for the maintenance of the status quo and release music that will foster this

¹² See Bourdieu, 1993; Caldwell, 2006; Foucault, 2008; Negus & Pickering, 2002; Sterne, 2003.

¹³ The discussion of the dynamics and structures of the music industry will be addressed in Chapter Four. As an overview to these structures, see Frith, 2001; Gronow & Saunio, 1998; Keith. Negus, 1992; Wallis, 2006. For more on the problems of consolidation and concentration of media ownership, see Bagdikian, 2004; Bettig & J. Hall, 2003; Kellner, 1990; McChesney, 2004

type of ideology, or at least that will not lead to a questioning of the assumptions that we make about our way of life. But the question remains of not just how culture has been represented through musical forms but who has allowed others (or, for that matter, has been allowed) to have access to these representations?

* * *

If to this point it seems as though there is a somewhat wobbly definition of these terms, it is by no accident: The rise of globalization and transnational structures of business, politics, life, and culture has led to a generalized destabilization of traditional understandings of these concepts that cultural studies has historically utilized to explain its object of study. Much that we have known in the past is in flux as we rethink the terms and conceptualizations that have long been assumed.

Indeed, this idea – destabilization – is a central theme to this dissertation, an undercurrent that exists throughout all aspects of my approach to the political constitution of culture in the increasingly postmodern era of post-industrial society. This trait, most notably along with decategorization and interdisciplinarity (amongst others) are heralds of postmodernity, yet if the fluidity of categorization that typifies this era is often problematic when applied to abstract theoretical concepts, then it is ever more so complicated when applied in reference to material conditions of those living in this society¹⁴.

The postmodern condition often has at its center a destabilization of categorization at all, a bristling at the notion of definitions and conceptualizations that attempt to explain social reality in some sort of definitive stroke ending in a full stop. Yet while there are debates over whether we are in an era of late modernity, early postmodernity, or somewhere in between if there is one

¹⁴ For more on the long-standing discussion of connections between Marxist approaches and the emerging rise of postmodern society, see S. Hall, 1986; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 2007.

thing that all parties can agree upon, it is that the more or less stable modern-era notions of nation, state, politics, culture, governance, and music (both cultural and aesthetic) have each been problematized through the decreasing distance and time afforded under globalization¹⁵. Sometimes successful in reformulating cultural understandings of these concepts, sometimes not, the assumptions inherent in these concepts under modernity have been exchanged in part to take into account new material considerations that necessitate at the very least a rethinking of both our theoretical understanding and our popular conceptualization of the role of cultural politics (Grossberg, 1997). It represents a rupture, however incomplete, with the past.

On this point, it is of interest to study the role of media in the constitution of culture on every scale in this era of transnational media flows, especially true in terms of changes in mediated music. Mediated communication has long been a key field of study in many disciplines, yet its influence today is central to understanding the way in which any culture emerges, any society operates. For cultural researchers, the role of globalization, the rise of new networks of communication, and the changing constitution and relationships of stakeholders have been central issues to almost every field of study. The 1990s through today have seen a number of arguments have arisen that correspond with the rapid growth and spread of communication media over space and time, and certainly the role of these very same media in both the creation and restructuring of power relationships on every level has raised many questions in order to incorporate the idea that power is now rarely confined to local, regional, or

¹⁵ These debates are clearly both broad and complicated as the intersection of a great number of issues have been problematized through the creation of new sites of cultural production and political exercise via new channels of communication. For more, see Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1996; Grossberg, 2005; Harvey, 2005, 2009; Kellner, 2006; Kraidy, 2005; Pieterse, 2007.

national borders¹⁶. New communication technologies have shifted notions of power relationships, yet novel networks of power have allowed for control structures that are amorphous and flexible, integrated into the everyday lives of peoples through their very cultural existence¹⁷. Methodologically, this is a new era of condensed time and space, the exercise of power over distance seemingly limited only by the scale of the globe and the limits of a medium, itself, one in which new models are needed in order to understand the changing dynamics of these relationships, new ways of understanding the resulting conflict that stems from the collision of differing flows of information and, ultimately, of influence.

The first step, however, is to leave the abstract behind and to focus specifically on understanding and dissecting the arrangement of power. The questions that this dissertation will address centrally revolve around issues of using the global music industry to illuminate questions of how flows of power work transnationally, who are the stakeholders in these relationships, the functions and structures of culture in everyday life, and the possibilities for new negotiations. As the scale of mediated communication has extended dramatically alongside the extension of domineering power structures over space, so too has the need for an extension in the scope of theory to encompass such a large range of practices and phenomena: A global exercise of influence on the part of dominant institutions necessitates a broad theoretical approach to explain

¹⁶ Furthermore, the very notion of the nation-state has come into question with the rise of corporatism through the trans-national corporation, the existence of numerous supra-national organizations such as the World Bank and the WTO, and the rise of new networks of communication technology, amongst a wide variety of other issues. While this notion is disputed for a number of reasons, it is clear that the centrality of the nation-state in global geopolitics is not what it once was. For more on these arguments, see Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004; Harvey, 2005, 1989; ILRIC, 2000.

¹⁷ The notion of control and internalized discipline – particularly in the concept of biopolitical production – will be discussed in Chapter Three and in terms of popular music in Chapter Seven. For an introduction to these concepts, see Agamben, 2005; Deleuze, 1995; Foucault, 1977, 1978, 2008; Giroux, 2006; Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004.

a wide range of structures and influence, and this comes neither easily nor simply (Schwoch & White, 2006). Particularly when looking at the way in which the emergence of these new power structures intersect with the exercise of cultural production through musical forms, there are almost countless possible entry points, as well as questions of where to begin and end one's exploration (Anderson, 2006).

The predicament here is to develop a theory that can be inclusive enough in its observations to incorporate such an abundance of cases while being concise enough in order to remain useful as a theory or meta-theoretical construct, to balance comprehensiveness with meaningful conclusions, theoretical risk-taking with validity. Yet perhaps more importantly than simple modeling, the overarching issue that is faced by researchers looking at the confluence of power entities and culture is two-fold: Who are the stakeholders in the contestation of power, and by which means is this struggle being fought? In other words, in the global age of the postmodern, network society, how is power constituted and exercised through cultural forms?

There are many interesting results that can be extracted from the development of new models of global political, economic, social, and cultural power relationships. Yet formulating one that attempts to be fully encompassing on the macro level by explaining how power works on the micro level is far from simple. Nor is it a problem-free undertaking: there are many troubling aspects of this subject of study that are not presently resolved, theoretical and practical issues that remain unanswered, and music functions a critical juncture for the articulation of cultural expression as it spans very contested grounds. Yet here, setting off on a journey of exploring these problems theoretically and empirically, this dissertation is driven from curiosity over an unanswered question: *How is popular music used as a negotiation of the powers of control in the new global order, and what possibilities are there for resistance?*

Project Roadmap

In a fitting quote, Burns (1997) discusses of the challenges in studying popular music:

The perfect scholar of popular music would know all the relevant literature from popular music studies itself and also from all other disciplines. Furthermore, this perfect scholar would be an expert in music theory, literary criticism, the history of popular music, the entire social and cultural milieu that surrounded the creation of the music in question, and all manner of social and cultural theory (pp. 126-7).

The tongue-in-cheek nature of Burns' notation notwithstanding, he makes a good point: Popular music functions not necessary as a reflection into a great number of elements of present society but instead as a window, so much so that the adequate study of popular music requires a discussion that is both broad in its approach to providing a contextualized understanding of its place in culture, while at the same time deep in its ability to explain and contribute to the complexities of theoretical practices.

Developing a model that encompasses these two axes is perhaps most pragmatically done by division, cordoning off these conversations to contained (and manageable) discussions. It is the approach that I have taken in developing my argument through a logical progression of chapters that build upon one another through the journey of theorizing, contextualizing, providing case studies, developing conclusions. With this in mind, the roadmap for this dissertation is as follows.

Chapter Two, *Flows and Negotiations: Globalization, Capital Structures, and Musical Possibilities*, is a chapter that begins the discussion of this dissertation broadly, focused on the

global context surrounding the production and distribution of music. Starting with a discursive project that theorizes globalization and subsequently positions music within this discussion, I address the changing flows of power on a global scale through an equally changing constitution of conceptualizations of practices, values, structures, and systems. Next, I shift to the economic, looking at the centrality of capital to the production of culture and the resulting new flows of information, power, people, and labor, particularly in terms of the emergence of Neoliberalism as a central dogma. Following this conversation, I look to the role of popular music as a way of bridging the processes of the globally political and the globally economic by looking to the way in which it works as both a commodity and an ideological force, able to function as a resource to be battled over in new negotiations of power.

The third chapter, *Everyday Cultural Negotiations: Does Music Set Us Free?*, narrows the discussion further. I look centrally to the role of culture – particularly different articulations of everyday life – as a central strategy of social control characterized by Neoliberal governance. I argue that new global flows of communication and new structures of information sharing have made everyday life a fundamentally politicized site of cultural production through Foucault’s notion of biopolitical production. Yet more importantly, popular music, as a central (and often covertly instituted) element of articulating everyday life, has become a particularly unique and effective form of social governance, yet one whose characteristics allow for at least the possibility of the emergence of a new agency, the potential for a new political order.

The primary goal of Chapter Four, *The Past, and the Shape of Things to Come: The Political Economy of the Global Music Industry*, is a discussion to provide a contextualized understanding of the political and economic considerations surrounding the music industry. I begin by foregrounding the argument with a brief meta-theoretical discussion of political

economics and the study of culture, partially to reconcile my approach to this debate surrounding the difference between the strict dogma that sometimes encompass each of these fields, but more in order to give the reader an understanding into these issues. I follow with a historical exploration of music industry structures and dynamics, followed by a discussion of the shift toward the new possibilities, and new regimes of control, that have emerged under the transition to digital production and distribution.

Chapters Five and Six, both case studies, expand upon and unify the concepts of the previous four chapters by illuminating the complexity of these theoretical discussions with material examples. There were a number of shifts in the political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes of the 1990s and 2000s, and the two case studies represent different ends of logics of the production and distribution of cultural forms in these two eras: The pre-network, pre-digital, and the increasingly postmodern digital age.

The case study of Chapter Five is Rage Against the Machine, a Los-Angeles based group that was among the most political and commercially successful bands of the 1990s. This chapter is divided into two sections the first looking to the history of this group, its music, the political response to its themes, the politics of its members, and the band's continuing and complicated legacy. The second is analytical, exploring not only the purported motivations of the band and its musical and political practices but also in measuring the efficacy of these resistant practices as a major-label band that existed well within the mainstream of musical production and distribution. Finally, the chapter looks to the strategies of liberation that the band advocated, and the strategies of control that were exercised against it in the name of cordoning off the group's political project in this largely pre-digital age.

The next case study, Chapter Six, is focused on M.I.A. and is divided much as the previous case study. The discussion begins contextually with this global music artist born in poverty to a revolutionary father in Sri Lanka. Starting with a discussion of M.I.A.'s life and background – quite interesting in its proximity to militant groups in a war-torn country – and moving to her musical career, I explore the themes present in her music, her life, and the processes with which she has been able to not only produce and release her music but also the way that she has influenced and been influenced by media through new networks of communication. The next section of this chapter, the analytical, draws several conclusions from this complicated musical artist, looking to her purported politics, her existence working within the global music industry, and both the ways in which her political project has been controlled by others – overtly and covertly – and her attempts to resist this through strategies musical and otherwise.

The final chapter of this dissertation presents conclusions by comparing and contrasting these two case studies within the theoretical context provided in the first four chapters. It addresses the overall importance of its findings, as well as its theoretical and political importance, and finally provides emerging areas for future research.

Concluding Remarks

There is much to discuss, of course, in looking at the issue of the cultural politics of popular music, but by examining the role of music in the domination or liberation of peoples, the present and the recent past emerges as a laboratory for the future, a place where the creation and establishment of certain processes and structures will offer us a shape of things to come.

This is a particularly exciting time to be an observer of the changing global relationships between the powerful and less than powerful, as the seeds of resistance are taking on a global shape through the connections between peoples, the new creations of political subjectivities through cultural forms. The past several decades have seen the world move in ways that few would have expected or could have predicted. Yet the development of resistance is in no way certain, and by no means assured through tactics musical or otherwise. Cultural and political resistance is always up against some very powerful forces, as the cultural exports of the West are enormous in terms of both stature and influence. Today's resistance is no exception.

The question at hand, then, is one of how to highlight the functioning of power relationships in culture to create a more equitable world, how to understand both the existence of these relationships and the way in which they operate. Indeed, as one of the critiques of the expansion of globalization is that local cultures, traditions, and roots are disappearing in place of others' culture, traditions, and roots – particularly a criticism of global music forms or the much-maligned label “world music” (Byrne, 1999) - the opposition is going to come much in the same way as will the resistance to political or economic imperialism: *The creation of a cultural politics of resistance, the creation of a cultural insurgency*. Music works as an especially valuable tool in this arrangement; what will be interesting to see in the future will be the way in which this cultural form responds to the exigencies of these powers and the success or failure of the creation of a new, more just political order. In the end, it is as Frith (2003) says, “There is still no better way than through music to be surprised by life” (p. 101).

CHAPTER 2
FLOWS AND NEGOTIATIONS: GLOBALIZATION,
CAPITAL STRUCTURES, AND MUSICAL POSSIBILITIES

As with so many things, it is the moment of destabilization that presents the possibility for real and democratic change. And it is this, the era beginning in the late 1990s through the first decade of the 21st Century, that is one where the traditional structures and ideologies of global power relations are not what they once were. What ends will come of this rupture remain to be seen, but one thing is certain: The story of the cultural politics of music in this era is one that takes place in a newly emerging age, intersecting globalization, global capitalism, and the constitution of political subjectivities. Things are changing.

In this chapter, I introduce the big picture. Beginning with a brief background of globalization and the flows of global capitalism and capital structures, I move on to a discussion of power dynamics and culture in popular music. Next, I discuss the confluence and complications of understanding this media form through issues of control and agency organized around a series of questions, asking important questions regarding the different approaches that the field has used to explore the way music functions as a cultural form. Does it work as a form of capital? As a dynamic of resistance or control? Or perhaps somewhere in between. I address the issue of implications for human agency - politically, culturally, and otherwise. I look to the possibility of another world different from the one in which we now live, to possibilities for a real resistance, deterrent to co-optation. And most importantly, if these possibilities actually do exist, then what events signify a real moment of critical resistance? These questions and discussion points are the broad theoretical foundation upon which this dissertation stands. And

as such, the goal of this chapter is to provide this base in order to foreshadow the discussion of my case studies, M.I.A. and Rage Against the Machine.

As a note on methodology and theoretical orientation, clearly these are complicated ideas, and in dealing with a subject as fluid and subjective as cultural production, there are rarely absolute answers. This, the providing of a simple and neat resolution, is not the purpose of this chapter – conclusions are the business of the final chapter of this dissertation. Rather, I hope to provide an illumination into the complexity of these concepts, their history, contextual background, and contemporary instances that serve as a window into larger issues. Yet on this point, if not unassailable answers, there are identifiable *processes* that this chapter provides, tendencies that can be illuminated from taking a macro view.

In stepping back for a moment to take a broad look at the various approaches toward the study of popular music, the mass of literature written on where the field has been and where it is going, there is one pattern that emerges: Though there have been changes throughout the history of media ownership structures, audience listening habits, media technologies, and capital structures, until quite recently, this change has largely been subsumed under a larger frame of continuity – of power, of order, of the maintenance of existent power structures in the global music industry. While it is not as simple as the old cynicism in the adage of the more things change, the more they stay the same, there are identifiable and distinct patterns, historical tendencies of power that can be seen through the intersection of the global music industry with the politics of culture. These patterns are ones that for all their promise of working toward the creation of new avenues of agency in individuals' global citizenship have yet to truly fulfill their potential. It is with these thoughts that the discussion begins.

* * *

It spreads like a meme, an idea that begets another idea, reproducing itself yet constantly in flux as it shifts through interpretation after interpretation in a never-ending process¹⁸. As the distribution of music is increasingly assuming a network structure (as opposed to its formerly limited, more linear distribution structure), two things are happening. First, the gatekeeping function of the major label system and, increasingly, the overarching corporate media system, has begun to see cracks emerging in its foundation, a base that for the past half-century has been nearly impenetrable. These are not fatal blows – the music industry is global, still maintains its power in most parts of the world, and will continue to have a good deal of power over transnational cultural flows for the foreseeable future – but alternatives are beginning to percolate up through unconventional means.

But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the rise of global distribution of cultural forms has in turn fostered new cultural forms, new influences that spread through individuals that listen, individuals that reproduce knowledge. When looking at creative output, the reproduction and reinterpretation of past cultural forms on an individual level begets the direction of culture in a macro form. And given that the music of the Global West has influenced the musics of the rest of the world for such a long time through a one-way movement, the rise of new networks of flows is perhaps a better model for understanding the contextual

¹⁸ Memetics, the more populist term coined by is a theory of information networks addressing the way that knowledge spreads by replicating itself much in the same way as genes do. The term, introduced in the pre-internet era in 1976, has been appropriated largely in recent years as a way of describing an idea that spreads through a distributed network structure (such as viral videos or cultural concepts), but also as “meme warfare” a strategy of social resistance used by culture jammers, such as The Yes Men or the Billionaires for Bush . It functions not unlike the concept of the sign in semiotics, and as will be discussed in Chapter Three, is a somewhat simplified notion of Foucault’s concept of biopolitical production. For more, see Richard Dawkins’ book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976) or, on resistance, Andrew Boyd’s *Truth is a virus: Meme warfare and The Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)* (2002).

situation in which global musics emerge (Appadurai, 1996). If there is one herald found in the digital age of popular music, it is that music *moves*¹⁹.

The ‘World’ in World Music: Theorizing Globalization and Positioning Music

Yet what is the movement of music on a worldwide scale but one element of the larger process of globalization? This term – globalization - on the verge of being so commonplace as to border on the banal, is used in such a variety of ways and articulated from so many (and often competing) perspectives of meaning that it can be difficult to ferret out exactly which “globalization” one might be talking about.

Indeed, the discourses surrounding globalization, the rise of global capitalism, and the exponentially crystallizing expansion of new networks of communication have been of such drastic breadth of scope and diversity of opinion in their attempt to reconcile such overwhelmingly complicated concepts, heralding these developments as everything from the savior of the poor (Sachs, 2005) to the propagator of greater poverty (Appadurai, 1996) from the liberation of the enslaved peoples of the world (Campbell, 2008) to the construction of a new economic slavery (Bales, 2000, 1999), from the creation of a new totalitarian sovereign body to the means by which revolution occurs (Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004). Clearly, this is a complicated concept requiring explication.

As a starting point Johnson (2000) offers the basic “A process in which social life within societies is increasingly affected by international influences based on everything from political and trade ties to shared music, clothing styles, and mass media” (p. 135), yet globalization is a mess of issues lumped under a common term that, while sometimes too broad to provide a

¹⁹ For an excellent discussion of the concept of movement via network distribution (particularly on the subject of musical forms), see Jones (2002).

relevant understanding of the concept, gives us a useful conceptualization of these processes all the same (Held & McGrew, 2000).

But there is something missing in Johnson's (and many other) common definitions of globalization: While these issues – the political, economic, and mediated – are clearly important, this concept is at its root a discussion of relationships of *people* (Appadurai, 1996). The global flows of information, capital, and cultural forms are indeed important, but at its heart, the study of globalization is a discussion of the material conditions of the lives of individuals. And indeed as the decisions of organizations and institutions are manifested in terms of their effects on populations: The abstract, amorphous *peoples* are made up of actual, individual *people*. Though some reduction is of course necessary, it is difficult to separate the functions of these global interconnected relationships with the real needs or motives (whether rooted in benevolent humanism or in exploitative machinations) of real people²⁰.

In any case, there are few universally accepted and uncontested conceptualizations, leading to much disagreement about the term. Held & McGrew (2000), worth quoting at length, describe this uncertainty:

Globalization has been variously conceived as action at a distance (whereby the actions of social agents in one locale can come to have significant consequences for 'distant others'); time-space compression (referring to the way in which instantaneous electronic communication erodes the constraints of

²⁰ A conversation regarding the effects of globalization is often lost in the general discussion surrounding the larger structures in critical scholarship, when after all, this is a material process with fundamentally material consequences. For an excellent discussion of the effects on peoples, see Alasuutari (2006), who argues that this discussion may be ignoring the basic principles of human development and enlightenment under modernity, and Appadurai (1996), whose work focuses on the material effects on people, themselves, under structures and practices of globalization and global capitalism.

distance and time on social organization and interaction); accelerating interdependence (understood as the intensification of enmeshment among national economies and societies such that events in one country impact directly on others); a shrinking world (the erosion of borders and geographical barriers to socio-economic activity); and, among other concepts, global integration, the reordering of interregional power relations, consciousness of the global condition, and the intensification of inter-regional interconnectedness...Simply put, globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up, and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction. (p. 3-4)

At its root – and indeed my own central use of the term in this dissertation - globalization can perhaps best be examined by the concept of *flows*, the confluence of forces and tensions, rational yet dynamic, that cannot be explained solely by looking at the movement of capitalist motives, or technology, or Western ideology, or any singular factor for that matter (Appadurai, 1996).

Instead of attributing these forces as singularly dominant in driving the movement toward global structures (or at worst, attributing them as deterministic), the economic, political, cultural, and technological development leading to new modes of understanding and functioning come from multiple and complicated forces (A. Johnson, 2000)²¹. There are multiple progressions available that can result from and further cause change in a global sense, and there is no defining teleology that moves globalization forward in some predictable, unified linear fashion.

²¹ The concept of flows is valuable, but a requires a great deal more discussion than the scope of this dissertation can provide. The concept's core in constituting the global imaginary is most notably seen in the work of Arjun Appadurai, a good deal of whose work constitutes these issues and looks at the grander scale of flows of capital, mediascapes, ethnicity, technology, and so forth as issues resulting from globalization and the rise of practices of global capitalism. For a discussion of flows, see *Modernity at Large* (1996).

Yet it is not to say that power does not lie in the background of these processes, whether politically, economically, and culturally. After all, there is a certain logic to humanity rooted in the relationships between bodies of varying power degrees, and there is no more explicitly fundamental embodiment of this idea than in the political machinations of nation states. This power affects *everyone*, as the nexus of nation-states, corporate powers, and peoples dictate everything from intra-nation stability to monetary policy to social engineering. Power is everywhere, whether seen or unseen²².

And with power comes a tension of values. As is the case with often competing visions of not only what is best for a given people but what is best for the *most* people, the question facing critical cultural scholars is over whether globalization is a real and material force or simply a construction created to justify a specific value structure²³. These competing values and beliefs of economic, social, and cultural production that transcend borders and boundaries to give us a multitude of voices from many perspectives, but no clear and unifying vision that can give us unbridled illumination. These are complicated, often contradictory, and often competing, yet there is a concrete and material historical progression of development that has been driven by differing ideologies that can be looked upon from a position that assesses the success or failure of their tenets by determining who benefited and who was left behind.

Values and beliefs are far from apolitical concepts and are at the center of the tensions over the way in which global flows of power function. It is no secret: The strategies for dominance, whether consciously decided or simply played out as the result of the logic of capitalism, are historically central to the development of a social order. The question becomes

²² The concept of power flows through the everyday is a subject that will be addressed in depth in Chapter Three, as well as a concept embedded in this dissertation's case studies.

²³ For an excellent and to-the-point overview of these debates, see Held & McGrew (2000).

one that asks of the kind of world order that can be had through the cultivation of a certain set of value and belief structures. In other words, how can we look to structures of power and the role that these relationships have had in fostering certain and specific subjectivities in global populations? But perhaps more importantly, how does one remove the cultural blinders that shield from view the often-opaque nature of our social lives, particularly when used for logics of control? As Harvey (2005) states,

For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. (p. 5)

With this in mind (and notwithstanding a the religious or empirical expansions over space in the pre-modern era), attempts to gain power over a distance have most often been exercised with a singular motivating factor: The accumulation and maintenance of capital.

The Rise of Global Capital Structures

Of the many issues inherent in any discussion of globalization and the rise of new flows of information, power, people, and labor, the spectre that haunts these discussions is one of capital:

Perhaps the most powerful form of globalization is economic, in which planning and control expand from a relatively narrow focus – such as a single firm doing business on a regional or national basis – to a broad global focus in which the entire world serves as a source of labor, raw materials, and

markets...Economic globalization is important not only because it complicates economic relationships but because it further concentrates economic power and weakens the position of working people under industrial capitalism. (A. Johnson, 2000, p. 135)

The intersection of contemporary globalization, logics of production, communication networks, and democracy can be seen in many areas of daily life as global economic markets often dominate many domains of social life. Yet for all of these discussions, the conversation surrounding globalization (particularly in the popular press) is one most often centered on economic and technological policy (Miller, 2001). In contemporary thought on globalization, the central tie that binds together these issues – politics, economics, networks of communication, democracy, and everyday life - is the philosophy of neoliberalism.

The neoliberal project, the doctrine that “political economic practices that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2), is the theory that the principle of market exchange is a moral good in and of itself, free from other interventionist attempts of government, free from morality and value judgments, able to act as a guide for all of human action. Its tenets are seen in the present-day economic dogma advocating the role of private enterprise, trade liberalization, and supply-side economics rooted in the market theories of Milton Friedman (Munck, 2005, p. 60)²⁴.

²⁴ The issues of the neoliberal movement and its connection to global capital structures is quite interesting and is supported by a large number of in-depth works that take a historical approach to the subject in order to see the tendencies of the present. There are a good number of histories of the neoliberal movement and its relationship to capital. See Giroux, 2006; Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007; Munck, 2005.

The common theme of each of these theories is centered as much on business as it is on the role of the state. Historically, neoliberalism argues, the state has only been problematic to the betterment of humankind when compared to the free market system, that true progress has been through philosophies that privilege private (namely corporatist) enterprises (Harvey, 2005). Thus, the role of the state is primarily to protect the framework that allows for free markets, free trade, and private property rights (Grossberg, 2005; Miller, 2001). Fostering the flows of capital that ostensibly exist for the benefit of the state as a whole is the business of government, not social engineering, citizen welfare programs, or second-guessing the supply and demand of the price system. We can see this philosophy codified in the political and economic doctrines of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and George H.W. Bush, to a lesser extent (but still very present) through the Clinton and Blair tenures, and perhaps to its peak level in the policies and strategies of the George W. Bush administration (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007)²⁵. Furthermore, the role of the state looms large in the constitution of popular music, from enforcing intellectual property rights, contract law, taxes and levies, censorship, and even access across one's borders, as we shall see in Chapter Six.

²⁵ Some have argued that we may be seeing the end of neoliberalism with the failures of the second term of the George W. Bush administration. The cracks in the Neoliberal system began to emerge with the Hurricane Katrina disaster of 2005 in New Orleans, two ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and later with the collapse of the housing and financial markets in America, fostering a worldwide recession – events that heavily factored into the election of Barack Obama in 2008. As of this writing in 2009, the tide seems to be turning in some regards, but it is too early to tell what the future of neoliberalism will look like. One thing is certain thought: The role of capital in driving policies friendly to global business structures, and therefore the cultivation of subjectivities also friendly to these structures, will not be disappearing anytime soon.

Neoliberalism as a posited theory is actually quite simple in its logic; where it becomes complicated is when we immanently critique²⁶ its stated goals against its own standards. David Harvey (2005) judges its theory in practice:

We can, therefore, interpret neoliberalization either as a *utopian* project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of the economic elites....I argue that the second of these objectives has in practice dominated. Neoliberalization has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded remarkably well in restoring or in some instances (as in Russia and China) creating, the power of an economic elite. The theoretical utopianism of neoliberal argument has, I conclude primarily worked as a system of justification and legitimation for whatever needed to be done to achieve this goal. (p. 19)

Harvey's comment recognizes one of the most common critiques of neoliberalism, that despite its rhetoric and almost religious belief in the principles of free markets and free trade, it appears to be more of a tool for maintaining the class interests of the wealthy and powerful than it is a philosophy of government to lead desperate peoples out of their misery through the global flows of market capitalism (Giroux, 2006; Harvey, 2005; Munck, 2005). While history has shown variety of guises under which expansionist doctrines were enacted, in retrospect, these efforts have had as their motivating factors two related purposes: The expansion of Western capitalistic

²⁶ Immanent critique, a strategy of evaluation used by critical theorists in measuring the success of political projects against their own internal logics as a way of ferreting out inconsistencies that are often telltale signs of ideological manipulation and power strategies. It is what Harvey (1990) calls a 'boring from within'. Herbert Marcuse is perhaps most famous for this with his advocating of 'negative' thinking as a strategy of judgment and evaluation. See Antonio, 1981; Harvey, 1990; Kellner, 1990; Marcuse, 1991.

democracy and the opening of new markets for production and consumption of goods and services (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007; Miller, 2001)²⁷.

These connections between globalization and capital markets under neoliberal logic were often seen as the savior of the poor, the feeder of the hungry, the rising tide that would lift all boats. Not to mention that this process – the ‘end of history’ articulated by Fukuyama (1992) that was the rise of liberalized economic markets reinforced through capitalistic democratic structures – was also seen as not just the moral but also the inevitable choice in the globalized era. To embrace the ideology of capitalism was to embrace human freedom; all other choices would necessarily lead to human misery, if not downright oppression. As former World Trade Organization Director General Renato Ruggiero stated in 2000, “Anyone who believes that globalization can be stopped has to tell us how he would envision stopping economic and technological progress; this is tantamount to trying to stop the rotation of the earth” (in Grossberg, 2005).

Yet once recognized as an ideology, we must also remember that neoliberalism is just that: An ideology. Ideologies are powerful things, rarely appearing haphazardly but instead, through the creation of the production or articulation of relationships, goals that exist in order to foster Gramsci's (1992) notion of ideological consensus and hegemony. Cultural hegemony

²⁷ Globally, rather than steering society toward a utopian ideal, the Neoliberal project has instead proven to be a strategy to reinforce traditional structures that have historically maintained control over wealth and power. This is the “strong arm” that can work to enforce the international order of capital channels, but also – and perhaps more importantly - through cultural and hegemonic control apparatuses that either maintain structures of power worldwide or tilt the power disparity in favor of the already powerful. Indeed, the evidence seen so far seems to confirm that the role of the Neoliberal agenda does not seem to be as much utopian for all as it is utopian for some.

works as a series of articulations as the product of design, efforts, goals, and logic, whether domination of a population is an explicitly realized goal or not.

This is the question that critical theorists grapple with constantly: How does the discourse and action of the powerful convince the masses to understand their world in a way that maintains power relationships? Or, in other words, how do people believe things that are against their own best interest? Ideology is one answer to this question²⁸, but the way in which this concept functions at the intersection of a media text as a commodity and cultural form are tactics that have proven to be much more subtle. This is particularly true in the case of popular musical forms.

Rethinking Culture and Dollars: Music as a Commodity Form

Yet for this discussion of the neoliberal project's adherence to the monetization of everything in the name of both financial and political goals, it is important to look to the role of culture in this process. This is for two reasons. First, if this movement's dogmatic belief in markets is indeed applied to the cultural realm, then it is important to distinguish the way in which popular music functions economically as a commodified cultural form, and second, if the movement's political goals are increasingly achieved through the articulation of cultural norms, then it is even more important to understand the way in which political ends exist through the cultivation of a nonthreatening cultural politics of music.

Like so many dynamics of control that are deeply embedded in the hegemonic structures of culture, music is woven into the flows of every aspect of everyday life, yet for its ubiquity, the

²⁸ As we shall see in Chapter Seven, the contemporary understanding of power (particularly in explaining the strategies of governance of the global Neoliberal movement) cannot fully be explained by ideology alone. A more complex model is needed to explain a more complex arrangement of power through language, the articulation of ideas, discourse, and everyday life.

political ramifications of this cultural form are rarely openly realized (Hesmondhalgh, 2002).

The structures that the powerful establish are what make the social actions and motivations as often the cultivated strategy that keeps power relationships static with the powerful and the weak in place, beyond simply actions or beliefs. It is a tricky process to document, as much of the time this power relationship works not through a distinct machination of back-room dealings but instead simply through the logic of capital, of unequal social functioning, of cultural hegemonic practices (Green, 1999; Volgsten, 2006).

Yet it is real, as are the class interests of those who wield power, and looking at the way in which this dominant order maintains control through music can equally provide possibilities for resistance by using music as a tool of insurrection. As Cohen (2008) states, “It is not only nationalists and warriors who marshal music’s resources” (p. 27).

In a sense, this debate can provide an overarching framework to explore the intersection of politics and music. The study the politics of culture in general is often looked as in a somewhat dichotomous relationship – working for control or working for liberation – yet this is too rooted in a bipolar fallacy while ignoring the somewhat murky conclusions over the wide range of values that encompass of the whole of popular music, whether the object of study is a platinum-selling megastar or a politically charged hip-hop crew out of Brooklyn. The structures of popular music encompass a wide range of lyrical, musical, and aesthetic content: There may be apolitical music, but even in the absence of overt political content, a politics is there (Balliger, 1999; Martin, 2006). And of the many ways in which this process can occur, it is among the most subtle that exists in popular music: The logic of capitalist production and distribution of cultural forms reinforces dominant structures through the absence of threats to those structures.

Popular Music and Social Control: The Culture and Consciousness Industries

Yet in viewing cultural forms as a tool along a long continuum of power relations from domination to liberation, then how are we to look at popular music in this relationship? As a consumer good? As ideological manipulation? As art? As discourse?

Responding to the advent of new media and new state structures in the post- World War II era, a group of researchers would pioneer an approach that would later manifest itself into what we know today as critical theory. The Frankfurt School, comprised primarily of Marxist theorists who had fled to America from Europe during World War II, were driven to find an answer to the question of why its massive working class that was not seeing equal benefits from the rationalization of capital structures in the pre- and post-war era had not developed an oppositional project. By focusing its attention on the way in which mass consumption affected mass culture (particularly as a result of mass media), the Frankfurt School's common conclusions were that these structures produced subjects that were docile and consented to their own domination, more focused on the consumption of goods than the well being of their society or their own lives.

Though several of the Frankfurt School would write on the political potentials of culture, the specific focus on popular media was perhaps articulated most effectively better than by Theodor Adorno:

In failing culture, [those searching for truth] compel conclusions about the way culture has failed mankind, and about what the world has made of mankind. The contradiction between the freedom of art and the gloomy diagnoses regarding the use of such freedom – this contradiction is not one of reality, not just of the

consciousness that analyzes reality so as to make some small contribution to change. (1976, p. 20)

Adorno's world, though positively gloomy at times, is one that as a central theme focused on the possibility in culture and art for human liberation from oppressive power structures, but more commonly upon the way in which this possibility is most often squandered through the logics of capitalism and political control in the consumption of cultural and material goods. His two main works on the subject, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (1976) and, with Max Horkheimer, *The Culture Industry* (1972), share a common and important theme in that they argue that modern culture (notably in his discussion of popular music) cannot be adequately understood when separated from the political and economic conditions in which it is produced²⁹.

The 'culture industry', the way in which political manipulation works through cultural forms, through the business processes that produce standardized, mass-produced commodities, in order to restrict human freedom. They state:

The categorical imperative of the culture industry no longer has anything in common with freedom. It proclaims: you shall conform, without instructions as to what; conform to what exists anyway, and to that which anyone thinks

²⁹ Indeed, Adorno's critique of culture is notoriously difficult in providing a framework of just exactly what it is that we're *supposed* to like. In particular, his critique of jazz rubs a number of people the wrong way. After all, if he is advocating for the originality of music, of the hubris and soul being expressed through original and meaningful compositions that arose on the margins of industrial production, what better form than jazz to incorporate these traits? However, the jazz Adorno was discussing has largely been interpreted to be the 'popular' swing jazz of the time, rooted largely in a classical tradition, recorded and easily commodified for largely white audiences, rather than the largely African-American jazz tradition that would dominate much of the post-war years. Leppert (2002) argues that such artists as Theolonius Monk, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and others all met Adorno's qualifications for "progressive" music, unlike the "mass" music of the big-band era swing groups. Despite Leppert's claim that these relationships are complicated – particularly by citing the fact that much-reviled saxophonist Kenny G got his start playing with Barry White in his funk era *Love Unlimited Orchestra* - attempts to answer what sorts of music Adorno would approve of in this age of postmodern musical styles are for the most part speculative.

anyway is a reflex of its power and omnipresence. The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness. (1963, p.90, in Martin, 2006, p. 60)

Music, then, becomes central to understanding the constitution of both subjects' affective responses and political potentials (Middleton, 1999). The banal, the uninspired, the rote musical forms that Adorno argues pander to commercial interests, imitating and duplicating mass tastes, in fact lower the consciousness of the listener, encouraging docile and idle "consumption of trash" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 50). As this happens, music is produced as a commodity for mass consumption, thereby contributing to the cultural norms of consumption as virtuous while discouraging individuality and encouraging conformity: Standardization and commodification of this cultural form leads to not only a lack of diversity and creativity in music but also the domination of the masses through cultural forms that reinforce the dominant ideology, creating what Jhally (1989) would theoretically cleave into a coordinated ideology-maintaining consciousness industry and a capital-driven, commodified culture industry. Culturally, this idea is intricately tied in with both of these concepts through the politics of production in the popular music. Adorno states:

In the mechanical rigor of [music's] repetition, the functions copied by the rhythm are themselves identical with those of the production processes which robbed the individual of his original bodily functions. The function of music is ideological not only because it hoodwinks people with an irrationality that allegedly has no power over the discipline of their existence. It is ideological also because it makes that irrationality resemble the models of rationalized labor. What people hope to escape from will not let them go. Their free time is spent

dozing, merely reproducing their working energies; it is a time overshadowed by that reproduction. The consumed music indicates that there is no exit from the total immanence of society. (1976, p. 52)

The full intertwining of music with social conflict allows for a control mechanism from within, a “source of false consciousness...without the planners’ intent or the consumers’ knowledge” (1976, p. 55).

