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MERCY MERCY ME (THE MEDIA ECOLOGY): TECHNOLOGY, AGENCY, AND "CLEAVAGE" OF THE MUSICAL TEXT

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Arthur J. Bamford

June 2010

Advisor: Lynn Schofield Clark

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Title: MERCY MERCY ME (THE MEDIA ECOLOGY): TECHNOLOGY, AGENCY, AND "CLEAVAGE" OF THE MUSICAL TEXT
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores changes that occurred in popular music during the 1960s and early 1970s through case studies involving three significant albums released in 1971 and 1972: Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, Sly and the Family Stone's *There's a Riot Goin' On*, and Stevie Wonder's *Talking Book*. These albums deserve attention particularly because, as this thesis argues, existing research on the cultural significance of popular music has focused largely on the periods before or after the 1970s and research on music-making technologies has focused largely on white artists or groups from the late 1960s. Addressing this blind spot, the thesis seeks to illuminate this time period and its place as a significant bridge to the digital era that followed. Moreover, by employing media ecology and practice theory as a framework, the thesis argues that these albums exemplify a cleavage of the recorded musical text from live performance, akin to that of the written text from oral-styled manuscripts to closed literary works. Drawing upon the tradition of the history and phenomenology of recorded sound, this thesis therefore aims to contribute to media ecological understandings of how human agency, industry structures, and technological affordances worked together to redefine the structures and the relationships with which they were associated.

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INTRODUCTION

Applying Timothy Taylor's (2001) practice theory to the analysis of music and technology, and employing media ecology as a theoretical framework, this thesis will compare the evolution of the written word/text from orality to literacy, to changes that occurred in the development of recorded music. In particular, this thesis will focus on one turning point in the history of sound recording, from the late 1960's to early 1970's, during which multi-track tape recording and synthesizer technologies were introduced. Analysis of this time period will be conducted via case studies involving three significant albums released in 1971 and '72: Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, Sly and the Family Stone's *There's a Riot Goin' On*, and Stevie Wonder's *Talking Book*.

By highlighting the affordances of the then-new technologies including magnetic tape, multi-track recording, and synthesizers, as well as changes within the music industry, including record label-owned studios, and the emergence of format-free FM radio stations, I will argue that, in terms of both production processes, and content, these albums exemplify a cleavage of the recorded musical text from live performance, akin to that of the written text from oral-styled manuscripts to closed literary works.

Furthermore I will argue that the mathematical theory of stochastic processes—which relates to probabilities, and involves studying the relationships between variables as part of a process as it unfolds in time—may be usefully applied to the study of media, technology, and social change. However, unlike the theory of stochastic processes, this thesis will consider certain variables as malleable, but not altogether random.

Ultimately, this thesis will explore the following question: how did changing variables in the structure of the recording industry provide the cultural space for Marvin Gaye, Sly Stone, and Stevie Wonder to exert their own agency and express their own creativity in unique ways? It will do so by specifically analyzing seminal albums by each of these artists; first, Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, then Sly and the Family Stone's *There's a Riot Goin' On*, both released in 1971, and finally Stevie Wonder's 1972 release *Talking Book*, which will serve as a kind of centerpiece among the six albums that Wonder put out in the early 1970s.

The reasons why these particular albums have been selected will be explained in greater detail in the following sections, but to summarize I feel these are prime candidates for a close analysis because they have fallen into several overlapping blind spots that exist in the literature that is currently available. Most research dealing with the music-making technologies that will be discussed here tends to focus on work produced by white artists or groups from the late 1960s. Similarly, there seems to be a break in the literature on both music technology, and the cultural significance of popular music from about 1970 to 1980.

One of the great advantages to studying Gaye, Stone, and Wonder, as opposed to many of their peers, is that they evolved and adapted during this time in such a way that they were able to produce comparably successful material during both the 1960s and

1970s that was radically different aesthetically. In many respects their own development during this time reflects a number of broader changes in the music industry, occurring concurrently.

Therefore these artists and albums have been carefully selected for this research as they represent black, popular musicians whose work not only utilized new recording technologies from the time period, but whose careers span what was a tumultuous period for the industry at large.

ORALITY AND LITERACY, AND MEDIA ECOLOGY AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The body of scholarship now known as media ecology has long been interested in the role of technology in social change, and it is to this body of work that the current thesis aims to contribute. This thesis will explore how new technologies introduced in the years leading up to the early 1970s, enabled artists, music recordings practices, and music performances to take an interesting new direction. I argue that the change that occurred at this time can be understood as a major cultural shift, not unlike the changes western culture underwent with the introduction of the printing press, and the move from an oral to a literate culture. In this literature review, therefore, I will introduce the work of Innis, Ong, and Havelock as each defines orality and literacy, and I will discuss their theories of the psychological, social implications of new technologies that occurred in the periods they studied.

Innis, considered the "father of Canadian communication studies," was the first to have documented the significant role that communication technologies, or media, have played historically in times of significant social change (G.S. Adam, 263). Innis "wanted to understand how technology reorganizes communication as a material practice," and eventually argued that "the most powerful consequences of technology are enacted through our social, political, and economic practices, rather than through direct changes in the individual psyche" (Pauly, 9).

Blondheim (2003) credits Innis for having

> "…proposed an extremely effective criterion for organizing and analyzing the plethora of communication media that bowed in or out in the course of history. This criterion is the time-space divide, as applied to the performance of media…The divergence of orality and literacy serves as the fundamental model, as well as the historical origin, of the time-media/space media polarity" (166).

McLuhan built upon Innis' work, but diverged from Innis by focusing on the "direct changes in the individual psyche" in his analysis of the effects of new media (Pauly, 9). It is in this regard that McLuhan's influence on Ong is most pronounced, as both scholars' emphases on "the differences between the visual and the acoustic, and the role of media in altering the balance of the senses" is tied to this individualized, psychological approach (Strate, 35; Pauly, 9). However, though McLuhan is certainly a significant contributor to both media ecology, and orality and literacy studies, it is important to note here that he is generally considered to be much more technologically deterministic than either Innis and Ong, both of whom were "not only interested in how certain media might account for a social change, but in the contexts in which various media were able to gain a foothold in a culture" (Schofield Clark, 91). It is important therefore, to consider other media theorists who approached the topic of media in cultural change with a less deterministic approach.

Ong diverges from McLuhan by tracing "an evolutionary model" as opposed to McLuhan's approach which "tends to emphasize the revolutionary impact…of the introduction of new technologies" (Strate, 36). Soukup (2007) identifies a "trilogy" of books by Ong, which define the scholar's central contributions to orality and literacy studies, beginning with *The Presence of the Word: Some Promlegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967b), then *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Conciousness and Culture* (1977) and finally ending with *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982). Soukup describes the central ideas and themes presented in the first two books of this trilogy as follows:

> "The first two books explored themes of oral expression in the context of the 'sensorium,' or combination of human senses; stages of technological involvement with the word (writing, printing, electronic); characteristics of sound and the role of silence; ways in which technological transformations interact with psychological transformation; the relationship of developments in culture and consciousness; and ideas about the relationship of primary orality to secondary orality…" (3-4).

However by the third book, *Orality and Literacy*, Ong "downplays the phenomenological approach…Instead the book places greater emphasis on the psychodynamics of orality and literacy, the characteristics of oral and literate communication and cognitive styles, and the vital role that memory and mnemonics play in oral societies (Strate, 36).

Havelock, a classics scholar, built on Ong’s concept of orality and literacy by contributing what might be considered case studies, one of which, *The Greek Concept of Justice*, has been called “a model of media ecology scholarship” (Strate, 40). Havelock (1986) also notably cites 1963 as a particularly significant turning point in orality and literacy studies “when a dam in the modern consciousness appears to have burst” (24) That is to say, Havelock contends that many scholars seem to have almost simultaneously become interested in this particular area of study. This observation is intriguing considering that it places the scholarly work informing this thesis in very close chronological proximity to the recordings of the albums that will be analyzed by this thesis.

Havelock, as well as a number of other scholars, has criticized Ong’s work for drawing an overly stark contrast, or ‘great divide’ between oral and literary cultures, or for overstating the differences between the two, while failing to appreciate the dynamic relationship between the them (Soukup, 2007). Along those same lines Sterne (2003) criticized Ong’s assertion that sound possesses a uniquely ephemeral quality, and that auditory experience is distinctively interior whereas the visual realm is exterior. To that point, Sterne points out that “Listening is a directed, learned activity: it is a definite cultural practice. Listening requires hearing but is not simply reducible to hearing” (19).

His description characterizes listening as a learned, directed endeavor, which is consistent with how Ong discusses the visual medium of the printed page as opposed to the aural realm of orality. In this regard I very strongly agree with Sterne's conclusion, but what is frustrating about his overall critique is that he seems to dismiss any theoretical relevance that might be derived from Ong's work on the grounds that Ong places the act of listening *prima facie* on the orality side of a binary pair, as related to the auditory, while implying that he (Sterne) feels recorded sound has a greater affinity with text than speech.

This is a kind of sensory-based "great divide" in action, as Ong's analysis of the written word, or more specifically the historical evolution of text as moving away from oral modes of communication, is overlooked despite being a potentially relevant and useful source with regards to the history of sound recording. This is noteworthy to this thesis because it illustrates a sensory-based conclusion regarding how to classify a given medium as oral or literate acting as a means of limiting the author's engagement with Ong's work.

I would argue this has been nurtured by what I consider an oversimplification, or reduction of the terms based primarily on physiological reception—any communication received through the ears is orality—as opposed to a psychological or phenomenological experience with a text. Similarly, I don't necessarily agree with how Ong characterizes the process of change, from orality to literacy, as a kind of directed, linear development, which seems to lend itself to the 'great divide' argument.

The only instance I've found of Ong's analysis being translated to other media is a brief mention by Peters (1999) who points out that "Walter J. Ong…has argued that Socrates' complaints about writing—that it diminishes memory, lacks interaction, disseminates at random, and disembodies speakers and hearers—are similar to late twentieth-century worries about computers as well as fifteenth-century concerns about printing" (36). Tying this issue back to Plato, and the *Phaedrus*, Peters wisely concludes that "The deprivation of presence, in one way or another, has always been the starting point of reflection about communication" (36).

This thesis will argue that while Ong's critical comparisons of what he calls oral and literate forms of communication have enduring value, the value is derived from his treatment of the issue of agency as it relates to new technologies and communication. Ong's critiques keenly illustrate that in literacy, the message-sender's agency is extended—not by any virtue of the sender or the message itself, but by means of the time and space binding properties of the medium. Additionally he calls attention to the use of new communication technologies, which become a significant arena in which the relationship between message-creators and medium controllers is negotiated.

In conclusion, this research shares these media ecology scholars' interest in tracing the evolution of the relationship between artists, agency, and technology at certain interesting points in history. Moreover, I share their belief that closely reviewing the work of particular artists through case studies is a valuable means of providing fresh insights into how we understand the dynamic relationship between the introduction of new technologies, and social change. However unlike these scholars, I hope to address this process as one in which dynamic changes occurred, without positioning one mode of production as being at odds with the other, or directed towards a certain end.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will discuss the theoretical framework underlying the current research. First, it will address the issues of agency and structure, as they are related to new technology, and music recording. Then it will briefly define my own perspective of, and special interest, in analyzing popular music.

This thesis owes a great deal to Timothy Taylor's (2001) chapter "Music, Technology, Agency, and Practice" from *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology, and Culture*. Taylor addresses three common assumptions that have framed a great deal of writing on technology in general: "volunteerism," "technological determinism," and "technological somnambulism." The final of these three, somnambulism, "assumes that, whatever it is, technology is made by engineers and used by everyone else…as such it doesn't merit serious reflection or consideration" (26). I'll dismiss this perspective right away, as the discussion that follows will demonstrate my disagreement with it.

Technological determinism is often attributed to media ecology scholars, although it seems that McLuhan is largely the culprit behind this perception (Taylor 2001, Schofield Clark 2009, Blondheim 2003, Meyrowitz 2003). Many of McLuhan's peers in media ecology, including Innis and Ong, were aware of the charges of determinism being made against them, most notably by Raymond Williams, and appreciated themselves the danger of over-stating the inherent power of a medium as an autonomous agent of social change. Describing Innis' position on the matter, Blondheim (2003) explains that "[Innis] places the accent in the communication technology determinant emphatically on the communication, not the technology side of the compound. In other words, Innis was a *communication* determinist" (2003). Similarly, this thesis seeks to describe the context in which changes occurred, with regards to the production of popular music, as a kind of alignment of certain variables, as opposed to a linear or intentional movement from one mode to another.

Appreciating the issue of agency that lies at the heart of the determinism/volunteerism antagonism, Taylor goes on to discuss actor-network theory—"associated mainly with Madeline Akrich, Michael Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law"—which "argues that human subjects and technological artifacts should be studied with the same methods; that is, no analytical distinction should be made" (32). Taylor's criticism of actor-network theory however, is that "they tend to evade that entity entailed by agency: structure," not structure in the Marxist sense, but as used by Giddens in the field of science and technology studies to mean a structure comprised of interrelated, functioning parts (33).

Ultimately Taylor proposes that, in order to address the role of technology in society, researchers should embrace 'practice theory,' as defined by Sherry B. Ortner.

Taylor argues that practice theory “can grapple adequately with the problem of structures and individual agency,” although “it is less of a theory than a founding argument—‘that human action is made by ‘structure,’ and at the same time always makes and potentially unmakes it.’” (Taylor quoting Ortner, 34).

As it relates to this thesis, structure will be loosely defined as the extra-musical factors that informed the production of the musical texts that will be analyzed. For instance, through the case studies dealing with Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder, we’ll see a change in the structure of how the record label—Motown—functioned, and how it produced pop music, as the result of external structural factors, such as new music-making technologies, and the shifting social climate that informed the work.

Taylor goes on to define agency then as “an individual actor’s or collective capacity to move within a structure, even alter it to some extent,” and structure as “always dual…structure both makes and is made by people…[and] thus does not preclude agency, but rather, structure and agency presuppose each other” (35). Concluding his discussion of both terms Taylor additionally offers a “central question” of practice theory as “what are these social actors doing in this time and place, and why?” (quoting Khazam at 37). This thesis will paraphrase that question as: what are these social actors doing in the recording studio, in the early 1970s, with multi-track tape recording, and synthesizers, and why, and how did their actions serve to redefine the structures with which they were associated?”

In addition, I would like to refer to these situations as stochastic processes. This term comes from probability theory, and is defined by Parzen (1999) as a theory "in which one studies a collection of random variables (called a stochastic process) from the point of view of their interdependence and limiting behavior. One is observing a stochastic process whenever one examines a process developing in time" (Parzen 1999, xvii). However, unlike Parzen's definition, I do not believe the variables involved in the process that will be addressed by this thesis to be random, like mathematic variables, but rather more dynamic ones.

It is important to define these terms because they will play a significant role in this research. The prequel to each of the three albums that will be analyzed is a struggle for various types of agency (economic, creative, geographic, etc.) which is played out, and reflected in many respects, through the subsequent production of the music, which becomes a kind of stochastic process.

In conclusion, I would also like to briefly address why this thesis will deal with music, and seeks to illuminate the phenomenological experiences of several artists, each of whose work I admittedly admire a great deal. Meyrowitz (2003) has pointed out that McLuhan "argued that while most members of a society see the present through a filter of the past, artists are able to see and understand the present and future more clearly" (199). As is often the case, McLuhan overstates things to some extent, but in general I agree with his notion of singling out artists as serving a unique function in society; one that is both deeply rooted in an established cultural heritage and practices, while projecting a vision, of one form or another, of the future. Therefore, this thesis will presume a degree of intentionality on behalf of the artists discussed herein. That is to say, although every aesthetic decision was not consciously or explicitly made, there were overarching feelings, ideas, and beliefs that implicitly informed each of these recordings. In addition, the new technologies that will be discussed served as tools and instruments with which, and through which, these artists constructed their work.

PRIOR RESEARCH

With regards to scholarly writing on popular music, Burnett explains that "two main lines have been taken in the mass culture 'debate'" regarding popular music (Burnett, 30). According to Burnett, one tradition, identified as stemming from the work of Walter Benjamin, deals primarily with "subcultural theories of youth cultures," an approach "well represented today in the field of cultural studies (Burnett, 32). The other tradition meanwhile is attributed to Benjamin's Frankfurt School colleague, Theodor Adorno. However unlike Benjamin's subcultural approach, Adorno's work has "until recently…stood alone in the history of socio-cultural studies in addressing contemporary music as a totality" (Burnett 41).

As Burnett indicates, there are several facets of popular music that Adorno explored and that have received little attention since; two of these areas in particular are relevant to this current research. First, as one of the original critics of the phonograph, Adorno addressed the new phenomenon of recorded music as opposed to 'live,' and its effect on both the listener and the performer, likening it to an oral/literate dichotomy similar to Ong's (Leppert, 236). Second, Adorno critiqued the aesthetic structure and content of new forms of popular music. He argued this resulted, in part, to new habits of listening fostered by new technologies—and he thus explored the implications of these changes on both the performers and listeners.

Although the issue permeates much of Adorno's writing on music, there are three essays in particular that deal most explicitly with the new phenomenon of recorded music: *The Curves of the Needle* (1927/1965), *The Form of the Phonograph Record* (1934), and *On Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* (1938). First, in *The Curves of the Needle*, Adorno deals with the idea of private turntable ownership as both a source of mediation between the musical performance and its audience, and as a means of a listening experience "wherein the aesthetic labor of others is privately heard rather than experienced intersubjectively and socially as may occur in musical ritual" (Leppert 234). This essay also finds Adorno beginning to articulate concern over the "archival character of records," which gives the impression of 'definitive' versions of songs, thereby reducing, he argues, the creation of new works, and new interpretations of existing works (272).

Building on that archival quality, *The Form of the Phonograph Record* forecasts an interesting conceptualization of the phonograph as akin to the written word. Adorno writes:

> “Anyone who has ever recognized the steadily growing compulsion that, at least during the last fifty years, both musical notation and the configuration of the musical score have imposed on compositions…will not be surprised if one day a reversal of the following sort occurs: music, previously conveyed by writing, suddenly turns itself into writing. This occurs at the price of its immediacy…If, however, the notes were still the mere signs for music, then, through the curves of the needle on the phonograph record, music approaches decisively its true character as writing.” (280).

Leppert (2002) explains why this particular analogy is used: “[Adorno’s] issue is storing—preservation—which he understands both literally and as an allegory” (235). What is significant then is that music has become able to transcend both time and space via the phonograph. This informs Adorno’s future observations that the ‘social situation’ of music may evolve into something more like that of literature, both for artists and listeners. For this particular thesis project, this conceptualization of music as literature helps set the stage for thinking about musicians as artists who, like writers, view themselves as individual creators. This is a point I will return to in the discussion of how the selected case studies will be analyzed, as noted below.

In addition to critiquing the phenomenology of listening to records, Adorno also critiques the new music of his day, and attempts to argue that proof of the negative effects of the commoditization of music can be heard in the music itself. This gets back to Burnett’s comment cited previously, and echoed by Leppert, regarding the two approaches to popular music criticism as influenced by Walter Benjamin and Adorno: “Benjamin speaks in detail about *how* audiences receive mass art, Adorno speaks in detail about *what* they are given to consume” (Leppert, 245).

The details of Adorno's—often overly subjective and highly critical—analysis of popular music don't necessarily need to be recited in detail here but a few examples are useful. The main critique of both *On Popular Music* and *On Jazz* deals with the standardization and homogeneity of both forms, despite their claims of newness in the marketplace. Adorno points to various features of the music itself: syncopation 'decorating' simple rhythms, non-improvised solos, the rondo form in which the individual voice of the verse falls into a collective chorus, and even the presence of the saxophone, which Adorno feels has dubious roots in German military marches, and not American jazz.

While his criticisms often seem a bit far-fetched, and are tainted by an enduring undercurrent of high-culture elitism, Adorno remains a rare example of an author trying to appreciate the implications of the music itself as symbolic of the culture in which it is produced and consumed. In addition, he responds to the aesthetics of the music very instinctually, and relates those aesthetic responses to his philosophical ideas quite explicitly. Ultimately, however, I think Adorno's analysis of the aesthetic content of music is one that presupposes that the economic influences guiding music production have stripped the artist or composer of his or her agency. One of the most intriguing aspects of this proposed thesis project is that each of the three artists I hope to analyze were involved in struggles with their record label management and fans for increased 'artistic freedom,' or the agency to have much more control over their work.

This leads to another significant work related to this thesis: Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* which, like Adorno, explores the history of recorded sound with an emphasis on the phenomenological, culturally-informed experiences of these new technologies.

Sterne explains that "From the very beginning, recorded sound was a studio art," and that "Studio work was widely understood as a practice entirely different from live performance" (236, 237). Sterne goes on to recount the various fears and anxieties expressed by early performers who took part in recording because of the difference between 'live' performance and recording.

From there Sterne provides several insightful illustrations that are a rare example of considering the psychological implications of the recording process, and new recording technologies, on the artist or performer as opposed to just the listener. For example, one singer being "immediately frightened by the thought of performing for a huge anonymous mass," describing the experience by saying "In my mind I visualized a life-sized map of the United States, and in every town, every hamlet, every cross-roads, there was *nothing but ears*. And all of these countless thousands of ears were cocked and pointed in my direction…*and they were waiting for me*" (quoting Duthernoy at 239).

Another type of recording-related anxiety is echoed by John Durham Peters in *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. Citing several examples, Peters concludes that "Having to speak into a soulless microphone was a common complaint in the 1920s and 1930s from entertainers used to performing before live audiences. The microphone replaced the faces and souls of the listeners" (213). Unlike Sterne then, Peters addresses the discomfort of performing for no [physically present] audience, as opposed to the fear of performing for a dauntingly large, imagined mass audience. Like Adorno and Sterne, Peters analogizes recording with writing: "The phonograph, like writing…is a medium that preserves ghosts that would otherwise be evanescent. …the phonograph is a copyist; it evoked many of the same anxieties as its predecessors…The phonograph, as its name suggests, is a means of writing" (160).

What is curious about both Peters' and Sterne's work (Sterne's in particular, as it deals exclusively with sound recording) however is that there is almost no attention given to music as a sound associated with its own cultural experiences, rituals, and significance. For all of Adorno's cultural biases, he at least deserves some credit for recognizing the importance of this unique aspect of sound recording.