And here, we begin to see the way in which cultural hegemony functions through musical forms. In a sense, we can look to the way in which a musical group or solo performer that is commercially viable knows how to be a successful. That is, the way in which they are *made*. While it is wonderful to think that the role of rock star is a meritocracy of the most talented individuals being the most successful, any look at the Billboard charts will tell you that this is not the case. Instead, the cultivated dictates of what is and is not acceptable in order to get radio airplay, to have a record deal, to get a record released, are all issues are firmly engrained in the collective consciousness in the history of popular music and the popular music industry. The great number of non-threatening teen starlets and boy bands singing inert pop music with multi-million dollar marketing behind them is perhaps the best testament to the depths to which this notion is embraced by the mainstream.

In the end, ideological control read through Adorno and Horkheimer comes back to their central thesis: Mass production breeds mass deception. Consciousness is replaced with conformity, and the celebratory, spiritual, and individualistic music that existed prior to the age of mass production and mass commodification could no longer serve the purpose in human society as it once did (Green, 1999).

Rather, as came standardized cultural products, so too came rationalized populations:

The principal function of popular music was to affirm the values and normative patterns of mass society and thus to reconcile the ‘humming millions’ to their existence as works and, increasingly, consumers; in filling people’s heads with simple tunes and escapist fantasies, it inculcated an ideological acceptance of, and an unquestioning obedience to, the status quo, while concealing the exploitation and mystification on which it was based. (Martin, 2006, pp. 60-61)

Material Enforcement, A Counterbalanced Reaction, and Possibilities of Emancipation

Not surprisingly, Adorno’s critique of music has itself been much criticized over the years³⁰, and its conclusions provides a less-than-nuanced answer when applied to today’s questions given the current understanding of power relations. However, the reason that his work on music is still so widely read is that it is imminently sensible in its critique, its basic claims of the mass commercialization of culture, albeit stopping something short of its attempts at a totality of a somewhat reductionist modernist approach and strict Marxist dialecticism. Even Adorno and Horkheimer, for all their glum predictions, acknowledge that the possibility exists for the use of culture as a libratory tool for the human condition, a way to break the chains of the culture industry and provide a way out of Marx’s false consciousness, although through a relatively conservative view of what constitutes productive music.

³⁰ Grossberg (1997) provides a concise summation of these critiques “Adorno, like other modernists, sees art as a transcendental, autonomous activity capable of utopian criticism. His definition of art, however, is derived from a particular historical moment which is then generalized into a universal measure. Thus the “standardization” of popular music is defined by comparison to the harmonic and structural complexity of the “canon.” He ignores other normative measures – such as rhythmic complexity, timbre, texture, and so on – which may give different aesthetic conclusions. Further, he ignores the conventionality of all cultural forms – based in the specificity of signifying practices – which would make the judgement of individuality and creativity a problematic matter of degree and local judgement” (p. 394). Also see Frith, 1996; Green, 1999; Middleton, 1990

Music is a strong form of ideological ammunition, and in the broad range of tactics and strategies (straightforward or covert, knowing or unknowing), history has shown more than a few examples of the power of music as a political weapon in negotiating different forces of power (Boti & Guy, 2003; Fischlin, 2003; Green, 1999). Music's special status as a political agent is different from other cultural forms, be they television, film, print, or otherwise. David Byrne of the Talking Heads should know:

For at its best, music truly is subversive and dangerous. Thank the gods. Hearing the right piece of music at the right time of your life can inspire a radical change, destructive personal behavior, or even fascist politics. Sometimes all at the same time.

On the other hand, music can inspire love, religious ecstasy, cathartic release, social bonding, and a glimpse of another dimension. A sense that there is another time, another space and another, better, universe. It can heal a broken heart, offer a shoulder to cry on and a friend when no one else understands. There are times when you want to be transported, to get your mind around some stuff it never encountered before. (Byrne, 1999)

Yet if the qualities of music that through a solid backbeat or catchy chorus can move people affectively, this movement can also be used as a primary transmitter, certainly of ideological manipulation but also, and perhaps more importantly, of emancipatory potentials. More formally, Strandberg (2006) describes this process:

Music has a special way of getting past the 'bouncers' of the human unconscious. This seems very paradoxical in many ways. In contrast to visual or linguistic messages, instrument music lacks any obvious 'content'. While you

can always argue about the contents of a text – and thus offer a contrary position – in the case of music, there are no words to oppose; it is mainly feelings, and you cannot argue against them on rational ground. (p. x)

With this in mind, there are new opportunities for the study of music throughout the various areas that media studies (and other fields) explores: Popular music can no longer be viewed simply as a soundtrack the societal event.

For instance, one cannot separate the countercultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, the leftist turn of the U.S., the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, the United Kingdom, and so forth, from the music that was happening at the time, nor can one distinguish the African-American experience of the fight for civil rights as separate from music (Boti & Guy, 2003; Fischlin, 2003; Kaufman, 2009). Throughout these and countless other movements, progressive or regressive, the social movements of these eras are remembered through in no better way than through their art, and in this art, no better way than through their music (Hesmondhalgh & Negus, 2002a). After all, this dissent was *countercultural* in nature, and the media that distribute music have historically had the most potential for pushing a message into the public sphere, raising the consciousness of the public to look critically at their world for themselves. This idea – critical consciousness – is the:

impulse and willingness to stand back from humanity and nature, to make them objects of thought and criticism, and to search for their meaning and significance – ‘to see life steadily, and see it whole,’ as Matthew Arnold put it, instead of remaining enslaved to custom, tradition, superstition, nature, or the brute force of political or priestly elites. (Thornton, 2005, pp. 3-4)

Critical consciousness is necessarily shaped by the roles of music through its potential to challenge, celebrate, and advance the human experience through its social obligation toward all of humanity, using creativity as a way of bringing social progress through the expansion of what is a liberatory consciousness – through progressive musical forms rather than regressive (Attali, 1985). Music can function as both enlightenment through not only re-thinking ones perspective, but also through educating about material events:

Under social conditions in which sustained frontal attacks on powerful groups are strategically unwise or successfully contained, oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion...These cultural responses to oppression are not safety valves that protect and sustain the machines of oppression. Quite to the contrary, these dances, languages, and musics produce communal bases of knowledge about social conditions, communal interpretations of them and quite often serve as the cultural glue that fosters communal resistance (Rose, 1994, pp. 99-100).

Clearly, the role that music plays as a political organizer cannot be understated. And if doubts persist in the mind of the public over the possibilities inherent in music as a tool of social organization, the threat that these possibilities hold in uprooting organizations of power is by no means lost on the powerful.

Threat Mitigation: Social Control through the Creation of Silence

If music is a powerful force for social change, it is interesting to examine the reasons why there are so few times in history where there have been identifiable musical insurgencies. Or perhaps in looking at the issue from the opposite perspective, how are musical threats to the

status quo dealt with by those who are currently in power? In terms of social control of subjects via musical forms, the powerful rarely fade quietly into the will of the people. The attack or restriction on messages that are counter to those in power through both overt, physical force and through market mechanisms as a logic of capital have acted in concert in order to generate a tension of control and resistance.

The control of musicians who represent Attali's (1985) concept of *noise* – “a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission” (p. 26) – that is, those who offer a disruption to the commercial, political, or social order that has benefited those who are in positions to benefit from that order's stability - these are the threats to the system that are controlled (Fischlin, 2003). In terms of formal censorship, this traditionally happens in one of four ways.

The first, and the most violent, is through the imprisonment, harassment, or even murder of artists who are using music as an oppositional form. Boti & Guy (2003) provide several examples:

Musicians all over the world have been censored, imprisoned, and even assassinated because they were seen as representing a threat to the powers-that-be. In Chile, the Pinochet dictatorship tortured and murdered singer/guitarist Victor Jara...; In Nigeria, singer Fela Kuti spent years in jail because of his open criticism of the corrupt ruling system; in Algeria, in the midst of religious tension, the Kabil singer Lounes was killed by unknown assassins; in 1972, Uruguayan *cancionista* Daniel Viglietti, famous for his pro-indigene *Cancion para mi America* was imprisoned by the military dictatorship – and all around the world, wherever protest occurs, sound and its repression are in constant tension. (p. 69)

Yet while the clampdown through the threat of force toward musical artist whose work incorporates a subversive message is a particularly powerful one, as a strategy of governance, it is not very efficient, and the violence that is involved in a physical clampdown on musicians can often have unintended effects³¹.

The second form of formal social control through music is state censorship, also a particularly effective form of silencing dissent and opposition. Through the legislation of cultural policy, states often seek to keep stable the order of power, often by appeals to national identity or to values that do not upset the dominant ideology, a practice that Balliger (1999) raises as problematic “because nation-states usually lack homogeneity on the basis of race, lass, religion, or political ideology” (p. 58).

There are countless examples. In the United States, the Federal Communication Commission’s censorship guidelines on indecency and obscenity prevents a number of truly free speech situations via mediated communication, and perhaps most famously, the hearings held by the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) in the 1980s that suggested the labeling or banning of music that held “objectionable content”³². The German Nazi Party’s ministry of culture

³¹ Fela Kuti, for example, became a martyr of sorts due to his constant harassment and the 1977 violence on he and his followers, including the murder of his colleagues, and defenestration of his mother, and destruction of his living and recording complex (notably, all of his musical instruments and master tapes were intentionally destroyed in the raid) Johnson (2000). The public outcry only made him more powerful, and Kuti would only build on his popularity in his fight for social justice against the corrupt Nigerian military government, ultimately leading to his founding the Movement of the People party the following year, and maintaining his insurgent status as a political hero of the people, a legacy that despite his 1993 death continues today.

³² The PMRC’s tactics were the latest in a long tradition of banning music as a moral panic through both state and social pressures. Early race records were censored on white radio based on “moral standards.” Link Wray’s 1958 *Rumble*, despite being instrumental, was banned on radio stations for fear that it would spark teenage riots. Ice-T’s *Cop Killer* was pulled from shelves and radio airplay in 1992. Marilyn Manson, among the most famous cases in the 1990s, was often barred from playing live in certain communities, in addition to community pressures against the sale of his music. The list is endless.

disallowed any “degenerate” music that did not fit into the ideals of the new German State, including most Jewish composers and all “negro music” and “swing bands (“Music Approved of by the Third Reich,” n.d.; “Music: Nazi System - TIME,” n.d.)³³. Che Guevara purportedly banned Western Jazz and Rock music as ‘imperialist’ music (Fontova, 2007).

The third form of formal social control is tied together in corporate and market censorship, a phenomenon particularly present in radio and retail outlets. Market censorship parallels the previously mentioned Culture Industry argument: The dictates of the marketplace, the treatment of culture as a commodity and the inherent appeal to economies of scale, will lead to a standardization of cultural forms that will neither threaten the status quo or the well-established industrial product. This is particularly true when it comes to the challenging of artistic conventions, as McChesney (2004) describes these contradictions in terms:

For artists, music is the most accessible of the popular arts because the capital required for good music is minimal compared with the outlay typically necessary to produce a good movie. Three people in a garage can record the greatest rock and roll CD of all time. Yet the corporate system does a dreadful job of exploiting this characteristic to the public’s benefit. The irony is that the four firms that now dominate popular music production and distribution worldwide now seem unable to generate original and compelling popular music. Most of the great movements in popular music have rise outside the corporate

³³ Although interestingly enough in the discussion of the affective power of music, any non-Jewish person who demonstrated a “genius” for music and was a member of the Reich Music Chamber was allowed to continue composing and performing (or allowed to have their work continue to be composed) in what “create a balance between censorship and creativity in music to appease the German people,” as well as to allow Hitler and Goebbels’ composers – Beethoven, Wagner, and Bruckner in particular - that represented “good German music” (“Music Approved by the Third Reich,” 2005).

music system, in inner-city neighborhoods, garages, small towns, and campuses. But the music giants cannot leave well enough alone: competitive pressures demand that they attempt to engineer the creative process as much as possible to ensure commercial success (p. 196-7)

But where these practices become especially problematic is when corporate censorship targets political speech, a process that can be much more intentionally direct. Functioning as a gatekeeper of popular culture, content censorship is the practice whereby retailers will refuse to stock album that does not meet some criteria, most often lyrical or artistic content that is deemed to be offensive on some given standard. Notable in this practice is Wal-Mart (including Sam's Club and Walmart.com), the world's second-largest record retailer behind the all-digital iTunes (Beaumont, 2008), as part of its "family-friendly" image does not carry any record that contains the "Parental Advisory Warning" sticker administered by the PMRC (McChesney, 2004). The complications to the free speech situation here are obvious, but the corporate dictates on what will and will not be carried subject consumers in many areas where Wal-Mart is the only music retailer (particularly with the closure of most local record stores in the past ten years) come from the limiting of the full range of expressions, ideas, and values that are represented in the racks. The company's official policy on music even states it forthrightly, "Wal-Mart may refuse to stock music merchandise that may not seem appropriate" (Walmart, 2009)³⁴.

³⁴ 'Appropriate' here can mean several things. Nirvana's 1993 *In Utero* was forced to change the song title of "Rape Me" to "Waif Me" and change the back cover art because Wal-Mart objected to the depiction of fetuses. It also means that artists' music does not criticize Wal-Mart itself. Sheryl Crow's 1996 self-titled album was rejected based on the lyrics to the song "Love is a Good Thing": "Watch out sister/Watch out brother/Watch our children as they kill each other/with a gun they bought at the Wal-Mart discount stores" (Harper, 2004).

Wal-Mart accounts for approximately 10% of the music sales in the United States, and artistically, musicians are faced with a compromising choice: Cut a version of the album to the dictates of Wal-Mart or lose as much as 10% of record sales (McChesney, 2004). Obviously, the labels do not want to affect their bottom line based on artistic merit, and often special editions of albums will be released solely for Wal-Mart stores that contain edited versions of songs, lyrics, and album artwork. Artists are encouraged to stay away from potentially offensive or politically divisive subjects. After Wal-Mart's rejection of their 2009 *21st Century Breakdown* album, an album of scathing critique on contemporary mass-produced culture, Green Day drummer Tre Cool discusses the problem:

If you think about bands that are struggling or smaller than Green Day ... to think that to get your record out in places like that, but they won't carry it because of the content and you have to censor yourself....I mean, what does that say to a young kid who's trying to speak his mind making a record for the first time? It's like a game that you have to play. ("Green Day lashes out at Wal-Mart's policy," 2009, n.p.)

Less formally, Hoffman (1997) in a telling quote, recounts a Wal-Mart clerk's response when asked why they don't stock certain CDs, "It's a family store...We don't carry other things that might bother people."

What these three control mechanisms – state oppression, state censorship, and corporate censorship - share is that they are easily identifiable formality in their tactics. They are the result of decisions to be made, overt strategies to be undertaken. Formal censorship, while often valuable as a tool of social control in maintaining a static order of power, is most effectively used as a strategy of last resort.

Rather, it is more effective to cultivate a population that a) does not produce music that represents a true threat to the dominant order or b) does not demand music that incorporates a truly revolutionary potential. This is most effectively done through the fourth method of social control through musical forms in the nurturing of certain and specific ways of life in subjects that beget a culture that in its everyday actions contributes to its own docility. This idea is Foucault's concept of *biopolitical production*, the way that knowledge begets other knowledge as a strategy of governance, and it is the central focus of the next chapter.

Concluding Thoughts

Today, the role of music in constituting dominance, as well as opening up space for resistance, is at a crossroads, certainly domestically in the United States but particularly in a global sense, a concept that will be shown by empirically looking at the case studies in the later chapters of this dissertation as the argument develops over the next several chapters. As communication researchers, the blind spot of the political nature of music is of prime importance, not only because it is expressive of struggle and dissent in a way that few other media are, but more so due to the fact that as disparate struggles of the world become increasingly well connected through the rise of new flows of information and power, the shared cultural forms of the poor and oppressed will be the forefront of the battles for ideological resources, locally, nationally, and globally.

Our current system of media leaves much to be desired in terms of our democracy, our society, and ourselves, as the role of neoclassical economics and neoliberalism in driving the policies and economies of our world has seen a dramatic increase in recent years. This is particularly troubling as we see the rise of culture being central as both an ideological and

economic tool in the control of populations. As evidence of the tenacity of its use as a tool of control, one needs look no further than the way in which the democratic function of communication is most often treated as a issue of business, not an issue of human freedom, not as a central underpinning of a healthy democracy. Arguments over what is good for business in the global media industry is the most often extent of the scope of debate on the issue, and little external discussion of the way in which these structures and practices play a part in the larger question of not only the production and reproduction of culture but instead of who is benefiting from the control of this very culture.

Indeed, the exceptional argument of the social and moral implications of the current structure is most often rejected with a litany of dismissals that range from anti-business to socialistic to anti-American, perhaps as a testimony to the tenacity of the pro-capitalist ideology that has been fostered over so many decades by privately held media outlets. Yet the general public is rarely happy with the media that they receive, and the increasing corporatization of public and private life under neoliberalism that results from this is a common theme of complaint.

Those who live as have-nots in our society have even more to gain from the rejection of corporate control of media – particularly in the global flows of the culture of the dominant elite - and one would hope that the realization that acceptance of the current state of media yields a poor media system and dysfunctional democracy would spread, but until the public is able to understand that the production of culture is driven by these forces, the possibility of change and a true enacting of human agency remains an elusive goal.

CHAPTER 3:
EVERYDAY CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS:
DOES MUSIC SET US FREE OR OTHERWISE?

In this chapter, I tackle the thorny issue of the cultural politics of music as an issue related to the social control of populations. To this point, I have discussed the context with which we can place such issues as globalization and global capitalism, music and power, music and political agency. The next step in this progression is to set off on a path of exploration, a tying together of the various structures and systems in the cultural realm that provide a model for how power is constituted and exercised in the postmodern era. To do this, I narrow the discussion from the previous chapter, looking at the ways in which these structures impact the individual and the ways in which meaning is articulated through individual practices. In a sense, this very path – the focus of this chapter – is to explore the question of what negotiations of power exist through popular music, how are they today exercised as symbolic capital, and by what means? In other words, can music set us free?

The thesis of this chapter – that neoliberal governance occurs increasingly through an articulation of cultural forms as a supplanting of traditional, non-cultural governing mechanisms – is based upon three positions:

- First, culture is central to the articulation of everyday life,
- Second, these articulations are inherently political: Postmodern governing mechanisms function primarily (though not exclusively) through the articulation of everyday life, that is to say, the cultivation of certain and specific subjectivities through cultural forms,

- Third, popular music is a particularly unique and effective form of social governance, yet these same unique properties allow the potential for an equally effective politics of resistance.³⁵

There is a long history of the using various tactics and technologies of control to uphold the dominant order of power, and the present is different only in the strategies used in this regard. The rise of new ways of thinking about power and the way it is exercised has presented new places, new sites, for the articulation of cultural meaning. Yet it is perhaps useful in exploring this idea to use a hypothetical, imagining the perfect world the politically or economically powerful would wish for in order to maintain dominance. Particularly in terms of popular music forms, one can ask what strategies of consciousness shaping and economic practices would emerge in this idealized world?

There are several ways of looking at this question. Economically speaking, we would see what we have seen in many media industries: Oligopoly control over production, gatekeeping privileges over distribution, high barriers of entry into markets, a dearth of competitive product or market innovation, a generalized state sanctioning of anti-competitive practices, and a tacit collusion between the state and private enterprises to conservatively establish and vigorously protect intellectual property rights³⁶.

Politically, the answers are not as easy to come by. Frankfurt School arguments notwithstanding, evidence supporting the establishment of a docile and consumerist public is

³⁵ These terms are risky: There is a lot of intellectual heft that is present in these words, and from a good number of often-contradictory positions, or articulations of concepts that are less than universally agreed upon. ‘Culture’, for example, is perhaps among one of the most contested terms in this field of study. With this in mind, this chapter will explicate when necessary within the scope of this dissertation topic.

³⁶ These issues will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

much less explicitly identifiable in terms of social control than in the economic. Yet evidence exists all the same, elusive though it might be, for the neoliberal project has increasingly worked through the politicization of cultural forms and articulations of everyday life as a central strategy of governance. As such, there are two central claims of this chapter as I explore the processes of cultural governance: First, that the practice of social control is a question of cultural agency within a framework of production and distribution of cultural forms, and secondly, that this framework has shifted in recent years from the approach the popular music form as a commodity to instead a negotiation of rights and power.

On this practice, there are three areas in particular that merit attention and provide a roadmap for the argument of this chapter. I argue that the conceptualizations of governance through cultural forms are increasingly seen in the exercise of power in our everyday lives, and the questions raised by examining the sites of cultural production – music, in this instance – present many possibilities, both troubling in terms of the exploitation of subjects, and promising in terms of liberatory potential.

Following this, I discuss the present state of global power as exercised through music industry structures through the lens of cultural governance. I address the technologies and practices of social control that have emerged in recent years and the implications to musical expression but, more importantly, the consequences to human freedom through the articulation of discourses, knowledge, and practices that work to uphold the existing social order.

But before addressing these two issues, it is first important to understand the complicated negotiations of power that exist in at the intersection of the postmodern conceptualization of that problematic term – culture - particularly in light of my previous discussion of globalization, network structures, and emerging technology. It is at this point that this chapter enters.

Thinking about Culture, Contextualizing the Political

Raymond Williams, for all his insight into our understanding of the subject, was so frustrated by the complicated, contradictory, amorphous nature of that word *culture*, that even he held regrets: “I wish I had never heard the damned word!” (Williams, 1979, p. 154, in Bennett, 2005a, p. 63). Indeed, recent years have seen the already-complicated idea of culture has become ever more so. While this is not to say that problematizing this notion was ever an trouble-free undertaking, the commonly understood idea of culture - at its most broad, the symbolic assignment of meaning – when looked at as a whole is so expansive and so overused that the complexity of what exactly constitutes this idea can obscure the actual analyses of cultural texts, themselves (Frow & Morris, 2000).

As such, history has given us not simply one concept of culture but instead has given us cultures, ideas that are often in contestation with one another as the term has been appropriated by a variety of disciplines that do not always yield an agreeable definition (Williams, 1983a). Culture has been explained as a number of different concepts – high/low cultures, folk cultures, mass cultures, gay culture, Arab culture, cyberculture, and infinitely on (Bennett , 2005a) – yet the generalized consensus in the field of cultural studies tends to fall into one of two perspectives. First, as a standard of cultural excellence, and secondly, as “way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group” (Bennett, 2005a, p. 80)³⁷. Obviously, these definitions of culture only overlap in certain regards, and there are fundamental contradictions that cannot be resolved

³⁷ I acknowledge that this is a woefully brief discussion of this topic, but a full discussion of the varying conceptualizations and definitions of culture would take (and has taken) volumes, well beyond the scope of this dissertation. These are interesting debates – particularly in the move from the late modern to the postmodern era – that are generally worth reading. For more on the differing perspectives on culture, see Bennett, 2005a; Calhoun, 2003; S. Hall, 277; Miller, 2001; Williams, 1979, 1983a, 1983b.

with the way that these concepts are generally articulated. Culture is, as Clifford (1998) states, “a deeply compromised idea that we cannot yet do without” (p. 10).

Yet there is fundamentally *something* there. It is a paradox: When examined as a whole, the idea becomes so broad as to become less than useful in the analysis of humanity’s beliefs, values, practices, and traditions, yet it fundamentally captures a notion of human expression for which there is no other explanation.

This complication is particularly present in the cultural analysis of musical forms. Indeed, in the academy’s understanding the connection between musical and culture, the two terms are often conflated, so often assumed as one in the same expression of the human experience that, as Middleton (1990, p. 158) states, some of the best-known accounts of youth culture and subcultures have in fact very little to say about music in the first place (in Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p. 117).

While global expansion of an ordering of power has been not only political but also economic, recent theoretical shifts looking at the way in which power flows through the infinitely connected web of peoples throughout the globe have recognized the increasing tendency of *culture* becoming the means through which power – political, economic, and otherwise - is exercised. Yet if modern developments on new articulations of cultural meaning and new technologies of cultural transmission have increasingly been the site of a new power dynamic, then it is of utmost importance to understand what this concept entails. This is particularly the case in understanding the current constitution of popular music forms and in embracing new conceptualizations of cultural politics. *When everyday life has become fundamentally politicized, then the everyday becomes a site of ideological struggle.*

The Rhythms of the Day-to-Day: Music and the Articulation of Everyday Life

The study of the everyday lived experiences of peoples can at times be elusive. Finding conclusions that are encompassing enough to bound the broad range of human experiences and expressions while at the same time containing the depth necessary for an adequate and fair representation of the ways in which humans understand their reality is indeed not approached lightly (Bennett , 2005a).

The solution to resolving this conundrum, and indeed the usefulness of addressing the question of the uses of culture in this dissertation, is a rethinking of both constitution and of scope. To break down culture into its constitutive parts, to create appropriate boundaries to the approach is to identify the aspects that compliment the research approach, while at the same time acknowledging the general comprehension of the concept as a whole (Frow & Morris, 2000). This is especially of importance when attempting to document the postmodern shift that has resulted in an erasure of the lines between the political and the cultural. It is as Grossberg (1997) states:

If cultural studies is interested in context as structures and milieus of power, if it is interested in the articulations between cultural practices and the noncultural, if understanding the cultural requires understanding everything that is not cultural, then any cultural studies project must transgress the institutionalized boundaries of the disciplinary organization of questions and answers (p. 144).

Particularly in political terms, when discussing the postmodern exercise of power and its often slippery nature in globalized and deterritorialized cultural space, it is necessary to develop a new way of thinking about both the nature and role of culture in everyday life.

The concept of everyday life (or, the everyday) is fraught with an incredibly wide variety of understandings³⁸, but at its heart is what Felski (1999) calls “the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds...synonymous with the habitual, the ordinary, and the mundane...it is also strangely elusive, that which resists our understanding and escapes our grasp” (p. 15, in Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p. 120). The value in looking to the ordinary everyday life is that it is often the most mundane of society that is deepest in the underlying processes that codify the social order. What Lefèbvre (1971) calls the “rhythms of everyday life” is an analytical tool that can be used to explore the way in which social actions and values are embedded in larger structures. Such things such as desires, self-care and health, opinions and beliefs, discourse and articulation, these all are far from free of power relations but are instead rooted in historical context that can be examined in order to make grander conclusions about the functioning of society. Perhaps the best definition of the term – and the one that I use in this dissertation – can be found in Bourdieu's (2000) thrifty definition, “the social order [that] inscribes itself in bodies” (p. 141).

Bourdieu’s definition is particularly useful in the analyzing and contextualizing popular music and everyday life. In many ways, the study of music and the everyday has often been a

³⁸ ‘Everyday life’ is a problematic yet useful phrase. Assuming that there is some sort of life “out there” to be examined, to be a source of data collection, to be observed implicitly assumes a value judgement: The ‘everyday life’ or ‘ordinary people’ argument fundamentally assumes a degree of difference, a value judgement that creates an ‘other’ that lives outside of a different set of values (Highmore, 2002). Furthermore, the everyday risks the danger of lending itself too far in social critique in some sort of celebration of “the repressed echoes of earlier more authentic forms of social existence in which transcendent values allegedly imbued the rhythms of daily life” (Bennett , 2005b, p. 116). While acknowledging these critiques, I take the position that the everyday is both more nuanced and more complicated than any of these perspectives, and that the processes everyday life lend themselves to neither a fundamentally liberatory or repressive structure but instead a network of flows of power that can be used in many ways for many purposes. For more on the everyday in general, see Bennett , 2005b; Certeau, 1984; Felski, 1999; Fiske, 1992; Gardiner & NetLibrary, 2000; Lefèbvre, 1971. For more on the everyday and music, see DeNora, 2002; Frith, 2003; Hesmondhalgh, 2002.

study of the mundane. The role that music has in the lives of members of any given culture is one that is often taken for granted. One does not have to look far to find a multitude of uses of music in our daily lives: As a soundtrack to moments in our lives, a sonic environment space-filler, a companion for the lonely, a shopping tool, a celebration of community, an anthem to affective or social change, or the many other uses of music with equally many motivations (Sterne, 2003). Most everyone, regardless of place or time, has had music that has spoken to the soul, times both good and bad remembered through song, and those occurrences in our day-to-day lives are events that signify meaning connected to non-musical events, whether affective or material.

Notwithstanding a number of 1960s rock critics' musings on the subject, the role of music on political subjectivities took on new relevance as part of the academy's cultural turn in the 1970s. Most literature on the musical and the everyday has been centered around the subcultural experience, although as Hesmondhalgh (2002) points out, there is very little discussion of music that actually occurs in much of this work and is instead focused on the idea of subculture as a stylistic articulation of difference³⁹. Regardless, these works cleared a path for the integration of music into the subject of the mundane as the first generation of scholars came of age who had been raised in the rock era, a time characterized by a diminishing line between mediated and non-mediated worlds to simply end up with the unified concept of the everyday.

Biopolitical Production: Culture as a Strategy of Governance

³⁹ See Williams (1983b) for perhaps the most notable example of this. For critique of this (and critique of the often-unrealized conflation of youth culture and music culture), see Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Middleton, 2003; Weinstein, 1999.

Yet the question remains: How has everyday life been appropriated to political ends? How are inequitable social structures created, maintained, and reproduced, and what are the implications of this practice? It is one often overlooked, and the easy oversight of the mundane is particularly relevant when examining the integration of the political into the routines of everyday life. Certainly, debates over social reproduction and structure versus agency have long been argued from both perspectives and on each point of the continuum between the formerly bipolar axes, yet the fundamental question – what are the forces by which our reality, our actions, motives, and values are articulated – is still at the root of every social theorist’s exploration. For Foucault, the question lies in the exercise of power through cultural forms that determine the production of certain subjectivities, certain ways of being, through a strategy of governance: Biopolitics.

Biopolitics (or biopolitical production) first arose in Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* as biopower, the “ explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (1990, p. 140). Though a complicated term used with a nuanced difference between its primary theorists, Giroux (2006) provides a concise definition of what these authors share:

[Biopolitics is] an attempt to think through the convergence of life and politics, locating matters of life and death within our ways of thinking about and imagining politics. Central here is the task of reformulating the meaning of politics and how it functions within the contemporary moment to regulate matters of life and death, and, in turn, how such issues are intimately related to both the articulation of community and the social, and the regulation, care and development of human life. Within this discourse, politics is no longer

understood exclusively through a disciplinary technology centered on the individual body...the body is understood primarily as an object of power...subject to those immaterial means of production that produce ways of life that enlarge the targets of control and regulation. (p. 12-13)

Biopolitics is the development of a certain social reality driven from a perspective of values in order to cultivate a way of life that is both very material and very specific in terms of its power dynamic, regulating life from the inside. Essentially, this concept – power – is at the root of how society regulates itself in terms of its social relations through institutions, values, norms, and behaviors. Throughout the early to middle stages of modernity, cultures have moved from a society of discipline where the *dispositifs* of power that regulate behaviors and interactions through workplaces, hospitals, customs, language – ways of being – determine the power dynamic between the state and its citizens.⁴⁰

In a liberal democracy, methods of control that end with brute force do not lend themselves well to this theory of government that emphasizes the role of the individual's power of self-determination. Instead, what is needed is a regimented system of control, an internally regulated regulation that is not only unquestioned by those who live underneath its influence, it is also so incorporated into the social, cultural, and economic realms that it becomes simply the

⁴⁰ This theme would be in constant development and refinement throughout Foucault's work. *Discipline and Punish* (1977) looked at the disciplinary controls that exist in order to keep society controlled from within through looking at the prison system, the army, and educational institutions, amongst other instances. *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973) delineated the role that the establishment of standardized medical systems and the rise of modern self-discipline in terms of health consciousness. Other areas of the *History of Sexuality* series (1990; 1998; 1988) describe the way in which sexuality becomes repressed through the modern way of living and its social and cultural control mechanisms, how discipline works into our everyday lives through cultural forms. Each of these examples offers an explanation for the way that we both understand and organize our social lives, as well as our own existence within these social lives that comes as a result of practices, values, beliefs, and discourses

way things are – imbued in the everyday, the lived experience of, the way in which subjects organize and understand their reality.

In short, biopolitics represents the shift from a domineering society of the state in the liberal democracy to the controlled of the self, the treatment of society not simply as the end object of domination but instead as both the subject *and* object of control (Deleuze, 1995). Foucault, in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1997), writes,

Liberal thought starts not from the existence of the state, seeing in the government the means for attaining that end it would be for itself, but rather from society, which is in a complex relation of exteriority and interiority with respect to the state. Society, as both a precondition and a final end, is what enables one to no longer ask the question: How can one govern as much as possible and at the least possible cost? Instead, the question becomes: Why must one govern?...Instead of making the distinction between state and civil society into a historical universal that allows us to examine all the concrete systems, we can try to see it as a form of schematization characteristic of a particular technology of government. (p. 75)

What makes biopolitics such a valuable tool is that it is able to extend these ideas examined both the macro and micro views of society that govern the individual in terms of this power relationship. It is, Foucault argues, an “ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power” (1979, p. 20).

Biopolitical control is both flexible and totalizing in the creation of a sustained population that reinforces the social order, one able to produce, to defend, to contribute to that

very order's continued existence. In essence, those benefiting from the current social order articulate a certain production of knowledge and discourse through disciplinary or controlling practices, actions that govern individuals through individuals' governance of themselves. It is an ends of fostering "appropriate" cultural and social production in the citizenry.

In a sense, the machinery of humanity is the combine of gears that keep power relationships static under the present state of a society of control, fully integrated with the everyday lives of subjects. This central concept is an organizing tendency of late modernity, described by Hardt and Negri (2000) as the process through which:

mechanisms of command become every more 'democratic,' ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens. The behaviors of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are thus increasingly interiorized within he subjects themselves. Power is now exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communications systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity." (p. 23)

The role of the control of the body becomes in a sense the control of the mind through more than just the regular sites of social functioning; it becomes rule from within that is fluid, adaptive, and flexible as a framework removed from what were formal institutions of disciplining.

Consciousness, itself, in the control society becomes a technology of governance. After all, when individuals are no longer able to be free of control in their own social reality in any regard, the exercise of power both broad and wide becomes complete.

In looking at the decreasing role of the state on the world stage (and thus the changing constitution of national and global sovereignty), the rise of the transnational corporation has created a crisis in the social order of liberal democracies. As such, it is not surprising that the new neoliberal order, with all its focus on the centrality of the market, had adopted biopolitical production as a central technology of governance on a global scale. The marketplace has always derived from a question of labor, and when the market mentality is applied to the everyday lives of individuals, the immaterial labor of subjects becomes the labor of their own governance. It is the snake eating its tail: Everyday life becomes the subject and object of regulation and rule, bodies become the means and ends of governance⁴¹.

The Many Constraints on Production and Musical Agency

With this in mind, we can move to the subject of how popular music fits into this relationship, its capabilities as a technology of both control and resistance. The seeming banalization of popular music, its mundane nature in our lives, raises a central question to this dissertation: What are the possibilities inherent in fostering different negotiations of cultural politics through music? Particularly in the global problematic understanding of the exercise of power, a question that today encompasses in its very nature of differing political and economic issues when state and national borders are crossed (culturally and otherwise). It is intersecting vectors and the collision of opposing forces, yet the proper starting point in reconciling the way in which these processes work through new applications of power is through looking at the role

⁴¹ More than a few authors have noted that biopolitical production – in particular, characterized by the uses of immaterial labor – is a strategy increasingly being used as tactic of neoliberalism in governing subjects. They are quite interesting arguments, albeit outside the scope of this dissertation to discuss at length. For these perspectives, see Agamben, 2005; Deleuze, 1995; Giroux, 2006; Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004; Klein, 2007.

of musical forms as an agent of change or stasis. In doing so we can look to the way in which certain subjectivities are cultivated – a process that occurs in many forms and through many strategies. Yet as with any technology of social control, these practices and belief structures are somewhat opaque. Rather than diving in headfirst to these thorny issues, it is important to first look to the possibilities inherent in the structures surrounding the music industry, the structural constraints on the way in which music is produced and distributed. And more importantly, to look away from literature and to focus more closely on the constraints of practices, technologies, and discourses that shape the way in which music is produced.

The production of music has until only very recently been a very difficult and expensive process. Traditionally, if one did not have the capital to produce a message, there was an inherent constraint on the production of music made in order for their message to be heard. Unless musical artists chose to independently distribute their music, compromises would have to be made in order to fit within the acceptable dictates of the marketplace, constructs that are rarely open to any and all messages, disregarding lyrical or musical content. It is rare for a band on a major label to be given complete creative control over their releases, whether overtly through contractual forms or more subtly through market dynamics and demands. There is neither provision nor guarantee that says that any record *must* be released or distributed.

However the emergence of new technology, while by no means deterministic, has created at least the possibility for a new musical politics to emerge. Musical agency, relatively limited in the major label era prior to the late-1990s, has increased with the rise of the network society in a way that has created at least a threat to the oligopoly on production and distribution that has been held in so few hands for the entirety of the recording industry. It represents a destabilization of production and distribution, an era unlike any ever seen previously.

In terms of changes to actual musical production, the rise of digital- and computer-based recording software has shifted down the cost of recording geometrically from the old system of magnetic tape (quite expensive even in when it was the sole recording medium), multi-track machinery and studio equipment (even more so), and costly musical instruments, so that anyone with a home computer can create music in their bedroom with minimal equipment and little training, truly a revolution in the production of new media of communication. Programs such as Garageband, included with all Apple computers, give multi-track capacities to everyone with a computer. Professional quality recording software such as ProTools or Logic can be had for several hundred dollars, and analog-to-digital computer interface boxes can be purchased for less than a hundred. CD-Rs can be burned and labels printed on home computers at little to no cost. Compared to the costs of the traditional recording studio, with a bare minimum of investment, the barriers to entry for putting one's message into a tangible form have effectively disappeared⁴². Assuming one already has the computer, a basic home studio can be had for less than the cost of one reel of 2" tape.