Sterne points out in his book's introduction that "Prior to the nineteenth century, philosophies of sound usually considered their object through a particular, idealized instance such as speech or music" (23). He continues that "…philosophers took music as an idealized theoretical instance of sound," but that after the nineteenth century and the invention of recording technologies "[speech and music] were now special cases of the general phenomenon of sound" (23).

While all three—Adorno, Sterne, and Peters—appreciate the correlations between recording and writing, in all three cases (especially with Peters) there is an emphasis on the spiritual aspect of recording-as-presence as opposed to a silent, 'dead' written text, a sound over sight privilege not unlike Ong's. This is a significant point with regards to this thesis because in each case, auditory experience is implied as connoting a 'live' experience, or 'presence,' which is a hallmark of oral as opposed to written communication.

The current research hopes to challenge this assumption, and consider whether this projected denotation or connotation of the 'live' or 'dead' affect of a text is necessarily bound to the senses through which it is received. However, these accounts remain valuable for dealing with responses to the initial receptions of recorded sound in its early history, with a special interest in the anxieties of performers. One contribution of the current research will be to extend this history of the phenomenology of recorded sound further, into a generation that never knew a world without recorded sound.

There is very little writing on music which follows Adorno's emphasis on "considering *what* listeners are given to listen to" that focuses on musicians and producers themselves, with a special emphasis on their changing phenomenological experiences (Leppert, 245). Among the best examples within this niche are Veal's (2007) *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae*, Wald's (2009) *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock and Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* and Milner's (2009) *Perfecting Sound Forever: An Aural History of Recorded Music*; each of which also contributes to what I feel is a gap in the existing scholarly literature in this area.

Veal's *Dub* explores the development of a unique form of reggae called 'dub' through the late 1960s and 1970s, arguing that the underlying philosophy of those creating dub music was, in a sense, prophetic of the current ethos that defines digital music production, with it's emphasis on sampling, and digital editing and manipulation. Citing Raymond Williams, Veal defines the "structure of feeling" in Jamaica that informed, and is reflected in, the dub reggae genre; describing various new technologies present in late 1960s recordings, and how they were employed by vanguard Jamaican producers.

Veal does an exceptional job explaining and critiquing the impact of these technologies, and his analysis—both theoretically and methodologically—has informed the current research substantially. However the factual relevance of Veal's research is less useful to the current project because he generally remains focused on Jamaica, and the music produced there through the 1970s; returning to the wider pop music spectrum only as dub's influence on digital music becomes apparent in the 1990s and 2000s.

In fact, most accounts of the history of popular music include a significant disconnect from the late 1960s, with the Beatles break-up in 1970 as a convenient denouement, to the early 1980s at which point the cassette, CD, MP3, and the internet became widely available in relatively short order (Cox and Warner, 399). Even Wald's excellent (2010) *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock and Roll* only begins and ends with the Fab Four, and devotes most of its time to the decades that preceded and laid the ground work for their unprecedented success. In addition, Wald tends focus on the construction, and evolution of a music business infrastructure as the primary catalyst for change, while largely avoiding the issue of recording technology.

It is interesting to point out here that the 1970s as a decade have been equally dismissed in other writing on popular music and culture. Elborough (2009) for instance explains that "as a decade the 1970s remains…one of the most keenly forgotten…of the post-war era" (264). An equally telling quantitative example is found in Szatmary's (1987) *A Time to Rock: A Social History of Rock and Roll*, which devotes 155 pages to the 1960s and a scant 14 pages to the "Soft Sounds of the Seventies." By many accounts, this decade was—in addition to being a drought for technological innovation—one of musical insignificance, consisting of little more than disco, yacht rock, and saccharine pop a la the Osmonds.

Moving back to the issue of technology in particular, Milner's (2009) work is an extremely valuable source for this current research, but one which is nevertheless still guilty of the chronological bias described above. *Perfecting Sound Forever* includes two fantastic case studies. The first discusses how Leadbelly's various recording experiences—first "in the field," then in the recording studio, then finally to tape, with its promise of multi-track possibilities—effected his relationship to Alan Lomax, an archivist from the U.S. Library of Congress who 'discovered' the Louisiana singer/songwriter/guitarist. The second study follows guitarist and inventor Les Paul's various attempts to multi-track—or record himself playing multiple parts and combine them into one recording—before , during, and after the development of magnetic tape recording technology.

Both studies offer intriguing insights into the relationship between each musician's artistic ambitions, and how new technologies impacted their work and relationships. Unfortunately however, both of these analyses end in the late 1950s or early 1960s. The following chapter picks up again with Def Leppard in 1980, only briefly looking back to the late 1960s with a particular emphasis, as is often the case, on the Beatles.

Milner describes the seventies as "the twilight of the analog-era," and repeatedly refers to the sound of this decade as "dry" (131). The term 'dry' refers to the practice of recording each instrument individually in separate spaces to prevent the sound of one instrument from "bleeding" its sound into a microphone capturing another instrument. Additionally, Milner and others attribute this overall 'dry' 1970s sound to the adoption of multi-track studios, and an increased ability to edit numerous takes together with relative ease.

Milner's analysis ultimately tends to assume that nothing artistically and/or technologically significant happened between 1970 and 1980. This is additionally frustrating because of the tumult that occurred within popular music in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For instance, Milner praises the Beatles for their mastery of analog technology, but fails to consider if it played any role in their 1970 demise. I do not mean to be overly technologically-deterministic in this regard, but would argue that it may be more valuable to study the work of artists whose career arc overlaps the introduction of several new technologies as opposed to those whose careers seemingly ended or began in close proximity to significant changes in the ecology of the studio space, as seems to be the case with Milner's work.

Taylor's (2001) *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology, and Culture* makes an interesting observation regarding our broader, cultural interest in 'new' technologies: "One of the ways technology works in Western Culture is to call attention to itself when it is new…After a period of use, most technological artifacts are normalized into everyday life and no longer seen as "technological at all" (6). His comment speaks to a tendency that I would argue exists in academic writing about music and technology as well; that is, to focus a great deal of attention on the development of new technologies, and the moments of their initial adoption.

In conclusion, this thesis hopes to fall with Adorno as music criticism that is ultimately concerned with the musical product that is given to listeners, as opposed to their experience with it. Unlike Adorno however, I will ascribe a higher degree of agency to the artists this thesis will foreground because, as their circumstances, and their creative uses of the technology available to them, will show, the struggle to gain agency within or from what Adorno might call the culture industry is an intrinsic part of their stories.

Additionally, like Sterne, Peters, Veal, and Milner I am concerned with the phenomenological experience of those producing music. This thesis hopes to build on Sterne and Peters' treatment of the recording experience and its kinship with writing, with the distinction that the current research intends to focus on, and give special regard to musical recordings as objects in and of themselves which have a unique social function and are therefore deserving of analysis.

Finally, the work of Veal, Milner, and Wald provide both excellent contextual information, and methodological models for this research. In all three cases however, as with much of the other writing available on music and technology, the authors have neglected to discuss popular music in the 1970s with much depth or consideration. An additional aim of this project, therefore, is to build on their research by beginning to illuminate the “twilight of analog” and its place as a significant bridge to the so-called digital-era that followed.

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND CHANGES IN THE RECORDING INDUSTRY

This section will address several significant changes to the technologies involved in the production and consumption of popular music. Specifically this section will discuss the development of longer-lasting, longer-playing, and better-sounding records which helped to facilitate the development of home stereo systems. Next, this section will discuss the growth of the music industry during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the emergence of independent record labels, including Motown which was home to both Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder. Finally, I will address the implementation of magnetic tape and multi-track recording, and the aesthetic possibilities these new recording formats offered to performers-turned-recording artists.

LONG PLAYING RECORDS

In June 1878, Thomas Edison provided the *North American Review* with a list of ten possible uses for his new phonograph machine. Fourth on the list: “Music.—The phonograph will undoubtedly be liberally devoted to music” (qtd. in Boorstin, 380). Edison was right. Boorstin (1973) appropriately couples the advent and growth of recorded music with that of photography in a chapter titled “Mass-Producing the Moment,” in which he summarizes the rise of records as follows:

> "By 1914 more than 500,000 phonographs were being produced each year, and five years later reached 2 ½ million. […] in the post-World War II year of 1947, over 400 million records were sold. Improvements in the technique of recording…and reproducing, and improvements in the fidelity of the sound, increased the demand and before long produced an…audience for *recorded* sound" (384).

Myriad developments and improvements to sound recording and playback technologies helped to facilitate the growth of the market and the birth of the 'album' as we now know it. Historically, the timing with which these technologies rolled out was impeccable, considering that "About 76 million men and women were born between 1946 and 1964," who grew into record-buying teenagers in the decades that followed (Millard 2005, 241).

Among the most significant developments in the history of the LP or long-playing record album was first, the material used to produce the record itself was switched from a shellac disc, which "had an average lifespan [of] only between seventy-five and 125 plays" to the "cheaper, lighter, durable, and storable" vinyl disc (Elborough 2009, 45-46). This increased durability gave records a sense of permanence as an object to be collected, and listened to repeatedly.

The vinyl disc was also one of many important steps toward higher fidelity, or technologies capable of recording, then reproducing sounds as close to the original, "real" sound event as possible, without aberrations such as hissing, popping, and so on. This quest for a seemingly perfect copy continued, and led to the 1948 introduction of the "long-playing microgroove disk, which slowed down the speed from 78 to 33 ⅓ revolutions per minute and increased the playing time [of an album] from four to twenty-three minutes" (Boorstin, 384).

Similarly, the microgrooves allowed for the introduction of the smaller 33 ⅓ rpm 7-inch disc by Columbia, and shortly thereafter the (slightly better sounding) 45 rpm 7-inch single from RCA. Eventually, after what was known as "The Battle of the Speeds," RCA's 45rpm single won the market, and became "the prime artifact of rock n' roll," largely due to its portability (Milner, 135-140; Millard, 224).

Once a level of fidelity comparable to the abilities of the human ear was reached, the recording industry, which had been turning a tidy profit selling a new and improved hi-fi system almost every season, aimed its attention at stereophonic sound. Basically stereo means that two signals—'right' and 'left'—are produced instead of one (monophonic), creating "a geometric sense of where the musicians were in relation to one another onstage" (Milner, 145). If we might compare fidelity to the quality of paints and canvases used by visual artists, then stereo would be akin to perspective: a simulated depth of field, allowing for more movement and a more engrossing experience.

To summarize, a number of technologies had simultaneously developed in such a way that the experience of listening to recorded sound had undergone a significant evolution. Records had become durable artifacts, their playing time had grown to about 45 minutes total, and stereo promised a richer spatial dimension for recorded sounds. All these advancements culminated in the home stereo system: a fixture in many homes during the 1960s that included an AM/FM transistor radio, a variable speed (i.e. 33 ⅓, 45, 78 rpm) record turntable, and right-and-left amplified stereo speakers.

It is worth mentioning that the artwork and packaging which encased these records was also continuing to become more elaborate. Surprisingly, until 1939 albums came in bland, generic wrappers that “resemble[d] the dustiest tomes in the library” (Elborough, 31). Indulging the suggestion of a twenty-two year old employee, Columbia Records tried putting a colorful cover on a recording of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and saw an 894 percent spike in sales for the album (Elborough, 31). This too added to the album’s status as a pop culture artifact to be collected and contemplated, and embellished the home listening experience.