If the lowering cost of producing a band is decreasing with the rise of new recording technologies, it is even more so with the advent of sampling technology. The rise in the use of samplers such as the Akai MPC were instrumental in the production of hip-hop records and developed somewhat organically due to their relatively cheap production cost, allowing for the creation of a new musical form that emanated directly from the introduction of this device. It is

⁴² The rise of podcasting can be seen as an interesting parallel of music production and distribution as representative of a destabilization of the traditional form of vocal broadcast in radio. Acceptable-quality microphones are now often built in to even the cheapest of computers, and semi-professional quality studio microphones can be bought for under \$50. Whereas non-network distribution of a radio program would require training, costly licensure, recording equipment, broadcasting equipment, and such, podcasting has at least the potential to be an increasingly democratic medium of communication through changing production, distribution, and network structures.

an example of a case where technology – indeed, the creation of a new musical instrument, albeit one that does not fit the traditional notion of what a musical instrument is⁴³ – has become central to the production of a complete genre of music. There can be no hip-hop without the invention of the sampler as a fundamental element of cultural production.

Yet even more important for its implication on culture is the rise of the network society. As it has with so many other industries, the expansion of broadband throughout the developed world has allowed for the voice of many to be heard through the various websites that can be used personally to distribute music. Distribution of physical, tangible copies is no longer a necessity for the production and reproduction of music, lending itself to be less controllable by either corporate or governmental figures.

The advantages of this are clear, but perhaps more importantly in terms of fostering the production of a new form of biopolitics is that through new channels of distribution lie the potential for voices of dissent that are not necessarily dependent on working within a certain set

⁴³ There is some disagreement over whether the sampler constitutes an actual musical instrument, whether the reinterpretation of others' music as raw material of composition is comparable to other instruments. This is particularly true in terms of the law, which in American has generally considered the sampling of previously recorded music to be the theft of intellectual property. Perhaps most famously in a 1991 case involving hip-hop artist Biz Markie's sampling of Gilbert O'Sullivan's 1972 *Alone Again (Naturally)*, Judge Kevin Thomas Duffy set a still-present precedent for the government's approach toward sampling, "Thou shalt not steal has been an admonition followed since the dawn of civilization" Gramsci's (1992).

I disagree with law's interpretation of sampling. Instead, I tend to take the approach that the creation of any music is generally one of pastiche, interpretation, and reinvention of previously heard music – one could argue that the emergence of genre works in this way. Many songs are learned by playing with other individuals and then reinterpreting their work. The blues, for example, worked in this way for generations, and eventually rock was born from the reinterpretation of the blues, which in turn itself spawned a number of genres. Moby's 1999 album *Play* took this argument one step further, sampling Alan Lomax's field recordings of early American blues (and folk) music as a reinterpretation not entirely unlike the reinterpretations of that original era. In Moby's case, the sampler functioned as a creative instrument, not simply a piece of technology. This argument could be extended further through the work of virtuosic turntablists and sample-based artists, such as DJ Shadow, Kid Koala, Cut Chemist, Coldcut, and many others. For more on the history of sampling, see Baran, 2009; Lessig, 2004; McChesney, 2004.

of boundaries often managed by an external set of gatekeepers. Whereas music used to have to cross borders (whether legally or otherwise) in a physical, tangible form such as on magnetic or digital tape, or as a record, or as a CD, and was subject to constraints of space, now the physicality of space has been eliminated, as has the oversight of control over content that can be much more difficult to escape when music is in a tangible medium.

Another advance in the question of distribution – and indeed of the resistance toward file-sharing of music lies in the creation of filesharing networks. Indeed, the reproduction of music has long been an issue in the popular music industry. Subverting the normal channels of distribution that restricted access behind the necessity of audience financial capital in order to purchase a music product, the barriers to accessing music,

Furthermore, the issue of distribution allows for consciousness-raising. Educating and raising awareness of not only struggles of power but also differences in perspective that come from diverse cultures is a central tenet of the molding of specific cultural consciousness of peoples – this is the biopolitics of resistance, but furthermore, it allows the creation of certain subjectivities that create a new power dynamic.

This, however, is what critics of globalization are concerned about in terms of the commodification of global music structures into a homogenous mass of whatever the culture industry finds most profitable, thus eliminating local music, customs, traits, beliefs – in a sense, local cultures. But just as there is potential for control in this way, there is also the potential for the unification behind differing social movements, for there is not necessarily one dominant force rooted in one dominant nation state or corporation but instead a variety of power points that, when massed, lead to a global ordering of power, a network of flows that exists in multiple dimensions. If culture is going to be used the means of control, then culture must also be used as

the means of resistance. Of all culture, music tends to travel the best in these flows in that it is able to go below the radar much more easily than photographs or the written word. It is a biopolitical order of the first degree – knowledge begetting other knowledge, discourse begetting other discourse – that allows for an articulation of a new subjectivity.

Concluding Remarks

This discussion of these issues is an argument not of inevitabilities but instead of potentials. Examining power structures in society, especially as they work through culture, tells us of the ways in which they function rather than the way that they will or will not go, and it is important that we remember that culture as an amorphous, apolitical entity does not have a moral slant one way or the other in and of itself. There is great potential for domination. There is great potential for liberation. But the role that the production of bodies and minds within culture plays will remain a tension between these two forces.

It is a battle over resources: The ideological consensus of the peoples of the globe. Culture in all of its forms has been the battleground of the production of docile subjects for some time now, and as music within the culture industry expands ever outward, gaining new footholds in new markets and supplanting traditional musical forms whose meanings were entrenched within given cultures, it will be interesting to see what the future will look like. One can imagine that the culture industry will always be powerful on a global scale; we have perhaps not yet even come close to reaching a critical mass of the cultural exports of elite nations and multinational corporations.

Yet the resistance to Western cultural domination can come in mysterious ways, even if these become incorporated within a given culture in some sort of hybridity. Music and culture

have shared a long history of being complementary; the future will hopefully present new opportunities for the production and distribution of musical forms that are free from the constraints of the Western commodity-based market, and will look to culture as a celebration of shared meanings rather than a function of profit-making. This tension of values will be the dominant question in the debate over the role of music in the global economy for the decades to come in fostering different subjectivities.

Yet subjectivity, we must remember, is rooted in the subject. And in the end, the possibility of resistance lies in the individual. Social change occurs through the consciousness-raising of a mass of individuals. Resistance occurs through the complicated influence of political, economic, social, and cultural contexts in which we all exist. Music, however, falls into an interesting category, able to articulate a wide negotiation of powers.

These articulations are far from simple, and rarely free from contradiction and complication. As a goal, this chapter has addressed these issues in order to provide the theoretical framework necessary for the empirical heart of this dissertation - the case studies of Rage Against the Machine and of M.I.A. - that illuminate these complexities (and indeed the contradictions) in using popular music as a catalyst for social change. The role of the everyday gives us an understanding of the sites and exercise of power that is perhaps best shown through these empirical studies, yet by drawing upon the theoretical perspective of the preceding chapter and this one, as well as the following discussion of the political economy of the music industry, these cases can illustrate the complicated exercise of power through both forthright authoritative structures as well as the sometimes opaque interwoven nature of everyday life.

CHAPTER 4

THE PAST SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME:

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE GLOBAL MUSIC INDUSTRY

The political economic critique of the global music industry is a long and convoluted history of structures, systems, and human agency in a way of explaining the way in which this media form contributes to the constitution of a social order. As a concise history of this field, there are four main themes that emerge when exploring its history: 1) Corporate synergies and consolidation, 2) expanded global reach and internationalization, 3) changes in technology and technological form, and 4) control of cultural production. It is these four themes that are the focus of this chapter, an approach that will provide the reader a discussion and foregrounding of these issues prior to this dissertation's discussion of case studies and conclusions.

However, before beginning the discussion of political economy of the global music industry, a brief discussion of theoretical approach. The historical divide between cultural studies and political economy is such that there have been quite a number of 'conceptualizing the field' discussions on both sides of the aisle over which boundaries existed and where, what the scope of each field should be, how to cleave the two neatly, and how (or even whether) these fields should be institutionalized⁴⁴. Many of these squabbles got quite messy: Anytime an orthodoxy is challenged in an already-constituted field (particularly one that wears its passion for social change as openly as the critical wings of each of these fields often did), there are going to be paradigmatic battles. However, it appears as though these debates hit a critical mass in the late

⁴⁴ There has been much effort put into both exploring (and sometimes agitating) the difference between critical cultural studies and critical political economy. See Garnham, 1995; Grossberg, 1997, 1995; Maxwell, 2001; Miller, 2001

1980s through the 1990s when, as Grossberg (1995) notably termed, these arguments became boring for many involved. In studying popular culture at the turn of the century, a generalized theoretical integration between the two was resolved by the admission of a multi-disciplinary perspective and multi-theoretical embracing of a wide variety of approaches. And thankfully, too: the remediation of the political economy and cultural studies approach has become, if not resolved to most, then at the very least a problem that is solved through the incorporation of a multiplicity of perspectives in exploring the cultural effects of media ownership.

This is particularly true in the past decade or so of critical cultural studies. My approach toward this debate is one of reconciliation. Grossberg (1995) articulates it well:

In the end, what is at stake is not so much the relations between cultural studies and political economy, but rather the ways in which questions of economics and of contemporary capitalism in particular are articulated into analyses of the politics of culture. For in a sense, cultural studies did not reject political economy, it simply rejected certain versions of political economy as inadequate. And such versions are characterized, not merely by their logic of necessary correspondences (reductionist and reflectionist), but by their reduction of economics to the technological and institutional contexts of capitalist manufacturing (with occasional gestures—and little more—to marketing, distribution and retailing), by their reduction of the market to the site of commodified and alienated exchange, and by their rather ahistorical and consequently oversimplified notions of capitalism. After all, to describe contemporary capitalism as dependent on waged labor and commodity exchange

is, well, rather uninformative, as is the observation that contemporary culture is increasingly commodified. (p. 80)

Simply criticizing cultural studies in the vein of Garnham (1995) as a field that ignores cultural production institutions and basks in the rosy glow of all things cultural seems to paint the scope of cultural studies too narrowly and avoids its critical components. Conversely, constituting political economy as a field that oversimplifies the argument of power and production seems somewhat unfair as well, and is perhaps motivated by the need to find convenient labels to place on the way in which certain critical scholars approach their work.

In either case, the past decade of popular culture studies has seen at least a generalized reconciliation between these two fields, eliminating the often myopic view toward the study of culture, production, and society that dogged these two fields, and more importantly, settled into internal squabbles that detracted from the commonalities that each approach shares in its goal for human liberation, as McCarthy (2006) states “For those who see the choice between political economy and cultural studies as an “either/or” one, the two movements are irrevocably divided by axiomatic differences in the scale on which they construct models of social change” (p. 28). While debates over the constitution of a field are often important in understanding the commonalities and differences between philosophical and methodological orientations, bickers such as these achieved little more than a politics of division that distracted from the common critical goals of both fields, however subjectively constituted. What these disciplines have in common is far greater than what they don’t: The policing the disciplinary turf by those comfortably walled within often leads to a misguided (and misunderstood) conceptualization of the larger political project. Indeed, Toby Miller reminds that bridging the gap “requires a focus

on the contradictions of organizational structures, their articulations with everyday living and textuality, and their intrication with the policy and economy, refusing any bifurcation that opposes the study of production and consumption, or fails to address such overlapping axes of subjectification as class, race, nation, and gender” (2001, p. 3).

Taking Miller’s approach, and leaving this debate to the past, I will use multiple trajectories in order to constitute a field of study, which is especially useful not just in cultural analysis but in the emerging transnational media flows that embrace cultural forms and the problems that occur when these complicated and complex structures collide. Understanding the articulation of specific ideologies is never an easy undertaking, but to do so requires structural, audience, and textual analysis of all aspects of the subject at hand. This is of particular importance with an object of study such as the cultural politics of popular music in a world as complicated as Balliger (1999) describes it: “It’s important to consider the politics of music in a changed world system - one marked by increased transnational labor and cultural flows, the disruption of stable spatialized inequalities, and the heightened commodification and politicization of everyday life” (p. 69).

* * *

With this brief foregrounding discussion in mind, I now turn to the subject at hand: The political economy of the global music industry. Many volumes have been written on the connections between the production of popular culture forms and industry structures, from arguing the connections between the role of business structure, government policy, industry regulation, and marketplace demand, as well as the issue of not just the nature of capitalistic structures but also the various disciplines and subdisciplines of market capitalism and philosophies of free enterprise.

To this point, the discursive history of the political economy of recorded music media has been dominated by the four narratives established at the beginning of this chapter. Yet in the discussion of these issues, the story that is being told is one that usually foregoes the central (if often unstated) theme of these debates: The artistic and commercial output of musical artists, and the political possibilities existent within these media texts. Rather than present a full history of the recording industry – a strategy of practical and pragmatic impossibility given the scope of this project – I present a brief and selective retelling with one goal in mind: To tie these issues to this field’s political economic history in order to highlight the present destabilization of discourse, of practices, of articulation, and of material conditions surrounding the popular music industry, and most importantly, to provide a background to the larger argument and case studies of this dissertation.

What It Was: A Selective History of Popular Music Media Structures (Late 1800s to Mid-1990s)

The music industry has always been dynamic and ingrained in the cultural and social nature of any given time period. Ever since the application of the phonograph to recorded music, the history of the recorded music industry has been focused around two distinct yet related issues: profit motive and the control of property⁴⁵. As far back as Edison’s lockhold on the recorded music industry through the proprietary control of the Edison Phonograph, there has been the desire among major label conglomerates for complete and total dominance over the processes involved in production and distribution in order to generate profits to their full potential (Gronow & Saunio, 1998; McChesney, 2004; Sterne, 2003).

⁴⁵ Edison famously clamped down on the control of many of his media inventions, including the phonograph and phonographic productions. See Gronow & Saunio, 1998; Sterne, 2003.

Indeed, the drive to consolidation and concentration that is inherent in the market-based, capitalistic structure of media industries has led to a number of conflicts over the years, conflicts that most often do not lead to a media system that fosters a stronger democracy, or at the very least do result in the mass commodification of culture (Bagdikian, 2004; Bettig, 1996; Bettig & J. Hall, 2003; Garnham, 1995; S. Hall, 1986; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972; McChesney, 2004). The pattern that has emerged repeatedly as new technologies created new markets and avenues for revenue while at the same time destabilizing traditional structures upon which these business models are built is nothing new, yet the way in which the corporate logics and the practices of capitalism have remained flexible enough to maintain hegemonic control over populations is especially relevant to the debate (Caldwell, 2006; Sterne, 2003).

The first half of the 20th Century saw a number of expansions and contractions in the number of record companies, as well as the mass-market appeal that came from the rise of broadcast radio⁴⁶. Yet this story of the political economy of the global music industry becomes particularly interesting in the 1950s and 1960s with the rise of rock, an era that saw a fundamental and distinct change in the global music industry as practices and structures solidified.

There were several developments in media technology that spurred this change, such as the rise of the vinyl LP, the introduction of stereo, but equally important was the solidification of

⁴⁶ For purposes of brevity and scope, this dissertation begins its discussion with the rise of rock music (starting with the mid-1950s into the 1960s) as a culturally defining characteristic (and its often-overlapping but by no means synonymous category of ‘youth cultures’ McCarthy (2006)) that ushered in the modern era of popular music. I acknowledge that this choice is somewhat arbitrary – the term ‘popular’ music existed before this era and described everything from ragtime to big band to classical – yet around a decade post-War, popular music both reflected and contributed to a cultural politics much different than these genres, not just in its appeal to youth, but also in its embracing of dissent and countercultural ideals. For more information on various topics regarding the history rock, rock cultures, and the popular, please see Brackett, 1999; Hebdige, 1987; Kassabian, 1999; Middleton, 2003; Weinstein, 1999.

an internationalized business structure: International trade was becoming increasingly liberalized, copyright was further established in the United States as a protection of intellectual property rights, and increasingly, global recognition and protections against unauthorized duplication were being enacted in many industrialized nations (Gronow & Saunio, 1998; Theberge, 1999). The rise of new relationships of transnational industrial and cultural production had changed the way in which the global corporation functioned, as did an increase rationalization of the processes involved in the creation and distribution of cultural products. As with so many other destabilizing factors throughout history, this resulted in an intersection of forces, yet a coming-together that was tactfully exploited by a handful of corporations in the name of the growth of their enterprises.

And it was indeed quite a rapid growth. The 1960s onward would see the beginning of almost 40 years of near-constant expansion. Gronow & Saunio (1998, pp. 137-8) provide compelling data. In 1960, the record industry in America was a \$640m business; ten years later, revenues were over \$1.6b. By 1980 gross revenue for the industry was at \$3.7b, moving close to 650m units per year. The emerging global market by this time was massive, as well: Over \$170m sold in the UK, \$199m in German, \$144m in France, \$220m in Japan, \$44m in Italy, \$84m in Canada, \$83m in Mexico. Record companies were realized to be big business, not just in terms of their profit-making potential for the release of new artists, but also from the realization of corporate interests (including formerly non-musical corporate holding companies and investment houses) in the 1970s that there was immense value in the film and music back libraries held by music companies (Bettig, 1996).

As a result of the changing business structure, this era saw a consolidation of the few major labels that did exist into even fewer, and highlighting the rationalization of the production

and distribution of popular music, there would begin to be a distinct change in musical content toward an increasingly homogenized output, a trend that, with few exceptions, continued through to the 2000s (McChesney, 2004). And as such, this era would see the business structure of the global music industry continue on its trajectory of mergers and acquisitions through the introduction of parent companies that formerly had little to do with the music business, but were interested in these assets strictly in terms of their revenue generation and company value. These companies ushered in the era of transnational corporate control of musical media.

By the 1980s, the industry was dominated by the so-called ‘Big 6’:

- EMI (United Kingdom),
- BMG (Germany),
- Sony (Japan),
- PolyGram (varyingly Canada, U.S., Netherlands)
- MCA (United States)
- Warner Music Group (United States)⁴⁷

This would in turn be reduced to the ‘Big 4’ by the mid-2000s, with MCA becoming Universal music and later merging with Polygram in 1998, and Sony merging with BMG in 2004 (Gronow & Saunio, 1998; Krasilovsky & Shemel, 2007). However, whether the Big Six, Five, or Four is not terribly important: An oligopoly is an oligopoly, and these four-to-six arrangements of

⁴⁷ One of the problems of writing on the ownership cycles of these companies is the rapid pace of change of ownership structures. Rather than listing a detailed description of the past and present assets of these corporations (and the convoluted history of their mergers, acquisitions, parent and subsidiary companies) that would most certainly be out-of-date within a year of the publication of this dissertation, there are a number of good online databases that are kept relatively current through the work of a dedicated group of scholars. Please see the excellent Columbia Review of Journalism’s excellent *Who Owns What* online database (<http://www.cjr.org/resources/>), or alternately Free Press’ *Who Owns the Media* (<http://www.freepress.net/resources/ownership>).

consolidated conglomerates during this era would control between 75-85% of the recorded music industry throughout this globe (McChesney, 2004; McPhail, 2006)⁴⁸.

Modern Times: Issues of Destabilization and Clampdown of Control (mid-1990s to the Present)

If the lessons of the past century have been any indication of the logics of production of the global record industry, it is that the uncertainties of the past decade have given little resolution in the destabilization of the present time. The late 1990s into the 2000s saw a number of developments that posed if not a number of questions surrounding the uses of music by audiences then a real threat to the decades-long control over production and distribution afforded to the major label cartel.

Much of this destabilization came from the major labels' inability to deal adequately with the rise of new media technologies and new models of production. The 20th Century saw a relatively standardized (if not comfortable) mode of production and distribution of popular music until around the mid-1990s. Media that pertained to musical forms were commonly limited to

⁴⁸ This raises the point of what is considered to be a truly independent label: As of 2009, 20% of the market that was still controlled by independent labels that work outside of the major label production system. These "indies" are important to understanding the full picture of the music industry. However, most indie labels fall into more contested zones. Often, indies are partly owned by major labels, such as Sub-Pop being 49% bought by Warner Records in 1995 (Gronow & Saunio, 1998; McChesney, 2004; Sterne, 2003), or more commonly, distributed by major labels, such as now-defunct Beserkley Records, which was independently owned but distributed by CBS and Elektra/Asylum, amongst others during its lifespan (Eyries, Callahan, & Edwards, 2005). Indie labels that become profitable or manage to acquire artists' back catalogs are commonly bought out by majors in the name of consolidation over competition, such as Rykodisc's purchase by Warner Music in 2006 (Associated Press, 2006).

I acknowledge that independent labels are complicated and important entities, both artistically and culturally. However, it has historically been very difficult to survive as a truly independent label with no connection whatsoever to the major label system. Yet if the fact that independent record labels need major label distribution in order to survive provides any conclusion, it is one that shows the control structure that have been established by the major-label system in the popular music industry is very successful in maintaining its control over what is and is not released (Kohl, 1997).

just a handful of forums: Tangible media (including wax cylinders, phonograph records, magnetic tape, and so forth), live performance, radio, and to a limited extent television and film. Record label profit was organized primarily around retail at brick-and-mortar stores (whether mom-and-pop record shops or retail stores such as Wal-Mart, Best Buy, or Sears), or to a lesser degree, mail-order or record clubs, such as Columbia House or BMG. Records were recorded on analog tape in a recording studio, mixed and mastered for a specific sonic and aesthetic characteristic. Material goods were shipped over space to be consumed by an audience. The focus of the industry was one of maximizing revenue streams through the current and back catalogs of these musics while minimizing threats to these streams, and though there were dynamics and technology changes during this time, the fundamentals of the popular music industry remained for the most part static (Gronow & Saunio, 1998; IFPI, 2009; Theberge, 1999).

This was true both domestically in the United States as well as internationally. The U.S. would see a steady increase in its cultural exports during this era characterized by the shift to a post-industrial state. These included television programs, films, literature and other texts, computer programs, but perhaps due to its relatively low cost of production, the lack of necessity of translation (if needed at all), and ease of transportation over space, popular music would become one of the predominant cultural exports of the global West (Fairley, 2001; McPhail, 2006).

The 1990s would see the first wave of destabilization, factors that would expand geometrically through the early years of the 21st century. There were several factors, in part or in whole drive by technological change, that facilitated this new arrangement. And indeed, of all popular media forms that have a long cultural history in Western society and emerging nations, it

is the structures of the recorded music industry that to this point have arguably been *most* destabilized by the introduction of new communication technologies.

First among the forbearers to this age would be the shift from analog formats to digital, beginning with the introduction of the compact disc. While introduced in 1983 to the public, the widespread integration of compact disc would within a decade become the primary format of music listening, with CDs outselling vinyl records for the first time in 1988, cassette tapes in 1992 following an ever-increasing drop in the price of not only CDs but also the price of CD players themselves (Theberge, 2001, p. xvi).

Yet more important during this era would be the rise of digital reproduction. While reel-to-reel magnetic tape and cassettes represented to the RIAA the “death of the music industry”⁴⁹ in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s would see the introduction of the CD-R (and for brief moments, the minidisk, the digital audio tape (DAT), and the digital compact cassette (DCC)), digital reproductive media that would provide no loss from generational copying and thus the free reproductive distribution and sharing of recorded sound. Eventually, these media would give way to the rise of computer-based music formats such as the MP3, WMA, FLAC, and a litany of others. By the end of the early 2000s, the need to have physical access to a tangible recording would become increasingly less prevalent, and in terms of the major labels, less relevant with each passing year (IFPI, 2009; Krasilovsky & Shemel, 2007).

Analysis

⁴⁹ The IFPI would launch its “Home taping is killing music (and it’s illegal)” publicity campaign that was much derided (and a constant target of both ridicule and parody over the years), yet would revitalize this same campaign, close to two decades later, changing “home taping” to “piracy” (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, 2009). The ridicule would return as well, with the viral culture of the Web creating a number of internet memes.

So why this long history? There are two key points to be taken from this discussion that are central to understanding the political economic history of the global music industry and the cultural politics of music: The rise of new technology and subsequent managed control of this technology. In both of these cases, the end result is a fundamental change in the logic of production of musical content—politically, culturally, artistically, and otherwise.

In exploring the first of these two points, the global music industry is fundamentally intertwined within the context of new communication technologies, and its political economic structure will respond (whether adequately or not) to these changes, primarily in order to gain or maintain profit. John Kennedy, chairman and CEO of IFPI, describes the seemingly subtle shift in approach toward the business of music: “Record companies are building an economic future based not just on selling music but on “monetizing” consumer access to it,” alongside “the enormous potential for licensing and generating commercial value from music at every point where the consumer is likely to want it” (IFPI, 2009).

Though there are many differences between the pre-digital age and the digital era, the most threatening to the traditional structures of the global music industry center around one area: The massive upheaval in the way that music is distributed. With the shift away from tangible musical media would come a sea change in not only the cultural site of music distribution – between 1999-2009, over 3000 independent record stores and all major music stores close their retail outlets, such as Tower, Sam Goody, Musicland, Virgin Megastores, HMV, and the Wherehouse, amongst a host of others (Perry, 2009) - but also a rise in new deterritorialized commercial sites for network distribution, legal and otherwise. There once was a generalized formula that worked for music corporations until this point, one that was fairly predictable or at least stable in terms of the practices and structures that created demand for music, but no longer.

New forms have emerged, and the relationship between the consumers and producers of popular music is in a constant state of uncertainty.

As this past stability has given way to a new dynamic, music corporations have experimented with several new forms of monetization of their product, new avenues for revenue generation. These include:

- **360 Deals:** The rise of so-called “360 Deals,” whereby the record company receives a share of nontraditional revenue streams such as tour receipts, merchandising, website income, sponsorship, and other tangibles and intangibles, has become increasingly common, with such artists as Robbie Williams, Madonna, U2, Shakira, Fleetwood Mac, Jay-Z, and others signing up (Leeds, 2007). This has also spawned the creation of new music labels, such as Clear Channel spin-off Live Nation, which only traffics in 360 deals, yet very quickly developed itself as a major player in the global music industry and is fast becoming a major entity in the global music business.
- **Live Venues and Ticketing:** In 2009, Live Nation produced over 22,000 concerts in 33 countries for over 1600 artists (Live Nation, 2009a) and had revenues of \$4.2b in 2008 including \$1.6b from non-U.S. sources (Live Nation, 2009b).
- **Mobile Music Downloads:** As mobile phones have increasingly begun to incorporate digital music players into their technology, carriers have bundled software in their phones that allow mobile music purchases in both subscription form, such as Nokia’s *Comes with Music* service in the UK, or Sony Ericsson’s *PlayNow* in Sweden, as well as allowing *a la carte* purchases of songs or albums via a number of services, such as mobile sales stores for iTunes and Amazon.com (Apple, 2009; IFPI, 2009).

- **ISP Subscription Services:** Internet Service Providers (ISPs), mostly in Europe such as TDC, BSkyB, Orange, Neuf Cegetel, and others, offer subscription services to its customers (sometimes included with the purchase price of monthly internet access, other times available for an extra fee). Excluding mobile music subscriptions, U.S. 2008 revenues for digital music subscriptions were over \$188m (RIAA, 2009).
- **Social Networking Sites:** Myspace, YouTube, Pandora, last.fm and increasingly Facebook, have become licensed streaming and retail outlets, generating revenue for these sites' parent companies through using bands' pages to generate advertising revenue, as well as for music companies through download sales via such sites as Myspace Music. (IFPI, 2009; Siklos, 2005).
- **Ringtones:** An increasingly lucrative market for music corporations and important factor in the music industry, Billboard Magazine would start listing chart positions for downloaded ringtones in November 2004 (Billboard Magazine, 2009). 2008 sales totaled over \$816m for the domestic United States and are estimated to be well into the billions of dollars worldwide (RIAA, 2009).
- **Licensing:** Song licensing and merchandising have increased the way in which music is monetized, and the use of music "synchronization" (the use of music in films, advertisements, television programs, etc.) has increasingly become a prime source of income (Krasilovsky & Shemel, 2007).
- **Video Games:** Music games such as the Guitar Hero and Rock Band franchises were responsible for 15% of all game sales in the first half of 2008 (IFPI, 2009). Additionally, popular music recordings are now regularly used as video game soundtracks, with royalties ranging from 8 cents to 15 cents per song per copy, or royalty-free buyouts

ranging from \$2,500 to over \$20,000 (T. Brabec & J. Brabec, 2004). As gaming platforms move increasingly online, built into the game will be a dynamic soundtrack with songs changing depending on trends (and, if the video game industry functions anything like the radio industry has for the past 50 years, through payola), paying royalties much in the way that radio does today (Totilo, 2006).

- **Digital Music Stores:** Additionally, legal music download sites have flourished and continue to grow at a dramatic rate. Apple's iTunes music store became the U.S.'s largest music retailer in February of 2008 and as of May 2008 had over five billion downloads (Apple, 2008). Amazon.com, 7digital, HMV, and Play.com in the U.S. and Europe have continued to have their digital downloads take the place of physical CD sales (IFPI, 2009). Digital download purchases (including music videos and kiosk purchases) in 2008 accounted for 1.1b units purchased – a 28% increase over 2007 – totaling \$1.6b in revenue (RIAA, 2009).

Clampdown of Control: The Music Industry's Response to Bootlegging, Piracy, and Counterfeiting

The second key point is that when faced with threats to its near-monopoly over the production and distribution of music, the popular music industry has clamped down through legal, coercive, financial, technological, and publicity campaigns to contain or eliminate these threats. As one perspective, the history of technology and popular music is one characterized by tensions: between consumers and record companies, between artists and record companies, between middle distributors (including brick-and-mortar retailers, online stores, foreign bootleggers, and more recently, internet service providers (ISPs), and between these three

entities and the legal structures of nation-states. (Krasilovsky & Shemel, 2007) point out that tensions such as these are common to the music industry, yet eventually “the two sides realize they need each other, and a balance is found” (p. 414).

However, in balancing these forces, the relationship becomes increasingly complicated when illegal reproduction of musical compositions is involved. Reproduction represents a threat to the relationship between industry structures and audiences, of commodity forms and use-values:

It has become possible for each listener to record a radio-broadcast representation on his own, and to manufacture in this way, using his own labor, a repeatable recording, the use-value of which is a priori equivalent to that of the commodity-object, without, however, having its exchange-value. This is an extremely dangerous process for the music industry and for the authors, since it provides free access to the recording and its repetition. Therefore it is fundamental for them to prevent this diversion of usage, to reinsert this consumer labor into the laws of commercial exchange, to suppress information in order to create an artificial scarcity of music....Repetition creates an object, which lasts beyond its usage. (Attali, 1985, p. 99-100)

Audio reproduction is generally done through three distinct but often conflated terms⁵⁰:

Bootlegging, the unauthorized duplication of a live concert or performance, *Piracy*, the unauthorized duplication of a sound recording (including tangible and digital media), and

⁵⁰ These terms are often incorrectly used interchangeably in both the academic and popular press, yet it is important to understand the distinctions between these three instances due to the political economic issues that are sometimes exclusive to one of these practices but not the others. For an excellent introduction to the history and contemporary issues of copyright and intellectual property and cultural forms, see Lessig (2004); for a music-specific discussion, see Krasilovsky & Shemel, 2007.

Counterfeiting, which is an unauthorized reproduction of the CD, artwork, packaging, and label in order to pass it off as authentic (“How to curb piracy,” 2007). The recording industry’s approach toward the control of culture has been predominantly directed toward the latter two.

Counterfeiting is a common practice in a number of developing countries, particularly as reproduction technology has become more prevalent and less costly. Indeed, there were 31 countries in 2004 whose illegal record sales outnumbered legal sales (Krasilovsky & Shemel, 2007). While the United States does have counterfeiting present, it is considerably less prevalent than in other nations that do not police intellectual property with the same level of vigilance.

However, as a more relevant issue to this dissertation, the clampdown against piracy has been tackled as an issue for decades, intertwining the business motives of these transnational corporations with government policy through a massive lobbying campaign against this practice. The advent of home taping through magnetic tape, and then again through the introduction of CD-Rs and CD burners, both launched a defensive campaign by the music industry and ultimately led (through considerable lobbying efforts) to a levy on the purchase of blank recording media including CD-Rs, audio cassettes, DVD-Rs, and other media formats (Gronow & Saunio, 1998; Krasilovsky & Shemel, 2007). The United States, Canada, and most European Union nations have some sort of private copying levy (Geist, 2007).

Furthermore, media companies, often working along side lobbying organizations such as the RIAA or MPAA, have tried to build in copyright protection or Digital Rights Management (DRM) software into technologies as a way of controlling reproduction. These have largely been unsuccessful, often due to the often-crippling effect that these technologies have on the end user

experience⁵¹. We can look to Sony, a vertically integrated music and technology corporation, as a case study. Sony BMG's 2005 tactic of including with purchased audio CDs a covert installation of a rootkit DRM program on a number that left the user's computer open to hackers, thereby punishing those who legally bought a CD (Mitchell, 2005). Sony's ATRAC proprietary, DRM-laden audio format was a drastic failure due to its crippling user experience when compared to other, less restrictive or unrestricted formats, or of Digital Compact Cassettes due to overly protective copyright management measures. Other attempts at controlling reproduction failed due to easily defeatable copy protection technology, such as an early form of Sony's CD copy protection that was 24 hours of its introduction by a simple black felt pen, leading one user to exclaim, "I wonder what will come next? Maybe they'll ban markers" (Reuters, 2002), or the great number of computer programs that would convert copy-protected files to DRM-free formats. Most DRM-encoded music files could be circumvented by simply burning an audio CD-R or CD-RW and reimporting that CD into one's computer.

If the user outrage over these punitive measures was extreme with these tactics, the furor over record company control of musical intellectual property took an increased upturn with the issue of piracy file-sharing networks. Though file sharing had existed for years using such internet protocols as Usenet and Internet Relay Chat (IRC), these programs were not centralized in their structure, and they were neither web-based nor especially easy to navigate for the average internet user. This would change with the introduction of Napster, which, despite its brief lifespan of just over two years from 1999-2001, was the first networked distribution site to

⁵¹ This appears somewhat illogical from a market perspective: Finding out what consumers want and then specifically not giving them that feature has historically proven to be a poor business model. Yet time and time again, new technologies and media forms have incorporated DRM or copy protection attempts. DRM in music has generally been considered a failure, and within a year of Apple CEO Steve Jobs' call for the end of DRM as unsustainable and futile, all major labels would end this practice (Jobs, 2007; Kravets, 2008b).

incorporate a central distribution of files over a peer-to-peer network structure, most of which were copyrighted materials⁵².

The response of the RIAA, the lobbying group representing the major labels (and indeed many larger indie labels) has generally been to immediately and forcefully clamp down on copyright infringement, historically characterized by a somewhat overly reactionary fashion. In 1999, six months after Napster's inception, the RIAA in 1999 sued the company for \$100,000 per copyright violation⁵³. Napster would later be found liable to another lawsuit by A&M Records in 2001 and would effectively shut down by July of that year (Evangelista, 2002). Napster's demise would be followed by several other similar filesharing networks: Gnutella, eDonkey2000, Kazaa (the original site, which was shuttered following a lawsuit (Bangeman, 2008)), and others, though many would re-emerge later as co-opted, for-pay music distribution sites. Ultimately, as of 2009, the predominant file-sharing protocol was the BitTorrent protocol, allowing for decentralized distribution of content (both legal and illegal).

Regardless of the protocol used for file sharing, the RIAA's and record labels' tactics have focused centrally on legal attacks. The RIAA and IFPI famously through the 2000s subpoenaed ISPs for the IP addresses of users that they suspected of violating music copyright, suing for up to \$150,000 per song, and commonly settling for several thousand dollars as part of their "subpoena, settle or sue" tactics that would lead to over 35,000 lawsuits⁵⁴ (Kravets, 2008a;

⁵² For a detailed analysis of Napster, its business structure, and its audience, see Giesler (2006).

⁵³ With over 200,000 songs hosted on Napster's servers, this amounted to more than \$20b (Menta, 1999). Clearly, this action was meant to put Napster – never a profitable enterprise (Kirkpatrick & Richtel, 2001) - out of business while sending a threatening message to others who would consider hosting a file-sharing network site.

⁵⁴ Incidentally, despite a small number of initial victories, after appeals, the RIAA would not win a single of its 35,000 lawsuits (Hesmondhalgh & Negus, 2002b). Much like the RIAA's treatment of Napster, the threats of huge dollar amounts directed toward common citizens was usually enough to

Van Buskirk, 2008). The RIAA would also threaten lawsuits toward corporations and universities that did not turn over users' information which the RIAA suspected in copyright infringement, in one case sending as many as 80 notices per day to Indiana University for several weeks (Singel, 2008).

Not surprisingly, moves such as these were very unpopular with the public⁵⁵ and led to a generalized demonization of the RIAA (as well as repeated attacks on its website by hackers (Ernesto, 2008)). In late 2008, the RIAA announced that they would cease their strategy of lawsuits (Van Buskirk, 2008). As of 2009, there was a noticeable shift in the RIAA and IFPI's tactics: instead of going after individual users, these trade organizations are lobbying governments to put pressure on ISPs to blacklist file-sharing network users after a series of warnings (IFPI, 2009) in addition to other proposals, such as a music reproduction levy placed on ISPs much in the same way that this tactic was used on blank recordable tangible media in preceding decades (Griffin, 2009).

Concluding Remarks

If the often clumsy and heavy-handed tactics of record companies, technology companies, the RIAA and the IFPI have proven anything, it is that when the threat of destabilization arises to upend the political economic order, it becomes quite easy to identify the parties who have benefited in the past from the maintenance of that order. The clampdown on

force an out-of-court settlement, presumably to function as a threat to deter others from engaging in file-sharing activities.

⁵⁵ As well as the overworked American court system. The RIAA would face a wide range of criticism from both legislators – Senator Norm Coleman expressing concern over the potential abuse of the goodwill of the courts to investigate these cases – but also the public, particularly articulated in a 2007 lawsuit against the trade group, alleging “they have clogged and abused the federal courts for many years with factually baseless and fraudulent lawsuits” (Triplett, 2007).

the control of information – for this case, music in particular – has historically been the solution through legal, coercive, and cultural means.

Equally, though, if there one issue that is affecting even the oldest veterans in the record business, it is the speed of change of the recorded music industry that has typified the first decade of the 21st Century is unprecedented. The past has provided a long history of these practices, industry structures, different stakeholders, and cultural forms that have emerged from a contextual history, one that has intrinsically been tied in with the control of power, wealth, and culture in the name of profit.

And if the past is any indication, the oligopolic control of the varying channels of the music industry is not going away. Yet at the same time, these entities' place in the cultural, economic, and political landscape has been drastically changed as new technologies and challenges to their dominance have emerged through both changes in production and distribution through a generalized tendency of destabilization: The Big Four are still around, and are still powerful, but with changing political economic structures, so too have these companies been forced to evolve.

As a foreshadowing to the following two chapters, the case studies of M.I.A. and Rage Against the Machine, as well as a unification of the multitude of issues discussed to this point, the structure of the global record today is in essence the confluence of globalization and global capitalism, the social reproduction of ideologies driven by political and economic control. And it has been quite effective in formulating a global order over especially over the past three decades, an order in which the global music industry is firmly embedded. It is a concept that we shall see in the following chapters through strategies of control, tactics of resistance, and the politics of

music-making come together in order to give the production of docility. Attali (1985), with great foresight for the shape of things to come, best concludes these ideas:

The industry, at the same time as creating the object of exchange, must also create the conditions for its purchase. It is thus essentially an industry of manipulation and promotion, and repetition entails the development of service activities whose function is to produce the consumer: The essential aspect of the new political economy that this kind of consumption announces is the *production of demand*, not the *production of supply* (p. 103, italic his).

CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDY: RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Of the many bands that embraced the anti-establishment ideal in the alternative music scene of the 1990s, there were few that were more embedded in the popular cultural consciousness than Rage Against the Machine. The band was both critically and commercially successful, musically and artistically innovative, able to raise as many listeners' consciousness as they were the contradictions over their actions.

Rage Against the Machine's approach to music was fundamentally political and quite direct in its critical discourses of power inequality: There was no mistaking this band's politics of activism, anti-establishment ideals, countercultural beliefs, and social justice. In the mid-to-late 1990s, there were few bands that embraced as specific a political idealism, even fewer that were able to achieve commercial success while unmistakably advocating for social change. Indeed, most of the music at the time consisted of teen pop and boy bands, inward-looking or nihilistic alternative forms, materialistic hip-hop or gangsta rap, all genres that were by and large apolitical in their views toward social change beyond perhaps a simple token song or a generalized but impotent rebellion.

This chapter will examine the politics, the music, the activism, and the context surrounding Rage Against the Machine. It is divided into two sections. The first is descriptive, examining the specifics of this case study: The band's members, their backgrounds and histories, the group's rise to fame, and notable events – political and otherwise - in the group's tenure as a band. The second section is analytical. I examine the political efficacy of Rage Against the Machine as a musical group and as a collective of individuals who share a common

politics. I ask the question of what, exactly, is the band's political project – a surprisingly difficult question to answer – approaching the issue by examining the response by authority figures and corporate structures to its message, the attempts to silence the band, as well as the groups' political and musical response to these attempts. Finally, I begin a formal discussion that will be addressed in further detail in the concluding chapter of this dissertation: Does Rage Against the Machine actually represent a threat to the political system, truly resistant qualities, critiquing the metropol while living inside it, or does their status as a multiple Grammy-winning, major-label signed, incredible commercial success mean that their political project was fundamentally compromised from the start?

Part One: Histories and Contextualized Background

The story of Rage Against the Machine and its political project cannot be separated from the story of its members' lives, their backgrounds, their activism, the contexts of their experiences. And like so many political activists who use cultural means as an agent of social change, their historical context is much more complicated than with sometimes vapid character of celebrity pop stars. Whether the audience for this music knows it or not, the band comes from a long line of radicalism and activism in its members' families, political activities (both working within and outside of state politics), academic backgrounds, and intellectual and activist pasts.

Musically, Rage Against the Machine is a band whose lineup has been consistent over its long history and is comprised of four members: Lead singer Zack de la Rocha, guitarist Tom Morello, bassist Tim Commerford, and drummer Brad Wilk. Politically, the band is centered

around de la Rocha and Morello, its two most radically distinct individuals, its two most outspoken members, and the driving force of the band's political principles⁵⁶.

De la Rocha's principles in turn, both musically and politically, were decided through a long background of his family, his schooling, his childhood, and his associations with political and artistic movements. Born in 1970 in Los Angeles, de la Rocha, a self-described Chicano of Mexican Native American ancestry, grew up the son of Roberto "Beto" de la Rocha. Beto was a painter and muralist in the Los Angeles area and would become a noted member of Los Four, one of the first art collectives that would achieve mainstream attention for Chicano art in America (Stenning, 2008). Possessing a resistant politics himself, in Zack's youth Beto would serve as the art editor to Caesar Chavez's United Farm Workers' magazine (Greif, 2002) and later found his own community-based magazine that would, in Zack's words, "empower the community and help them get through so much of the capitalist indoctrination that had been force-fed to [the Chicano] community in order to keep us exploited and down" (Brannon, 2007, p. 38).

After Zack's father had a psychotic breakdown, asking his son to help burn all his paintings before going on a 40-day hunger strike, Zack would move in with his mother, a

⁵⁶ As a note on terms, I have decided in this paper to refer to the band as a singular collective, but more often than not, when I refer to Rage Against the Machine, I am referring to de la Rocha and Morello. It makes sense: The other two members of Rage Against the Machine – Bassist Tim Commerford and Drummer Brad Wilk – are more noted for their musical abilities than for their political outspokenness. Commerford gives very few interviews and rarely discusses his politics, even more rare is an outspoken Wilk. While it appears that their politics match de la Rocha's and Morello's to a degree, neither has an identifiable public character on political issues beyond what can be assumed to be beliefs that have been represented in the band or the band's music as a collective. As fairly indicative quotes of their interest in overt political activism, when asked about their notable on-stage naked protest of the PMRC in 1993, Wilk said, "I was thinking about how the wind felt underneath my scrotum, what the people in the front were thinking, and all the cameras flashing and what they were going to be thinking as they developed their film." Commerford was considerably less politically idealistic, "Want me to be perfectly frank? The size of my penis." ("Rage Against the Machine Biography," 2009).

doctoral student in anthropology at University of California Irvine. As one of the few Chicano students at his high school, his self-proclaimed defining political moment took place when a teacher was joking with the class about a U.S. border crossing station:

He was describing one of the areas between San Diego and Oceanside, and as a reference to this particular area of the coastline, he said, 'You know, that wetback station there.' And everyone around me laughed. They thought it was the funniest thing that they ever heard...I remember sitting there, about to explode. I realized that I was not of these people. They were not my friends. And I remember internalizing it, how silent I was. I remember how afraid I was to say anything...I told myself that I would never allow myself to not respond to that type of situation - in any form, anywhere. (Fricke, 1999)

De la Rocha would later describe Irvine as, “one of the most racist cities imaginable. If you were a Mexican in Irvine, you were there because you had a broom or a hammer in your hand” (Kane, 1999). His musical experience as a youth would be steeped in several genres as he would begin playing in a Southern California punk band in high school and taking in hip-hop culture. The lessons would be educational in terms of both musical aptitude and cultural politics. Describing this time, De la Rocha would state,

I was listening to hip-hop early on, growing up in both East Los Angeles and Orange County, and I had a lot of white friends who refused to talk to me the second I put on an ADIDAS sweat suit and was breaking, or when I was walking through campus with my radio, playing Eric B. and Rakim, and LL Cool J and De La Soul. To so many whites then, it was just noise. To me, it was people reclaiming their dignity. (Stenning, 2008)

Guitarist Tom Morello, more outspoken off-stage than de la Rocha, comes from a political activist family, unsurprising, given his own political activism over the years. Morello was born in 1964 in Harlem to Mary Morello, a white high school teacher of African studies and social activist. In response to the PMRC censorship hearings that attempted to clamp down on musical lyrics through censorship and parental advisory labels, she would in 1987 form Parents for Rock and Rap, an anti-censorship organization whose goal was to “counter some of the measures [the PMRC uses] to suppress artistic freedom” (K. Johnson, n.d.). The group would in 1996 win a Hugh Hefner Freedom of Speech award for its work against artistic censorship (“Winners and Judges of the Hugh M. Hefner First Amendment Awards,” 2008).

Even more politically notable was Morello’s father, Ngethe Njoroge, a black Kenyan guerilla fighter who fought, both politically and physically, for independence in the rebellion against British colonialism of the nation in the 1950s. Njoroge would later be the first Kenyan ambassador to the United Nations. Divorced from Mary soon after their child’s birth, Tom would not know his father until late in life, and they remain estranged to this day, as Njorge has become an owner of a large tea plantation in Kenya (DiNovella, 2009).

Growing up bi-racial, Morello developed a resistant politics at an early age, unwillingly as it were. Describing he and his mother’s move to Libertyville, IL when he was a boy,

I integrated the town. It is an entirely white conservative northern suburb of Chicago and I was the first person of color to reside in the town. My mom and I moved there in 1965. She was applying to be a public high school teacher in communities around the northern suburbs. In more than one of them, they said, "You can work here, but your family cannot live here." They were explicit about it. I was a one-year-old half-Kenyan kid, and they told my mom, “You're an

interracial family so you can live in the ghetto in Waukegan or go to North Chicago or somewhere like that." (DiNovella, 2009)

Morello would later study political science at Harvard, graduating with honors (Stenning, 2008). Soon after, he would move to Los Angeles to work as an aide to then-Senator Alan Cranston, only to be fired two years later when a constituent of the senator's called the office to complain that "colored people" were moving into her neighborhood, to which he replied that the problem in the neighborhood wasn't with them (Greif, 2002; Buchi, n.d.). Politically, he self-identifies as "a socialist. I believe people should have meaningful control over their society, which we don't have. And there should be democracy in the workplace, as well as in politics" (Gavin, 2000). These politics would take him along similar paths as the other members of Rage Against the Machine, leading to their meeting in the Los Angeles underground scene.

The Beginning of the Band: 1991-1996

Rage Against the Machine would form in 1991 and would soon play their first public performance in a friend's living room at a party in Orange County (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009). The group would continue to perform in the Southern California area in the upcoming months and produced a demo, entitled simply *Rage Against the Machine*. The album's cover art was as provocative as the music, featuring clippings of stock market prices with a match taped to the inside cover. Self-released and self-financed, the album would go on to sell over 5,000 copies in a short few months ("Rage Against the Machine: Discography," n.d.) and would lead to a bidding war between several labels for the band. The band would hold out for full creative control of their music, eventually signing a record contract on Epic Records ("Rage Against the Machine: Biography," 2001), a subsidiary of Sony Records after Sony had bought all of CBS'

music holdings in 1988. This most notably being recognized as the band's "leap to the majors did not go unnoticed by detractors, who questioned the revolutionary integrity of Rage Against the Machine's decision to align itself with the label's parent company, media behemoth Sony" (Ankeny, 2009). The band would go on tour through the first half of 1992 before recording their debut album on Epic, opening alternatively for Suicidal Tendencies and Porno for Pyros and later playing the Lollapalooza Music Festival (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009).

Rage Against the Machine's first proper album for Epic, also entitled *Rage Against the Machine*, would be released in November of 1992. The album was striking in its originality, both musically and politically. Released as an overtly political album during the inward-looking grunge movement and following the largely apolitical 1980s metal scene, the self-titled album wasn't quite like anything that had been seen in mainstream society since the countercultural revolution of the 1960s. Lyrically, this was true – the album did not even remotely deal with commonplace pop music themes as love, teenage angst, spirituality, or other relatively benign topics. Instead, it was fundamentally assaulting to structures of the dominant social order, a decidedly leftist album focused on a politics of resistance, rebellion, and a generalized anti-establishment ideals. Themes included U.S. government state intervention in third-world countries, anti-consumerism, anti-corporatism, critiques of consolidated and controlled media, police brutality, racism and sexism, globalization and third-world politics, and a host of other critiques of social functions resulting from disparity in orderings of power. The cover was notable for featuring the photograph of the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist Vietnamese monk, who set himself afire to protest the persecution of Buddhists under the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem (see Figure 1). The photo is a famous one amongst historians of social activism, which would win the Pulitzer Prize for photography that

year, and would be instrumental in turning John F. Kennedy's sympathies to the Buddhists (Tang, 2002).

Sonically, the album would be an original blend of formerly disparate genres, equally rooted in the heavy metal sound of Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath with the hard-hitting hip-hop delivery of Public Enemy. It was among the earliest influences on the genre that would go on to be called rap-rock, nu metal, or a variety of other terms that have not aged well and are usually pejoratively used today⁵⁷.

The album's attention-grabbing centerpiece, and the song that Rage Against the Machine is probably still most noted for, was "Killing in the Name of." Comprised on only eight repeated lines, the song's central theme, shouted 17 times in the final two minutes of the song was most people's indoctrination to the band: "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me." The song would be the band's first single. Recounting the choice of this song, Morello would later comment,

I remember when our A&R guy suggested that this be our first single and I was like, "Are you kidding?" To the band's credit, we were always fearless in our business decisions and to choose the most profanity-laced song as the debut salvo – possibly the most profane single there has been – was something we were proud

⁵⁷ Indeed, Rage Against the Machine would be somewhat unfairly lumped in with a number of genre artists as Korn, Limp Bizkit, Kid Rock, Incubus, and a host of others. While Rage Against the Machine indeed laid the sonic ground for these artists, critics of this categorization often cite the band's political project and social activism as evidence of these fundamental difference, regularly noting that the similarities between the bands stop at a vaguely alike sonic aesthetic. Said Moon (2000), "Thanks to Limp Bizkit and their legion of imitators, rap metal now gets dismissed as an evolutionary mistake, the bastard realm of repetitive two-bar guitar riffs and sledgehammering monochrome beats. But the pioneering Rage Against the Machine were always deeper than that...Not only do Rage understand the sweep of rock and rap history, but they had bold and unusual ways of tearing that history up." In a more contextual comment about Rage Against the Machine's place in the broader musical landscape of the time, Bush (2009) would state, "Rage Against the Machine isn't really the only metal band that matters, but their aggressive social and political activism is refreshing, especially in an age of blind (or usually self-directed) rage due to groups like Limp Bizkit, Bush, or Nine Inch Nails."

of and gave a great indication of where we were headed. To this day, I don't think there's a Rage song that really resonates in the way that this does. The core of all rebellion is denying the repressive authority and I think that is summed up very succinctly in [the closing line]. (Stenning, 2008, pp. 84-5)

Commercially, the album would be a blockbuster success, entering the Billboard top 200 charts and remaining there for 89 weeks. In 2007, the album would be certified triple platinum sales of over 3m copies (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009).

The next year would have several important events occur that are worth noting:

- In July of 1993, Rage Against the Machine would stage a silent protest against the PMRC at the Lollapalooza festival. The group would take the stage, completely naked, and stand silent with guitars feeding back over the P.A. with duct tape covering their mouths and P-M-R-C written across their chests. The event would make a name for the band, as full-frontal nudity makes for the attention of the press in and of itself. The group would go on to play a free show to make up for not playing at this event (Gavin, 2000). Morello would say "It was our way of letting the audience know that if they didn't take the issue of censorship into their own hands, they would not be able to hear artists like us" (Stenning, 2008, p. 95).
- In September, less than a year after the release of *Rage Against the Machine*, the group would headline the Anti-Nazi League benefit. They would over the next two years headline a number of other festivals, many of which would be benefits for social causes such as several Rock for Choice dates, several dates to benefit the defense fund of controversially jailed American Indian Leonard Peltier and later for equally controversially jailed Mumia Abu-Jamal (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009). The group

would tour incessantly during this era, headlining a number of tours themselves, most of which played to sold-out audiences.

- The band would become incredibly commercially successful during this era, as well as critically successful in many circles. In February, the group's video "Freedom" would be the most broadcast video in the country (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009).

A Developing Political Project: The Evil Empire Era

In April of 1996, Rage Against the Machine would release their second full-length LP, entitled *Evil Empire*. Two weeks later, the album would enter the Billboard Top 200 Album Chart at #1 and reach as high as #4 in the U.K. charts (Stenning, 2008). By 2007, the album had sold over 3m copies (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009). It was a critical and commercial success, a rare feat for a sophomore album following a breakthrough debut as successful as *Rage Against the Machine*, particularly one released over four years later.

The *Evil Empire* would spawn Rage Against the Machine's most prolific period in terms of the band musical and political output. The politics of this follow-up album were much stronger than in their first, with many more artistic risks taken, and the album had a darker, heavier sound that fit with the lyrical content. And as with the escalation of political content in its musical forms, the band would use its opportunity in the public eye to equally escalate its political activism through a number of events in this era.

- In June of 1996, Rage Against the Machine would play the Tibetan Freedom Concert, a two day event that at over 100,000 in attendance would be the largest benefit concert since 1985's Live Aid concert (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009).

- In a particularly notable event in Rage Against the Machine's history, 1996 would see the band play Saturday Night Live on the same night as billionaire and presidential candidate Steve Forbes. No doubt motivated by the controversy of these two very different guests, Saturday Night Live would object to Rage Against the Machine's hanging of upside-down flags on their amplifiers, ordering stage hands to remove the flags seconds before airtime. The group would refuse to allow them to do so, and would be forcibly ejected from the studios, not allowed to play their second scheduled song that evening. After the fact, Morello stated that the flags represented:

Our contention that American democracy is inverted when what passes for democracy is an electoral choice between two representatives of the privileged class. America's freedom of expression is inverted when you're free to say anything you want to say until it upsets a corporate sponsor. Finally, this was our way of expressing our opinion of the show's host, Steve Forbes....[SNL's producers] demanded that we take the flags down. They said the sponsors would be upset, and that because Steve Forbes was on, they had to run a 'tighter' show...SNL censored Rage, period. They could not have sucked up to the billionaire more. The thing that's ironic is SNL is supposedly this cutting edge show, but they proved they're bootlickers to their corporate masters when it comes down to it. They're cowards. It should come to no surprise that GE, which owns NBC, would find 'Bullet' particularly offensive. GE is a major manufacturer of US planes used to commit war crimes in the Gulf War,

and bombs from those jets destroyed hydroelectric dams which killed thousands of civilians in Iraq. (Gavin, 2000)

- In 1997, the group would create its own two-hour radio program, “Radio Free L.A.” The program would consist of two live sets of a band consisting of de la Rocha, Morello, and other guests, including Beck and Cypress Hill, as well as political commentary by a number of political notables including death-row prisoners Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu-Jamal, political activist and scholar Noam Chomsky, and Chuck D of Public Enemy. The program would air on more than 50 commercial radio stations across the United States, and interestingly, was funded by Sony (Gavin, 2000). Morello would state “Radio Free LA provided a musical and political gathering point for the majority of Americans, and you people especially, who rightly felt left out of the “democratic process” (Stenning, 2008, p. 124).
- In perhaps a cruel twist of irony, the group would open for U2 on their tongue-in-cheek commercial “Popmart” tour of the world. Yet despite the overt commercialism of this tour, Rage Against the Machine would donate the net earnings from these performances to a number of charitable organizations, including Friends and Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal, Women Alive, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, The National Commission for Democracy in Mexico, the Zapatista Front for National Liberation, and others (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009). The group would raise over \$400,000, said Morello, “We want to raise a lot of money. That’s one thing that rock can do, and it’s so easy. People pay money to see it, and you can use that money to enrich yourself, or you can use it to benefit other people and other causes” (Kane, 1999).

- The group would release a video comprised of concert footage, uncensored full-length videos (most of the band's videos were edited for content and language when aired over video networks), home video, and other material (including a CD single of a cover of Bruce Springsteen's *The Grapes of Wrath* influenced "The Ghost of Tom Joad"). The home video would sell over 100,000 copies, certified platinum.
- Tom Morello would be arrested in Los Angeles in 1997 during a march against sweatshop labor by the Guess? brand. The group would subsequently lend its name and image to an anti-sweatshop publicity campaign, supporting a garment workers' union, stating "Rage Against Sweatshops: We Don't Wear Guess" (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009).
- In 1999, Zack de la Rocha would speak on the floor before the International Commission of Human Rights of the United Nations in a full session to advocate against the death penalty in the United States, using the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal as a central case (Lang, 1999).
- The group would be nominated for four Grammy Awards. At the 1996 38th Grammy Awards, "Bulls on Parade" off *Evil Empire* would be nominated for Best Hard Rock Performance and "Tire Me" would be nominated for Best Metal Performance, the latter of which would win the award. "People of the Sun" would be nominated the following year at the 39th Grammy Awards. "No Shelter" would be nominated for "Best Metal Performance" at the 40th Grammy Awards ("Grammy Award Winners," 2009).
- Rage Against the Machine would play the Woodstock 99 Festival. The concert, notable for its violence, fires, rapes, and crass commercialism at the expense of spirit of the concert, would have plenty of blame thrown at the artists involved on the final night,

many of which played aggressive music and did little to quell the riots. Rage Against the Machine would be criticized by several major media outlets for their contributions to this activity, accused as negligent in their behavior, including setting an American flag on fire on stage. The band would, in turn, publicly criticize the organizers' handling of the concert, including its exploitative food and beverage costs and lack of clean water and toilet facilities (Gavin, 2000).

Spending Earned Political Capital: The Battle of Los Angeles

The group would record its third album, *The Battle of Los Angeles*, in 1999. Describing the multitude of meanings, Morello would explain the band's choice of titles, based in the political, social and cultural realities in the city:

It's intentionally ambiguous but part of it speaks to the fact that there's an ongoing battle of LA boiling just underneath the surface. There's a tremendous amount of tension in the city, as evidenced in the wake of the Rodney King verdicts, and it's still bubbling close to the surface. We're just one court verdict away from the whole place blowing up all over again. And it's something you notice here every day on the streets. On the Sunset Strip, for example, there are Bentleys and Rolls Royces driving by, and there are people at the same time who are so hungry that they're almost ready to attack you for spare change. And also in our music, you can hear the tension of the city, the aggression, the smog, the hip-hop, the desperation and the hope that's all part of L.A. (Kane, 1999)

As the group had amassed a good amount of political and cultural capital with its celebrity status, commercial success, and great popularity, the group's political activities and ambitions would greatly increase during this era. The album would be released on November 2, 1999, one year before election day in the United States.

Several notable events occurred during this time:

- In a culture jam of sorts, the band would shoot its video for "Sleep Now in the Fire" across the street from the New York Stock Exchange. Shot with noted documentary filmmaker Michael Moore, the group would perform in front of a crowd of hundreds of onlookers on the steps without a license, eventually trying to obtain entrance to the NYSE. Security at the NYSE would lower the metal protective barriers that block access the doors to the building, and the band would be arrested along with Moore (Basham, 2000). Footage of the protest was interspersed with a faux game show based on the then-popular *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* and featured questions related to social justice. The video closed with a sound clip of Kentucky Republican Representative Gary Bauer, "A band called...Rage Against the Machine, that band is anti-family and it's pro-terrorist" (Moore, 2000) The video would go on to be one of MTV's most played videos.
- In August of 2000, the group planned to play outside of the Democratic National Convention at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. After facing a lengthy legal battle where a lower judge had ordered them to play in an enclosed venue miles away from the Staples Center, the group upon appeal was allowed to perform across the street from the venue in a so-called "First Amendment Zone." With over 8,000 attendees, the concert was designed to protest the two-party system in America, and would be peaceful until well after Rage Against the Machine's set when the show would be shut down by police

during a following band's set, citing violence and rocks being thrown at authority figures (Feldman, 2000).

- The song "Guerilla Radio" off *The Battle of Los Angeles* would be nominated and win at the 43rd Grammy Awards for "Best Hard Rock Performance in 2001 ("Grammy Award Winners," 2009).

Breakup, Aftermath, A New Band, and Reunification

On October 18th, 2000, the group would disband. Following a bizarre event where bassist Tim Commerford would perch himself atop a set piece during the MTV Video Music Awards after the band lost an award to Limp Bizkit, the band's future had been in question. Zack de la Rocha confirmed the band's demise with the statement,

I feel that it is now necessary to leave Rage because our decision-making process has completely failed. It is no longer meeting the aspirations of all four of us collectively as a band, and from my perspective, has undermined our artistic and political ideal. I am extremely proud of our work, both as activists and musicians, as well as indebted and grateful to every person who has expressed solidarity and shared this incredible experience with us. (Armstrong, 2000)

In December of 2000, Rage Against the Machine's final album would be released. *Renegades*, produced by Rick Rubin, was a collection of cover songs by artists such as Afrika Bambaataa, The Stooges, Minor Threat, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, MC5, The Stooges, and others. The song "Renegades of Funk" would go on to be nominated for the 2002 Grammy Awards (Gavin, 2000). *Renegades* would be followed by a number of live DVD recordings of their performances, released by Epic Records over the next several years.

Post Break-Up Activity

Despite the group's break-up, the members – Morello in particular – would continue to be both productive and successful through the 2000s. De la Rocha would keep a low profile over the next seven years, rarely speaking to the press and quietly working on a solo album with a number of notable producers, including a full album of songs with DJ Shadow, another full album of songs with Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor, several songs with The Roots' Questlove, hip-hop artist El-P, and others (“Review: One Day as a Lion,” 2008; Stenning, 2008), which as of this writing has yet to be released, with the exception of one track – “March of Death” that was distributed for free on the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq as a protest, supporting the “millions world wide who have stood up to oppose the Bush administration's attempt to expand the U.S. empire at the expense of human rights at home and abroad. In this spirit I'm releasing this song for anyone who is willing to listen. I hope it not only makes us think, but also inspires us to act and raise our voices" (de la Rocha, 2003). Using similar lyrical themes but a stripped-down musical sound of a Fender Rhodes electric piano and drum kit, De la Rocha would in 2008 release a five-song EP of a new project, *One Day as a Lion*, that would receive generally favorable reviews (“One Day As A Lion: Reviews,” 2009), if not a commonly expressed question about de la Rocha's ability to return with a full-length after eight years absent.

With de la Rocha out of the band, the remaining members would at the urging of Rubin team up with former Soundgarden lead singer Chris Cornell to form Audioslave in 2001, signing to Sony. Not surprisingly, the band would take on much of the sound of Rage Against the Machine, hard-hitting and aggressive, but would leave the political themes as an occasional side note rather than a central focus, Cornell wishing to not simply be the new lead singer of Rage

Against the Machine (Moss, 2002). Despite its generally apolitical nature, Audioslave would be incredibly commercially successful, if not critically divisive, with its three albums each going multi-platinum, sold-out arena tours, and multiple Grammy nominations for the group before its breakup due to personality differences between Cornell and the other members in 2007 (“Chris Cornell Speaks About His Split With Audioslave,” 2007).

Tom Morello’s Emergence as the Primary Political Activist

Perhaps most interesting during this era was the emergence from the umbrella of Rage Against the Machine of Tom Morello as both a solo artist and political activist. Morello, always the most outspoken off-stage of his political beliefs and forward in his activist leanings, developed an alter-ego to the mostly apolitical Audioslave which he named The Nightwatchman. Beginning at open mic nights and coffeehouses and consisting mostly of solo acoustic performances reminiscent of early Bob Dylan or Woody Guthrie songs –admirably simple coming from the effects-heavy guitar sound he used during Rage Against the Machine – The Nightwatchman is what Morello the “black Robin Hood of 21st century music” (Behm, 2008). He describes the political project he was undertaking:

Due to the troubled times we live in, it seemed like it was an appropriate time to get this music out. Some people might say it's kind of preaching to the converted, but frankly, the converted need a kick in the ass. Given the situation in our country and around the world, the fact that the White House is not ringed with pitchforks and torches means that people are not either paying enough attention or following through with how aghast they actually are. [The music is] is a reaction against illicit wars, a reaction against first strikes, torture, secret prisons, spying

illegally on American citizens. It's a reaction against war crimes, and it's a reaction against a few corporations that grow rich off this illicit war while people beg for food in the city streets. (Harris, 2007)

Morello would sign to Epic Records – Rage Against the Machine’s former label - and as of this writing has released two solo albums under the moniker. Neither album has been as commercially successful on par with either Rage Against the Machine or Audioslave, yet that does not appear to be the point of the albums. Rather, using direct language and simple music in the politically active folksinger tradition spreads the message very similar to Rage Against the Machine’s, yet through a different artistic approach, if not one that has less of a potential to reach a mass audience. If nothing else, Morello claims that the work that he does as The Nightwatchman is more political and artistically fulfilling than his work with his former bands (Rubio, 2007).

Morello’s political activism during this period would be substantial, as well, using music as a vehicle for social change. He would organize the “Tell Us the Truth” tour in 2007, a tour with equally political musicians Billy Bragg, Steve Earle, and Lester Chambers that would focus its critiques on media consolidation (Wiederhorn, 2003). With Serj Tankian, the lead singer of System of a Down (a band whose politics are similar to Rage Against the Machine’s), Morello would in 2003 form “Axis of Justice,” a social activist organization whose stated mission is “to bring together musicians, fans of music, and grassroots political organizations to fight for social justice. We aim to build a bridge between fans of music around the world and local political organizations to effectively organize around issues of peace, human rights, and economic justice” (“Axis of Justice Mission,” 2009). The group would use music as the central entry point into larger themes of social justice and social action, eliciting the support of a number of musical

acts who would perform benefits, allow the organization to set up booths at their concerts, and participate in a number of dialogues on issues of social importance. The site would also serve as a clearinghouse for volunteer opportunities and ways that fans could get involved, as well as producing a DVD of a number of artists' live performances as a fundraising benefit for the organization.

Rage Against the Machine Reunification

In 2007, Rage Against the Machine would surprise many by reuniting, first for a one-off festival date at the Coachella concerts in California and later for a small tour. Claiming that the band was reunited because it was necessary given the political state of the world and the Bush administration (Harris, 2007), the band would pick up right where they left off. It was a different time, and the band would step back into the headlines in this new era of blogs, viral information sharing, and conservative talk shows and pundits when de la Rocha stated on stage at Coachella that President George W. Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney should be “brought to trial as a war criminals and hung and shot...this system has become so brutal and vicious and cruel that it needs to start wars and profit from the destruction around the world in order to survive as a world power...And we refuse to not stand up; back down from that position” (Stenning, 2008, p. 197). The group would notably soon after perform a protest concert in Minneapolis during the 2008 Republican National Convention that was largely peaceful, including an acapella performance in the mass of protesters, using megaphones to lead the audience through a number of their songs (Sony Music Entertainment, 2009).

Morello would in 2008 state that Rage Against the Machine will continue to tour in the future, but it is unlikely that they will record a new album, “[The Nightwatchman is] my

principal musical focus, as I see it, for the remainder of my life... This music [is] as important to me as any music I've ever been involved in. It really encapsulates everything I want to do as an artist” (Graff, 2008). As of this writing, Morello was forming a new band, The Street Sweeper Social Club, with former frontman for the politically charged hip hop group The Coup, Boots Riley (Greenhaus, 2008), and de la Rocha would be recording a full-length LP with his One Day as a Lion project.

Part II: Analysis

Questions of motives; questions of political efficacy

For the good and the bad, the contradictions, the issues of authenticity, the hazy political logic, it is important to note that Rage Against the Machine’s political project makes them *media activists*. It is also an easy fact to overlook: Rage’s celebrity status, ubiquity in pop culture, and catchiness in their music makes it easy to neglect to focus on the obvious - that buried in the pop hooks and melody is an appeal for a change in the social ordering of power, a call for justice. It is a protest, a tactic of social activism, and unlike many other activist strategies of the 1990s used to educate the public and place pressure on those in power, the members of Rage Against the Machine used popular music as their central strategy to enact social change.

They were also among the most commercially successful musical artists of this era, selling over ten million copies of their studio and live albums (Stenning, 2008), playing before literally millions of fans during their career in the U.S. and abroad, and continuing to maintain an enormous fanbase and mass popularity long after its demise⁵⁸. It is safe to say that the history of

⁵⁸ The band’s reunification at the 2007 Coachella concert would be the headlining event of an already notable lineup of bands, with an estimated 60,000 of the event’s 180,000 ticketholders in attendance (Kot, 2007)

modern popular music has never experienced a band that has been able to simultaneously achieve their level of success while espousing their level of radical beliefs and social activism: When one thinks of political musical artists, they are most likely the first band to come to mind⁵⁹.

Yet this raises a central question about the band: If Rage Against the Machine's politics are assumed to be sincerely motivated, given the band's embrace by both mainstream audiences and corporate record labels alike, how revolutionary can their politics really be? In other words, how radical are the radical politics of this band?

It is a question often asked. And for good reason, as there are more than enough contradictions that exist in this group, more than enough ammunition for critiques of the band's tactics, message, delivery, and politics. Yet the band's political message is fairly clear. They rarely, if ever, surprise audiences with their political stances. Whether one has expressly heard the band discuss its opinion on given topic or not, it is not hard to figure out what causes they support and what they do not.

Yet this discussion leads to a more troubling issue: If Rage Against the Machine did actually represent a true threat to the system, why were they allowed to release their records in the way that they did within this system? It is inductive: A threat to the stability of the economic system will obviously not be allowed to rise to the level where their actions could endanger the power and profits that go to those who benefit from their actions. It is common sense for those who are benefiting from the release of Rage Against the Machine's albums and the profits from their merchandise and tour receipts.

⁵⁹ Indeed, the culture jamming and social activist magazine *Adbusters* in 2005 would ask its readers via an email what musical artists they were listening to, which artists were motivating readers' social activism. They would specifically ask readers not to send in the name of Rage Against the Machine, as the magazine just assumed that all of its readers were influenced by the band.

If this is actually the case that the band's potential for social change is actually just one more hegemonic control mechanism – truly believing in their own resistance while actually working for larger political and economic structures - then there is the possibility that Rage Against the Machine are simply pawns, fully believing in their revolutionary potential, completely sure of at least the possibility of a change in the broader social system (either on a macro level or an individual case basis), yet existing in the system of mass media production and capitalistic enterprise. Or are their politics legitimate in the group's capacity for social change? Are there effects that come from their music being used as the primary vehicle for spurring social action?

This is a question that dogs every political artist. Yet given Rage Against the Machine's overt politics, worn on the sleeve for all to see, it can be assumed that Epic Records (and its parent at company at the time, Sony Records) realized a number of things from the onset.

The first is that Rage Against the Machine's music would sell. Epic's interests and the band's interests are not the same. Thought they may be shared on a certain level and are not necessarily incompatible – Rage Against the Machine wants its music to be heard and so does Epic - there are different motivational forces and different reasons for their popularity.

Rage Against the Machine was commercially successful through the 1990s and continues to be today. They are a band that has made Epic Records, and Sony, its parent company, a healthy profit over the years, and its back catalog continues to sell, particularly as interest in the band has seen resurgence in their reformation. Furthermore, Morello has a particularly close relationship with the label, which released the very profitable Audioslave records in a joint deal with Interscope Records (owned by Universal Music Group), and has been the sole label for all

of The Nightwatchman's and the Street Sweeper Social Club's first record⁶⁰. Not counting live albums, Morello has been a part of ten albums that have been released on major labels.

So why would Epic go along with everything that Rage Against the Machine has asked for? Why would the label, as a subsidiary of Sony, a publicly traded company accountable to shareholders and quarterly earnings, be interested in the band given its targets? The answer is singular, but complicated: The profit motive. While there may be interest in the band's message among record company executives and A&R representatives for a number of reasons, no band will ever be signed to any label if they are expected to lose money. Even smaller labels, accountable to nothing more than their basic needs and self-sufficiency, cannot afford to lose money, and the culture industry function of music as a commodity is implicit in the nature of media art forms in a capitalistic society. The political message – in whole or selectively in part – may be of appeal to those who work for Epic or Sony, yet the profit motive is the driving force.

Epic wanted a superstar band, and they got one. But what formulated the band's superstar status? What did Epic hear in the band that made them think that it would sell? Though this is not a dissertation on aesthetics, it is impossible to discuss the success of a band without at least briefly addressing the issue, as it is one of several central issues necessary to understand the band's popularity but also its ability to get played on radio, and ultimately to sell records

Rage Against the Machine's sound was heavy-hitting, rooted in hip-hop culture, funk, heavy metal, and hard rock. Stylistically, the band held a groove in its bass and guitar lines, many parts of which were played in unison and at a syncopated rhythm over a steady drum beat

⁶⁰ De la Rocha's *One Day as a Lion* would be released on Anti, a large but true independent label affiliated with Epitaph records and noted for its roster of critically acclaimed (if not commercial blockbuster) artists such as Tom Waits, Solomon Burke, Neko Case, and the artist perhaps most politically aligned with Rage Against the Machine, Michael Franti.

and de la Rocha's caustic delivery. De la Rocha's delivery cannot exactly be described as singing; it is more rapping, a delivery of hard stresses on the one and the three in almost every bar, a percussion instrument of sorts that functions as a central point of the band's musical aesthetic and compliments the dual guitar-bass lines that drive the groove, not unlike funk in its structure. As a guitar player, Morello is among the most unique and talented guitarists, ranking number 26 in Rolling Stone's (2003) "The 100 Greatest Guitarist of All Time." His guitar playing is quite innovative, being influenced as much by the hard rock and heavy metal guitarists as it is by DJ Turntablists, as his style often draws previously unheard of sounds from his guitar that mimic the sound of DJ scratching. As such, the band would be considered among the originators of the now much-derided "rap-rock" genre of music.

The band's music is quite aggressive, not only in its lyrical content but also in its attack and timbre. The hard-hitting drums and distorted guitar give the band a forceful edge that is found in hardcore and metal bands, and played particularly well in the grunge and alternative years of the early-to-mid 1990s, both on radio and at live shows of this era, when moshing (the mass audience's slamming into one another at live concerts) was both new and omnipresent at concerts.

Moreover, the band's sound fit well on modern alternative rock radio, with power chord structures and anti-establishment lyrics. Most articles discussing the band's music describe the audience as young white males, a demographic that always plays well with a generalized countercultural ideal in musical forms. The band's aggression, it can be imagined, played well with this audience, and record companies, always wishing to find a new edge to set their product apart from its competitors yet without being so stylistically radical as to alienate its audience,

could see the potential in this group of young men who were both musically talented and embracing a new extreme of anti-establishment politics.