In his (1945) analysis of the historical transition “From Script to Print” Chaytor concludes that “When culture had reached a stage at which the individual read to himself for his own enjoyment, a different kind of literature was demanded” (13). As the rest of this section, and the chapters that follow, will further explain so too was the case with recorded music. When culture reached a stage at which the individual listened to music alone for his or her own enjoyment, a different kind of music emerged. Adorno had forecasted this type of change years earlier (with a greater concern for its effect on the audience; see: Leppert 2002, 332–348). but it wasn’t until high-fidelity, stereophonic, vinyl LPs started landing on turntables in the early 1960s that the separation between what live music had been, and what recorded music would become in the years ahead became pronounced.

Boorstin (1973) concluded his analysis of these changes as follows:

> “When music became only another, universally accessible form of repeatable experience, it lost much of its distinctiveness as an experience. By 1960 the new techniques were being used to make music of any and every kind ubiquitous…This new technology was reshaping human consciousness” (385, 389).

HEARD IT THROUGH THE HI-FI

With regards to this reshaping of consciousness occurring at the turn of the decade between the 1950s and 60s, Milner (2009) makes the interesting observation that the general public was initially slow to embrace both high fidelity equipment, and then stereo, and did so in both cases through novelty sound effect records instead of musical recordings. It was more interesting to hear the sound of a ping pong ball bouncing back and forth across the stereo than a symphony with the brass on one side and woodwinds on the other. This, Milner contends, is because “As a concept, “high-fidelity” suggests quality with an added component of “truth” (140).

But whereas “the World War II generation were audiophiles who longed for hi-fi [truth]; their boomer offspring were not and did not;” “the postwar generation would not merely tolerate “corrupted” sounds, but also embrace them (Milner, 152, 154). This is no doubt an apt metaphor for the broader social changes taking place at the time. One Social Theory (ed. Lemmert 2002) reader aptly titles its section covering 1963 to 1979 as “Will the Center Hold?” borrowing the phrase from poet William Butler Yeats. The ‘Center’ in this case refers to the moral center of modernity, and describes this era as a time when “The cohesive center of social life first starts to come unglued” (371-372).

Producer Phil Spector is often hailed as one of the first to compromise the veracity, or truthfulness, of the music he recorded as part of an aesthetic vision. In pursuit of “creating something that had no connection to real-world sound,” Spector developed a recording technique called the “wall of sound:” a dense assemblage in which “no individual instrument should be discernable” and “sounds were intentionally lost” (Milner, 153).

One of Spector’s engineers, Larry Levine, describes the novel experience of hearing the wall of sound: “See, it was not truthful at all…What everybody strives for in studio speakers is truth; this didn’t in any way duplicate what you heard in the studio” (qtd. in Milner, 153).

In addition to manufacturing a sound, Spector is also notable for creating groups, usually a ‘girl group’ consisting of a few female vocalists, to perform and personify his vision. As we’ll see later through Marvin Gaye’s frustrations with Motown, and Sly Stone’s difficulties drawing a distinction between his true-self and constructed alter-ego, this practice of fabricating a persona or group proves to be much more difficult than engineering a sound.

THIS MAGIC MOMENT

In addition to spawning the home listener, changes to record production materials and equipment also had a profound impact on the business of making and selling LPs. This section will explore how the rise of independent record labels, particularly Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder's label, Motown, went about manufacturing not only hit songs but 'star' talent as a product. It will also begin to explore the issues of ownership, identity, and authenticity that eventually drove Gaye to challenge Motown, and demand control over his music and image—a struggle that ultimately benefitted Stevie Wonder as well.

Along with better sound, a longer shelf life, and longer playing times, an additional benefit of the new vinyl LP, and the introduction of magnetic tape in the recording process, was lower production costs. Renting, or even owning a recording facility was now within financial reach for many would-be impresarios.

Millard explains:

> "From 1948 to 1955 the four major companies—Columbia, RCA Victor, Decca, and Capitol—placed over 75 percent of the hits on the *Billboard* top-sellers chart. In 1958 their releases accounted for only 36 percent of the…charts, which were now full of the releases of independent companies like Atlantic and Chess. By 1960 there were around 3,000 record labels in the United States" (229).

The term record 'label' actually speaks to an interesting difference between the "four major *companies* mentioned above, and the independents. 'Label' refers to the stickers affixed to the center of a record with the song title and artist's name. The *company* that produced a record therefore came to be identifiable by their unique label on the record. The earliest record labels existed within larger corporate entities, and used the sale of recordings primarily as a way to boost the sales of larger-ticket items they manufactured like turntables and amplifiers.

Columbia Records, for instance, was Thomas Edison's own label, created to help sell his phonograph by giving consumers something to play. The technological refinements discussed above allowed for smaller independent labels to emerge that could not only make music, but make it their sole product. This is an important change because whereas a label like Columbia would have little interest in cultivating its own unique sonic aesthetic, or differentiating itself in the market by virtue of the kinds of music it released, independent labels such as Chess, Sun, Motown, and Folkways came to be known by releasing material with a very particular sound and style.

Concurrently, radio took a similar turn thanks to the emergence of television. Radio stations responded to the medium's waning popularity by attempting "to seek out new audiences – not the mass audience, which was quickly lost to them, but the segmented ethnic and youth audience" (Millard, 231). This market segmentation was further exacerbated by the "decline of the radio networks [and] the end of their monopoly," which prompted many independent stations to take to the airwaves.

What is interesting in the case of both independent radio stations and similarly independent record labels is that they generally served a niche audience. On the one hand this plurality expanded the popular music palette as young listeners' could wander through a multitude of genres at the turn of a dial, but on the other hand it also meant that most labels and producers were beholden to their niche. In its early days the Top 40 format further facilitated this by consolidating the cream of the indie station's pop crop into an eclectic, albeit repetitive, mix that would "mingle the Beatles and Herman's Hermits with Motown, Frank and Nancy Sinatra, Herb Alpert, and Dionne Warwick" (Wald, 238).

HITSVILLE USA

Motown Records was in many ways the quintessential 1960s independent record company, fusing a Tin Pan Alley-meets-Henry Ford assembly line production method with Phil Spector's "producer-as-auteur" approach to create a crop of fastidiously crafted, sonically consistent, camera-ready teen pop stars (Milner, 152). Motown founder Berry Gordy imself has described his vision for the label as one informed by Detroit's automotive production plants:

> "At the plant the cars started out as just a frame, pulled along on conveyor belts until they emerged at the end of the line—brand spanking new cars rolling off the line. I wanted the same concept for my company, only with artists and songs and records. I wanted a place where a kid could walk in one door an unknown and come out…a star" (qtd. Edmonds, 17).

Gordy's concept of a hit factory was not entirely new however. In 1910 a song publishing collective known as Tin Pan Alley[1] had been called just that, a collaborative "of popular song factories" by the *New York Times* (Suisman 2009, 41). Similarly, with

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[1] Tin Pan Alley is a broadly applicable moniker like "Hollywood" that applies to pop songwriters and publishers in the early 1900s. "Geographically, the industry was first concentrated around New York's Union Square" (Suisman, 21).

Tin Pan Alley “Every aspect of songwriting, publishing, and promoting was broken down into elemental, specialized parts” and “song were crafted specifically, deliberately, and essentially as commercial products” (Suisman, 41).

One marked difference between Motown and Tin Pan Alley was, of course, the fact that Motown was not simply writing and publishing but also recording songs. Among the many factors that contributed to Motown’s success, one that is often cited is the fact that, until 1968, all of the label’s material was recorded in the same studio, by the same cabal of musicians. In fact, the entire label was encased by one relatively small building on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit. This extraordinary consistency between every aspect of the process led to a distinctive ‘sound’ that one could identify with Motown.

Milner (2009) anecdotally describes how one teenager named Tony Bongiovanni attempted to recreate Motown’s distinct sound in his parent’s garage. After countless hours of close listening and experimentation, Bongiovanni called the label to share the impressive results. Within 24 hours of the call, a representative from the label was offering the 17 year old something like a paid internship with the label to further hone his skills (155).

Taking the young engineer under its wing was not simply charitable however, Motown was well aware that their sound was as much a part of the brand as anything else. “They had this acoustic sound that engineers in New York were trying to replicate,” Bongiovanni, who grew up to be a renowned recording engineer/producer, explains, “but there’s something ineffable about it, a combination of the unique studio and the practices of the engineers…produced a sound that nobody in New York could replicate" (155-156).

This becomes increasingly important in light of Marvin Gaye's attempts to gain creative control and an increased amount of agency within Motown's corporate structure, and will come up again in a later chapter on Gaye's label-mate Stevie Wonder. In both cases the artists did not simply want to write their own material, but also record it outside of Motown's Studio A facility, with a different cast of engineers and producers. Whereas recording had previously been the practice of capturing a song in the studio it was now becoming a craft unto itself with a substantial effect on the finished product. The process of creating one's own 'voice' or 'sound' in the studio now had as much to do with the room itself, microphone placement, mixing, and a number of other seemingly technological considerations.

FROM DISC TO TAPE

In Milner's (2009) account of music recording technology, he concludes that "The story of recorded music in the postwar, pre-digital era is largely the story of multi-track tape recording" (156). Originally, music and sound in general was recorded by a single source, or single 'track'—at first through a large horn that would literally 'cut' a record by etching grooves in real time into an acetate plate, and then by more sophisticated microphones. This meant what was heard by listeners was always a 'live' performance of musicians (carefully arranged) in a room. Editing an acetate or vinyl record after the live event was also an impossibility because of the materials onto which the sound was ascribed.

Again quoting Milner (2009) “Tape reshaped the contours of recorded music, first by linking sounds that had not been linked in their original incarnation, and eventually by allowing sounds that had occurred at different times to be experienced simultaneously” (108). That is to say, the practice of recording an entire ensemble playing together in a room evolved into recording an ensemble playing together in different rooms (to control the “bleeding” of one instruments sound into another’s microphone), and then to musicians playing alone, in different rooms, at different times. In any configuration, editing was also now a possibility as pieces of tape could be cut and reassembled without disfiguring the sounds they contain.

Needless to say, what was at first a convenient way of not having to perform countless takes in search of one flawless rendition, quickly opened a new world of aesthetic possibilities. The process attributed to the Beatles for their pioneering multi-track work in creating their *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* album was actually not unlike what Les Paul had been doing decades earlier with records. Paul would record himself on one record, then record himself playing along with that record to sound like two guitars, then again to sound like three, and so on. The Beatles similarly realized that four tracks worth of recording could be mixed and ‘bounced’ onto a single track, opening up three more tracks to record additional parts on. By repeating this process, an almost endless number of takes could be compiled into one very sophisticated whole.

The success of the Beatles 1967 four-track triumph *Sgt Pepper* prompted many major studios to install new mixing consoles in order to accommodate as many tracks as the technology of the day allowed: first four, then eight, then sixteen, twenty four, etc. For as many tracks as were available, artists could find a use; or as the Beatles producer George Martin put it, it was "an era of trying things out like mad in the studio, the era of almost continuous studio experimentation" (qtd. in Elborough, 246).

It is also interesting to consider that multi-track tape recording opened up the possibility to examine each part, or each instrument's performance, as opposed to evaluating the recording in its entirety. If, for instance, the bass player flubbed a note on the second chorus of a song that was recorded live in-studio, but the rest of the performance was particularly energetic and well-played, the bass player would presumably overlook the imperfection. With multi-tracking, either the entire group could play the song again and splice the corrected chorus into the original take, or the bass part alone could be re-recorded and added back into the whole.