Given this, there are great implications, and a seemingly great hypocrisy, about a band that espouses a generalized antagonism toward capitalism and capitalistic structures, yet allows its music to be released by one of the big four record labels, allows its music to be sold in retail outlets owned by multi-national corporations, allows its music to be licensed for film releases of relatively benign and apolitical works, simply for what can be imagined to be either commercial or aesthetic purposes⁶¹.

It is a common point of criticism of the band, and of many groups who are both commercially successful and politically minded⁶². Looking at user comments on a number of articles, as well as blog postings (both on Rage Against the Machine fan sites and other music sites), there is a common critique of the group as revolutionary poseurs, as using their revolutionary politics as a fashion statement of a novel subject matter to set them apart from the mass of other bands. Stenning (2008) discusses this critique of hip rebellion:

⁶¹ Rage Against the Machine's music would be licensed to a good number of films, including *Higher Learning*, *The Crow*, *Natural Born Killers*, *Bamboozled*, *The Matrix*, *Godzilla*, and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (Internet Movie Database, 2009). Clearly, hearing the lyrics to "Sleep Now in the Fire" (sample "The noose and the rapist, the fields overseer/The agents of orange/The priests of Hiroshima/The cost of my desire/Sleep now in the fire") in the sequel to *Charlie's Angels* presents a situation that does little to fulfill the political project of the band as much as it does its commercial imperatives.

⁶² Strauss (1999), reviewing *The Battle of Los Angeles*, would offer a satirically biting critique of the band's formula, then three albums in, "Have you ever tried writing your own Rage Against the Machine song? It's easy. Just grab a religious pamphlet off the street. Replace the word God with killing, Jesus or Christ with a political prisoner like Mumia Abu-Jamal or Leonard Peltier, and scripture citations with swear words. Lines from a recently distributed tract -- "Jesus came to the earth to take the penalty for our sins" and "all our evil has cut us off from God 'for the wages of sin are death' (Romans 6:23)" -- become, "Peltier came to the earth/To take the penalty for our sins on himself./All our evil has cut us off from the killing/For the wages of sin are death, shit."

There are many so-called political bands in existence but their rhetoric seems to be designed as much to give them an identity rather than any inherent desire for change. It is a way to quickly sell records. If young kids think they are being rebellious by buying 'dangerous' music, then it will have the same effect whether it's W.A.S.P. singing about fucking like a beast or a modern punk band singing of political atrocities...Rebellion is an alluring concept to most adolescents. (p. 109)

More to the point (and somewhat less kind toward Rage Against the Machine's audience's political agency), Wiederhorn (1996) presents another perspective, "Disaffected teens rallied behind the cries of 'Fuck you/I won't do what you told me,' from 'Killing in the Name,' but they seemed to view Rage's appeal as an excuse to skip school and take drugs."

It is an easy argument to make, and a difficult one to dispute beyond examining the evidence toward the band's sincerity, and through its members' rare public justifications for the way in which it releases its music. Yes, Rage Against the Machine does appeal to the aggressiveness that drives a lot of hard-hitting bands, and there is no doubt that much of the audience that listens to Rage Against the Machine enjoys them because of reasons other than the calls for social justice, or those who embrace the lyrics and energy of the music as a pure but blind affective appeal to rebellion, as Strauss (1999) discusses, "Though some may find the lyrics naive and over the top, fans do take them to heart -- though not always in context, as can be attested by anyone who saw the marauding teens chanting, 'I won't do what you tell me' as they lit a match to Woodstock '99.'" Though teenage rebellion has a long history in pop music and functions as a bedrock in the canon of this genre, it is important to remember that for musical artists who attempt to use their art form as a political project, a call to action for an

audience, there are times when music is subject to as much audience interpretation as other media forms.

Questions of the Music; Questions of the Politics

Yet if political compromise is necessary to play to a mass audience, Rage Against the Machine is an interesting case. It is safe to say that not a single independent or unsigned band has been able to reach a fraction of the band's audience - yet one can ask what, exactly, is Rage Against the Machine's political project⁶³?

For a band as politically motivated as it is, this is a surprisingly difficult question to answer. Rage Against the Machine seems to have a largely indistinct political project, centered on a generalized rhetoric of anti-establishment notions, with a number of instances where they have targeted or advocated for specific causes. While they are known as a band embracing resistance, if asked specifically what their larger project is, most people would be hard-pressed to describe it beyond a cause advocated for in a specific song. Their subject matter ranges along a broad continuum but generally lists as a Marxist-esque critique of contemporary society, the state, corporate enterprises, media control, racism, and trans-national politics and exploitative practices. The band's lyrics are often found siding with the poor and the oppressed, critiquing those in power and their abuses inherent in privilege, greed, money, governmental policy, and so forth, as well specific causes such as Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, the Mexican Zapatista resistance group, and other causes that either were issues embraced by the American Left or became so, in part or in whole through Rage Against the Machine's songs.

⁶³ This actually raises an additional question in addition to their political project, which is why did the band choose music as the best way in which to achieve this political project? This is a central issue to this dissertation, one that will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

The first goal can be assumed to be teaching the public about the issues that Rage Against the Machine thinks are important as a rhetorical device used to enact social change. The educating function of music (as well as many other artistic forms) is a deep-rooted one in American culture, and the band has used this throughout its career as a tactic of social activism. Certainly, this is true in the issues raised in Rage Against the Machine's lyrical content, issues that rarely saw the light of day in mainstream media outlets, let alone on non-news radio stations that focused on modern rock formats, yet also in the liner notes of their CDs. Each of their albums would feature photographs or lists of books that had an implied message of recommendations for people who might be interested in furthering their understanding of a number of the issues presented in their music and included everything from macro-theory books on political theory and democratic functioning, to how-to manuals on resistance and media activism, to specific books on Leonard Peltier and Che Guevara⁶⁴. Their CDs each had a list of organizations whose causes the band supported and the contact information for those who were interested in getting more information, including the Anti-Nazi League, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Refuse and Resist, Parents for Rock and Rap, and many others ("Liner Notes - Evil Empire," 1996). The band's website serves as both a promotional mechanism for the band, but also features a "Freedom Fighter of the Month" in addition to links to organizations and causes, both information and action-oriented (including a link to Morello's "Axis of Justice" Foundation) ("Rage Against the Machine Homepage," 2009). Furthermore, Zach de la Rocha participated as an founder and featured speaker in the 1998-9 Spitfire Tour, a public speaking tour that traveled to a number of college campuses throughout the United States with celebrity

⁶⁴ A full listing of texts in the liner notes of their albums – numbering in the dozens - is far too extensive for this dissertation. For a complete listing, see the liner notes themselves, or (Gavin, 2000)

speakers and prominent activists speaking to audiences about issues of social justice and social change (“Spitfire Tour,” n.d.).

It appears that Rage Against the Machine has taken it upon itself to act as a breakthrough artist in order to bring certain items to the attention of the public in the name of social justice. These issues were (and often still are) rarely addressed in the popular or journalistic press – this is particularly true with ongoing or large-scale events - but even if the issues are present in mainstream news sources, there is a large portion of the public that does not regularly consume news. As such, using a popular music form as an educating agent of elucidating social problems and advocating for social change can, given the right resources for audiences to act upon this knowledge, make for a powerful social change agent, and this form has a long history of using song in order to educate and inform the public. Morello discusses the band’s thoughts on this approach,

A tremendous number of people have picked up on the politics of it...We hear from them every day. The glut of mail and e-mail we receive is astounding. But I think our audience in general is a very intelligent one. There are always going to be people who are just coming for the aggression in the music, and that’s perfectly fine - we don’t play this elitist music that’s for New England coffeehouses. It’s not this kind of political folk music for the converted. But some of the people who come for the rock will leave with something very different than what they came with. When you sell 9 million records, you can’t expect there to be 9 million ideological adherents. And that’s okay - if you get 10 percent of them, that’s still 900,000. (Kane, 1999)

Yet there is a question that many have been asking given the band's reunification in 2007. Rage Against the Machine's political project seems to be incongruous given the band's timeline: The band would release its first album soon after the election of the Clinton administration, would break up on the eve of the election of George W. Bush, and would reunite in the waning days of his administration.

The band – indeed, no friend of the Clinton Presidency - had much to say about that era's political choices, including the so-called War on Drugs, the low-intensity conflict of continuous bombing and embargos on Iraq, the economic policies of the administration, and the embracing of a generalized Neoliberal politics that, despite Clintons status as a young and politically agile Democratic reformer, left him no choice but to embrace the deregulation, market liberalization, and privatization that was established under the long run of successful Neoliberal politicians that had preceded him (Harvey, 2005). Kane (1999) writes, "While the Democrats have found life cushier in the center, that pretty much leaves Rage as the most popular Leftist-progressive radicals in America." He's probably right: The 1990s' newfound peace in the end of the cold war, and the prosperity from the unparalleled expansion of the economy of the Global West resulted in an era of little difference between the platforms of the right and left in American politics.

Yet the Neoliberal order would reach its apex during the second Bush Administration, when these policies would be extended to their utmost extreme with the addition of high-intensity conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, massive disenfranchisement of minorities, divided healthcare and education systems, massive government surveillance and warrantless information gathering, and a host of other issues that characterized the administration's politics. It was as if everything that Rage Against the Machine had criticized during the 1990s, everything that the

band stood for and cared about correcting during its tenure had not only come full-circle but had expanded so drastically that in retrospect, few on the right or the left in 2009 can believe the extent to which the Bush administration faltered. At the turn of the century, and particularly in the years following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the changing political tides fundamentally shifted the nation toward a conservative perspective that resulted in a number of the now-failed policies of the Bush Administration. It was a time when the U.S. government would go on to abuse its power to the fullest extent in the name of Neoliberal (and otherwise) principles.

So where was Rage Against the Machine? Where was the preeminent dissenting voice in popular music, and possibly the preeminent political voice in all of popular culture? Where was the band that had claimed to have a political project for social justice and provided one of the few critiques of the injustices and wrongheaded policies of powerful nations and corporations? If the activist left of the United States (and indeed elsewhere) ever needed a rallying cry, it was during the second Bush administration. Rage's political project clearly served a valuable dissenting voice in the public sphere when the Democratic party was well in the middle; Now that conservatism had taken an extreme hold in American politics and were generally given a free pass from the established news media, Rage Against the Machine's critiques could have provided at least one voice of public dissent in the cultural realm, a counter voice that was absent in the newfound (and myopic) patriotism of many voices in contemporary country music or the lite pop of the post-9/11 era that served more as a distraction than a contributor to a healthy public sphere.

The band would reunite at the tail end of the Bush administration in 2007, having missed what would appear to be a tailor-made opportunity for Rage Against the Machine's political

project to push forward in its mission. Morello discussed the band's desire to play shows again, "Is it a coincidence that in the seven years that Rage Against The Machine has been away that the country has slid into right-wing purgatory? I think not. It occurred to all of us that the times were right to see if we can knock the Bush administration out in one fell swoop, and we hope to do that job well" ("Rage Against The Machine discuss reunion ," 2007).

Yet the question remains: Where were they? If they indeed believed in the mission that they were advocating through almost the complete decade of the 1990s, then as society shifted increasingly more toward the right in the 2000s, why would the band not put aside its personal differences⁶⁵ and move toward a more meaningful goal? During the era of the group's breakup, Zack de la Rocha would essentially disappear from public life, and the remaining members would form the largely apolitical Audioslave. Morello's The Nightwatchman project would tackle political issues, but would be playing to relatively small audiences, with no mainstream radio airplay, no videos gaining rotation on video networks and getting respectable views on Youtube, but most likely preaching to the choir in terms of political critique. It is a strike of credibility against the band's adherence to its own political project and principles that if it were really as dedicated to a shift in the political order, it would have used the means that it had at its disposal in order to affect change.

The band's re-emergence right before the election of Barack Obama, a considerable leftward turn in the direction of world politics, does not further help their case, but to the band's

⁶⁵ Like so many politically charged organizations ruined by infighting among volatile members (and even more artistic collaborators ruined by the same charge), Rage Against the Machine was close to breaking up through its entire lifespan. Its success notwithstanding, the band's members notoriously did not like one another, one of the reasons why the band would have such a great span of time between the release of its albums. One can assume that these tensions existed between de la Rocha and the other members, given that the remaining three members would go on to form Audioslave with one another.

credit, the fight for political justice and a change in the social order would continue no matter who was in office. Morello claims that this work through music – The Nightwatchman in this case, but one can imagine through Rage Against the Machine, too - as a political force is as relevant today as in past eras:

On one hand I'm hopeful a new day has dawned, but on the other hand I really do believe that the system under which we live is fundamentally a one corporate party state with two right wings. We still have two unjust wars, a horrendous financial crisis, a gross disparity between rich and poor, and the environment sliding into the abyss. All those things have yet to be confronted. It's important for us to address those issues and continue the struggle, which the Nightwatchman will certainly do. (Behm, 2008)

Silencing the Band: Methods of Control, Command, and Censorship

Yet whenever there is the possibility of social change, the emergence of a new threat to the existing order of power, it is almost always met with a clampdown by those who are currently benefiting from the dominant order, or those who have been taught to defend the ideals and principles of the era's ruling ideas. With this in mind, how have the politically, economically, and culturally dominant have resisted the attempts to destabilize these structures and processes?

The answer lies somewhere in a gray area where state politics and private economics overlap. In terms of state politics, Rage Against the Machine would represent a threat to social stasis on several occasions, leading to police crackdowns on their concerts and on their fans. It is true that history has shown a number of cases where police forces do not take critique very well,

perhaps most notably in the case of Ice-T and his song “Cop Killer” off the Body Count album. Police are often an easy target of authority to foster anti-establishment credibility, but there is little denying that they are a central target of Rage Against the Machine’s.

Yet it highlights one of the ways in which music that threatens the stability of the social ordering of power is commanded and controlled by those in power. As an example, Rage Against the Machine was scheduled to play The Gorge Amphitheatre in central Washington State in 1997. However, William Weister, the sheriff of the county, used the court system to attempt to block the concert. The court documents filed would refer to them as a “militant, radical, and anti-establishment” group with “violent and anti-law enforcement philosophies of Rage Against the Machine” as reason to ban the concert (“Police Censorship Targets Rage,” 1997). The county court would two days before the show rule that it must be allowed to continue, but the police would pressure the venue to double its privately rented security force to 240 personnel (Cooper, 1997). Weister would more than quadruple the number of police officers assigned to the show from twelve to fifty and announce a “no tolerance” policy toward concert-goer unrest, leading to the arrest of 80 people despite the fact that “The cheerful teenage and twentysomething crowd looked more like it was headed to see a tennis match than a big, bad rock 'n' roll band” (Lewis, 1999). De la Rocha would offer a pointed rebuttal, “He has the nerve to call us violent when last year there were 80,000 cases of police brutality filed against departments all over the country this sheriff pig is poppin' off, poppin' off about how we're violent. Well, shit, he belongs to the most violent gang in US history” (“Rage Against the Machine: Words,” 1997).

The band would open the show with a cover of N.W.A.’s controversial “Fuck the Police.” In the encore, the band would play “Killing in the Name of,” whose lyrics, “Some of those that

work forces/are the same that burn crosses” and “You justify/those that died/by wearing the badge/they're the chosen whites” sent quite a clear message of the band’s thoughts on the matter. Introducing the song, de la Rocha would call out Weister, “So, Sheriff, you think you can intimidate us? There are so few of you and there are so many of us. There ain't nothing more frightening than a pig with political aspirations. We take it as an insult that he calls us violent because everyone knows the police are out of control” (“Police Censorship Targets Rage,” 1997). The group would face similar tactics in many districts, and De la Rocha would later make clear, if not illuminate the complexity, of the group’s principles, “Cops have been following us around all over the country saying we support cop killers. Let's make it completely clear. We don't support killers, and especially not killer cops. We do support innocent brothers and sisters being framed up in prisons all over this country, people like Mumia Abu-Jamal” (C.J., 1999).

Implications and Tough Questions

While this is just one example, it is indicative of a larger *process* through which attempts are made to control music that may be threatening to the existent social order. Official censorship, whether overt or through more indirect means (such as legal but strategic tactics of making concerts difficult to perform, noise ordinances, opaque references to the “public’s safety,” or other such roundabout action), is not uncommonly faced by bands that take on social change as a political mission.

Yet more troubling is the way in which music that, while popular, may encounter resistance in its attempts to subvert the social order in more indirect ways. In the case of efforts to cancel the Rage Against the Machine concert in Washington, county commissioner Helen Fancher, in endorsing the Sheriff’s cancellation of the show, provides a telling quote,

As I understand it, the Sheriff's Department has done a lot of investigating of this group and found that there was a tremendous amount of disobedience and near-riot conditions at their shows. When they have head bangers and this heavy rock and they advocate disruption, it *introduces an element into our county that just doesn't exist here.* (“Police Censorship Targets Rage,” 1997, italics mine)

This last sentence deserves a moment of reflection. Fancher’s off-the-cuff comment can be read in a number of ways. Clearly, as the elected county commissioner, it can be assumed that Fancher does not represent a challenge to the status quo, other than to reinforce already dominant beliefs. Yet comments such as this are representative of the challenges facing musicians who choose to try to subvert the dominant order rather than to conform to the rigid yet unspoken subjects, genres, and delivery that are more apt to produce commercial success, if not maintenance of the status quo. It is a function of the articulation of normalcy, of the everyday life that a community chooses for itself through articulating certain values over others, and as discussed in chapter two, the articulation of values is most often done through a logic of the dominant order. This is true of musical acts that represent a different perspective than the community at hand politically, but also in terms of differences in economic, ethnic, cultural or moral values. For those that don’t like it and want to change things, it is assumed, they can just move on because they and their oppositional values are not welcome in the community. This tactic of community standards are most often veiled in a thin sheen of a dislike of the values and aesthetics of hip-hop, if not racist undertones as hip-hop totems begin to integrate themselves into communities.

Comments such as Fancher’s also represent the power that music has for social change and the integration of communities not previously open to new ideas or to people unlike

themselves. Clearly, Rage Against the Machine has taken on a number of social justice issues, both specific (in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal or Leonard Peltier) and systemic (as in the case of media consolidation, U.S. government foreign policy, or police brutality). These arguments blend into one another by contextualizing social injustices in the larger flows of problems and causes, and trying to right things to the way they should be from a given value structure is rarely today an argument of absolutes: The case for change in the postmodern era is never quite as easy as a simple problem and a simple solution.

Yet it must be remembered that the reformulating of a new social order is achieved through the creation or cultivation of a disorder, not necessarily in the name of violence or physical strife, but certainly in rejecting the dominant tenets of mainstream life. Rage Against the Machine's use of music provides them a particularly valuable entry point into communities that may otherwise never have heard oppositional viewpoints, or if present at all, are often marginalized or censored, and the liberating and democratic functions of disorder can be through a cultural politics as well as they can through a politics of violence or physical overthrow.

Radicalism in musical aesthetics has always faced a resistance as the older generation laments a bygone era or the music of their youth, or at worst, creating a moral panic of the music that is accused of corrupting the youth. It is a normalizing function of keeping social systems static, and it takes place along the cultural politics of race, class, gender, sexual politics and orientations, and many other issues. Music addressing these topics is often deemed unwholesome, lewd, or indecent – after all, the FCC's regulation of content is largely driven by turning to “community standards” – and it is often censored when there is a threat to the political, social, cultural, or moral standards of any community, often in the name of protecting youth and

children from a corrupting of the mind by way of the ears⁶⁶. The PMRC is perhaps the prime example of this practice.

Morello would discuss the cultural and political attack on disorderly music in just these terms,

Normally, the kinds of music that are always attacked are black music, hip-hop, hard rock and, like, working-class white music, like heavy metal or whatever. Because those things, I think not coincidentally, speak to the American underclass. And some, obviously your Metallica songs, don't have an anti-sweatshop message. Still, there's something in the form that they find threatening, maybe the way in which young people express their independence. They don't like extreme music and they want to shut that down. And they want you to be obedient and they want you to not veer from the mainstream. (Stenning, 2008, p. 96)

In the case of Rage Against the Machine, the police acting in their role as a barrier for the physical safety of the public is understandable in any case, musical or not, and there are few who wish for unsafe conditions to exist in any setting. Yet when state, corporate, or community censorship begins to be for political reasons rather than public safety, problems begin to emerge. And the public safety argument is often the one used in order to repress those whose speech is oppositional to authority figures, whether elected officials, the police, or otherwise, and clearly, when the police have become the appointed censors of culture (political culture in particular), there are problems that arise for not only freedom of expression but also for a diverse and truly

⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, when asked what bands would be welcome at the Gorge Amphitheatre, Council Commissioner Fancher stated that artists such as Yanni or Rod Stewart would be more than welcome to play ("Police Censorship Targets Rage," 1997).

democratic culture. The Artists Network of Refuse and Resist!, a anti-censorship coalition, acknowledged this fact following the Rage Against the Machine Gorge Amphitheatre concert:

This is a victory, but the fact that Rage's right to play was challenged at all--and particularly on overtly political grounds--is an outrage. The Artists Network of Refuse & Resist! condemns this attack on the band and on its audience, which includes millions of youth who have been inspired by Rage's uncompromising stand for justice. Artists who do not go along with the program of strict obedience to authority are more and more becoming a target of open censorship. They are banned from venues, their lyrics attacked, their record companies threatened. Particularly in the hip-hop scene, this has become a regular practice, and is part of the whole agenda of repressive politics riding high today. It must not be tolerated anymore. ("Police Censorship Targets Rage," 1997)

Concluding Remarks

Like so many areas where one sees a political process in motion, it is not as easy as looking at Rage Against the Machine as simply entertainers or simply political fighters. The complicated intersections of political and cultural forms that exist in the popular media of the 1990s present a case where the goals of the many parties involved become more difficult to identify, more blurred in the larger social picture.

In the end, de la Rocha describes in a 1999 interview what the goal of Rage Against the Machine may have been all along:

There are so many voices who are doing exactly what we're doing. But because we're at an intersection where art and commerce collide, the massive

mergers that have gone on between the major record companies have developed into a new format, a vacuum in which to sell this very poppy, very commercially-oriented music – all these one hit wonder bands. Because of that, the five major record labels have predominantly ignored a number of great bands...people who, like us, also see music as a viable weapon in terms of politicizing young people who may not have yet responded to the times and conditions in which they live. It's very important that music occupies that space. I can't say that Rage is the most important band in opening people's eyes to global concerns, we just happen to be the band who have been able to create this open space within pop music and try to set in motion a new era where more dissident voices within commercial music can come and be a part of this dialogue. (Stenning, 2008, p. 198)

De la Rocha's point is a good one, and despite that the question remains of how revolutionary can a group be that was nominated for (and won many) a Grammy award during almost every year since its inception - how anti-establishment can a group be if they are fundamentally embraced by the establishment – the political project of a band like Rage Against the Machine necessitated working within the dominant media system of the 1990s, as the alternatives were few. Even in 2009, the promise of alternative channels have not quite materialized to the full and democratic structures that many who prophesized the liberating potential of new networks of communication and information. But in the end, there is promise all the same – the topic of the next chapter - and these tactics, however effective or ineffective they may have been for the goals that Rage Against the Machine set out, what can be agreed upon is that the band represented one of the most political, and most interesting, bands of the 1990s.

CHAPTER 6

CASE STUDY: M.I.A.

There are two ways to view M.I.A.'s status as a public figure. The first is as a revolutionary musician, a former political refugee and contemporary musical artist whose political project of liberating the poor and oppressed peoples and educating the culturally and financially affluent of their struggles is nothing short of the noblest of goals. The second is as a politically impotent pawn, exploited willingly or unwillingly into working against the very people that she espouses as beneficiaries of her political project, an inert poseur of a fabricated rebellion and a style – revolutionary chic - that can move units on the global music scene.

Or perhaps located somewhere in a space in between these two views. The exercise of power in the postmodern era is rarely unequivocally cut in one direction or the other, the spaces where power is exercised rarely absent from ambiguity and inconsistency. Yet in any case, one thing is undeniable: Compared to the easy answers that come from the vast majority of today's neatly packaged musical artists, M.I.A.'s complications and contradictions make for a fascinating study.

This chapter will examine M.I.A. in the many roles that she takes upon herself, and the many other roles that are assigned to her. The research question of this larger project – the political possibilities of popular music – is troubled by this case: As a truly postmodern musical artist existing in an increasingly postmodern political economic and cultural environment, she does not fit neatly into any given box. Indeed, there are few artists who can have the fortitude to take up a seemingly revolutionary politics, record for a major label, be the preeminent cultural diplomat for the entire Sri Lankan Tamil people, model for Marc Jacobs, and at the same time be

honored as one of *Time Magazine's* "100 World's Most Influential People of 2009" (Jonze, 2009).

But finding a neat category in which to place political music artists is not the goal of this project. Instead, M.I.A. as a case study provides a window into larger processes of the global ordering of power and cultural flows in the age of globalization, and the narrative structure of the themes in this chapter are interwoven into the chronology of her life. With this in mind, and similarly to the previous chapter on Rage Against the Machine, this case study chapter is divided into two sections, beginning descriptively and ending analytically. Starting with an in-depth discussion of M.I.A.'s life and background as a child of war and a refugee in a new land, I then move on to her development as an artist and musician, and the major events in her life that have created not only her musical but also her political personae, sometimes overlapping, sometimes not. In the next part, I discuss several conclusions on M.I.A. through a critical discursive approach, finally followed by a discussion of what, exactly, M.I.A.'s political project is, and what it could be in light of the tendency of her artistic and political direction. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a contextual window on M.I.A. and her place in the larger political and economic structures that exist in this era of new cultural politics of conflict and logics of globalization and global capitalism.

Critical darling, commercial success, political complication, and most of all, undeniably exciting, M.I.A. disquiets the political, cultural, and musical scene in not just the pop charts but also the very notions of what constitutes the global cultural and economic marketplaces. It is with these complexities that the conversation begins.

A Radical Pedigree: Becoming M.I.A.

The story of M.I.A., Mathani “Maya” Argulpragasam, is one that for all its victories and defeats, for its complications and contradictions, cannot be told without a narrative of war, globalization, poverty, and migration. Yet as with any particularly interesting case study of an individual, it also cannot be told without the circumstance of her family, her life, and her nation, all aspects of this performer that are as important to her path of social activism as to her artistic development. The tale begins with her father, the revolutionary⁶⁷.

Arul Pragasam (alternately A.R. Arulpragasam, or more commonly, Arular) was born in Sri Lanka to family of Tamil heritage, living his early life as a minority, discriminated against by the Sinhalese majority that would politically and culturally dominate the Sri Lanka state. However, Arular’s life would take on a significant role in Sri Lankan politics in 1971. Upon finishing his Master’s degree in Moscow, Arular and his wife, Kala, would move to the Wandsworth section of London, a largely immigrant community with many South Asian residents. Arular would in 1975 take on a role as a founding member of the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS), an organization advocating the creation of an independent state for the Tamil people located in Sri Lanka. The group would achieve its first notoriety in demonstrating at the Cricket World Cup in June of that year, a conflict that would prompt unrest between the Tamil and Sinhalese supporters for Sri Lankan independence in London and beyond.

1976 would prove to be a momentous year for the Arulpragasam family. March saw Arular leave London for Lebanon to train with a group affiliated with the Fatah wing of the

⁶⁷ The history of M.I.A.’s background and her family is the result of a number of sources, including Arulpragasam, 2008, 2002; Davis , 2005; Harrington, 2005; Joe, 2006; Mangla, 2004; McKinnon, 2005; Sisario, 2007. Understandably, the stories that surround the leader of a rebellion or a revolutionary are often either inflated or conflated, particularly in a country with a state-run media system that denied access to the Tamil minority. I have done my best to corroborate this history across these media.

Palestinian Liberation Organization. Later that year Maya was born in London. The family would within six months depart to Sri Lanka, leaving the Wandsworth community and its ethnic tensions behind.

This year also found Sri Lanka in the beginning stages of a campaign of ethnic violence between the Tamil and the Sinhalese Buddhist-dominated nationalist party that had dominated government soon after the departure of the British in 1948. The minority Tamil nationals – approximately twelve percent of the Sri Lankan population (“No Victory in Sri Lanka,” 2009) - were discriminated against in the following decades through a system of economic, educational, and administrative measures, leading to the development of a movement that would solidify in the 1980s to over 30 loosely affiliated resistance organizations. Arular, as a founder of EROS, would take on a leadership role in the quest for an independent Tamil state⁶⁸.

Due to his fugitive status and the violence that might have been inflicted on his family, Arular went into hiding soon after the family’s return to Sri Lanka in 1976. The family, living in abject poverty during these years, would introduce Arular to Maya as her uncle, as he would sneak through the window of the family’s house in the middle of the night to visit his daughter. During this period, the family moved constantly from house to house in a childhood inundated with violence where Maya’s school would be bombed during a governmental aerial bombing campaign, along with the deaths of friends and the jailing of family members. Said Maya, “We saw him once a year, for 10 minutes at a time. My mum said, ‘That’s your uncle—your dad is dead.’ It was to protect us from the police interrogations at school””(Mangla, 2004).

⁶⁸ It is important to note here that while there were a number of organizations that were insurgent groups, many Tamil peoples were not part of these rebel factions. This would become particularly important in 2008-2009, when the government would be accused of human rights violations toward Tamil civilians.

The military was a constant presence in her life, visiting the family often and asking about the whereabouts of her father (Billet, 2006). In the early 1980s, the tensions between the Tamil rebels and the Sinhalese grew to an outright civil war, and in 1986 Maya's family fled to London. Arular stayed behind. The Arulpragasms were now refugees, and Maya a child estranged from her father.

London Calling: A Fatherless Child and a Newfound Music

Upon arriving in London, the family would be given an apartment in the Phipps Bridge Housing Estate, a run-down neighborhood of high-rise apartment blocks largely occupied by the lower class of London, a section of town that in the 1980s became a lawless ghetto of drug dealers and criminals. The area was historically poor, white, and generally xenophobic, unwelcoming to the newly integrated immigrant minority community. Certainly the 1980s were a time in England where clashes over British nationalism were prevalent in dealing with what became known as the "immigrant problem", yet the Arulpragasm family was one of two Asian families in their block of apartments. Maya didn't even speak English at the time, beyond two words: "Michael" and "Jackson" (Harrington, 2005).

Yet for the personal and cultural turmoil in this period of Maya's life, these years would be formative for her future as a global music artist. Living as a cross-border refugee is always an exercise in adapting to new cultures, and the experience of taking in British culture with her Sri Lankan cultural heritage would leave her somewhere in an in-between stage of those cultures. Not to mention the *mélange* of others that she would experience as London became an increasingly global city with its wave of immigration in the 1980s.

This was particularly true as Maya would listen to the radio, taking in the many musical styles being played during that era in the UK, from punk to new wave to the emerging hip-hop genres. When her radio was stolen from their flat, she would listen to hip-hop albums played through the walls by her neighbors (Frere-Jones, 2004).

During this era in Sri Lanka, the dominant Tamil resistance group became the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), known more commonly today as the Tamil Tigers (Bhattacharji, 2009). Arular's EROS would become absorbed by this controversial organization, which was vicious in both its attacks on government and government-supported organizations, but also on competing Tamil-liberation organizations, and to much criticism⁶⁹ (Philip, 2009). In 1987, the group, then known as the "Black Tigers" began using the tactic of suicide bombing, most notably claiming the life of former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. The LTTE began forcibly conscripting child soldiers as part of its tactics of resistance and was accused of using civilians as human shields, leading to UNICEF and Amnesty International's criticism over their practices, and has been accused of murdering civilians and governmental officials alike. In turn, the Sinhalese-controlled Sri Lankan government would in turn later be accused by more than a few external observers of genocide, the mass eradication and wanton killing of Tamil civilians, a

⁶⁹ The LTTE would be listed as a terrorist organization by over 32 nations, including the United States, and the Sri Lankan government would be accused of genocide of the Tamil peoples. Yet like so many insurgent organizations, the line between the freedom fighter and the terrorist organization is one less of fact than of subjectivity, a division often used as much for political purposes as for discursive ones. The articulation of these concepts is an issue I am not tackling in this paper – neither the LTTE's nor the Sri Lankan government's hands are clean in the matter, and atrocities have been committed by both parties. I am instead more interested in the factual happenings of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government as it provides context to M.I.A.'s life and cultural development, and will leave judgement on the merits of this argument to the reader.

government strategy of not distinguishing between the Tamil Tiger insurgents and non-insurgent Tamil peoples (Bhattacharji, 2009; “No Victory in Sri Lanka,” 2009; Philip, 2009)⁷⁰.

A cease fire accord was signed in 2002, and after almost two decades of infighting, the two sides would live in a somewhat uneasy *détente* until 2005 when the Sri Lankan government would pull out of this accord and renew attacks, the battle escalating over the following years. Attacks on Tamil civilians would intensify to their highest levels of this civil war in 2008-2009, leading to an estimated 20,000 civilian deaths (Philip, 2009) and an estimated 265,000 civilian refugees (Polgreen, 2009) in a war that until then had already resulted in over 70,000 deaths (“Sri Lanka military, rebels trade death toll claims,” 2008). In May 2009, the Sri Lankan army would declare victory in this, the longest-running civil war in recent Asian history (Sengupta & Mydans, 2009), and would soon assassinate Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, effectively ending 26 years of civil war (McDonald, 2009). United Nations and others’ allegations of war crimes against the Sri Lankan government in their treatment of Tamil civilians were unresolved as of June 2009 (“No Victory in Sri Lanka,” 2009). The 26-year war was a quagmire of human costs, with tit-for-tat attacks and brutal human rights abuses on both sides. Peace did indeed come, but at an uncomfortable price in terms of the most basic morality of humankind.

From the Poor, to the Poor: The Artistic Development Maya Arulpragasam,
and the Emergence of M.I.A.

⁷⁰ This description of the war grossly oversimplifies a civil war that is tremendously complicated in both its historical and moral contexts. For a more detailed description of the battle between the Tamil and Sinhalese groups, see Bhattacharji, 2009; “No Victory in Sri Lanka,” 2009; Philip, 2009; Polgreen, 2009; Sengupta & Mydans, 2009; “Sri Lanka military, rebels trade death toll claims,” 2008.

If there were any bright spots in the civil war between Tamil rebels and the Sri Lankan government – and there were few indeed – it was that the refugee experience, the life of a family uprooted by discrimination, war, and insurgency, would provide the context of a bold young artist's work.

Maya's beginnings as an artist would come not in the musical or performance world but in the graphic arts. She would attend Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, graduating with a degree in fine art, film and video. Her first public exhibition was in 2001 in London, featuring a visually artistic version of her influence of civil war, her experience as a cross-border refugee, and elements of hip-hop culture. M.I.A.'s graphic work would consist mostly of visually arresting, neon colored, spray-painted stenciled versions of revolutionary propaganda, with the common image of the tiger lending a winking support of the rebel group⁷¹. Her work would be published in a Pocko Books edition of her visual artwork alongside written commentary on her past and a background on the violence between the Tamil and Sinhalese nations.

Yet it is important to note that while politics and art have historically allied with one another for both the reinforcement or resistance of the cultural order, the use of cultural affronts on power have often been the result of the specific choices of media made by the artist. Wheaton (2005) makes the case thus:

⁷¹ Much like artist David Cerny's pink Soviet tank on display in the Czech Republic, the bombs, tanks, guns, the tigers and palm trees of Sri Lanka – the sites and the means of violence – are given different ends through her artistic approach of using neon green, blue, pink, and orange stencil treatments. The hostility of the past is there, yet its candy-coating both enables the effect of resistance through culture while negating the materiality of violence. A neon green gun (or a pink tank, for that matter) exists not as a weapon of material violence but of cultural resistance through pop sensibilities. In terms of a politics of resistance or a politics of art, M.I.A.'s willingness to unsettle the audience both visually and politically in her visual media would foreground her development as a musical artist.

The superficiality of M.I.A.'s chosen media -- graffiti stencil art and popular music -- makes politics a risky business. Her approach is the opposite of that of radical artists like Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino, who followed Franz Fanon in calling for an art that documented resistance while breaking down the barriers between spectator and artist. They called for artistic processes -- and exhibition -- that involved the audience directly, making them reexamine their role and forge a new, collective, identity. M.I.A.'s art and music, by contrast, are all spectacle. The two-dimensional stencils and the catchy hooks can only subvert the audience's role after their immediate appeal has worn off, and they lack the breadth to contain a full alternative program. What's more, the distance that comes from rendering real-world political conflicts in such a stylized, vibrant medium feels very much like the distance afforded by nostalgia, hero-worship, and romanticism. Graffiti -- like hip-hop -- is a superficial, ephemeral medium, with its own set of artistic risks. (n.p)

M.I.A., the Musical Artist

If those artistic risks -- particularly in the subversion of the audience -- were evident in M.I.A.'s early visual art, her development as a musical artist would only amplify this politics. Her path into music was one that would come through the development of a unique voice and a series of well-placed coincidences. Her acuity in the visual arts would lead to a commission by Justine Bateman in the group Elastica to develop the cover art and a video for the band's 2000 album *The Menace*. This would in turn spawn an invitation to document Elastica's subsequent tour, leading to a video documentary and music video.

During this tour, Maya would also meet electroclash artist Peaches, the opening act for Elastica's tour, who introduced her to new technologies for music production, such as the Roland MC-505 Groovebox, an all-in-one music beat production device that was often used in the creation of electronic music due to its pre-programmed beats and flexible editing capabilities. Upon returning to London, she would record a six-song demo EP using the MC-505, with one mic and a budget keyboard. An early version of one song, *Galang*, would be leaked onto filesharing networks where it became an underground sensation on dancefloors and ipods alike.

Galang would be her first hit, but one that represented an early instance of a song gaining notoriety through file-sharing and subsequently through the college radio circuit, leading to notoriety in the club and eventually to the mainstream U.K. radio circles and college radio stations in both the U.K. and the U.S (Reynolds, 2005). M.I.A. was soon signed to U.K.-based label XL Recordings, a large but independent label, and in America, to Interscope records, a subsidiary of Universal Music, in turn a subsidiary of France-based Vivendi Holdings.