Another result of this interest in scrutinizing individual takes, and assembling a final track, is that it started to bring musicians up into the control room, where they previously had no business being.

> "When [the Beatles] first began their recording career, it was still a world where musicians were musicians and technicians were technicians, and the twain didn't

> meet. Paul McCartney recalled that during the band’s early sessions…the control room seemed “like heaven, where the great gods lived, and we were down below.”” (Milner, 157)

In many respects the ways in which multi-track tape recording impacting the recording process and environment reflect the other changes which have been discussed previously in this section. Just as the emergence of higher-quality records and home stereo equipment led to a more reflexive, solitary listener, artists could also now produce material entirely by themselves, and scrutinize their performances much more closely. Similarly, the market fragmentation which resulted from the rise of niche-focused independent record labels and FM radio stations finds a parallel within the studio space, in which recordings now become the sum of separately recorded parts, as opposed to representing a whole.

MARVIN GAYE - WHAT'S GOING ON

One of the most intriguing distinctions to consider between the oral and written word is what we might call the life and death of each. Before sound recording technology existed, spoken words ceased to exist the moment they were spoken, however the speaker had to be physically present for the listener to hear. With text, words may exist (at least in theory) forever, but the author may be far away, long ago, or no more by the time his or her words cross the reader's eyes. In addition, the burden lies with the reader of a text to breathe life back into the written words by reading them.[2]

Exploring this very idea of "Death and Life in the Text of a Book" Ong (1977) points out that "Analogies between sound recordings and writing of course suggest themselves here" but he concludes that such analogies "must be left aside" as they are "not relevant to the present concerns though well worth studying in themselves" (234). Unable to resist nibbling at his own bait however, Ong does offer a bit more on this issue in the form of a footnote, in which he concludes that "sound recordings do not involve the psyche, as writing does…The implication of death in sound recordings is less than in writing" (234).

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[2] See: John Durham Peters *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, particularly Chapter 4: "Phantasms of the Living, Dialogues with the Dead" for more on this issue.

Marvin Gaye might have disagreed. By the end of 1970, matters of life and death were heavy on Gaye's heart, while his mind was entrenched in an as-of-yet unmade album that had in many ways been years in the making. This section will explore how changes in the methods of production, and consumption of music in the United States after World War II culminated in the production of Marvin Gaye's 1971 *pièce de résistance What's Going On*. In doing so it will show how Gaye transitioned from an uneasy performer to an auteur by crafting a cohesive, aesthetically and thematically consistent, album to be listened to as such.

AIN'T NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING

Marvin Gaye was always a squeaky wheel in the Motown machine for reasons both justified and not. As Edmonds (2001) summarizes:

> "[Marvin] had a contentious relationship with the label from day one, acquiring a reputation as a difficult recording artist, a diffident live performer and, in a sort of passive-aggressive way that became his trademark as much as any vocal mannerism, a troublemaker" (32).

Several in-depth biographies, including Edmonds and most notably Ritz (1985), have brought to light "that beneath [Gaye's] gentle, bashful exterior lay an angry, bottomless sea of secret torments, barely submerged self-loathing and shame (Edmonds, 19). While the mercurial singer's spiritual journey is undoubtedly an important part of the production of *What's Going On*, this section will focus instead on the singer's conflicts with Motown throughout the 1960s. This is not to diminish the weight of the already well-documented inner-struggles that informed the album, but to focus instead on the dynamics of Gaye's acrimonious working relationship with Motown.

The most important thing separating Marvin Gaye from his fellow singers was that, while most of the label's roster seemed content to buy into Berry Gordy's vision and play their role, Gaye was discontent from day one with almost every part of the experience except the paycheck. What makes this dissent all the more interesting is that Gaye did not necessarily want to abandon pop for art's sake, he wanted to—and had an ego big enough to believe he could—do both, and do it all himself.

One example of this was the kind of songs Gaye was given by Berry Gordy and the labels songwriters. Gaye's own ambition was always to be a crooner in the vein of Nat King Cole or Frank Sinatra but Motown elected to cast him instead as a "rock n' roll belter" (Edmonds 2002, 22). James Green, an engineer who recorded some of Gaye's early singles was almost as uncomfortable with the situation as Marvin. "For someone with his quality of voice, you don't want to hear him straining like that. But that's what Berry Gordy wanted. He had everyone in a niche" (Edmonds 2002, 23). Similar expectations followed the singer on-stage, where a false machismo was even harder to muster for Gaye, who believed that "you have a relationship with your fans…they feel like they know you, and they do" (qtd. in Ritz, 79).

As the labels premier solo male artist, Gaye was also the prime candidate to record duets with the labels female stars including Mary Wells and Kim Weston but most notably with Tammi Terrell. While this came closer to the kind of pop singing Gaye was interested in, it was still a far cry from it. Moreover the duets had as much to do with providing Motown's PR machine opportunities to ignite fan imaginations with rumors of behind-the-scenes romance. Edmonds (2002) concludes "Motown was a carefully choreographed black and tan Camelot" (118).

Something Berry Gordy understood as well as Phil Spector was the increasing importance of image and celebrity in the then-infant age of television. "By the early sixties the power in teenage music was falling into the hands of writer-producers" (Ritz, 69). This is something that will be seen again in the next chapter regarding Sly Stone who was more of a self-produced counter-culture star than the pop idols produced by Motown, but nevertheless was successful in large part because he mindfully constructed a visual as well as a sonic aesthetic for himself and his group.

It certainly didn't hurt that Berry Gordy's fledgling hit factory secured a roster of talent that still stands as one of the most impressive in popular music history, with an equally strong work ethic. But just as a good song benefits from a great arrangement, Gordy wanted his young ensemble with star talent to look as good as they sounded. A kind of Motown finishing school was created to add an air of sophistication to Diana Ross, the Temptations, Stevie Wonder, and others. Maxine Powell, who ran the school, explains:

> "I taught them discipline and also how to handle people. …I taught them manners. Be warm, I told them, be natural, be poised, and be positive. I gave them stage presence. I taught them how to walk, how to talk, how to hold a microphone. I explained to them that body communication is an art. Mr. Gordy was interested in giving these young artists class" (qtd. in Ritz, 88).

While working on this research it was interesting to see the enduring legacy of Powell's instruction as I viewed several documentary films and archival clips of interviews online. Just like the unmistakable sound of a Motown single, there is a certain demeanor that is consistent among interviews with the label's stars. The way they sit up straight, smiling pleasantly, legs crossed, always impeccably dressed. The way they pause briefly before answering questions with softly-spoken, meticulously articulated, slang-free, sound-byte sized statements. Ms. Powell should be proud.

Powell's assessment of Marvin Gaye is that he was indeed a troublemaker, skipping classes or arguing with the instructor throughout, but that he didn't necessarily need the classes to begin with. As she told Ritz (1985) "Marvin had fine manners and poise. He was a person of breeding" (88). Gaye later criticized the finishing school as a means of 'whitewashing' Motown, or making the young stars more appealing to a white audience, but paradoxically he fully appreciated that there was more money to be made this way. "Everyone wanted to sell to whites 'cause whites got the most money. Our attitude was—give us some. It's that simple" (qtd. in Ritz 73).

For a time, Gaye was content with "playing a game" at Motown because Berry Gordy's assembly line was indeed making money, thanks to an astonishing 110 top ten singles between 1961 and 1971 (Ritz 73, www.Motown.com). However as the 1960s drew to a close Marvin Gaye became increasingly discontent with the label as he began to discover some of the difficulties that arise when identity is mass produced.

The first of two major events that served as the inspiration for *What's Going On* was the death of Gaye's duet partner, Tammi Terrell at the peak of the duo's popularity. After having racked up a slew of hit songs together, "Terrell collapsed in [Marvin's] arms onstage from an undiagnosed brain tumor in the summer of 1967" which would eventually lead to her death in 1970 (Edmonds 2001, 5).

On the day of Terrell's funeral, a new duet called "The Onion Song"—which was already a hit in the UK—was released in the United States (Edmonds 2002, 78). The radio-listening, record-buying public was more-or-less oblivious to the fate that had befallen Terrell, but in retrospect one begins to wonder how a young woman dying of brain cancer was able to continue releasing effervescent pop singles.

The sad reality is that Motown simply replaced the faulty part. Terrell's half of "The Onion Song" and a number of other recordings arguably as far back as 1968 were an impersonation performed by Valerie Simpson, a songwriter at Motown (Edmonds 2002, 78). Both Simpson and Gaye were convinced to go along with the charade as a way of alleviating their friend's overwhelming medical expenses, but for Gaye the incident intensified an already nagging impetus to reclaim his identity before it was too late.

In addition to conflicting Gaye artistically, the twilight of Terrell's life was also instrumental in setting the stage for *What's Going On* logistically. First, Terrell's on-stage collapse was traumatizing enough to prompt a "self-imposed ban on performing" that sent the already stage-shy Marvin Gaye into studio seclusion (Ritz, 123). Coincidentally it was during this time of "hibernation and preparation…psychologically insulated from the pressures of show business" that Gaye elected to produce material, for a group called the Originals, at Motown for the first time.

Gaye's experience with the Originals not only took the troubled singer's mind off of Tammi Terrell, but also found the singer arranging, and recording for the four-part vocal group with then-new multi-track tape technology (Ritz, 137). What is important to highlight at this point is that Gaye began reflecting on the fact that he could now multiply his own voice. It's difficult to affirm the oft-made claim that *What's Going On* was the first album in which a singer did this, but what is clear is that it had never been done as compellingly as on *What's Going On*.

This leads to the other significant influence on the production of the album. The loss of Gaye's sister in song Tammi Terrell had further compelled him to say something, while circuitously introducing him the possibilities of multi-track recording. But it was Marvin's flesh and blood brother Frankie who finally provided the singer with something to say, while in a sense also inspiring how he would say it.

Although, as the next chapter will show with regards to Sly Stone, many black artists were feeling increasingly responsible to speak out through their music to address the volatile racial situation in the United States towards the end of the 1960s, Motown had more-or-less managed to remain withdrawn within their pop fantasy world. Edmonds (2002) colorfully elaborates: "…cultural revolution had been raging for years, but inside the Hitsville fortress the tried-and-true Motown Sound was still serenading blissfully unaware teens in the heart of a maltshop America that no longer existed," further perpetuating the enduring critique that the label's primary interest was to placate its white audience (118).

One of the most intriguing lyrical themes on *What's Going On* that will be addressed more fully in a later section is that of the family. The family metaphors come across on the album as social and spiritual—with brother and sister often sounding like slang for a male or female friend, father sounding like a prayerful call to God the Father, and mother referring to mother earth, or the actual life-giving female nucleus of a family. What makes the album all the more compelling however is that much of Marvin's pleading, particularly to the father character, was as much directed towards the singer's own earthly family.

The stories that Frankie Gay[3] shared with his brother upon his return from Vietnam about the horrors of war, as well as the questions he posed about the upheaval at home not only put Marvin's relatively trivial problems into perspective, they also woke some sleeping giant-sized insecurities within the singer. The boys' physically and psychologically abusive father Marvin Senior—a bishop in his church who spent evenings at home in women's clothing and/or lingerie—had constantly chastised his more sensitive son for being effeminate and inadequate. The situation was made all the worse for Marvin Junior by schoolyard rumors about his father's sartorial proclivities, and of course the family surname.

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[3] Marvin added the letter 'e' to his surname when he began performing.

For father's favorite son to have fought the good fight overseas while the black sheep was seducing white teenage girls over the airwaves on the home front was no doubt troubling for Marvin, who was already extraordinarily insecure. This was not lost on brother Frankie who concedes that

> "I think Marvin was envious of my war experience He saw it as a manly act that he had avoided. It's even stranger because while Marvin was always my hero, I was also his hero. I really believe he wanted to be me" (Ritz, 147).

This was further compounded by the fact that a cousin who shared the name Marvin Gay was killed in combat, which was brought to Marvin Gaye's attention while he was, as a cross-promotional move, playing a soldier in a campy made-for-TV movie (Edmonds 2002, 114).

Between singing music he disliked and devalued as pure product, cashing in on duets recorded with an imposter of his now-deceased friend, and playing a make-believe G.I. in Hollywood while the real Marvin Gay died in combat, Marvin Gaye was desperate to do something authentic, even if it was a testament to confusion. What was and still is so compelling about *What's Going On* is how convincingly Gaye projects this confusion over both the inner-self and the outer-world to the listener. The multi-tracked vocals on the album are not a convenience used to save the cost of extra back-up singers, they come across as the inner-voices of the singer's own mind, driven to madness by trying to make sense of a world gone mad.

The next section will discuss the production of the album, and analyze the final product musically and lyrically. In addition it will review some reactions to the album in order to address how Gaye was able to drastically alter public perceptions of him in one fell swoop. Through this analysis I hope to show how Gaye's careful plotting of the album as a whole, and its inner-dialoging, introspective, spiritual lyrics are comparable to changes identified by Ong, Havelock, and others regarding the evolution of the written word and the impact of silent reading, and later print.

RIGHT ON

For better or worse, pop music in the late 1960s was moving from the hips to the head. The emergence of the private listener found audiences clamoring from more musically ambitious, thought provoking material to ponder. The Rolling Stones front-man Mick Jagger told *NME* magazine in 1967 that "We are moving after 'minds' and so are most of the new groups" (qtd. in Elborough 236). Elborough further reflects that "looking back…what is most startling is the speed with which musicians and their fans retooled their desires for and expectations of an LP…'doing your own thing', in the parlance of the period—was in itself starting to be held in greater esteem" (245-246).

Concurrently the formats and conventions of radio broadcasting were also becoming more open and adventurous, allowing for more exploratory material to make its way to the airwaves. FM radio, which had been predominately devoted to classical music, background muzak, and/or duplicating the programming of an AM station, was cleaving off into its own unregulated entity (Sterling and Keith, 101–123). One industry publication from the time described the change as follows:

> “The cloistered little world of FM radio has been invaded—by rock and roll, big bands, hockey game play-by-plays, and sexy girl announcers making slightly off-color remarks…Most of them bear no resemblance to the intellectual and exclusive image…that has characterized FM radio to its tiny but intensely loyal listening audience” (qtd. in Sterling and Keith, 127).

As AM radio moved closer to standardized programming, FM headed in the opposite direction, with many stations describing themselves as “progressive, alternative, free-form, psychedelic, and even the “anti-format”” (Sterling and Keith, 130). Needless to say the purportedly anti-establishment tone of these stations carried great appeal to the youth market. Sterling and Keith (2008) conclude that “FM reflected the sharper divisions in American society” through their fragmenting audience, and diverse playlists.[4]

Two new aesthetic paradigms to emerge from the changes occurring at this time were the intimate singer-songwriter, and the ambitious concept album. Coincidentally these two disparate genres lead us back to the Beatles break-up: Lennon was critical of McCartney’s work which he saw as high-art banalities, while McCartney grew uneasy about using Lennon’s increasingly personal and politically progressive lyrics. It quickly becomes apparent listening to the former Beatles' debut solo albums[5] how incompatible their artistic ambitions had become.

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[4] See: Sterling and Keith (2008) for a much more in-depth explanation of AM and FM radio in the United States.

Hungry for truth, and authenticity, the "oeuvre of lone troubadours, who…dominated the first quarter of the 1970s" was appealing to Marvin Gaye, who found the music to be calming, as many listeners presumably did, during a time that was as tumultuous for the country at large as for the singer himself (Elborough, 284).

Specifically, Gaye cites the work of James Taylor, "a rangy, brooding, posh kid…who sang gentle…self-revelatory tales of woe" and whose album *Sweet Baby James* sold over a million copies in 1970 (Elborough, 280). As Gaye told Ritz (1985), "I found some comfort in singers like James Taylor. James' voice has a soothing, mellow quality which came at just the right time, like a lull in the middle of a storm" (140).

Aesthetically speaking Elborough (2009) points out that the sparse, "pastoral and…much less jarring" sound of this particular niche was also "a music ideally suited to listening to on LP in intimate domestic spaces" (284). Meanwhile concept albums[6] started becoming just as common around this same time, especially after the 1966 releases of the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and Frank Zappa's *Freak Out!*.

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[5] Lennon's *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, McCartney's *McCartney*, Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* (produced by Phil Spector), and Starr's *Sentimental Journey* and *Beaucoups of Blues* were all released in 1970 following the announcement that the group was breaking up on April 10th of that year.

[6] The term 'concept' album basically refers to an entire LP (or LPs) centered around a particular musical and/or lyrical theme.

The interesting difference between the two however is that with singer-songwriters the emphasis was on lyrics as confessional, introspective poetry best contemplated in solitude, while concept albums were generally more escapist, and led listeners into a sonic world detached from reality. Although most concept albums employ broadly applicable literary themes, few seem to directly address real-life concerns in a direct or explicit way.[7]

Gaye's intention with *What's Going On* was to merge these two genres and offer an "emotional and literary complexity" to his listeners (Ritz, 149). To achieve this kind of complexity lyrically, Gaye attempted to take on the persona of his brother Frankie, through whom he would be "looking back at American through the soul of his sibling" (Ritz, 146). Gaye's intent for the sound of the musical backdrop to this story has not been explained as clearly, but it is safe to assume from listening to the album that Gaye was moving towards the melodic, orchestral grandeur of the ballad style he admired, (artists like Nat "King" Cole and Frank Sinatra) without forsaking the rhythmic engine that drove most Motown singles. In fact Gaye employed an even denser rhythm section than the usual Motown sound, making "[*What's Going On*'s] deep and varied use of percussion…a strikingly original signature" (Edmonds 2002, 166).

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[7] Frank Zappa's 1966 *Freak Out!*, a biting social commentary, might be an exception to this rule save for the fact that Zappa's satirical barbs are often so over the top that its difficult to take him seriously.

What we do know is that Gaye was keenly interested in an album that would more of less play all the way through, and could be considered as a singular piece of work as oppose to a compilation of singles. The process of recording the material was, at first, like any other Motown session with the house band in Studio A. The basic tracks for the album were recorded on August 23, 1969, with just a handful of additional sessions weeks or months later to add the strings and vocals (Weinger, 2001).

Although there is certainly a consistent feel to much of the album, what gave it its great sense of continuity was a few very deft post-production decisions made by Gaye. First, the individual songs were stitched together by engineers. One such engineer, Steve Smith, explains the process as follows:

> "“The studio technology was still pretty primitive…To edit, you had to physically cut the tape with a blade. So when the basic rhythm tracks were done [the engineers] took the multi-tracks and edited the entire album together by hand. It was quite an accomplishment.” With the basic tracks already cut into the larger collage, the overdubs were then applied to the entire album, adding immeasurably to the cohesiveness and flow of the finished product” (qtd. in Edmonds 2002, 167-168).

In addition, Gaye contracted an older local jazz saxophonist named ‘Wild’ Bill Moore—described as a “rhythm and blues honker”—instead of one of the smoother jazz players around Motown (Edmonds, 184). As the story goes, Gaye “turned [Moore] loose” in the studio one night to “splatter tenor sax all over his tracks like an R&B Rauschenberg. Wild Bill improvised across the entire stitched-together canvas of the album, and then Marvin went back and kept the bits that caught his fancy…” (Edmonds, 184). This sort of editing conducted by Gaye of Moore's playing is something we'll see used to a far greater extent in the next chapter on Sly Stone.

The final unique aspect of the creation of *What's Going On* is of course the multiple overdubbed vocal takes that Gaye recorded, however I consider these to be more significant in terms of *how* Gaye used these multiple vocals than the mere fact he did so. Therefore the vocals will be discussed at greater length in the next section.

As noted earlier, the care and consideration given to the covers and packaging of pop albums had also become increasingly complex by the end of the 1960s. The well-known collage cover of The Beatles *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* for instance provided as much eye candy as aural stimulation for listeners. But Motown remained behind the curve in this regard; as Edmonds (2002) explains "To say that [their] artwork was generally mediocre is being charitable" (199). Accordingly, Marvin Gaye's ambitions for his album did not end with the music itself.

The cover photo of *What's Going On* is undoubtedly a far simpler and more somber image than the cover of *Sgt Peppers*, but in many ways *Sgt Peppers* served as the inspiration for the rest of design. Edmonds (2002) describes the LP's sleeve:

> "It was a gatefold cover that opened up like a book, unheard of for a…Motown album. If you were to take The Beatles *Sgt Pepper* cover, open its gatefold and lie it flat front cover up, it matches the inner sleeve of Marvin's gatefold exactly: lyrics and credits on the left side, and a collage of figures on the other" (203).

The last part of this statement is important to point out here: "lyrics and credits." This was the first Motown release to print the lyrics, and remarkably also the first to print full credits for the entire cast of songwriters, musicians, and engineers…except of course Berry Gordy (Ritz, 148).

Before turning to an analysis of the album's musical content, I'd like to highlight one additional aspect of the notes that accompanied the album—a letter to the listener, from Gaye. This message serves as a nice transition because it underscores his own feelings about the album as a personal statement, about his listeners, and about the album's very spiritual tone, with a few subtle shots at Motown as well. The letter begins:

> "After some several days of reflecting and pondering and general thought (which is very unusual), I still can't think of any non-complimentary things to write about myself. And I ain't gonna write no general information type stuff either, so I guess I'll just give credit to some good people who, without their help, I could have completed this project a lot faster. More about them later. And anyway, if you like the artist well enough to buy his or her album, you don't have to be told how groovy it is, or which tunes you should dig, or how great his or her majesty is. I mean the fact that people just won't let us think for ourselves really bugs me!" (Gaye, 1971).

Gaye continues by telling the reader, with his tongue planted firmly in-cheek, that they don't have to enjoy certain songs and lyrics, which he specifically identifies, just because he does. From there Gaye begins thanking a number of people, starting with "God for giving me strength and faculties to do this album," then a separate paragraph dedicates the work to a short list of family members and friends. Setting the mood for the album, the final paragraph of Gaye's dedication reads:

> "Find God: we've got to find the Lord. Allow him to influence us. I mean what other weapons have we to fight the forces of hatred and evil[8]. And check out the

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[8] One lyric from Sly Stone's song "Poet" reads "I'm a songwriter; my only weapon is my pen."

> Ten Commandments too. You can't go too far wrong if you live them, dig it. Just a sincere and personal contact with God will keep you more together. Love the Lord, be thankful, feel peace. Thanks for life and loved ones. Thank you Jesus. Love, Marvin Gaye" (Gaye 1971).