Yet M.I.A.'s critical artistic acclaim came initially through her involvement with her first "unofficial" album in 2004 – a promotional teaser of sorts - entitled (with tongue planted firmly in cheek) *Piracy Funds Terrorism, Vol. 1*. Recorded with Philadelphia-based DJ Diplo as a mixtape, this album contained some of M.I.A.'s earliest work with the MC-505 mashed up with other artists' songs, many of which would be the sketches and studio outtakes for her first proper album, *Arular*, which would be released the following year. The plan worked: *Piracy Funds Terrorism* became a viral sensation after the single *Galang* became an underground hit on dancefloors, Northeastern college radio stations, and through sales of the album at locations ranging from local CD stores to tables on Canal Street (Christgau, 2005). The press would jump on board too: *Piracy Funds Terrorism* and M.I.A. would become a critical sensation, with the

album ending up on many year-end “best album” lists, reaching number 12 on the prestigious online music site *Pitchfork* (Breihan, 2004) and number 23 in the *Village Voice*’s annual “Pazz and Jop” poll of rock critics (“Pazz & Jop 2004,” 2004). Expectations were high for her first proper album to see if she could stand on her own two feet.

More importantly, *Piracy Funds Terrorism* would establish M.I.A. as an artist with an uncompromising vision. Despite its sample-heavy content, mashing up many different genres of commercial and underground songs with the vocal tracks and demos of the then-upcoming *Arular*, M.I.A. and Diplo did not legally obtain permission for any samples – sampling major hits such as the Bangles’ “Walk Like an Egyptian,” Jay Z’s “Big Pimpin’,” Salt-n-Pepa’s “Push It,” or any of the other songs from Ciara, Missy Elliott, LL Cool J, or the dozens of others used in this creative work would have made the release of the album a financial impossibility for an independent release (Breihan, 2004). Even though the samples had not been cleared (and notwithstanding the irony, given the album’s title), the adamant adherence to her project would result in a successful fight – at least in some regards – for her artistic vision. M.I.A. secured complete creative control over her recordings, both on XL and on Interscope (Durbin, 2007), stating, “They can only start meddling in my stuff if they knew what to do with me, but they don't. Nothing has come before me like me, and they have nothing to compare it to....[They can't say,] 'Well the other Sri Lankan girl is doing it like this, so we should do it like that.' They don't have that, so I'm pretty much forging my own path" (Davis , 2005). At this, the early stage of her career, the strength to make a record that required little compromise was rare, doubly so to be granted this latitude whilst working within the major label system.

New Sensation: The Release of *Arular*

The buzz around M.I.A. was intense in 2004-2005 as critics who has flocked to *Piracy Funds Terrorism* hailed her as the new interesting direction in hip-hop and electronic music, yet these were critics that also awaited M.I.A.'s first proper solo release.

Named after her father's assumed moniker in the Sri Lankan resistance movement⁷², 2005's *Arular* wasted no time establishing M.I.A. as a music artist who was from a different musical, political, and cultural tradition than most contemporary Western musical acts. The first song, "Banana Skit" (Arulpragasam, 2005a), is an intense 36 seconds of nothing more than a beat located somewhere between New York hip hop and Punjabi bhangra or dancehall. It is one of the most powerful and personal statements on an already autobiographical album:

Refugee education number one
here we go
Banana
ba-na-na
say it again now
ba-na-na
say it again now
ba-na-na
na-na
ba-na-na
say it again now
ba-na-na
say it again now
ba-na-na
say it again now

get yourself an education

⁷² M.I.A. had been estranged from her father for close to two decades at the time of the record, yet she had her own motivation for the name, "In the beginning I did it as a way of finding him. There were lots of reasons, but it kept mounting up and it seemed that that word had so much affect on my life. My mates were like did you know that your dads name when you spell it 'A and then rular' it says a ruler - kind of was he that much of an egomaniac? But it was a Sri Lankan word and that's why he's got it, the name. I thought if I use it for the album he would find it on the internet. I always imagined there would be so much of it on the internet he'd go, who's that girl, and find out who I am. It worked because I know that he knows about and I got a message saying, 'please change the title of the album'. On one hand I did find him and on the other he asked me to change the name" ("M.I.A. - Interview," 2009).

The strong emphasis on the final line of the song is no joke, nor is the story itself. M.I.A. describes the inspiration behind the song:

When I came [to England] everybody assumed that I was really thick because I didn't know English. Then you find other things to do that make you feel like you can relate. Learning English was just like a nightmare. It took us about two years when I thought I'm not going to these stupid dumb classes, because they used to take me and my sister in a van during school hours and put us in this weird institute with other refugee kids and special needs kids. We'd learn English like we were 2 years old.

It's kind of why "Banana Skit" is on the album because it's taking the piss of what I used to have to go through. After that it was fine though because I found hip-hop and I was off. I learnt a lot of English through hip-hop because it was like someone's saying something with some force. ("M.I.A. - Interview," 2009)

And thus the album begins. The themes on the *Arular* are intense – it is indeed a protest album - and the targets of her critique wide-ranging. The celebration of resistance and independence is a theme throughout almost every song. The themes of this album are many and include (as a non-comprehensive list) identity politics, poverty, immigration, refugee status, discrimination, war, revolution, genocide, censorship, child soldiers, countercultures, sexual politics, hip-hop braggadocio, transnational corporate enterprises, kidnapping, drug running, and so forth.

M.I.A. takes a generalized self-affiliation with the working class and the repressed, those who do not benefit from the modern era of neoliberal free trade, global war on terror, transnational media enterprises, and so forth. It is an album that confirms Frere-Jones (2004)

observation of M.I.A. as a truly “world artist.” And an artist who was not afraid of stirring up controversy, nor willing to compromise her vision. Despite its lyrical content of incendiary provocations, sexual liberation, support of a generalized insurgency (not to mention dancefloor anthems such as a new mix of her first single *Galang*), *Arular* was a critical smash⁷³.

Commercial success would be more elusive. M.I.A.’s hip cache in certain circles, most notably indie rock and some dance cultures, was great during this era, with M.I.A. being a “must-know” artist. Yet there was no hit single, and little airplay on radio (excluding college stations, which would embrace the album, but have little sway in mainstream radio trends). In addition to the fact that *Arular* is a difficult album to make sense of in the landscape of conventional pop songs, M.I.A. would face governmental censorship, corporate censorship, and visa troubles. Beyond the corporate censorship of record stores unwilling to carry her album – which was labeled with a “Parental Advisory – Explicit Lyrics” sticker and for which no edited copy would be released - M.I.A.’s first major battle would be with MTV.

In terms of album content, the video for “Sunshowers” (Arulpragasam, 2005b), a song telling a story from the perspective of person eventually killed by a nameless authority for his or her association with Muslims, would be among the first to face difficulty in the corporate media environment. In the video for the song, MTV would object to the lyrics “You wanna go?/You wanna winna war?/Like PLO, I don't surrendo”⁷⁴, particularly in that lyrics were placed in the

⁷³ *Arular* was among the most critically well-received albums of the year, including a nomination for the prestigious Mercury Prize in Britain, position number two in the Village Voice’s Pazz and Jop poll of critics, and would rank in the top ten of more critics’ lists in 2005 than any artist with the exception of Sufjan Stephens’ *Illinoise* (“Best Albums of 2005,” 2005).

⁷⁴ MTV would also inane question the subtext of this same song’s lyric “I salt and pepper my mango” (Harrington, 2005). MTV’s censorship tends to be nothing if not inconsistent, but always characterized by a generalized conservatism. This case fits in well with the culture industry hypothesis, particularly in an advertising-driven medium, that drives a logic to avoid controversial topics in order to not alienate audiences, which would work against the central purpose of the

context of M.I.A. in the jungle, surrounded by a group of individuals who espoused an imagery of an insurgent group. M.I.A. was first asked to change the lyric, which she refused, then asked to display a disclaimer that would show before the video stating that neither MTV nor M.I.A. actually supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization. She refused, and the video was banned by MTV⁷⁵. M.I.A., herself, would best sum the problems with censoring speech of this sort:

Come on, that's not fair that I can't mention Palestine....What we've done is said all the acts of terrorism or rebellion are connected and there's one big conspiracy of terrorism. That's dangerous. So I have to be brave about that. There's issues about the PLO that people don't know and if a line like that puts that idea in people's heads that's a good thing. It's really important to find out what everybody thinks about the PLO, not what I think. (Lynskey, 2005)

Due to the content of her music and her self-imposed reputation as a political artist, the next several years would see attempts to clamp down on M.I.A.'s political advocacy and speech throughout the globe by a number of different methods.

On tour in Australia, M.I.A. would be asked to sign an entry contract that stated that she would not insult the government. Durbin (2007) describes the incident:

According to M.I.A., [the contract] explained that Australia supports freedom of speech, but that there are limits to the country's hospitality -- in other words, so far and no further....When asked what, exactly, Australia was afraid she

channel: To generate revenue for its parent companies by selling audiences to advertisers. The PLO is one such possible alienating topic, yet M.I.A.'s political voice is not given access to the public sphere through a censorship of corporate logic.

⁷⁵ As an example of the somewhat haphazard (and often ridiculous) nature of corporate censorship – and its failure at a coordinated effort at times – MTV.com would write several articles praising M.I.A.'s originality and content, even specifically highlighting the *Sunshowers* video (Davis, 2005).

would say, M.I.A. explained, "I'm a bit beyond being an artist who says, 'Give peace a chance.' Part of me is like, 'Give war a chance,' just to stir it up, you know what I mean?" At her show in Brisbane, she lit the entry document on fire. The crowd loved it. (n.p.)

Yet the greatest imposition was yet to come. Following the critical acclaim that *Arular* saw in the year following its release, M.I.A. also caught the attention of a number of other artists and producers, most notably the hip hop producer Timbaland, perhaps the preeminent producer in hip-hop who was behind albums from Jay-Z, Missy Elliott, Alicia Keys, Justin Timberlake, and a host of other major names in the genre.

There was trouble though. In 2007, M.I.A. was set to enter the U.S. to record her follow-up to *Arular*. On her Myspace blog⁷⁶, she posted the following entry:

THEY TRY SHUT MY DOOR!

Roger roger do you here me over!!!!

the U.S immigration wont let me in!!!!

i was mennu work with timber startin this week, but now im doin a Akon "im locked out they wont let me in" im locked out! they wont let me in! Now Im strictly making my album outside the borders!!!! so il see you all one day, for now ill keep reportin from the sidelines.

to my people who walk wiv me in the America, dont forget we got the internet! Spread the word! or come get me!!!!!! ill be in my bird flu lab in china! liming and drinkin tiger beer with my pet turtel. I love everyone for the support, now i need it more. ill stay up spread out else where.

(Arulpragasam, 2006a)

⁷⁶ M.I.A.'s blog postings on her Myspace blog and her Twitter page often use intentional misspellings, unusual spacing, and long strings of capitalized letters. For the purposes of this project, I am formatting these much in the same way as song lyrics, maintaining their original spelling, phrasing, capitalization, and punctuation, including all grammatical and structural errors in language and otherwise.

M.I.A.'s visa had been denied by the United States government. The reasons provided for the denial of the visa are mixed depending on the source, and, perhaps as a strategy of choosing one's battles, M.I.A. hasn't said publicly what these reasons might be other than through vague allusions. It is not hard to imagine, though, and the consensus seems to be focused on the lyrical content of *Arular* as central, her support for the PLO in *Sunshowers*, her background of having a Tamil Tiger father, and a rhetoric of resistance throughout her artistic and public appearances did her no favors in the Bush-era politics of a generalized conservative clampdown on the slightest threat to American interests, no matter how remote the possibility. Three weeks later, M.I.A. would post a brief response on her blog, "sometimes i wish i sang about sex and money, money sex sex money money and sex. but you know me, i dont wanna get rich, or die trying. and these dayz the money that immigrants send back home aint even for fixing grillz but more like limbs" (Arulpragasam, 2006b).

The Sophomore Album: *Kala*

With her inability to enter the U.S. to record her follow-up album, M.I.A. would travel the world for over a year with portable recording equipment, visiting and recording the UK, Japan, Australia, Jamaica, Liberia, Trinidad, India, Sri Lanka, and eventually, the U.S. over a year later when she was able to obtain a working visa through a lengthy legal process (Christgau, 2007; Durbin, 2007; Pytlik, 2007). The resulting album, *Kala* (named for her mother), would be released worldwide throughout August 2009. Just as her travels would take her to both the luxurious and poverty-stricken areas a great number of cultural, ethnic, and national localities, the record would reflect this diversity as mix of genres from all over the world, and a transnational juxtaposition of influences from Ivory Coast drums to Sri Lankan folk melodies,

Bollywood standards to Brazilian Favela electronic beats, presented alongside the incorporation of musical and lyrical nods to everyone from the Pixies, Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers, New Order, Depeche Mode, and many others. It also features a number of artists that M.I.A. recorded in her travels, including Afrikan Boy from Nigeria, The Wilcannia Mob, an aboriginal Australian hip hop group, a children's chorus in Trinidad, and a 22-piece drum corps in India ("M.I.A. doesn't need a visa, just inspiration," 2007; Christgau, 2007; Pytlik, 2007). The album, like *Arular*, received almost unanimous critical acclaim as an aesthetically groundbreaking in its production, risk-taking in its artistic project, and even more politically loaded than either of her two previous outings ("M.I.A.: Kala: Reviews," 2009). In a move rare for a new artist following such a critically lauded first album, *Kala* would achieve at least the same level of critical superlatives⁷⁷.

Yet perhaps her biggest hit – and indeed, her first foray into pop-stardom – was in the song *Paper Planes*. Based off a sample from The Clash's 1984 song *Straight to Hell* and with lyrics reinterpreting Wreckx-n-Effect's 1992 hit "Rump Shaker," and would be released as a single in late 2007, the song (and indeed *Kala* as an album) would achieve commercial success until June 2008 when it was used in the trailer for the Judd Apatow stoner comedy film *Pineapple Express*, though the song wasn't actually used in the film, itself. It became the hit of the summer, blasting from car windows and on dancefloors. The song would later be used in the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (a film that addresses many of the same themes as M.I.A.'s life and artistic direction), would reach number 4 on the Billboard Hot 100, and would be nominated for a Grammy Award for Record of the Year (Collis, 2008).

⁷⁷ *Kala* would be voted the third-best album of the year in *The Village Voice's* "2007 Pazz and Jop" poll of critics ("Pazz and Jop 2007," 2007) and in the top ten of at least two dozen critics' lists ("Best Albums of 2007," 2007)

The song, despite its catchiness, was politically loaded, a song sung in satire of society's fear of immigrants with the chorus blending words and non-verbal sound clips, "All I want to do is [gunshots] and [gun cocking] [cash register ring] and take your money." Ironically, it would be the denial of her visa that would prove to be the inspiration behind her biggest hit,

When I wrote it I'd just gotten in to New York after waiting a long time and that's why I wrote it, just to have a dig. It's about people driving cabs all day and living in a shitty apartment and appearing really threatening to society. But not being so. Because, by the time you've finished working a 20-hour shift, you're so tired you [just] want to get home to the family. I don't think immigrants are that threatening to society at all. They're just happy they've survived some war somewhere. (Collis, 2008)

Paper Planes would propel M.I.A. to stardom, and throughout the rest of 2008-2009, M.I.A. would be increasingly thrust into the public eye as the song would continue under its own momentum. She would announce her retirement from performing at the Bonnaroo Festival in June (O'Donnell, 2008), and soon after would announce her pregnancy and marriage to Ben Brewer, guitarist of band The Exit and son of Edgar Bronfman, Jr., the CEO of Warner Music (Gaston, 2008). The retirement would be short-lived, as she would go on to perform at the 2009 Grammy awards alongside Jay-Z, notably while nine months pregnant. As of June 2009, M.I.A. was spending time with her family, maintaining her public status through a number of interviews (mostly focusing on her unofficial role as a global cultural diplomat for the Tamil people), and recording material for the follow-up album to *Kala*.

Part II: Discussion and Analysis

Findings: M.I.A. and the Cultural Politics of the Global Music Industry

In my research on M.I.A. and the context surrounding her political and cultural identity, I have come to several findings about her based on audience and critical discourses on the matter:

1) First, and as an overarching theme, M.I.A.'s music is representative of a truly postmodern and uniquely original production. Even with her detractors, there are few critics and audiences that do not acknowledge the uncommon aesthetics of her songs in the fact that there is something interesting happening musically in her pastiche assemblage of musics from a wide range of eras, styles, genres, traditions, and meanings. M.I.A. reinterprets the past freely, taking something such as the lyrics as Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers' "Roadrunner," a song of teenage romanticism of driving up Route 128 in Massachusetts while listening to early 1970s AM radio, and without changing a word of the hook, flips the song on its head to become a narrative of poverty, resistance, and insurgency in the song "Bamboo Banga."

Road runner, road runner
Going hundred mile per hour
With your radio on

[...]

Yeah, I'm knocking on the doors of your Hummer Hummer
You'll be hungry like the wolves hunting dinner dinner
And we're moving with the packs like hyena ena
Barbarella look like she's my dead ringer
When I'm dogging on the bonnet of ya red Honda

I'm a road runner
I'm a world runner
(Arulpragasam, 2008)

Clearly, the radio that Jonathan Richman was listening to is not the same frequency M.I.A.'s radio, the speed in M.I.A.'s song is not for the joy of an open highway, the road is not Route 128.

Furthermore, her music is undeniably catchy, and an audience analysis of her music lends itself to a polysemic reading. Of the many authors who have written on M.I.A.'s live concerts, a generalized narrative emerges: Audiences at rock shows want to dance, and if there exists a cultural politics at these shows, they are secondary to the beat. Depending on how one approaches this issue, it means that either the beat is the entry point into the politics as a necessary first step with affective considerations before the discursive, or it is that the politics is lost completely as an inconsequential element to most. Frere-Jones (2004), in describing the song "Galang" off *Piracy Funds Terrorism* (2004), which he introduces as "an example of actual, on-the-ground world culture: synthetic, cheap, colorful, staticky with power," goes on to discuss these connections:

The beat is shuffling and abrasive, made from what sounds like the by-products of some other, more polite song. It most resembles Jamaican dancehall patterns, but with a twist. Alongside the beat runs a distressed motif that may have been a melody before it was Xeroxed fifteen times. The lyrics combine the exhortations of dancehall ("London calling and speak the slang now, boys say wa, go on girls say wa wa"), the embattled war mentality of American hip-hop ("Fed's gonna get you pull the strings on your hood / One paranoid youth blazin' through the hood"), and a scenario that sounds far removed from Leicester Square: "They say river's gonna run through / work is going to save you / praying you will pull through / suck a dick, he'll help you / don't let them get to you / if

he's got one you get two / Backstab your crew sell it out to sell you." The verses are simply stitched together, without dogma, by a chorus that is classic dance-floor doggerel: "Blaze to blaze, galang a lang alanga / Purple haze, galang a lang a langlang....It's a voice from a place where kids throw rocks at tanks, where people pull down walls with their bare hands. It could be the sound of a carnival, or a riot. (n.p.)

Frere-Jones' point – and it is a point made by many other rock critics who place M.I.A.'s lyrical and artistic productions within a larger framework – is that M.I.A.'s music is truly indicative of the contradictions and complications of the postmodern era, and to understand the role of music in this emerging trend, one cannot adequately analyze the song, the artist, or the possibilities of messages without first understanding that context matters.

2) M.I.A.'s music is transnational, not only in its reach but also in its themes and influences. This was true with *Piracy Funds Terrorism* and *Arular*, but the globe-trotting recording sessions of *Kala* were acknowledged as important in almost every commentary on the album. And it shows: There has rarely been a song that is, frankly, as unusual to the ears of the Western pop establishment as the pounding drums, children's chants, screams and shouts, and assorted unclassified sounds in *Kala's* single "Bird Flu." It was the strangest song played on dancefloors that season, and it was recorded in four different nation-states over the course of a year.

With songs like these, M.I.A.'s music is among the most global of all global music artists. As Sasha Frere-Jones (2007) argues, M.I.A. reclaims "world music" from the impotent feel-good ghetto of the record store shelves and turns it into something meaningful. And the

message is geared towards a worldwide audience. The first four lines of “Bucky Done Gun” (Arulpragasam, 2005) not only reach out to the world but demand its attention:

London/quiet down/I need to make a sound
New York/quiet down/I need to make a sound
Kingston/quiet down/I need to make a sound
Brazil/quiet down/I need to make a sound

Music in the postmodern era is fundamentally affected on a global scale, and the boundaries of place and culture that have previously fenced in musical influences will continue to disappear as access to transnational networks of information increase. It spreads across borders, which are increasingly becoming less important in the global sphere as new, deterritorialized sites of cultural production begin to appear. Describing the path that her life took after the denial of her visa in 2006:

It stopped me dead in my tracks. I couldn't get on people's tracks here or work with any of the producers I had lined up. I'm pissed off about the whole thing, but it shaped my record into what it is. It gave me so much more. I recorded in India and every country that was anti-American....It forced me to go to these places on my own—without management, lawyers, anyone. There aren't any other girls in the world making music like that—going out and making music with strangers, living among the rats and cockroaches, getting people outside the music community involved in projects. (Joe, 2006)

Yet even though the territorialized sites of production are becoming less important than in past eras, M.I.A.'s music and lyrical content are reminders that space still does matter in a material sense. Her music exists in the space that is meta-territorial, present both in (and as a result of) the space-transcending nature of online communication networks but also placed in those localities that are still on the bottom end of the digital divide. M.I.A.'s music is not different

from her own life, a juxtaposition of first and third cultures and ways of being rolled into one entity.

3) M.I.A.'s story shows that no matter what one's political project is, progress is often dependent on establishing the right narrative. The popular press blew up when she emerged on the Western cultural radar due in part to the catchiness of her song, but her exoticism and seemingly authentic (albeit fully exploited for marketing purposes) connections and advocates for the poor, and perhaps for revolutionary groups, gave her a story that was truly unique in the pop music world in the mid-2000s. It had people talking: Most articles mentioned her background and these connections as prominently as her music. In a world of plastic, mass-produced and formulaic pop stars, hearing a story that was new and different about an artist whose work itself was new and different made for good copy, if nothing else.

Rock music, perhaps as a statement of its easy exploitation and fabrication of meaningful emotions – has from the very beginning had a crisis of authenticity. In a way, we want to feel that our culture's artists are originating from a place where they feel their work is authentic so that we, as individuals, can think of musicians living out their songs on display. Whether we might be able to live through them, or at least know that their pain or love or mental illness or dependency struggles were much like our own, everyone likes to think that the songs in which we place personal meaning or with which we identify in some sense originate from a place unmotivated by commercial interests whether that is truly the case or not. The celebration of the seemingly real or authentic (for whatever that might mean for subjects) is why we create martyrs of the young dead rock stars or lionize the mentally ill: There is little doubt to the origins of their songs, and any assumption that the songs were written for commercial purposes is usually

forgotten, even if this were true. Kurt Cobain's suicide erased all doubt as to his sincerity in his music, all critiques that he was a sellout, and so too with Elliott Smith's suicide. We assume that Wesley Willis' or Syd Barrett's or Daniel Johnson's mental illness gives them the lack of capability to be motivated by anything other than true artistic expression. 50 Cent's nine bullet scars lend him a credibility, if not a lampooning from time to time. Sid Viscious' or G.G. Allen's death of drug overdoses glorifies their music even further because it reflects the ultimate sacrifice for their art, the full extent to making something true. Would anyone still care about Sid Viscious if he didn't live fast and die young? It's difficult to find a paragraph written about Wesley Willis that didn't begin with the story of his mental illness before discussing his music.

The point here is that narrative matters. Musicians in today's hypermediated, global information environment do not exist in a vacuum where their success is based solely on musical aesthetics. For M.I.A., her background gives her an originality that not only separates her from the pack but also fits into the countercultural ideal that has long been established. But the narratives for critics aren't the same as the narratives for consumers (though there can be an overlapping at times), and the people on whose behalf she claims to be working factor into the equation as she brings with her identity the voices of people whose experience is similar. It is as Sargent (2007) says, "M.I.A. is the one major pop star speaking for the people in the world's shanties and alleys without condescension. Why not record there, too?" (n.p.).

4) This emerging world of the transnational postmodern music artist is fundamentally political in nature. The intersection of culture and the political projects of neoliberalism (particularly through its use of biopolitical production, M.I.A.'s use of which will be discussed in the following chapter) makes the everyday life a political one, and this is achieved largely through

the use of cultural forms, whether through the presence or absence of political content. M.I.A.'s artistic work, regardless of how it is received or on whose behalf it may be working, is fundamentally political work.

Working to bring certain issues to the forefront, to the public consciousness, is a battle of articulating concepts and values in such a way as to make people place an importance of meaning within these values. M.I.A.'s work as a public spokesperson for the Tamil people very much functions in this regard, particularly as she is the predominant Tamil national in the eye of the Western media. Indeed, it is hard to think of a second.

M.I.A.'s attempts to raise the consciousness of the American people to the problems in Sri Lanka took the form of a media campaign, and ultimately, by building publicity capital, she was able to use it to further her cause. Speaking of her attendance at the Time 100 reception of inductees, she stated,

THE NEXT PERSON I MET WAS OPRAH!!!! SHE SAID SHE LIKED MY JACKET FROM THE MAGAZINE (THE ONE MY BROTHER GOT FOR ME FROM THE SIDE OF THE STREET AT SXSW 09) SHE SQUEEEEZED MY HAND SO HARD , I WAS CONVINCED SHE CARED. MICHELLE OBAMA GAVE A SPEECH AND THERE WAS MAD SECRET SERVICE IN THE AIR SO I DIDNT GET TO THROW A PAPER PLANE AT HER SAYING " STOP THE BOMBING OF THE TAMILS IN SRI LANKA"

I MET MANY MORE PEOPLE , SOME KNEW ME , SOME DIDNT I WASNT SURE ABOUT MY INFLUENCE BUT.....IF I DO HAVE ANY INFLUENCE, I WISH I COULD GET THE MEDIA TO SPOTLIGHT THIS: THANKX TO BRITISH PRESS WE GET THIS MUCH

OPRAH CAN YOU DO SOMETHING BOUT THESE CAMPS PLEEEEEEEEEEEASE?

(Arulpragasam, 2009a)

Similarly, M.I.A. would use social networking site Twitter as a central campaigning point to bring attention to the plight of the Tamil people, making the argument that they were being the

victim of human rights abuses through both her own posts and as a meta-site, linking to a number of video clips, song lyrics, journalistic pieces, editorials, and social commentaries on the matter. This was in addition to her own social activism, which used her voice through her followers on Twitter to highlight a number of clothing companies whose clothing was made in Sri Lanka, thereby inherently working with the Sri Lankan Sinhalese majority. She called for a boycott of these companies during the later stages of the Sri Lankan civil war, highlighting the plight of the Tamil minority as an indirect result of these companies' actions (Arulpragasam, 2009b).

5) Despite this rhetoric and social action, M.I.A.'s true politics are oblique and best approached with a certain level of skepticism. Her political stances and the motivation behind them, while seemingly forward in many ways, are presumptive only in their restraint. Her main issue is clearly one of freedom for the Tamil people, but the big question – does she or does she not support the tactics of the Tamil Tigers – is never convincingly answered in that she often states that she does not actively support the organization, but also has never come forward and actively castigated this organization – two actions with very different meanings, and different consequences. It is as McKinnon (2005) states, “She is charmingly elliptical about her politics – her website contains smiling photos of gun-toting Tamils, but no explicit endorsement of their rebellion – a mystery that makes her seem dangerous in these edgy times” (n.p.).

There is quite a difference, though, between being a revolutionary and using revolutionary imagery. The vagueness in her political disclosures is a sign of the existence of a larger political logic, one that is potentially entrapping her in working against whatever her goal might be. Part of the strong appeal of M.I.A. is that by not providing an unequivocal answer to the question of her politics, she plays into a cultural and political logic that has been established

in such a way as to make disclosure disadvantageous in many ways, thereby upholding the current social order. If M.I.A. were to divulge a support for the Tamil Tigers, she may have won popular support for the movement in many ways among Western audiences (the providers of her livelihood) but may commercially alienate others along the way. She unequivocally advocates for the Tamil minority and publicly has criticized the Sinhalese majority party in Sri Lanka, but it is important to remember that the Tamil Tigers are a separatist group, and that not all Tamils condone the means of the Tamil Tigers, even if their end goal of an independent Tamil state might be shared.

The Tamil Tigers have most often been politically articulated as a terrorist organization by most first-world nation-states (and in some of the popular press), criticized regularly for their use of human shields, of their tactics of attacking civilians, their use of suicide bombers, and other practices that are reprehensible by any standard. Yet as is often the case with an insurgent group that does not have the legitimacy of a sovereign state to use both financial and diplomatic means as a source of recognition, the Tamil rebellion lost a major discursive advantage to the Sinhalese majority party before even one shot was fired: The articulation of the “terrorist” often results in an equal articulation of an implied noble stature conferred upon those battling terrorism. In this case, even for the critiques of both parties that do exist, it was not until the recent escalation and eventual defeat of the Tamil Tigers that the Majority party would be questioned in its tactics in the popular media, with reports that the group had killed tens of thousands of civilians in its offensive to quash the Tamil Tiger movement (“No Victory in Sri Lanka,” 2009).

* * *

While M.I.A.'s ambiguity may seem as though it represents a vagueness on her personal beliefs, in many ways it commercially represents a strong selling point of her public persona (and therefore, her identity and music as a commodity). The creation of controversy has always been a valuable commodity in popular media forms, perhaps second only to the allure of the rock star with the mystery of untold countercultural beliefs. But in either case, she isn't telling.

As a question of pragmatics, particularly in her early career, if M.I.A. were to divulge an unequivocal critique of the Tamil Tigers, in addition to losing her cryptic revolutionary "is-she, or isn't-she" allure, there would be consequences elsewhere. Even thinly veiled in ambiguity, the possibility of revolutionary mystique is a central lyrical theme in her work, yet more importantly, it plays to the central narrative of her life and career as a musician, as discussed previously. Coming out as an unequivocal opponent to the Tigers at the time would have served neither her political nor her economic purposes, and rather than simply being less than advantageous, would raise questions on her motivation and goals that would hurt the goal of the Tamil peoples living in peace. She may be against the LTTE, she may be for it, but as with so many things in life, her feelings may be mixed between an understanding of the frustration of seeing friends and family killed, even wishing for revenge, and the possibilities for an end to war and the potential for freedom through whatever means might be available, whether violent, economic, diplomatic, or otherwise.

Yet on the complexities of this issue, one thing becomes clear: M.I.A.'s advocacy for the hundreds of thousands of Tamil people is undeniable. And understandable, for she is Tamil herself, from a war-torn country, and witnessed first-hand the violence that came from living in a state experiencing the brutalities of civil war when she was a child, but also experienced it beyond simply observing, as Binelli (2005) recounts her story:

In 2001, she returned to Sri Lanka with her mother, with the intent of making a documentary that would retrace the steps of her childhood and discover the fate of a cousin who had joined the Tigers and died under mysterious circumstances. "We were partners in crime when we were kids, soul mates. At ten, I left. He stayed and joined the Tigers. He died the same week I graduated with a fine arts degree. At that time, for me, everything was London, London, London. You know, Stella McCartney, fashion. Then you get a phone call, that your cousin died for a cause. How do you communicate that to anyone in London, dying for a cause? It was just amazing to me that someone my age, who had the same start I did, who was better in school than I was - I would always copy off his papers - he ended up dead. And I didn't."

The fact that M.I.A. had escaped the violence is a key element of her musical and political persona. That she escaped to London and immersed herself in the arts scene there, later to use this very expressive mode to educate the public to experiences both hers and of others in Sri Lanka is important in that those who were never able to leave the country for a more industrialized nation-state were not permitted to have equal access to the public sphere, political or not. Expressing these ideas M.I.A. posted on her Myspace blog:

THE TRUTH TO WHY I LEFT TO SRILANKA WAS ...
A. I COULD , I WAS BORN IN LONDON.

B. EVERY TOWN AND VILLAGE MY MOTHER TOOK US TO
WOULD GET BURNED DOWN BY THE ARMY. IN THE END EVEN THE
TAMILS WOULDN'T LET US STAY THERE AND AFTER MY SCHOOL
WAS SET ON FIRE BY THE ARMY, I HAD NOTHING TO DO THERE, AND
WAS REALLY FUCKING BOARD.

C. FUCK YOU TO ALL THESE EVIL PEOPLE TWISTING THE
TRUTH. YOU DONT SPEAK FOR ME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I CAN SPEAK FOR MY
SELF.

D.WHAT PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT YOU DONT HAVE TO BE A TAMIL OR A LTTE SUPPORTER TO KNOW THAT BURNING DOWN A SCHOOL WITH 800 KIDS IN THE NAME OF FIGHTING TERRORISM IS NOT COOL. I AM NOT A LTTE SUPPORTER. I WAS JUST AN 8 YEAR OLD THAT DIDNT GET KILLED ON THAT DAY, THATS ALL. (Arulpragasam, 2008).

M.I.A.'s public outspokenness for the rights of the Tamil nation is credit enough to believe her sincerity when it comes to her support of this people. Yet in her view toward the Tamil tigers, she presents an ambiguous view. True, she does regularly state that she does not support the violence and that she, herself, is not a terrorist, yet she seems to approach the group as a less than enthusiastic critique, and at times seems to show if not approval then at least a sense of shared admiration. One can imagine that the LTTE and M.I.A. share an understanding of the critique of the Sri Lankan Sinhalese majority government and its tactics – understandably, having one's school burned down at eight years old will do that – yet due to the fact M.I.A. and the LTTE do share the same goals and that there is a mutual understanding of cause of the problem, the two may agree on ends that will solve the problem, yet not have an agreement on the means by which to accomplish this end. There is a difference between outright support of an insurgency group and a critique of counterinsurgent forces, even if there is a probable distinction between one's public statements and private beliefs.

Yet this difference is one that can be articulated from a number of different perspectives: For better and for worse, M.I.A. has often been accused of supporting a terrorist organization herself. Certainly this spectre was raised, if obliquely, through the concern over her 2005 denial for an American visa, but less formally, being perhaps the central public figure in the fight between the Tamil and Sinhalese factions.

This highlights the divisive nature of using one's place as a political spokesperson in the cultural realm is always inviting the possibility of personal attack, particularly in the case of a violent civil war that has targeted civilians where the lines between morally right and wrong are less than clearly drawn, the labels of 'terrorist' or 'insurgent' or 'freedom fighter' being differently articulated. If anything, the subjectivity of allegiances has allowed for the creation of new battles being fought in the cultural realm as counterdiscourses appear in reaction to M.I.A.'s.

And as an inevitable (and often times understandable) backlash, there have been more than a few attacks on her as supporter of terrorism, sometimes in the public eye. In January of 2008, Sri Lankan-American rapper DeLon created a row by releasing a video that reinterpreted M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" off of *Kala* accusing M.I.A. of both representing and supporting a terrorist organization. Using M.I.A.'s backing track, he changed the lyrics of the song to reflect the tactics of the LTTE toward the Sinhalese majority civilians, including the use of human shields and suicide bombings, but central to his lyrical content was M.I.A.'s support of the Tamil Tigers through her music, her imagery, and her off-stage rhetoric (DeLon, 2008)

Interestingly, M.I.A.'s label, Universal, would clamp down on DeLon's reinterpretation of M.I.A.'s video on the grounds that it violated intellectual property claims by repeatedly petitioning Youtube to remove the video. Youtube would comply, DeLon would sue to allow Youtube to keep the video on its site, a battle that the artist would lose ("Interscope Artist, M.I.A., Exposed For Questionable Use Of Lyrics and Artwork," 2008). As for its content, the video was clearly protected as parody under the freedom of speech but fell into that gray area where the corporate control over distribution has an obligation to uphold its own interests prior to the interests of open and democratic discourse. Lawsuits are very expensive to defend and

business logic often results in the defense of the freedom of speech being placed behind corporate profits.

However, Ceylon Records, an independent label, would capitalize on DeLon's use of this song, going as far as releasing a press release that would be quoted in most every article written on the row between he and M.I.A. While DeLon, of Sinhalese Sri Lankan descent and living in Los Angeles, may have had political motivations in critiquing M.I.A. as a supporter of terrorism, the response was astoundingly large, generating millions of hits for the Youtube video and leading to a number of other web videos where DeLon would criticize M.I.A., Universal Music Group, and the LTTE (DeLon, 2008).

What is illuminating about this row is that that if anything, these struggles confirm the power of the musical form as a discursive strategy of social change. Using the music as a discursive marketplace of ideas in order to make an argument that can speak to people in many different ways allows for the creation of a new political subjectivity in the minds of listener, as well as the emergence of new technologies of communication.

Yet at the same time, there is no denying that controversy is an easy way of generating publicity, effective for one's political movement, but also for one's career. We see this with DeLon, a largely unknown rapper prior to these events, and critiques of publicity-seeking abounded when this video became popular, as online music Pitchfork described the controversy over the video on DeLon's website:

Lest you question the self-promotion claim, consider the following: The text beneath the video on the website of DeLon's label, Ceylon Records, calls the rapper "'The New Revolution' in Hip-Hop" and heralds him as "An Emerging International Star" who "represents peace and unity in Sri Lanka." A press release

on the subject goes on to proclaim DeLon "the most recognizable Sri Lankan hip-hop artist after winning the 'Best Rap Performance' Award from Derana Music Television (equivalent to MTV in the U.S.)." (SolarSKI, 2008)

Indeed, the press release for the video would end with the paragraph, "Recently partnering with Greenpeace Organization, and through his own nonprofit, The Sri Lanka Foundation, DeLon has helped spread light on the atrocities around the globe through his music and has built over 80 houses in Sri Lanka after the wreckage of the Tsunami in 2004. The controversial video can be viewed on the Ceylon Records Homepage at www.ceylonrecords.com" ("Interscope Artist, M.I.A., Exposed For Questionable Use Of Lyrics and Artwork," 2008). Further complicating things, Marshall Shen, the head of Ceylon Records, would ask the question, "In the video, we didn't really accuse her of being a Tamil Tiger. But we're asking, Why she is putting these images out there if she doesn't support them?" (Gornstein, 2008).

However, it is important to recognize that controversy worked in much the same way with M.I.A.: The first image of her in the public eye was the cover of *Piracy Funds Terrorism*, a photo of her wearing a t-shirt stating "complaints department" with a hand grenade underneath the lettering with a pull-tab number on the pin. Indeed, looking at early press coverage, her narrative was one of the things that set her apart from the start was her background and connection to a revolutionary group⁷⁸, and her lyrical content during this era (and indeed in

⁷⁸ Consider this 2005 review from *The Guardian*, one of the earliest reviews of her album, "For Maya Arulpragasam, guerrilla tactics aren't a trendy tag for a shambolic gig, they're a way of life. Having survived the upheaval of moving from Britain to the rebellion-torn Sri Lankan homeland of her father, a freedom fighter, she came back to the UK only to battle her way through life on a south London council estate....Arulpragasam's confrontational storytelling and brazen punk politics are reminiscent of Neneh Cherry and Peaches, respectively, though the hostage-taking scenario in Amazon and three skits offering a guide to refugee education make for uneasy listening" (Clarke, 2005).

subsequent eras of her career) would take on revolutionary themes that would become harder to separate between an artistic license and a personal politics, such as in the track *Freedom Skit* (2005): “Freedom fightin' dad/Bombed his pad/Called him a terror/Put him on wanted ads.” M.I.A. did little to downplay those connections in her early years as a public figure, and the strength of her current stature in the public eye has much to do with the fact that she rarely discouraged these connections, if not forthrightly embraced them. Whatever her personal politics or professional project might have been at the time, M.I.A. clearly used her “revolutionary chic” as a way of establishing her as a new artist, different from the herd of other new artists whose albums are released every day.

Audiences, though have taken these personae in many different ways. The approach to a political project is often a divisive one, and the roles that musicians such as M.I.A. take on themselves have consequences that go far beyond what they may have originally intended. Especially with the moral subjectivity of something like a civil war, there will be a great number of critiques of those who support one side as lacking a human morality in their support of a group that performs atrocious acts. This was particularly true in M.I.A.'s case:

In case you missed it, M.I.A. videos, her album art, and most of her interviews are chock full of tamil tiger propaganda. in our super-hip underground indie world, everyone is absolutely apeshit into this third world ghetto mystique right now and its pretty infuriating to me because alot of people have no fucking idea what the hell all that shit represents in real life. please read up the wikipedia article on the tamil tigers, who are straight up TERRORISTS that are responsible for the death of over 50,000 people in sri lanka since the early 80s. since her dad was one of them, this is what she talks about constantly and she has openly

supported them; to uninformed people, their "revolution" is so fucking cool. frankly, its pathetic and disgusting to me. look up the acts in the actual wikipedia article: (<http://en.wikipedia.or...>) yourself if you don't trust me. the tamil tigers have been attacking innocent people (including women, children and peace workers) for over 15 years now. IT'S ALL THERE. too bad jimmy iovine and rolling stone and spin and every other garbage pail music rag seems to think that some hot sri lankan chick's political raps are so fucking important and groundbreaking that they are constantly and consistently willing to over look this tragic and brutal aspect of her marketable image for the sake of hipness. DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE. (Christian Y., 2008)

In the end, Christgau (2005) best sums M.I.A.'s relationship to terrorism,

Let's think for just a moment about how much M.I.A. actually supports the Tamil Tigers...I see no sign that she supports the Tigers. She obsesses on them; she thinks they get a raw deal. But without question she knows they do bad things and struggles with that. The decoratively arrayed, pastel-washed tigers, soldiers, guns, armored vehicles, and fleeing civilians that bedeck her album are images, not propaganda—the same stuff that got her nominated for an Alternative Turner Prize in 2001. They're now assumed to be incendiary because, unlike art buyers, rock and roll fans are assumed to be stupid. (n.p.)

Questions of a Political Project

Yet with the ambiguities – intentional or not - over the way in which M.I.A. has approached these issues, this discussion raises one overarching question on which she has never been

convincingly explicit: *What is her political project?* There are three possibilities, none of which are necessarily exclusive of the other.

First, her goal may be one of educating global audiences (the culturally myopic West in particular) to the plight of the Tamil People in Sri Lanka, with a subsequent consideration of fostering political pressure on the Sinhalese-controlled Sri Lankan government to cease persecution of Tamil peoples or allow a new Tamil nation. M.I.A. is undeniably the preeminent spokesperson for the Tamil people, clearly a lonely position to be in. Few Americans had heard of the Tamil people, let alone understood the nature of the conflict until M.I.A. entered the issue into the public consciousness, and this is probably true for many other parts of the world. Even still, the conflation between the Tamil people and the LTTE is often misunderstood, which M.I.A. understands is necessary to straighten out as a central part of her political project. In her appearance on the Tavis Smiley (2009) talk show, she laid out the case:

You don't know more about it because due to the propaganda -- when you think Tamil, you automatically think tiger, and that is completely disproportionate. So human beings around the world have to be taught to go Tamil equals Tamil civilians first, and the Tamil Tiger is a separate thing. And both of those groups are different. It's like a square and a circle.

And the thing is there's only 4,000 Tamil Tiger soldiers in Sri Lanka...But using those people, [the Sinhalese government is] managing to wipe out the whole Tamil population, the civilians, and that is why you don't hear about it, because the propaganda in the media, because if you're a terrorist organization, you don't have the right to speak, that is passed on to the Tamil civilians. The Tamil civilians don't have the right to speak or right to live, they don't have any liberties.

So that's been the key thing, that when you think al Qaeda, you're not thinking Afghanistan. That if you want to go and fight and kill al Qaeda, then you can, but you can't wipe out Afghanistan. And that's what's happening in Sri Lanka, and I think it's really important for America to understand that, because they set the precedent on how you fight terrorism around the world.

And it's really important that just that sort of throwaway comment, "Oh, Tamil, she must be a Tamil Tiger," actually, the repercussions of that is killing people back home. (n.p.)

As a musical ambassador, M.I.A. is able to use her clout as an alternative route into the media. It is a groundwork that has been laid well: The 2008-2009 political unrest in Sri Lanka led to a number of mainstream media outlets turning to her as a spokesperson on the conflict.

As for herself, M.I.A. claims that this was all part of the plan. From a January 28, 2009 blog post,

IM ON TV!

TODAY I WENT ON T.V

I did CNN HEADLINE NEWS

CNN LATIN AMERICA

AND TAVIS SMILEY ON PBS WHICH WILL AIR AS I POST THIS!!!

tomaro
im gonna do
al jazeera
france 24 and
ap t.v

I want you to know that , everyone has been asking me on the shows to talk about the sudden popularity im experiencing, the babies, the grammies the oscars etc

and i want you to know that this has been part of the plan from day 1.

this is the only oppotunity i have had to do something about the genocide
in Sri Lanka and im seizing that oppotunity

so for a lil while im gonna go from being

M.I.A. TO I. Y. F.

IN YA FACE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
(Arulpragasam, 2009)

The second possibility may be a project of fostering new political realities of the global poor as a trans-national resistant class. Clearly, M.I.A. has an affection for the poor, having grown up in destitute poverty in Sri Lanka only to move to London and live again among the poor in a housing project. It is a constant theme in her work, to which she says, “I use political references or words to reflect everything—whether you're poor, whether you're from the street, whether you can't pay the bills, whether you're just the underdog all the time” (Christgau, 2005). Understanding poverty from a first-hand experience lends her credibility in this regard, and her public persona has been one where she has regularly expressed through her interviews and her art. The repeated opening line of the first proper song on her debut album *Arular* tells the story right away: “Pull up the people/Pull up the Poor”.

As evidence of her sincerity of motive, her travels throughout the world often led her to slums, which she documents in not only her music, but also other media outlets afforded to her, particularly in the case of her blog on Myspace and her Twitter account. Most notably, a December 12, 2006 post on her Myspace blog was quickly passed along on a number of other blog sites on the web, detailing her recent trip to Liberia. Quite insightful into her character, it is worth quoting at length (albeit heavily edited), beginning with the answer to the question on why she visited the country:

SO I SAID YES FOR THESE REASONS

1 . I'M NOT [a mainstream celebrity], i don't live in a bubble. BUT I HAVE SEEN THE REALITY OF THAT. STRAIGHT AFTER TMBARLAND AND TIMBERLAKE SIDE I WANTED TO GO TO HUNGERLAND AND...NO TIMBER HOUSE BY THE LAKE LIKE.

2. I WANTED TO GO AND DEAL WITH POST BONO ERA
.... "PEOPLE COME AROUND WITH THEIR CAMERA , SHOW THE WORLD WHAT I LOOK LIKE ,.....WILL THEY COME TOMARA" SENTIMENT.

C. I AM THE THING I WAS GOING THERE TO BE SHOCKED BY.

I DID ALL THE PRINCESS DIANA THINGS. WENT TO SCHOOLS ,HOMES THAT WERE EMPTY BOMBED OUT BUILDINGS , VILLAGES WITH NO WATER ELECTRICITY, SAW THE MOST RAWEST THINGS

[...]

FOR THE U.S DAY TO DAY RUNNING OF IRAQ
IT COST APPROX 85 MILLION PER DAY.

5 OF THOSE DAYS CAN REBUILD BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LIBERIA!! 4EVA

FOOD , WATER, ELECTRICITY R STILL MISSING BECAUSE EVERYTHING HAS BEEN LOOTED AND SOLD TO OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES, LIKE THE TRAIN TRACKS PAVEMENT THE CABLES FOR ELECTRICITY TO PASS THROUGH, EVERYTHING IS CLEANED OUT.

[...]

I ADMIT I LOVE LIBERIA BECAUSE THE WAR STOPPED !! IN SRI LANKA THEY R STILL AT IT,

NOTE TO ANYONE READING THIS!!!!!!!
PLEASE LOOK OVER THERE, THEY HAVE BLOCKED THE ROADS TO JAFFNA WHERE I COME FROM . 500, 000 PEOPLE ARE BEING STARVED SYSTEMATICALLY TO DEATH. NO FOOD ALLOWED IN, I CANT EVEN BEGIN TO TALK ABOUT WHY THATS HAPPENING, BUT MAYBE U CAN. IT MAKES ME FREEZE , IT TOO CLOSE TO HOME.

[...]

I WANTED TO SAY

THIS ISNT A BLACK WHITE THING!
THIS ISNT AFRICA AGAINST THE WORLD THING
MAYBE NOT EVEN
RICH / POOR THING
WAR THING

ITS 1ST WORLD....MEDIA VS 3 WORLD MESSAGE THING.
(Arulpragasam, 2006)

M.I.A. would go on to use concert revenues from several of her shows (including her \$100,000 performance at an afterparty for the MTV Awards in 2008) in order to found a school in Liberia, which as of June 2009 was nearing completion (“M.I.A. to build schools in Liberia,” 2008).

As further evidence, M.I.A. uses her music as a voice to bring issues to the forefront of the cultural consciousness of the public. Consider the lyrics to two songs that partner with one another to present a theme of sorts of global poverty to serve as an educating function. “10 Dollar” (2005) off *Arular* is a story of teenage prostitution and human trafficking:

China girl was a little girl
From a town
That's all you need to know

[...]

China girl grew up to be a big girl
Had her sights set on a bigger world

Dial-a-bride from sri lanka
Found herself a yorkshire banker
Need a visa? got wth a geezer
Need some money?
Paid him with her knees up
Year later, started to ease up
Got her own way, shouted out 'see ya'

Yea, what can i get for 10 dollar?
Anything you want.

A similar theme is seen in the lyrics to “20 Dollar” off *Kala*:

War, war, war!
Talking bout y'all's such a bore
I'd rather talk about moi

Like do you know the cost of A.K.'s up in Africa?
Twenty dollars ain't shit to you
But that's how much they are
So they're gonna use the shit just to get by

[...]

So I woke up with my holy Quran
And found out I like Cadillac
We shooting 'til the song is up
Little boys are acting up
And baby mamas are going crazy
And the leaders all around cracking up
We goat rich, we fry
Price of living in a shanty town
Just seems very high
But we still like T.I.
But we still look fly
Dancin' as we're shootin' up
and lootin' just to get by

Later, it calls to the listener to consider the ramifications of these facts, interestingly, by quoting (and indeed, flipping on its head) the lyrics to The Pixies' “Where Is My Mind” (1988):

With your feet on the air and your head on the ground
Try this trick and spin it, yeah
Your head'll collapse when there's nothing in it
And you'll ask yourself:
"Where is my mind?"

The third and, having examined the evidence, the most likely, possibility is that M.I.A. is actually concerned about these issues but that the immediate efficacy of her project is compromised by her having to balance the concerns of maintaining celebrity status with her political advocacy. Yet for the loss in immediate social change through the expression of an

extremist viewpoint, in the end, M.I.A.'s political restraint may prove to be not a hindrance as much a long-term strategy of maintaining a relevant voice in the public sphere.

Indeed, it may be that M.I.A. has her political strategies figured out more than she lets on. Clearly, she realizes the power of the state to limit her expression after being denied a visa in 2005 on the grounds of her alleged support for the Tamil Tigers. There is a delicate balance to be had. In an interview with PBS' Tavis Smiley (2009) lends itself to this conclusion:

M.I.A.: And I think it's always been that's the thing about my music. Like, I wanted to become a musician and help, like, some sort of change, or stand up for what I believe in, or use music for what it's supposed to be for. And so it wasn't really about getting fame and success and becoming a celebrity and selling records, it was more about bringing together an opinion or a point of view of the other that doesn't usually get heard in the mainstream.

Tavis: You know there are a lot of artists who shy away from that; they don't want to bring their truth, whatever that is, into their music. They just want to entertain people.

M.I.A.: I know, but music was also used for social change. It's not a bad word. And I think we just kind of shy away from it because the pressure of being successful and the pressure of being sexy and standing up for nothing is just so big, you know what I mean?

Tavis: Yeah, I like that.

M.I.A.: Yeah, so I think that is -- you have to be pretty tough to, like, fight that, and the fact that I kind of had the experiences that I had made me so tough

and thick-skinned that it didn't matter what anyone put onto me, but it was more about the people that I was representing. (n.p.)

While her music has always been political, the level of M.I.A.'s rhetoric and social activism took a noticeable and significant turn with the 2008-2009 escalation of the Sri Lankan civil war when the celebrity status that had been established as a musical artist made her the central spokesperson for the Tamil minority. As any artistic statement, the context surrounding that statement matters, yet as the eyes of the world turned to Sri Lanka during this escalation, so too was there an escalation of M.I.A.'s status in the media eye. M.I.A. was fighting for the very survival of the Tamil people rather than the recognition of an independent state, and she took on an unequivocally and specific role as a political leader that was unlike the veiled and ambiguous nature of her earlier years.

Perhaps these tactics can be thought of a way of passing as non-threatening, a way of negotiating the desire to see social change with the desire to not be forcefully marginalized in one's action through political maneuvering or through economic logics. In a sense, one of the weaknesses of political artists who focus singularly on one topic through a career can end up preaching to the choir, unable to maintain the momentum or attention that is required to enact a change in the social order. The die-hard fans will be on board, but others will lose interest along the way.

This leads in turn to the effectiveness of her political activity and the political content of her music. This a particularly troublesome question due to one overarching reason: M.I.A. is working within the dominant logic of power (and indeed, the dominant logic of capitalism) with the hope of reformulating that logic of power. Her status as a political leader, after all, became much more prominent once she started speaking directly to the people instead of through her

music when the Sri Lankan government began to crack down on the Tamil minority. At the point of this conflict's escalation, it seemed as though her role, and indeed her rhetoric changed as she became an activist fighting for the survival of her people rather than her previous ambiguity toward the fight for an independent state and the oppression toward the Tamils. M.I.A. had always been public about the Sinhalese government's treatment of the minority, yet this publicity was masked behind a generalized rhetoric of insurrectionist freedom fighter, told from a third-person point-of-view or a fictionalized character in a song. Rarely was her project so direct in its educational role and its appeal to the public for pressure on political leaders until the very end stages of the Sri Lankan civil war.

Yet this raises the question of the political possibilities of M.I.A.'s music. An excellent method for judging the efficacy of a perceived threat is to gauge the response of parties who are threatened. Nonthreatening actions will not warrant a response, because what is the point? If one reflexively imagines their own action if they were the one in power, it is no stretch to say that even the smallest threat will receive a response.

With this in mind, given that the U.S. government did not allow her entry shows that the government was at least somewhat concerned of her as a threat. In a way, this appears to be a validation of her political efficacy in at least some degree. There is an argument that can be made that the government was simply enforcing a conservative approach to a foreign national, for from the state's point of view, there is little to be gained from her entry across the border and much to be lost through her "misbehavior" whilst in the United States.

However, in thinking back to the way in which the nation-state deals with musical threats, this fits very much in with the command and control of information through the limiting of voices. Particularly in the case of foreign nationals who do not have the same rights as

citizens, those who raise their voices in opposition of contemporary state or capitalistic enterprises often see themselves labeled as threatening or as troublemakers. Those who have a possibility of agitation may find themselves with reminders of their proper place as guests; those who truly agitate things often find themselves deported or, in the case of M.I.A., disinvited for return visits due to her critique of the interest of America and its allies.

Yet it was because of her status as a musician that she was able to have a voice at all: Her celebrity gave her access to the public sphere, gave her a voice to spread her political project, in a way that very few others have had access to. And with this discussion necessarily comes the question of whether or not her music and public persona has been co-opted, whether M.I.A.'s activity works primarily for her own political project, or whether she, knowingly or unknowingly, has had her labor used for purposes other than her own. It is the central question of this dissertation, and it is the focus of the next chapter, the conclusion.

In the end, M.I.A. is an excellent case study in representing the complexities and contradictions of the place of musical artists in the postmodern age of the global politics of culture, neoliberal governance, and the network society. The conclusions drawn on her work provides few definitive answers on the outcome, but many insights into the way in which the processes of control, and the possibilities of liberation, function in this emerging age. It is a place where the sometimes easy categorization, the often clear-cut definitions and outcomes of modernism, have given way to a much more contradictory place where value judgements cannot be made in quite the same blanket fashion, for better or for worse. In any case, the problematic status of M.I.A.'s political project, her persona on and off stage, is a question of strategy and efficacy, and it is the subject of the next, and final, chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

This, the concluding chapter of this dissertation, is an analysis of a disruption, the separation of the politics of music making from the structures of the past that have embedded themselves in these practices for over a century. The preceding six chapters – four dealing with theoretical, historical, and practical context, two of case studies – have built upon a great number of areas to convey a unified set of findings. Respectively, the emerging novel order of power, new strategies of control through cultural forms, issues of globalization and global capitalism, the political economy of the global music industry – these together present a large-scale environment in which we can place equally the historical analysis and forthcoming tendencies of power, music, and everyday life.

In the end, the argument comes around to the very question that started this journey: What can music do? This idea – the changing social processes that result from the changing structure, organization, and exercise of power – is best explored by using these two case studies as a method of comparison and contrast. Revisiting the purpose of this dissertation, the central project is to connect the theoretical to the empirical as a method to address its central goal of understanding the role of popular music in determining the political constitution of the everyday lives of global citizens. It asks the question of how popular music is used as a negotiation of the powers of control in the new global order, and what, if any, are the possibilities for resistance.

Throughout all of these findings, though, there is one central thread that spans the nuances of each of these questions: *The crux of power in the cultural politics of music lies in distribution.* No other issue comes close in terms of importance. The battles being fought,

whether through markets, state politics or cultural politics, macro or micro economic structures, or any of a long list of sites, are non-issues without the question of distribution. It is not unlike the tradition of information-sharing through the press system: Production matters, but without distribution, production means little.

This is particularly true in musical forms where the two cannot reasonably be separated from one another, as the creation and spreading of information is central to the cultural lives of peoples around the globe, down to the smallest of communities. Distribution is fundamentally and unequivocally a site of contested control, not just in the name of the maintenance and accumulation of monetary capital but equally so in terms of political and cultural capital. Music-making, as a cultural form, has always been intertwined with power; The subject being studied by this dissertation is the way in which power is negotiated at these sites with the goal of identifying the *processes* through which the cultural politics of music create, maintain, or renegotiate power in the digital age.

This chapter of findings is focused around five questions. Put most simply,

- First: The production and distribution of music is fundamentally different for M.I.A. than it was for Rage Against the Machine. What changed?
- Second: Each of these artists walk a shaky line of political resistance within mainstream political, economic, and cultural institutions and structures. On whose behalf are these artists working?
- Third: The efficacy of these artists' political projects is not easily measured, qualitatively or quantitatively, particularly given the complications of the preceding question. For each of these artists, how effective was their political project?

- Fourth: The emergence of a new global ordering of power structures and relations is in many ways evident. With these case studies in mind, what is the place of the global music industry in this new order, both theoretically and materially?
- Fifth, and finally: What do these findings suggest in terms of future directions of research, new ways of theorizing the cultural politics of music in the network age?

The case studies presented in the preceding two chapters were strategic: The findings of this chapter will be presented as the argument is made for the changes in the exercise and strategies of power in the pre-digital and the digital age of production and distribution. These two case studies – M.I.A. and Rage Against the Machine – are indicative of fundamentally different eras, characterized by fundamentally different modes of production and distribution. These eras are as dramatic in the method through which this new power is exercised as they are dynamic in its rapid deployment. The powerful are still powerful; It is the exercise of this power that has shifted. With this, let us begin the discussion.

* * *

1) *The cultural politics of music is fundamentally different for M.I.A. than it was for Rage Against the Machine. What changed?*

The comparisons between these two bands - groups that belong to the quite exclusive cadre of musicians that have been able to toe the line of mainstream commercial success and political activism - are many in that they both have much in common in their approach to the political in music and the musical in politics. Still, there are differences both theoretical and material that separate the two. Although Rage Against the Machine, whose most prominent era would be the 1990s, and M.I.A., who would begin creating music in 2004, are only separated by

a relatively short period of time, the processes and role of popular music in society are fundamentally different: Today's musical world has drastically altered the roles of music, the ways in which it is produced and distributed, its contextual place in society, its uses and practices. The question, then, is *what changed?*

There are several answers that can provide insight into the similarities and differences between these two case studies. These include four sub-points:

a) *The creation of digital formats.* Putting aside the politics of these artists' works, among the primary differences between these case studies that lend insight into the changing processes of the cultural order of music, there is perhaps none more important than the creation of digital music formats. This was first in the compact disc (and to a lesser degree in the MiniDisc and the DAT and DCC digital tape formats), but much more importantly in the introduction of digital formats that did not require a tangible medium, such as the mp3 format⁷⁹. This is as true in terms of production as it is of distribution: Most recording studios would shift to digital recording media during the 1990s, and the drastically lowered production costs for digital home studios would continue throughout the 2000s.

As a bellwether of the changing era, Rage Against the Machine's 1992 self-titled first album was released on three formats: Compact disc, cassette, and as a vinyl LP. 1996's *Evil*

⁷⁹ Of these forms, one of the most notable developments was the creation of data compression algorithms (sometimes known as lossy formats, versus lossless, where all data is retained). The wavefile format was the primary computer sound format for over a decade, yet its uncompressed, lossless format made the file size quite large – particularly troubling in the era where hard drive space and processing memory were at a premium. The creation of the mp3 format allowed for drastic reductions in file size, which also facilitated the transmission over a variety of communication network protocols, as well as the creation of mass-storage portable music listening devices.

Empire and 1999's *The Battle of Los Angeles* would be released on only on CD and cassette⁸⁰.

Furthermore, each of Rage Against the Machine's albums would be re-released in digital formats throughout the 2000s, beginning with Sony's own flash-in-the-pan 2003 site, The Store, and later on its retail joint venture with EMI, PressPlay. The tracks, however, would be hampered by two common early fallacies, restrictive DRM and high pricing, with individual tracks costing \$3.50 on The Store to download.

Instances such as Sony's restrictive attempts at controlling the rights of the music were not limited to this company. In fact, it was indicative of the generalized response of the music industry toward establishing a new regime of rights control over its music, particularly in distribution, but even more so in the user experience through the use of DRM strategies. The case of Rage Against the Machine illustrates the way in which the changing formats of technology were viewed during this era primarily as a threat to the profit motives of major label record companies and their parent corporations' shareholders, and secondarily, if they could be controlled at some point in the future, as a new revenue stream. As new formats emerged that would allow for lossless reproduction through digital formats, the resulting response would be a shift in the very way that music was released to the public. Their politics aside, Rage Against the Machine represents this era, functioning as a very successful (and very profitable) major label recording act, indicative particularly in the releases of their first two albums as functioning in the traditional strategies embodied within the established system of production and distribution.

Conversely, M.I.A.'s albums would be released in an era in which record companies had begun to focus centrally on the digital format as the end point of the last century of medium

⁸⁰ All three of Rage Against the Machine's albums would later be released on vinyl LPs as there became a small but notable resurgence of the medium in the 2000s amongst music listeners.

developments⁸¹. As a musical artist whose career began in the digital network age, her work has used digital formats as a central strategy of selling albums, yet her genre-hopping and globally influenced music also been the result of the creation of these new formats, as well as the creation of new networks of information sharing. M.I.A.'s studio albums would be released on CD, LP, and digital formats, cassette tape being a dead format for commercial releases by that time.

b) *The creation of new networks of information-sharing.* Whether one is speaking of ideas or finances or tangible objects, reproduction has always been about sharing. In terms of music, the rise of new networks of communication through internet connectivity allowed for the creation of both new opportunities and threats. Yet the ambiguity over the outcome of these strategies can be as true for political activists as for the maintenance of existing power structures.

Regardless, the 2000s represented a fundamentally different musical world than the pre-digital age, primarily through the emergence of peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing networks.

Starting with Napster in the turn of the millennium and continuing on through an astonishing number of predominant distribution protocols in the next ten years –at least a half-dozen or so from 2000-2009 – file sharing became the single greatest threat to the commercial stranglehold

⁸¹ One of the many uncertainties over the future of musical media is to look at how the industry will continue to repackage old media. With each new format that emerged in the past century, consumers had to re-purchase the same album on a new format, from LPs to cassette tapes to CDs to digital formats. Now that music exists primarily in a medium-less, intangible format, it is unclear how the industry will continue to market its back catalog. For now, it appears to be through higher fidelity digital recordings. For example, the Apple iTunes store introduced iTunes Plus in 2008, where users could repurchase their 128kbps mp3 files as higher fidelity 256kbps. However, as the cost of hard drive space continues to drop to the point where storage will be effectively unlimited in terabytes or petabytes, it can be imagined that music will eventually be entirely encoded digitally in lossless formats in the next five to ten years. Once all digital music is lossless format, the ability to re-sell the same album in new formats has reached its finite end – there is nowhere else to go. There is a possibility that the return to vinyl trend will grow as consumers desire a tangible product (not to mention its hip cache), but it is doubtful that the future will see vinyl become anything more than a niche market.

that record companies have held over the production and distribution of popular music in the industry's hundred-plus year history.

This has led to a massive supply of free music for audience consumption, the only limits to finding music being the level of obscurity or legal threats toward illegal downloading. Even with the changes through digital distribution through P2P means, the future will most likely hold an even greater expansion, as the viral nature of file sharing and the ever-decreasing cost of storage space allows for the aggregation of massive databases of music collections to be shared, replicated and reproduced throughout a wide variety of nodes.

Just as notable is the global scale of these nodes. The rise of new technologies of communication have allowed for these networks to function as transnational information-sharing flows of information and data. These largely unregulated networks circumvent the traditional modes of distribution that are maintained by record industry gatekeepers, taking control of the distribution of music away from those who have used the global channels of moving music as a primary mode of control. Instead, the role of file-sharing networks not only allows for the wrestling back of control from traditional structures of distribution, it creates the possibility for new avenues of political activism through the formation of new ways for ideas to emerge in the public sphere. Those artists whose work embodies a political project as a goal can not only have a way to evade some forms of political or market censorship, but also allows for the creation of new political subjectivities by having at least the potential for greater audience access to their music.

Rage Against the Machine's era was characterized by the corporate system and little alternative elsewhere. There were indeed independent record stores – considerably more than in the late 2000s – and there have always been other options, such as selling music at concerts and

out of the trunk of one's car. These possibilities, while admirable, do not allow for a mass audience on anywhere near the scale necessary for success in achieving one's political goals. Discussing the negotiation necessary between the depths one's political ideals and the pragmatic goals of achieving one's political project, Morello discusses the issue, "It's great to play abandoned squats run by anarchists, but it's also great to be able to reach people with a revolutionary message, people from Granada Hills to Stuttgart" (Gavin, 2000).

While the network era of M.I.A. still shares some of these traits – arguably, there is still at least the possibility for social action through mainstream media channels – the difference is that the rise of network flows has allowed for new avenues through which musicians can be heard, greatly diminishing the necessity of compromising to channel or market dictates, as discussed in the next section.

c) *The changing outlets for media consumption.* Of the many differences between these two case studies that can lend light to the emergence of a new cultural order through music, there is perhaps none more distinguishing than in the way in which music is broadcast and purchased.

Radio during the 1990s would undergo a drastic change that saw an industry already dictated by corporate logics of profit, consolidation, and a cozy relationship with record labels become even more so. Pre-1996, radio was an industry that was already quite concentrated in its own right. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 would eliminate many of the caps on ownership that had already existed, and despite the act's goal of fostering increased competition in telecommunications industries, in terms of most media, it would instead lead to massive concentration.

Radio was among the most concentrated, due to the de facto elimination of ownership caps on radio stations. Five corporations – Clear Channel Communications, CBS Radio, Cox, Citadel and Entercom – would continue to grow to control the vast majority of the radio market, owning a collective total of over 2,050 radio stations between them as of 2007 (“Chart: Radio,” 2009). Clearly, the consolidation of radio markets did not lead to increased competition, but more importantly, it did not lead to a more diverse radio environment.

The second main broadcast medium of music during the 1990s – the televised music video – was an industry considerably more consolidated, and, consequently, artists were subject to a much shorter leash of control. Since its emergence to the mainstream in 1981 until the advent of streaming internet video sites in the late 1990s and early 2000s, music video held a unique place in the grander context of popular music. For most of the 1980 and 1990s, music video was a monopoly dominated by one company – Viacom – through its various holdings, including MTV, VH1, CMT, BET, and the various spin-offs and genre-specific channels that would spawn from these entities. Still today, almost twenty years later, there are few competitors to these channels.

Televised music video via MTV or VH1 were the primary tools used in order to promote album sales throughout the 1980s. The 1990s would see the channels move away from music video into other programs, such as documentaries, reality shows, dramas, sketch comedy, game shows and other non-musical content, but music videos were still shown in limited numbers through programs such as Total Request Live, a program that would count down the top ten videos of the day. TRL would be phenomenally influential and, as one of the few remaining video outlets on the channel, would also be intensely competitive amongst record companies

competing for these valuable slots, often through payola and careful grooming of musical artists in order to fit the proper TRL image and demographic.

Rage Against the Machine's relationship with the channel would be the subject of much criticism. The band would use MTV as a medium for their purpose of educating the public, yet the critique of their use of a major media outlet in order to work within the system elicited a number of claims of working for the very powers that the group was opposing.

Yet during this era, there were few better ways to reach a new mass audience through other media, few other strategies that could allow for the group to offer an alternative to more mainstream topics or benign political projects. This is despite MTV's attempts at branding itself as encompassing the radicalism and rebellion that has long been a part of the mythology of rock and roll and hip-hop in popular American culture.

In terms of MTV and its problematic relationship with truly countercultural politics, De la Rocha would state,

MTV, in itself, is like a bad history book. They'll attempt to be progressive or attempt to re-enfranchise people politically, but in the long run, it does more to hurt people than it does to promote any realism about it. The fact of the matter is that MTV plays a very influential part in the lives of young people. People watch more than they read. They watch more than they do anything else. So to not use TV is the most counter to our goal. I think we can use it as a medium...That's the benefit of having someone like Epic records on your side, though. *They'll pay them to play it, you know?* I think we have to realize that there could be millions of people exposed to Leonard's case as a result of putting his struggle on the air (Brannon, 2007, pp. 46-48, italics mine).

Clearly, the overlapping means of the record company and the band itself were not shared in the ends that each wanted to achieve, but there are advantages for the political artist in a case such as this. Yet for the critiques of Rage Against the Machine's use of music video on MTV and VH1 would pale in comparison to the group's 1999 appearance on MTV's Total Request Live. Among the most politically benign of MTV's programming, TRL usually featured staid interviews with pop starlets and record-company-made pop stars about subjects of little consequence to mainstream news, if not to the tabloid press. Clearly, associating the band with this program was problematic. However, Morello explained,

I grew up in a place where there was no access to anything indie. None. One Musicland within 40 miles. I never want to be elitists, and that's where a lot of kids see their music. We weren't going to skip the show because Britney Spears rather than Soundgarden may be on the day after us. The only concern for us is that the music and the politics are uncut. It's not like we are donning midriff outfits and sweaters in order to pander to the programs or the audience...TRL is where kids watch their rock. And we're going to do our best to terrify them. (Stenning, 2008, p. 149)

Morello's quote shows the primary difference between not only the way that music was listened to but also music was distributed, and even more importantly, the way in which musicians, no matter how revolutionary they purported to be, were required to work within the confines of the dominant structure. Even if located at the margins of that structure, it was necessary to toe the line due to the fact that on broadcast and cable television, there were simply no other options. Groups were faced with a tough decision: Do they restrain their political

statements just enough in order to achieve mainstream airplay, or do they refuse to compromise their message and are in turn cut off?

As it is, Rage Against the Machine would face censorship on many of the group's videos on MTV and VH1, requiring edits to be made in order to remove visuals that the station found objectionable. Morello would later discuss the problematic intersection of market regulation or corporate conservatism with the politically active artistic statement:

I think it's an important part of the screening process for artists. You have to be obedient in many different ways in order to get your music played on the radio, in order to get your videos played on TV. And one of those ways is the language. You know bands that tend to unapologetically use strong language are excluded from the mainstream. Often, or occasionally, those bands have a subversive political message as well, which is then also excluded from the mainstream. (Stenning, 2008, p. 94)

Referring to the lengthy list of objections to the 1996 video "People of the Sun" for lyrical and graphical content made by MTV, Morello would state, "Not to sound like too much of a conspiracy theorist, I think they don't like the politics of the band, and they look for excuses not to play the video" (Stenning, 2008, p. 110).

Working within the mainstream radio and music video systems would provide M.I.A. similar roadblocks. Like Rage Against the Machine, her work faced censorship issues with MTV, as mentioned in the previous chapter with the video for her song "Sunshowers."

Yet as a prime distinguishing characteristic that separates the pre-network era of Rage Against the Machine from M.I.A.'s era lies in the massive expansion of non-television, non-radio channels of media through which musicians can push forward their political agenda. In

other words, the musical world of the 1990s was one that largely existed through traditional media forms, media that allowed little citizen participation or more than a one-way, or at best, two-way flow of information.

The massive economic and technological structures necessary to maintain these media also necessitated deep pockets, and with deep pockets came the need for increased revenue streams, which in turn led to formal or informal advertising dictates on content that would lean toward a generalized conservatism and corporate (if not FCC-mandated) censorship.

The end of the 1990s would see the emerging mainstream rise of the network society through the dramatic expansion of internet access to households, a trend that would become ever more important with the rise of broadband speeds that would allow for massive data transmissions, including streaming audio and video. Because of this, music video has seen resurgence with the advent of streaming web video services, starting with iFilm in 1997 and continuing most notably through with Youtube, but also through downloading via distributed bit torrent network protocols and through pay services such as iTunes or Amazon.com's music video downloading services that can be played on users computers or on mobile devices such as the Apple iPhone. This is particularly the case with Youtube. As of July 2009, fourteen of the top twenty most-viewed videos of all time on Youtube would be music videos, with a combined total of over a billion views.

Perhaps the greatest difference between these groups' eras is that there is a much lesser degree of censorship that occurs on Youtube and similar video sites. While censorship does exist on many of these sites (particularly as the result of corporatist logics of clamping down on uses of intellectual property), there still remain other alternatives for the distribution of content, such as hosting videos on one's own web site or using bit torrent networks as a distribution point. It is

quite an effective method to get one's message out: The video for M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" has of this writing over 36m views and over 112,000 comments. Most notably, M.I.A. posted a message on the video's page, "PAPER PLANES by M.I.A official video P.S THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A CENSORED VERSION!!!! IF U SEE IT PLEASE REMOVE! I WILL NEVER CENSOR THIS SONG." ("M.I.A. Paper Planes official video," 2009).

Yet beyond the new avenues for the distribution of video content, simply the existence of web pages as a communication medium is a fundamental difference, a phenomenon that is very much taken for granted in this day in age. For most of Rage Against the Machine's career, the band did not have a website. In fact, for the first few years of the group's existence, there was no such thing as the world wide web (which was released as a protocol in 1993), and the group would found its first site in 1997. The rise of websites again presented a more democratic society in many ways through the creation of new channels of communication, but for the musician with a political project, it allowed new possibilities of both spreading one's musical message and to present resources that audiences could use to take the next step in their activism.

A look back⁸² at Rage Against the Machine's site from 1997 shows typically little content (internet speeds were hampered by mostly dial-up service, slower computing speeds, and as predecessors to new web programming technologies such as Java or Flash). Quite interestingly, though, in addition to low-quality, 30 second clips of the band's music, tour dates, and merchandise, there were a number of links to organizations that the band supported under the listing "Praxis," including Rock for Choice, Refuse and Resist, Friends and Family of Mumia Abu Jamal, and tens of others. It appears that the group realized early on the possibilities inherent in this new medium.

⁸² Archive.org, an archival service that catalogs the history of webpages, was used in order to examine these sites' pasts.