WHAT'S GOING ON

The analysis that will follow in this section is inspired largely by the work of Ong, or more specifically by the research of myriad other scholars whose contributions to the study of the development of literature he summarizes and synthesizes (as do others including: Havelock, McLuhan, but none as thoroughly as Ong) to identify the kind of broader aesthetic and cultural shifts he is then able to consider the significance of.

McLuhan (1962) identifies four texts in particular which he describes as extraordinarily illustrative and therefore valuable with regards to this area of research, which he calls "massive myths of the Gutenberg transformation of society. Besides *Gargantua*, they are *Don Quixote*, the *Dunciad*, and *Finnegan's Wake* Each of them deserves a separate volume in relation to the world of typography" (147). Indeed, it seems that each of these texts is discussed often, in terms of their relation to the development from writing to print.

James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* in particular seems to be a text that Ong was keenly interested in, as it obscures the lines between orality and literacy so brilliantly and is therefore applicable to his theses about these two distinct forms of communication in so many ways. Of particular interest to Ong is what he calls the "cyclic pattern" of

Joyce's work; that *Finnegans Wake* "faces backward into itself…[which] dramatizes the very textual shape…or retrospective flavor of literature generally" (1977, 249-250). Ong further concludes that "Its retrospectivity is what gives *Finnegans Wake* its overpowering impact on the unconscious" (1977, 250).

Although my understanding of Joyce's work is extremely limited[9], I would like to use this notion of a cyclical plot structure as described by Ong, and the dynamic non-linear time structure it implies, as a way of framing this analysis of *What's Going On*. The following section will address the album as a musical text, not with the intent of performing a close and precise musicological study, but rather as an exploration of the structural homology of the album as a whole, in light of the themes that have previously been discussed. That is to say, this section seeks to illustrate correspondences between the issues addressed in previous sections, and the musical and lyrical content of the album.

Ultimately, I hope that more generally this analysis will bolster the claim that *What's Going On* is indeed an introspective and highly reflexive album that demands a much different response from listeners than the typical Motown fare that came before it.

What's Going On begins with a song of the same name, and a chorus that asks that very question. More specifically, the song begins with the sound of several young men greeting each other before a saxophone solo ushers in the ensemble and Gaye begins singing "mother, mother…" The family is an important metaphor that sustains throughout the album, and in fact Gaye repeats this call to "mother, mother" in the closing lines of the album's final track, "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)".

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[9] I am not embarrassed to concede this; Lee Spinks (2009) *James Joyce: A Critical Guide* calls *Finnegans Wake* a "notoriously difficult" to read book and argues that its the "least read major Western work" for this reason.

The lyrical phrases that begin "What's Going On" refer first to the mother, then the brother, then the sister, then the father, who is addressed twice. In addition, the song concludes with repetitions of the phrase "right on baby" which occurs throughout the album, and forms the chorus of a song of the same name (sans "baby"). Actually the first two songs both pose questions: "What's Going On" then "What's Happening Brother," which takes on a more conversational tone, but introduces several other recurring issues including financial problems and unemployment. The crowd of young men's voices that started the album—voiced by members of the Detroit Lions—also continues throughout these first two songs, giving the songs an almost live feel with intermittent flourishes of clapping and cheers.

"What's Happening Brother" ends with the line: "What's been shakin' up and down the line, I want to know cause I'm slightly behind the time" before segueing into "Flying High in the Friendly Sky," a not-so-veiled drug reference which introduces an additional recurring theme: the sky. Again in last song of side A "Mercy Mercy Me," and of side B "Inner City Blues," we hear about pollution in the sky, and bills piling up "sky high." Drugs, or 'getting high,' pollution, money, and perhaps even the space program (which Gaye also criticizes) symbolically cloud this sky.

The [friendly] sky then becomes a kind of metaphorical liminal space between Gaye and the father—divine or human, which leads to a more abundantly used device throughout *What's Going On*'s lyrics. Gaye constantly addresses his comments to "my friend," 'baby," and the familial titles (mostly brother and father) but it remains unclear "who is saying what to whom?" (Ong, 1977, 274).[10]

An excellent example of this is the song "God is Love" which begins "Oh, don't go and talk about my father" then continues "God is my friend/Jesus is my friend," which also serves to draw attention to the father and son dynamic within Christianity's triune God. Interestingly, the printed lyrics that accompany the album only capitalize the word "father," as might be expected in reference/reverence to God during one of the final lines of the song: "For when we call on Him for mercy, mercy Father." Lyrics for the following song, "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)", repeat this same line verbatim but do not capitalize the word.

This mid-album announcement that "God is my friend" also leaves the listener looking back to previous lyrics like "tell me friend, how in the world have you been" or "Well I know I'm hooked my friend, to the boy[11] who makes slaves out of men" to question whom Gaye was addressing his many queries at in the first two tracks. The question of "who is saying what to whom" is even further obfuscated by the treatment of Gaye's vocals, which gives the impression that what we're hearing may be the singer—himself a brother, father, son, and friend—simply talking to himself, or even within himself.

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[10] Ong's explanation and use of this question will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

[11] This is an especially potent lyric. "Boy" was a slang term for heroin at the time. In Christianity, God the Father first frees his people from literal slavery in Egypt, then Jesus, the 'son of man,' is said to provide a metaphorical release from a kind of spiritual slavery (i.e. Galatians 5:3 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."). This is an especially good example of the way Gaye connects the album's Biblical themes with socio-political commentary.

The primary effect used on Gaye's vocals throughout *What's Going On* is reverb, which Veal (2007) explains as follows: "The reverberation unit blends a series of simulated echoes sequentially to stimulate spatial dimension within a recording" (71). In Gaye's case, the reverb effect is applied more heavily to the background vocals, making them seem distant. Interestingly, what we might call the 'lead' vocal—the one loudest in the mix, with the least amount of reverb—for much of the album stays in a lower register vocally, and remains sounding somewhat relaxed.

Gaye's former manager Joe Schnaffer has described Gaye's vocals as follows:

> "Those voices were often like a conversation. He would sing the song a certain way, but the backgrounds he'd sing a different way, making it like an answer. When we talk we say what we've already thought in our minds that we want to express. But at the same time we have other voices in the back of our minds…So Marvin's backgrounds would often say what he was really thinking, while his lead was what his mind wanted his mouth to say" (qtd. in Edmonds 2002, 175).

Within this dialogue it is the seemingly distant background vocals that usually move into the upper-register of Gaye's voice, and tend to sing the phrases more emphatically. The effect of this makes for a dynamic listening experience as the ethereal background vocals seem to keep stretching further and further into the stratosphere while the more immediate lead voice remains grounded. If considered in a spiritual sense, the background voices sound as if an inner-conscience is trying to break through the polluted skies but remains unable to do so.

Alternately, if the multiple voices of Marvin Gaye throughout the album are thought of in relation to the album's construction of time, it is valuable to remember that Gaye began singing as part of the background ensemble for the Moonglows, and often carried the higher tenor parts for the group. So the seemingly distant Marvin's singing in falsetto may also represent younger incarnations of the singer, calling back to him. In either case, the experience of hearing the reverb-laden background Marvin Gaye's engaging in call and response styled exchanges with the more present, lead Marvin calls to mind some kind of intriguing inner-dialogue, a formal, reflexive quality of the album.

These voices also inform the narrative arc of the album, which seems to climax with the fourth and fifth songs: "Save the Children" and "God is Love." In the first portion of the album leading up to "Save the Children," Gaye's voices are more-or-less together, harmonizing but not rhythmically separate, or seeming to respond to one another. "Save the Children" focuses on a spoken monologue delivered, or preached, by Gaye that begins with the morose lyric "Who really cares? Who's really willing to save a world destined to die?" before moving to refrains of "let's save all the children" and "save the babies."

The song's production and arrangement now separates the very close sounding speaking Marvin from the distant singing Marvin. The effect is as if the sonic simulacra's of Gaye's ego and superego have split, with "Wild" Bill Moore's saxophone as a kind of id, weaving its way throughout the inner-dialogue. "God is Love" continues this divided sound, but shifts musical gears into a far more ebullient mood following the grim "Save the Children."

From "God is Love" however the mood downshifts back towards the almost nostalgic "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)" which turns our attention from father to mother (earth) while again asking "Where did all the blue skies go"? Musically this final song on the A-side of the original LP seems to form an interesting sort of creation themed, chronological trilogy: first, there is the forward facing optimism of "Save the Children," encouraging listeners to save the world around them for the sake of new lives; second is the celebratory, present-tense "God is Love"; and finally the retrospective "Mercy Mercy Me," which is musically similar to the first two cuts on the album.

This is further reflected in the photograph on the back cover of the *What's Going On* in which Gaye is standing on a playground, wearing a black raincoat as though at a funeral, which covers up a mustard colored suit and tie—the kind that might have been picked out for him by the Motown Finishing school (Edmonds 2002, 200). Edmonds (2002) similarly contends that "The setting suggests that [Gaye] is presiding over the death of innocence, the unquestioning innocence that had created the Sound of Young America"—a former tagline for Motown (201).

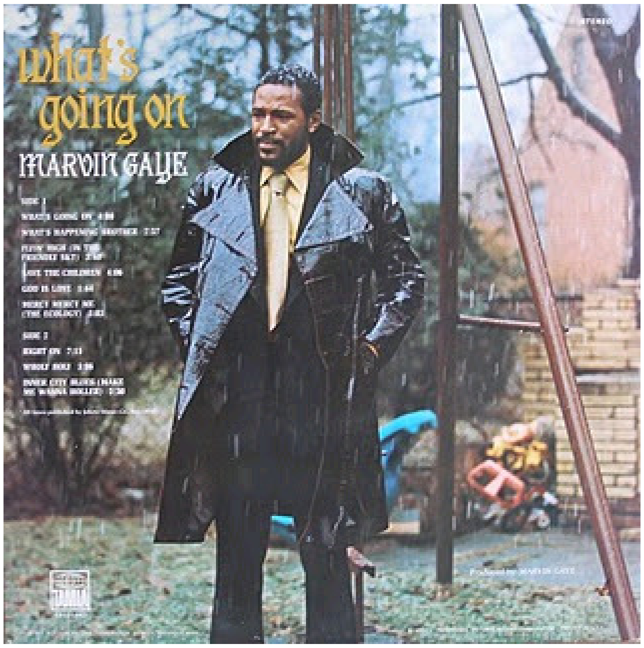

Figure 1.2.
The original back cover of *What's Going On*.[12]

Side B begins with another shift in gears musically to the more up-tempo and expansive "Right-On." To call the changes from one song to the next "shifting gears" is not accidental either, from the beginning of the album through "Right On" there is a singular almost unflinching rhythmic groove. It is only with the next-to-last song "Wholy Holy" that this pulse fully releases its grip.

"Wholy Holy" is also unique in that it is, for the most part, a singular voice of Marvin Gaye issuing a call for the audience to "come together." The reverb on this vocal is more balanced than elsewhere; neither too close nor too far. If *What's Going On* ended with “Wholy Holy” it would indeed be a much different album—not necessarily leaving the listener with closure so much as a moment of tranquility, and a feeling of optimism for the future. Instead, Gaye’s work ends with “Inner City Blues (Makes Me Wanna Holler)”, returning us to the present confusion.