Similarly, though, as the effects of the network society have become increasingly ubiquitous in the culture of everyday life, the rise of blogs has given artists direct access to their audiences. It is not uncommon for musicians to maintain a blog via their Myspace page, and increasingly this is the case with the social networking site Facebook and the 140-character limited microblogging site Twitter.

For M.I.A., the use of blogging has been central to her political project, both as a musician and as a political activist. She was particularly active on her Myspace blog, using it as the central sounding board for her political projects, her travels around the globe, to bring attention to issues that she deemed important, and to offer a counter flow to the critiques that were directed toward her. More recently, M.I.A. has used her Twitter account as a central medium of communication, largely to political ends. The vast majority of her numerous posts on her Twitter page are dealing with the plight of the Tamil people, the lack of media reporting, and the human rights issues on the refugee camps, amongst a number of other issues, stating "I have to show people what's going on in Sri Lanka. It's much better than me banging on about myself and where I get my hair done" (Harrington, 2005).

The sheer number of media that are available for the political musician to spread his or her message is a development in recent years that has allowed for new possibilities for political and social activism, the changing media landscape being used as a method of not only through musical but other means as well. In the end, the role of popular music and musicians' social activism through new distribution channels allows for at least the possibility of new voices to be heard that would not have otherwise been able to surface, new ways in which political movements can spread, new subjectivities can develop.

d) *The changing global cultural politics of the post-9/11 world and Bush-era Neoliberalism.*

While the argument can be made that these two should be treated as different entities – neoliberalism, for example, existed before the events of September 11th, and a case can be made that not all events post-9/11 were part of the neoliberal project – the Bush administration was not reflected in the politics of neoliberalism but instead was firmly embedded within its ideology. And if there were any doubts over the ushering in of this era, the apex of neoliberal philosophies, the events of the years following the terrible events of that day would erase any dispute over where the Bush Administration stood.

To be sure, the pre- and post-9/11 worlds were fundamentally different. This was true on many levels – political, economic, and cultural – but given that these different axes provide the context in which music exists, there was little surprise that both the politics of music and of music-making would shift from these two eras. Yet as covered in Chapter Two, the strategies of shutting down music that represented a threat to the dominant order existed before the neoliberal order and will certainly continue to do so long into the future. As long as there are political artists working through their given medium to enact social change, there will be attempts to silence their message.

Rage Against the Machine and M.I.A. both faced these restrictions at different times and through different measures, but the goal was the same in shutting down their discourse. Rage Against the Machine most notably – and perhaps as a sign that they did represent at least the possibilities of shaking up the system - would face banning in several instances, but none more notably than on the infamous Clear Channel list of banned songs.

On September 12, 2001, Clear Channel Radio Networks, which at the time owned over 1200 radio stations across the United States (McChesney, 2004), distributed a list of over 160

songs that were not appropriate for its radio stations to play. Many included the words “New York,” “Plane,” “Falling,” “Death,” and so on, although many other songs’ inclusion on the list seems somewhat inexplicable. It was a powerful tactic, and one that is characteristic of the new logic surrounding the changing structures that exist at the intersection of politics, culture, and music. Said Morello,

There’s only been a few times in my history as a musician and an activist where I’ve ever felt ‘the Man’ push back. One of them was in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Clear Channel banned all Rage Against the Machine songs from their radio stations. They faxed this memorandum to all the station that listed specific songs that could not be played, including John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’ and the Gap Band’s “You Dropped the Bomb on Me.” The only artist whose entire catalogue was singled out was Rage Against the Machine’s” (Stenning, 2008, p. 160).

For their part, Clear Channel would later claim that they did not actually ban any songs and that the list was simply a suggestion of songs that station programmers would want to take into consideration, following the events of September 11th. While this may be formally true, it was in all practicality a de facto banning when a memo comes from the upper echelon of a corporate board. Clearly, imagining oneself in the position of a Clear Channel programmer, it would not be advantageous to one’s career to play any of these songs.

Rage Against the Machine’s songs may have faced corporate censorship, yet what they have in common with M.I.A.’s is that they are the target of strategies used by those who are benefiting from the current structure so as to maintain the dominant order. This is, however, characterized by a number of tactics beyond simply the corporate censorship. The denial of

M.I.A.'s visa puts her in company with Rage Against the Machine as a strategy of restricting certain discourses from reaching the public sphere, which is seen through such tactics of banning the group from playing in certain venues, or the direct prohibition of discourses such as theirs from mainstream radio or public spaces. While there are protections in place for the freedom of speech, it is the increasing privatization of public space and increasing conservatism in terms of media content censorship – essentially, a free-speech shutdown in the spaces where people consume music – that represents the greatest threat to the future of music as a democratic discourse.

* * *

2: Each of these artists walks a shaky line of resistance within mainstream political, economic, and cultural institutions and structures. On whose behalf are these artists working?

In the history of the various conceptualizations of critical social theory, one of the central questions in understanding the relationship between different dynamics of power has been one of consciousness: How aware are people of their oppression, and consequently, if the activist working for social change is not aware of these structures, then is their work in fact supporting the status quo? In other, perhaps more simple terms, on whose behalf are social activists working?

The confluence of political and economic structures that dominate much of the cultural landscape (whether mediated or otherwise) allows for such a completely encompassed system that works well in stifling dissent or threats to the existent system. Yet the role that the powerful – governments, transnational corporations, supranational trade and monetary organizations, the wealthy class – play in this arrangement is one that works not necessarily through surveillance but instead through biopolitical means. It is a new tactic of a network structure of cultural

regeneration, a virus of sorts where certain and specific subjectivities beget other certain and specific subjectivities under the grand rubric of the logic of capitalism.

Of the many issues that are the result of this arrangement, there are two that are the most troubling. The first, shared by both M.I.A. and Rage Against the Machine (and already previously discussed), is the reliance on major labels. Working in the confines of the very system that one is critiquing is problematic, and there are clear contradictions that exist that are rarely easily resolved. It is a common critique of both of these artists by factions from all sides, lay consumers, critics, and activists, alike.

Yet it is the second issue that is much troubling: The increasingly problematic status of many of the alternatives to the major-label system. The democratic promise of the internet and new global networks of mass communications are indeed great. There is a multiplicity of opportunities to contribute to the public sphere, as anyone with an internet connection can start a website for little cost, if any at all.

In terms of popular music, the role of the internet has become central to the production of music. As recently as the late 1990s, there were bands that still did not have a web presence; Today, ten years later, it is almost unthinkable. The 20th Century understanding of what constitutes media and media content was fairly stable through most of this era, as well as both the understanding of who the stakeholders were and where they stood in this arrangement of power. Yet as with so many traditional definitions in the march toward postmodernity, the rise of the network society has created a destabilization of our understanding of these concepts. This includes not only the definitional understanding but also a real and drastic explosion in the complexity of these concepts.

Anyone with a song to upload and an internet connection can have their music or video distributed for free on the web or sold via these sites. Any user with an internet connection can have instant access to an unprecedented amount of music. On the surface, these sites appear to be fulfilling the democratic promise of the internet: Access to the public sphere for all at little to no cost.

Yet there are indeed costs. The essence of biopolitical production as a new, more nuanced, more flexible understanding of power relations is rooted in the question of labor: How is the labor of everyday life (whether conscious or not) used in order to maintain dominant power structures? User-generated content, in musical and non-musical terms, has the possibility to be used as a tool in order to fulfill the democratic promise of the internet. Yet it also has the possibility to masquerade as freedom while in fact using the labor of the crowd in order to achieve a stasis in the political order.

So in the end, from a macro view, it is not as simple as being able to argue that either artist is fundamentally working for or against the dominant structures of power. Beyond simply their status as major-label artists, both M.I.A. and Rage Against the Machine work within the larger structures of capitalism that, despite their very real (and at times successful) appeals to social change, work in other ways to reinforce the dominance of other transnational corporations.

As of this writing – and this will most certainly change in upcoming years - the central site for the distribution and streaming of online music is News Corporation-owned Myspace. The central site for music video (and much music streaming) is Google-owned Youtube. The central site for music retail is Apple-owned iTunes. Every time that M.I.A. posts an entry on her Myspace blog, for example, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation makes money off of advertising. Every time one of Rage Against the Machine's videos is played on Youtube,

Google earns a profit, not much different in this case from the early days of MTV when the channel made its money off the promotional music video content made (and paid for) by others. In the case of M.I.A. or Rage Against the Machine, the media content may be revolutionary and may indeed possess within it the possibility of resistance and the potential for change, yet the road to change through the creation of media content may be blocked by the limitations of the medium itself that negate any political action. Biopolitical production is a struggle, and the modern utilization of this strategy of power takes its costs not solely in terms of capital or financial costs but at the expense of human freedom.

In a sense, these arguments of biopolitical production on a macro level represent an extension of the same critiques of groups that work within the system of capitalism in order to either overthrow that system or, more realistically, to change the system to a more equitable and enfranchising ideal. It is a common critique, particularly thrown towards musicians that sign with major labels with the term “sellout.”

Morello disagrees with these critiques, countering these claims with the debate over principled anonymity versus working for political change,

A lot of labels contacted us, and lots of them just didn't seem to understand what we wanted to do. They kept talking about the message of the music as a gimmick. They were interested in us just because there was a buzz... They saw us as the latest local rock band to be hyped.... When you live in a capitalistic society, the currency of the dissemination of information goes through capitalistic channels. Would Noam Chomsky object to his works being sold at Barnes & Noble? No, because that's where people buy their books. We're not interested in preaching to just the converted (Gavin, 2000).

In the end, the debate for these artists appears to come down to a question of efficacy: Do to the benefits of working within the current capitalistic and commerce-based system function as a better strategy to affect change in the material conditions of the lives of people, or is it better to maintain the principled radicalism and attempt to overthrow the system? Does being a reformer achieve a better end than being a revolutionary?

There's a long history of this debate in the ongoing crises over Marxist through both in and outside of the academy. When applied to the intersection of art, commerce, and political activism in this 1990s, the question wasn't so clear-cut, nor were the available alternatives. Achieving one's political ends can be the result of a compromise of non-political aspects of one's project, such as artistic credibility, yet when a band can balance these two things to some degree, they may find the that means for political change can take many forms. Having faced this question quite often during Rage Against the Machine's career, Morello makes a case for their band's chosen means, the pragmatism of critiquing the band itself, and the assumptions that are made about credibility and the indie/major label system for political bands:

I don't care what people at indie-record stores necessarily think. What we're trying to do is get Leonard Peltier out of jail. How do we do that? Do you want fewer people organizing to get him out? Or do you want more?...A better question might be to all other bands on major labels, 'Why aren't you doing something with the tremendous amount of exposure you have to effect some sort of change?' Rather than just attacking a band that is using it for some sort of political goals. Why not look at all of the bands that aren't doing that? (Stenning, 2008, pp. 88-89).

And later puts it much more bluntly:

Leonard Peltier doesn't care what label we're on. We've been able to introduce his case to an entirely new generation of young people, which increases the press through letter-writing and emails and what have you, on President Clinton to try to get an order of clemency. The Anti-Nazi League in Europe doesn't care what label we're on because when it comes time to hold a benefit show, we draw enough people to help put bodies in the streets and to throw bricks at fascists....It's tactical as much as anything else. You have two choices when you're in a band with political ideals: You either put your head in the sand and you sell 45s out of the back of a truck and you're very proud of yourself for how pure you are, or you engage the world and you do your best to make strategies to effect real change. (Stenning, 2008, p. 102)

In the end, both artists can use their exposure as both a springboard, a discursive tool to spread countercultural ideas to a public that generally does not encounter them in these media, but more so, the artists also amass political capital to have a voice in other media as a way of addressing tactics resulting in the next question of this conclusion, the effectiveness of these artists' strategies.

* * *

Third: The efficacy of these artists' political work is not easily measured, qualitatively or quantitatively, particularly given the complications of the preceding question. For each of these artists, how effective was their political project?

It is the question that is central to any political project: What was accomplished?

Gauged by formal or informal means, the end results are not only a measure of the efficacy of the project itself but also a measure of the very possibility of change. Every successful or failed project is an experiment. It is beyond debate that Marx's adage of the ruling ideas of any era will be the ideas of the ruling class, yet these experiments in resistance show us the cracks in the dyke, the holes in the wall where the light comes in. But it also illuminates the dykes themselves, the walls, the impasses. Through either failure of execution, strategy, circumstance, or overwhelming odds, there are battles that cannot be won by traditional means, and some that cannot be won at all. These two artists being among the most notable politically motivated of their generations, measuring the achievements of each is a window into the very possibility of using the power of the musical form for social change.

Yet this raises the question of what does it mean to measure the effectiveness of a political project that uses a cultural form as its central strategy? In this era, where power is embedded in the smallest processes of the everyday, there is little useful information that can be extracted by examining these political projects on a simple scale of success or failure – it is much more complicated than that when the nuances of biopolitical production are considered.

In terms of Rage Against the Machine's political effectiveness, there are several ways to measure their larger project – a generalized skepticism and resistance toward authority - and their more specific projects, such as the cases surrounding Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu-Jamal.

In terms of Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier, de la Rocha has always maintained that his support for these two individuals was not a claim of their innocence or guilt, but instead served two purposes. The first was to gain access to a fair trial for both. Each case had similar problems in the enactment of their trials, including inconsistent testimony, hearsay, problematic

evidence, and generally mishandled legal defenses, with many of the central claims of the prosecution being negated in the years following the trial. In retrospect, both of these cases had ambiguities over these individuals' guilt or innocence, but it is fairly clear that there were real problems with the legality of their trials⁸³.

If the goal in this case can be viewed as the attempt to gain a new trial for both, it would fail. Yet not for lack of effort: After a long legal defense, Abu-Jamal's case for a new trial would go all the way to the Supreme Court in 2009, which would rule that his sentence of death would stand (Mears, 2009). Peltier would with the support of many repeatedly appeal his case, but to no avail. He would continue to fight his case despite over three decades in prison, and was as of this writing waiting on the results of his July 2009 parole hearing (Ray, 2009).

The second goal is to use Abu-Jamal and Peltier as windows into larger issues about race, class, law, and social justice in America. On this project, Rage Against the Machine would be quite successful. Though these two prisoners' cases were public knowledge before Rage Against the Machine was a band, they were little known, and support for them had not reached a critical mass. It is safe to say that with constant mentions of the band in its lyrical content and through interviews and speaking opportunities brought both Peltier and Abu-Jamal's cases to the public consciousness, but also opened a dialogue for a debate over a number of issues in American society, including race and ethnic relations, police and governmental brutality, the court system,

⁸³ Perhaps as testament to the uncertainty over both Abu-Jamal's and Peltier's cases' innocence or guilt, there are a good number of organizations that have presented both sides of the case, often quite fervently. For a good overview of both sides, see "Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition, NYC," 2009; "Official Daniel Faulkner Website," n.d.; "The Danny Faulkner Story," n.d.; "The Mobilization To Free Mumia Abu-Jamal," 2009. For an overview of the public arguments over Peltier's case, see "Friends of Leonard Peltier," 2009; "No Parole Peltier Association," 2009; "The Leonard Peltier Defense Committee," 2009.

and the death penalty. It can be imagined that these artists brought issues such as these to the consciousness of many who may have not thought about them otherwise.

As for M.I.A., the effectiveness of her political project remains to be seen in many ways, as her development as a political artist is still a work in progress. She has not yet as of this writing spent the political capital that was amassed with the massive success of her last album and the blockbuster “Paper Planes,” and as such, it will be interesting to see what her next step will be in terms of musical and non-musical political activism.

Yet her activism to this point provides much to be discussed in terms of efficiency. Whether believed or not, M.I.A. claims that the goal of her career has always been to enter the people’s consciousness through musical forms with the end goal of an end to the oppression of the Tamil people. And much like with Rage Against the Machine and its political projects, if one were to measure M.I.A.’s project on a large-scale level, the fall of the Tamil Tigers and, as of this writing, the continued imprisonment of over 300,000 Tamil refugees in Sri Lanka would look to be a failure. Yet measuring this political project differently – like M.I.A.’s career, still a work in progress – leads to different ends.

Clearly, one of M.I.A.’s central missions, whether it began intentionally or not, was consciousness raising. The Tamil civil war, despite its ongoing nature for almost three decades, was rarely discussed in the mainstream media, almost as rare in alternative media. Despite the tragedy of the human rights abuses on both sides of the civil war, a localized, decades-long conflict between two parties on a small South Asian island does not garner much attention in the Western mainstream press on its own. It was simply not an issue that people knew about.

This leads to a number of conclusions about the power of music in the network age. What M.I.A. was able to do with her music and her political persona, and what makes her such

an interesting case study on the power of music in the network age, was to use her music as a conduit, an entry point. Particularly in the network age in which the vast majority of music consumed is non-local and is mediated instead of performed live, music rarely can change the course of history on its own, and even more rarely is it able to move souls immediately to action.

However, it can be a major contributing factor to political action in both rhetorical and educational tactics. Particularly in the later, music works especially well as an educator, able to be appreciated on several levels, but one of which is to bring previously unheard-of issues into the public sphere, and then to make the case rhetorically as an appeal to policy or social change.

This can also be done using the music as an entry point into publicity for the artists themselves, whetting the appetite of the public in order to gain publicity that will lead to different avenues of political action, such as blogging, interviews, writings, political leadership, or strategies that use music as a stepping stone to other outcomes.

In a sense, this is a strategy that both Rage Against the Machine and M.I.A. share in their use of music as a political change agent. It is an effective strategy, as listeners who are interested in the music open to the views of the musician (whether accepted on their terms or not) and use it as an entry point to a larger political project. Furthermore, in the case of M.I.A. and the Tamil nation or of Rage Against the Machine and Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu-Jamal (amongst other issues), each musician became a spokesperson for the issue, often so much so that they were central public figures in the debates going on over these issues. This cycles back into the music of these artists, which in turn cycles back to their activism and appeals to social action in their respective audiences in the name of the larger project at hand. Art as a political tool has much potential for social change.

De la Rocha discusses these political possibilities inherent for resistance in hip-hop music,

All the misogyny and senseless violence aside, I think that rap is unquestionably the most threatening form of music to the power structure we live under. Look at Ice-T. I mean, it's rare that an artist with one song [Body Count's "Cop Killer"] can have the world's eyes focused on...police brutality. It has been done in music to that level, when you have the president recognizing the artist. It forced everyone in the world to focus on police brutality. And that, to me, was a very important thing that no other art form has been able to do. (Brannon, 2007, p. 36)

Yet this is not to say that all political projects can be effective simply because they use music as a central strategy. Given the political and economic realities, the logics of production that have historically been unfriendly to forms of music that are threatening to the existent order, it is more common than not that music embracing a political project has to be put aside until the artist has earned enough political capital (and often financial capital – taking a political risk is rarely the safe monetary choice) to be able to speak his or her mind and have a fan base large enough to demand release of the artist's album.

This is becoming less true as new alternatives to major label distribution emerge, yet in certain movements, the political project inherent in musical projects have always been the case, such is the case in the emergence of inner-city hip-hop in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Prior to its commercialization and subsequent banalization, early hip-hop had little commercial power and was about other more equitable issues entirely. It is a movement that has sustained itself in a

certain tradition of hip-hop, yet been left behind in the mainstream of the genre. De la Rocha notes this potential,

I think that hardcore and hip-hop have been some of the most powerfully subversive music to ever exist. I think they both tend to de-emphasize – in certain circles of rap; I'm not talking about all of them – but they do tend to de-emphasize a lot of the bullshit that is involved with mainstream music and emphasize what I think music had as its original purpose. That purpose was to communicate between people, to solve problems...What music was used for then was to organize, to settle tribal disputes, to communicate and get together spiritually, to uplift and just have that peaceful relationship with the earth. That's what music was for. (Brannon, 2007, pp. 36-7)

Similarly, M.I.A.'s political understanding of her place in the larger political realm is one of using her music as a way into larger issues, of raising consciousness on issues that are close to the artists, themselves. Discussing her final decision to center her artistic career around political and social change, she states,

When I did it, I felt, 'Am I seriously imposing some weird, strange way of seeing things on people?' Now it feels I was right all along. It's totally relevant, and it's what's going on, and if that was the most shocking, outrageous thing, then look what's happening every day. . . . It's not that I'm shocking and injecting into society some strange concept. I'm just reflecting, piecing it together in one piece of work so you can acquire it and hear it. All that information floats around where we are -- the images, the opinions, the discussions, the feelings -- they all exist,

and I felt someone had to do something about it because I can't live in this world where we pretend nothing really matters. (Harrington, 2005)

The common discourses that surround musical artists who take on political projects are much the same as anyone who takes on a political project. There are easy critiques – however often they may be rightly offered – that can be used in finding the hypocrisies that exist in their career, the times when the groups may appear to be espousing one thing while their actions suggest another. While it is important for cultural critics (and lay society at large) to maintain a healthy skepticism, it is also important to recognize the successes of these political projects as well. However, when examining the cultural politics of music, working within the larger system has grand implications, which leads to the next troubling question.

* * *

Fourth: The emergence of a new global ordering of power structures and relations is evident. With these case studies in mind, what is the place of the global music industry in this new order, both theoretically and materially?

Among the prime limitations of this study is that the future is still very uncertain in what the specific structures of the music industry will look like. Even in the outlets through which music is distributed in the network age, the past ten years have seen dozens of distribution outlets come and go, from brick-and-mortar chain and independent shops, to online proprietary distribution retail stores, to illegal file-sharing structures and protocols, to new ways of listening to music. And all of these changes, all of these new ways of understanding the role of music in the everyday lives of people through the structures in which these lives exist, they occur on a global scale increasing at such a geometrical rate that it is difficult to fathom.

With this in mind, the traditional structures of production and distribution that the global music industry are antiquated. The problem here is that the old way of conceptualizing globalization as ultimately a logical extension of the relationship between capital and labor is no longer valid. We need a new way of understanding these ideas that takes into account the notion of culture not as an afterthought, an effect of the logic of capital, but instead as a resource. To be sure, the flows of capital between states and private enterprises matter, as does the resulting disparity of wealth. But can class fully explain the relationship between the lowest people on the ladder? No – it is either reductive or incomplete in its account.

It's also unrealistic and not representative of how power works. The articulation of culture in a way that works for a specific end is, in a sense, a weapon of control or resistance, a resource to be battled over for the political constitution of subjects. As the previous question showed, it is a problematic way of embedding the political in the everyday. Yet if everyday life has become the means through which power is exercised, then it is the explosive potential that is inherent in our cultural forms and the structures surrounding those forms that must be most closely looked at in order to understand how this ordering came to be.

This is particularly true when exploring the exercise of power in the network age. We, as cultural critics, need a new model of how social movements work in the age where society is determined by new networks of global communication, with changes in the way that information moves, the declining status of the nation state, the increase in global corporatism. Things have changed, and what we need to know is not only what changes occurred but what the right tools are, the right questions to ask, in order to understand this new ordering. As such, part of what must be explored are the structures that determine the cultural forms of everyday life, the exercise of material and theoretical forms that affect the consciousness of cultural consumers.

Looking at the music industry in particular, its day-to-day functioning and political and economic practices have become engrained in the structures of the business lend themselves to new conceptualizations about the way in which culture works within the larger embedded power structures. Furthermore, it leads to the question at hand: In accepting the role that cultural forms play in the relationships that exist in the new global ordering of power, what is the place of the music industry in reinforcing the dominant order, and what possibilities (if any) exist through both its present structures. In other words, what are the political potentials for both domination and control that exist in both present music industry structures and the tendency of future developments in this industry as representative of larger global structures of power?

There are many answers. The incorporation of resistance into the mainstream – the commodification of dissent – is a tricky issue containing a great number of problems. The music industry was perhaps among the first of modern cultural forms that was able to effectively co-opt the very idea of resistance and of dissent by taking the rebellion and countercultural ideal of the 1950s and 1960s and commodifying it, beginning a long development of the co-option of dissent in the name of big business that continues through today. Looking at this culture in the 1990s through the era of the dot-com boom where branding was central to the commodification of cultural life, Thomas Frank (1997) states:

The problem with cultural dissent in America isn't that culture has been co-opted, absorbed or ripped-off. Of course it's been all of these things. But it has proven so hopelessly susceptible to such assaults for the same reason it has become so harmless in the first place, so toothless even before Mr. Geffen's boys discovered it angsty away at some bar in Lawrence, Kansas: It is no longer any different from the official culture it's supposed to be subverting. The basic

impulses of the countercultural idea, as descended from the holy Beats, are about as threatening to the new breed of businessmen as Anthony Robbins selling success and how to achieve it on a late-night infomercial.

The people who staff the Combine aren't like Nurse Ratched. They aren't Frank Burns, they aren't the Church Lady, they aren't Dean Wormer from Animal House, they aren't those repressed old folks in the commercials who want to ban Tropicana Fruit Twisters. They're hipper than you can ever hope to be because hip is their official ideology, and they're always going to be there at the poetry reading to encourage your "rebellion" with a hearty "right on, man!" before you even know they're in the auditorium. You can't outrun them, or even stay ahead of them for very long: It's their racetrack, and that's them waiting at the finish line to congratulate you on how rebellious your new style is, on how you shocked those stuffy prudes out in the heartland. (p. 226-7)

The role that the music industry plays in reinforcing the advantages of the dominant order are not as simple as looking to some sort of conspiracy as they are for understanding the nuanced ways in which power structures are deeply embedded in the day-to-day cultural life of music producers and consumers alike. As far as the future goes, it appears that the music industry is but one of many cultural industries that is ingrained in the larger logic of cultural production, as not simply involved in the production of capital but also the control of rights and the cultivation via biopolitical production of new subjectivities friendly to the present state of power. It appears that the future struggles over power will be fought through cultural forms as much as (if not more than) physical conflict, which leads the discussion to the next question.

* * *

Fifth, and finally: What do these findings suggest in terms of future directions of research, new ways of theorizing the cultural politics of music in the network age?

In this, the end of beginning of the 21st Century, the study of popular music leaves the academy at a crossroads. The shift to the postmodern era has troubled many of the ways that popular music has existed in the past, left behind the traditional structures and understandings of the way in which power works. For critical scholars in particular, the development of biopolitical production as a technology of governance is particularly interesting as a new way of conceptualizing power.

Yet the study of popular music as a cultural form is not only interesting, but also important, as understanding the way in which cultural forms have become politicized, the embedding of power into the very logics of production of cultural projects, is central to understanding the structures and subjectivities of individuals living within those structures.

We are at an interesting moment in history. There are many different possibilities for the development of a new political reality. Yet these are possibilities with outcomes that are far from clear. To determine where we as a society are, as well as where we are going, it is necessary to first look at the historical tendency alongside the material conditions of the present time, and to use these instances to provide context to developments in theory. And in developing cultural theory, it is as important to provide a solid base upon which it can stand as it is to allow it to remain flexible. Though grounded theory is always rooted on a solid foundation, its malleability to incorporate new developments in society is an essential part of studying the politics of culture: Changes in theory necessarily follow changes in society.

This is especially true in terms of the way in which music is used as a controlling or liberatory exercise. Today, in this great moment of destabilization of popular music structures

and orderings of power, there is the potential for great upheaval in the social order, new negotiations of power to be enacted through a wide variety of means. But more importantly for this, the final question of this dissertation, is to look forward. The cultural politics of music surrounding a new regime of control and new cultural production capabilities of resistance emerge through the central question of new possibilities of musical production and distribution.

As such, there are a number of future research avenues for this work that appear to show promise in terms of the field's development, new avenues of future research that can continue the trajectory of these themes. First, and perhaps foremost, is Hardt and Negri's theory of Empire⁸⁴. Among the most unorthodox and provocative of the many works that have attempted to explain the way in which power is organized in this new era, Empire is at its most simple the constitution of a global civil society. It is a formulation of a new paradigm of sovereignty, one that is fundamentally rooted the processes of globalization that function as a "source of juridical definitions that ...project a single supranational figure of political power" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 9). No longer reliant on the historically antecedent conceptualizations of the nation-state that largely dominated the 19th and 20th Centuries⁸⁵, Empire is a unified order that is fundamentally de-centered and necessarily deterritorialized, a new global sovereignty that reconceptualizes our

⁸⁴ A point of language and terminology: The *concept* of Empire has a complementary and necessarily connected *concept* of Multitude, which will be later discussed. The *titles* of the books that develop these concepts are somewhat confusingly also entitled *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004), which, despite how it may appear, both address in equal parts both the *concepts* of Empire and Multitude in their texts, with *Empire* laying the groundwork of the theory and *Multitude* further developing both parts. There appears to be a lack of consensus over syntax in the scholarly field concerning whether Multitude is referred to as a separate theory from Empire or is a sub-category of the theory of Empire. I am not terribly concerned with this debate. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to the entire *theoretical model* of Hardt and Negri (encompassing both the related concepts of Empire and Multitude) as simply "Empire" and will italicize when referring to the specific works *Empire* or *Multitude*.

⁸⁵ Perhaps most notable of these is Max Weber's (1946) understanding of the nation state as a *social* institution that is granted authority in order to exercise power, including the maintenance of law and order, stability, legal systems, police forces, general welfare, education, healthcare, and so forth.

understanding of how power is constituted in the era of globalization through a reorganization of political spaces. They explain the concept thus:

The decline in sovereignty of nation-states, however, does not mean that sovereignty as such has declined. Throughout the contemporary transformations, political controls, state functions, and regulatory mechanisms have continued to rule the realm of economic and social production and exchange. Our basic hypothesis is that sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire. (2000, p. xii)

It is a question of arrangements: of power, of technologies, of networks, of logics, of structures. But at its heart, it is an attempt to explain a number of diverse conditions of present-day society in order to provide a model to explain the global arrangement of power that supplants the modern-era conceptualization of the nation-state as *the* central entity in global power relationships⁸⁶. National and cultural differences are largely subsumed under a logic of rule, determined at least in part by economic considerations but by no means simply as such, and one that rules on micro level through macro structures. More concretely, Hardt and Negri state:

⁸⁶ Structurally, Empire is comprised of a “mixed pyramid of global constitution” comprising of a three-tiered, hierarchically stratified system that incorporates a multi-level power structure. In the first tier – the “unified global command” - lies the United States as the top superpower, the nations of G8, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), NATO, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The second tier are smaller developed nation-states and transnational capitalist corporations that work via a network of flows of capital, technology, goods, labor, and populations of human migration that provides the life within the rigid structure afforded under the first tier. The third-tier base is the Multitude, an unstructured network of the world’s peoples in groups representing populist interests, albeit ones that have little global power in this given structure and therefore must have their voices heard through mechanisms of representation, such as the General Assembly of the United Nations and some NGOs.

We think it is important to note that what used to be conflict or competition among several imperialist powers has in important respects been replaced by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonial and post-imperialist. This is really the point of departure for our study of Empire: a new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts. (2000, p. 9)

Though among the most influential in explaining the structure and exercise of power in the network age, Hardt and Negri's theories are also among the most controversial⁸⁷. The response to the introduction of these concepts has been of quite a wide range along a continuum of enthusiastic support to scathing critique. And indeed, much inquiry (and much editorializing, both positive and negative) has been directed toward trying to figure out what, exactly, Hardt and Negri are proposing in their complicated and convoluted model of global power. Yet regardless of one's conclusions on the merits of their model, one thing is clear: the ideas contained in *Empire* and *Multitude* are as innovative as they are polemical, and there is *something* happening in the changing world order that necessitated Hardt and Negri's argument.

Placing music in this arrangement, its uses in this negotiated power arrangement can be seen woven into larger arguments about Empire's grand structures – the state, trans-national corporations, trade organizations, monetary bodies – but more importantly as a site of biopolitical production. The shift toward Empire as representative of the ordering of power in the globalized, network age (particularly under the logics of Neoliberalism) is increasingly

⁸⁷ For an overview of the critiques of the theory of Empire (and often of much of Hardt and Negri's work in general), see Borón, 2005; Passavant & Dean, 2004; P. Thompson, 2005.

exercising its power through cultural means rather than the traditionally political or traditionally economic.

Yet when the sites of production in this case are determined by the knowledges, discourses, practices, and beliefs that dictate subjects' being, the connections to the everyday fields of cultural production become evident. Bourdieu's concept of fields of production, the ways in which we see the negotiations of power being enacted through a populace that is creative. The formation of works of art exist in a constant struggle through the production of creative work, the ways in which the creative can allow for both maintenance and disruptions of the status quo, or even perhaps somewhere in the in-between spaces. He writes,

“The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. ‘bourgeois art’) and the autonomous principle (e.g. ‘art for art’s sake’), which those of its advocates who are least endowed with specific capital tend to identify with degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 40)

It is a relational power, one that is a struggle between a number of different powers as the center of gravity shifts through changing contexts and material arrangements. These struggles that are present in a given field present a wealth of possibilities, yet in terms of music and the political possibilities that exist within its power through the articulation of everyday ways of being.

These, the study of the everyday lives of subjects, represent the third future trajectory for research. As discussed, the everyday is a central concept in the new ordering of power. The

politicization of day-to-day live, the use of the actions, beliefs, and values – Foucault calls these ‘ways of being,’ Bourdieu, in a slightly more nuanced view, calls this the ‘habitus’ – are connected through the notion of the everyday environment, consciousness of the way in which the world works.

Furthermore, Lefebvre’s work on the everyday lives of citizens has lately become central to the understanding of the way that power works through these channels, and across a wide range of disciplines, and for good reason. The production of space, and increasingly the sites where this new era of globalization and global capitalism has allowed for new conceptualizations of space that exist beyond simply the material world, has created new everyday negotiations of power. This is in addition to new articulations of meaning through social production. In terms of popular music and new network structures, the roles that these negotiations and articulations of space entail in formulating new social spaces represents a clear connection to biopolitical processes, particularly in the roles that hegemony is produced and reproduced through cultural and social forms.⁸⁸

Lefebvre’s work has grown in importance in recent years as the creation of new spaces of material and virtual worlds in relation to actual, physical cities – the metropol – has allowed for new spaces of resistance to open. In terms of future research areas to expand the scope of this dissertation, the relationship of musical artists to these spaces seems to have become increasingly interesting as their work begins to transcend these very structures and institutions. Rage Against the Machine, for example, was embedded firmly within the metropol, producing and disseminating music through physical means, and their work was rooted in a material site

⁸⁸ This is an all-too-brief depiction of Lefebvre’s work, which spans a wide range of topics as an interdisciplinary Marxist scholar. For what are largely considered to be his seminal works, see *The Production of Space* (2000) and his two volume *Critique of Everyday Life* (1991, 2002)

(their album *The Battle of Los Angeles* was fundamentally rooted in the varying social, political, economic, and cultural relationships that existed in that city). Conversely, as M.I.A. has become an increasingly global musical artist, the scope of her work transcends the singular metropol altogether. Her experience as a refugee in numerous locales, traveling the globe in recording *Kala*, moving around the world as an international recording artist and humanitarian, her musical work and her politics is the result of a new constitution of the metropol as a new, less rooted space that does not necessitate one, unified, singular space in order to be conceptualized. She critiques the metropol(s) through existing in the liminal spaces between them, or outside them altogether. Yet what is especially important for future researchers in examining these constitutions will be this: If the sites of cultural production are shifting away from these sites, then we can assume that these are as open for new negotiations of power as they are open for spaces of resistance. How and what these spaces look like as new networks of communication (and indeed, new mediated cultural forms) continue to expand to these locales remains to be seen.

* * *

So in the end, do groups such as Rage Against the Machine and M.I.A. ride the beast or feed it? As unsatisfying as it may seem, it is not as clear as delineating each into a category, able to be fully commodified or fully resistant. To say that any artist, even the most crassly commercial, falls into one category or the other is too myopic of a view for this increasing postmodern era, to simple of an answer in the fuzzy politics that exist in the negotiation of the political that exists through mediated cultural forms around the globe and through all media

Yet in identifying the trends and tendencies that exist in and through popular music, this becomes an argument not of inevitabilities but instead of potentials. Examining power structures

in society, especially as they work through culture, tells us of the ways in which they function rather than ends that they will achieve, and it is important that we remember that culture at large is an amorphous, apolitical entity that does not have a moral slant but is instead given one by its component forms. There is great potential for domination. There is great potential for liberation. But the role that the production of bodies and minds within culture plays will remain a tension between these two forces. It is a battle over resources: the ideological consensus of the peoples of the globe.

Culture in all of its forms has been the battleground of the production of docile subjects for some time now, and as music moves, gaining footholds in new markets and supplanting traditional musical forms whose meanings were entrenched within given cultures, the future is uncertain. But one thing is clear: The tensions between differing values will continue to be the dominant question in the debate over the role of music in the global economy for the decades to come.

The power of the cultural critic in this tension, and indeed the possibilities for human freedom, lie then in the exposure of process. The processes in cultural life that are exhibits of the domination of populations are exposed in order to enlighten, to educate, and to change (even in ourselves), and it is important to both recognize the sites where real resistance is occurring and to keep a keen eye out for sites where unrealized resistance is possible. In putting these two together, it is the cultural critic that provides the illumination necessary to identify repression in all its forms and to provide encouragement and opportunity for new political possibilities for a more just and equitable future.

Music today exists not as peripheral to this tension but instead is directly embedded firmly within it. As a resource to be battled over, the negotiations for power that exist within this

cultural form are at the very least incredibly complicated as new forms of cultural appropriation and new strategies of governance render few areas of social life as apolitical anymore. The power of music as a cultural force in defining the human experience and as both affective and rhetorical appeals, its power has historically been used as often for specific types of cultural production that benefit dominant powers as it has been for subversive ones.

Yet it paints a picture of hope in the fact that the politicization of everyday life may indeed be the downfall of dominant institutions. When the day-to-day resources of the masses are amalgamated, when the minute resistances that occur through the actions of the many exist on micro levels, when the firm and forthright confrontation of undemocratic and inequitable political forces are countered by the articulation of new values and structures, human freedom flourishes through the formation of a new biopolitics of freedom, democratic knowledge begetting democratic knowledge. The seed has been planted, whether it is able to flourish into a new politics that works for the benefit of all will be seen through the cultural and political struggles of the 21st Century, through the artists who fight for the liberation of humankind. And while the possibilities are far from certain, in the end, it may very well be the music that sets us free.

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