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[12] Accessed online at: < http://myvinylreview.blogspot.com/2009/04/marvin-gaye-whats-going-on-and-lets-get_19.html> on April 27th, 2010. It should be noted the reissued CD version of the album cited elsewhere in this research features a very similar, though different photo.

Musically, and lyrically “Inner City Blues” bears a striking resemblance to the opening “What’s Going On,” however the cries to brother, sister, and father have been replaced with the frustrated “makes me wanna holler, what they do with my life.” The rhythmic current that had pulled the work along before “Wholy Holy” returns, as does Gaye’s octave-apart styled vocals as on ‘What’s Going On.”

What has changed is that Gaye now feels as though he is powerless, and utterly frustrated, despite his constant affirmations throughout the album that God will indeed deliver mercy. Towards the end of the song, Gaye reintroduces the refrain of “mother, mother” as though he has given up on the father. Following a dramatic musical climax, “Inner City Blues” breaks down to just Gaye’s dual voice singing plaintively to his “mother, mother.” The percussion and saxophone reenter together with Gaye’s voice, which now carries a heavy amount of reverb, and fade away together, back into the first song on Side A: “What’s Going On.”

Finally, it is important to identify one thing *What’s Going On* doesn’t talk about: sex, an omission Gaye would correct in abundance with 1974’s *Let’s Get it On*. Considering that almost the entirety of Gaye’s oeuvre at Motown up to this point had been songs about relationships it would no doubt come as a shock to fans that the one struggle Marvin isn't burdened by throughout *What's Going On* is problems with his significant other. For all the stylistic changes the singer made on this album, his conversion from sex-symbol to ascetic may have been the most immediately apparent departure for fans.

In conclusion, *What's Going On* met Marvin's ambitions of creating a work of "emotional and literary complexity" that would challenge his audience's expectations (Ritz, 149). Instead of following a simple linear narrative, Gaye instead employs a more fluid sense of time that looks to the past and future from an uncertain present through the widely applicable lens of the family.

This family metaphor also serves to situate the cyclical narrative within a religious framework—touching on issues of love, creation, mercy, and renewal. Ultimately, *What's Going On*'s impact seems to stem from the powerful allegorical association between Gaye's troubled relationship with his own father as a metaphor for a seemingly unloving or merciless paternal God in a world gone mad, as well as undercurrents of confusion surrounding Gaye's own identity and psyche—brought to life by Gaye's novel uses of reverb and multi-tracking.

MERCY MERCY ME (THE ECOLOGY)

What's Going On was released on May 21st, 1971 and quickly became the most successful album of Marvin Gaye's career, with three singles reaching the Top Ten by year's end (Ritz, 152). In addition to just selling however, the album dramatically altered the public's perception of Marvin Gaye the pop performer, who they now began to see as an artist. Critical reviews reflected this point as well, as major publications including *Time* and *Rolling Stone* magazine conceded that they had "underestimated Marvin Gaye" (Ritz, 148).

What is equally impressive is that the album was able to ascend the pop charts with musically ambitious material, and equally taboo lyrical content. As Ritz (1985) describes it:

> "It's easy to forget how radical the work was by 1971 standards…There was…the old adage that, lyrically at least, gospel and pop never mix. Jesus simply wasn't mentioned in secular song, not if you were aiming for a pop market. In one fell swoop, Marvin disproved these theories" (152).

The differences that have been described in this section are significant because they begin to point to popular music being not only listened to but also produced differently. I believe that Marvin's Gaye's conceptualization and creation of an album as a unified whole with very personal, spiritual lyrics, and his dynamic application of vocal recording techniques all underscore this broader shift.

Technologies of both record manufacturing, such as the microgroove 78rpm LP, and recording, such as multi-track tape, did not necessarily cause these aesthetic changes, but certainly played a significant role in facilitated them by becoming a means through which an artist like Gaye could exercise his agency and recreate his identity in opposition to that which had been constructed for him by Motown. Through his struggles with the label we begin to see the performing-singers of old becoming recording-artists, beholden to no one as they follow their muse.

The next chapter will turn to Sly Stone who allegedly changed the title of his group's 1971 release from *Africa Talks to You* to *There's a Riot Goin' On* in response to Gaye's album. The development of multi-track tape recording and editing and the malleability of these new materials allowed Stone to push the boundaries of his own agency as a producer, songwriter, and performer even further than had Marvin Gaye.

SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE - THERE’S A RIOT GOIN’ ON

In the closing pages of Miguel Cervantes’ seminal work, *Don Quixote*, the story’s protagonist—an antagonist unto himself—finally recognizes and denounces the error of his knight-errant ways. From his deathbed, Don Quixote curses the many books he read in his younger years, which he blames for having warped his mind into thinking that he too could become a heroic knight. Finally, shortly before he dies, Quixote changes his name back to Alonzo Quixano.

Historically, *Don Quixote* is a significant work because of how Cervantes critiqued literacy itself through the story, and its title character. As Ong (1977) explains, “*Don Quixote*...stands as a specimen of multilayered irony worked out through the most self-conscious interaction between author and printed text that the world had yet seen” (291).

Sly and the Family Stone’s 1971 album *There’s a Riot Goin’ On* is not unlike Quixote’s deathbed reversal. It is an album in which one can hear the once idealistic producer and performer known as Sly Stone retreating from a life of tilting pop music windmills to face his former self, Sylvester Stewart, and ask the same question posed by Marvin Gaye’s then-recent release: *What’s Going On?* The answer turned out to be one that not only questioned the late 1960s ideals championed by the Family Stone’s previous releases, but one that also calls attention to an increased sense of confusion and anxiety regarding Sly's role as his group's producer, songwriter, and star.

However unlike Cervantes' literary masterpiece, part of the enduring appeal of *There's a Riot Goin' On* for many listeners continues to be the question of whether it is the calculated creation of author Sylvester Stewart, or merely the absent-minded mumblings of his quixotic alter-ego, Sly Stone.

Drawing from Walter Ong's (1977) chapter titled "From Mimesis to Irony: Print and Writing as Integuments of Voice," this section will discuss a shift within Sly and the Family Stone's music from a mimetic approach to an ironic one, culminating with *There's a Riot Goin' On*. In addition it will address how the production of this album reflects the identity crisis Sly Stone was facing at this time, as the distinction between his life as a performer, and as an artist and producer was obscured.

SING A SIMPLE SONG

Just like a young Alonzo Quixano absorbing stories of chivalrous knights, Sylvester Stewart began his musical career as an avid audience member with an active imagination. This is not to say Sylvester couldn't play, he had been part of a number of bands as far back as an honest-to-goodness family band with his siblings growing up, but until the Stoners, who then became the Family Stone, formed Sly was primarily known as a fledgling record producer, and as a radio deejay/personality on one of San Francisco's leading 'black' stations: KSOL (Vincent, 91).

In many ways, the formation of the group was an extension of these roles for Stewart: he wanted to produce a group that could reproduce, and synthesize the pop music of the day. As Lewis (2006) concludes, it is evident from Stone's "colorblind" and exceedingly eclectic playlists on KSOL that "This is where Sly Stone was really born into the world, his persona and his aesthetic" (30).

John Turk, a member of the Stoners who left shortly before they became the Family Stone, recalls an early band meeting as follows:

> "The first rehearsal, we went to Sly's house and he brought out a bunch of albums and throws them on the floor. He says "Pick out a character." He had Beatles, the Turtles, and all that. We were jazz cats, we thought we were. What does that have to do with music? He was ahead of his time. He wanted a show, not just a musical band" (qtd. in Selvin, 25).

Saxophone player Jerry Martini has similarly pointed out that the multi-racial, male and female make-up of the group was as deliberate as their sartorial decisions: "[Sly] told me about it before we even started the band. He knew exactly what he was doing: boys, girls, black, white" (qtd. in Lewis, 36).

Musically too, Stone was attempting to assemble a kind of penultimate pop group, who began playing covers of the top songs of the moment, then fused those covers with originals—for instance Otis Redding's "I Can't Turn You Loose" into the original "Turn Me Loose"—before finally sticking to their own songs (Lewis, 37). And even the original material was, in some respects, unoriginal, drawing its strength more from an enjoyably eclectic sum than its otherwise formulaic parts.

This is important to consider because, as Ong (1977) explains, in “oral performance…everyone is saying everything to everybody through the mouth of the…performer. Speaker, audience, and subject form a kind of continuum” (276). “Mimetic ideas of art are based on acceptance of copying as a primary human enterprise. And oral cultures build their whole world of knowledge largely on copying in speech what has been said before” (284).

Ong goes on to explain that mnemonic devices such as copying, patterns, and repetition are therefore vitally important in an oral culture. There are several areas where these kinds of devices can be heard on Sly and the Family Stone’s early recordings which I’ll explain below. Briefly they are: first, most of the band’s lyrics are about music, or the song to which they’re a part; and second, the group often integrates familiar melodies (or musical clichés) into their songs. Ultimately these recurring elements induce a participatory response from the listener in which he or she feels as if the recording is a live event.

Even a passing glance at Sly and the Family Stone’s early albums begins to indicate that their favorite thing to write songs about is music, with titles such as “Dance to the Music,” “Ride the Rhythm,” “Sing a Simple Song,” and “Dance to the Medley” which is more-or-less an extended take on the previous ‘Dance’ song. “Dance to the Music” is perhaps the best example of one of the Family Stone’s song-songs. After a brief introduction of the song’s main melodic theme and chorus, “dance to the music,” it breaks down to nothing but drummer Gregg Errico’s gospel-infused beat.

From there, each member introduces his or her self vocally before entering back into the song instrumentally. First is guitarist Freddie Stone who sings: “All we need is a drummer, for people who only need a beat. I’m gonna add a little guitar, to make it easy to move your feet.” After a similar introduction from bassist Larry Graham, Sly introduces himself in a way that harkens back to the band’s practice of intertwining original and cover material, as he sings “you might like to hear my organ, playing ‘ride, sally, ride’” recalling the chorus of Mack Rice’s 1965 hit “Ride Sally Ride.”

Finally, Sly informs the audience that “[trumpeter] Cynthia [Robinson] and [saxophonist] Jerry [Martini] have got a message they’re saying,” to which the pair responds “all the squares go home!” before the now-full band moves back into the chorus. Ultimately, the effect of this deconstruction, and reintroduction of each instrument which often references an imagined, dancing audience, gives listeners the impression that they are hearing and participating in a live event.

Another device employed often by the Family Stone is to paraphrase familiar melodies. The opening track of the group’s first record, *A Whole New Thing*, in fact, finds the horn section playing a brooding version of “Frère Jacques” or “Ba-Ba Black Sheep” in a minor key before launching into the urgent, and funky “Underdog” which deals implicitly with racial inequality. Lyrically, Stone never identifies race as the variable which prevents the song’s title character from succeeding, but through the familiar nursery-song melody the audience is able to fill in the blanks, and make the association that the underdog being described is a 'black sheep.'

Similarly, the group's 1968 song "Plastic Jim" utilizes a slightly off-tempo reworking of the familiar melody from the Beatles' 1966 single "Eleanor Rigby." Veering dangerously close to Paul McCartney's original lyric "all the lonely people, where do they all come from?" the Family Stone sings "All the *plastic* people, *what* do they all come *for*?" The song then goes on to bemoan a fictional, misguided fixture of the local social scene called Plastic Jim who shows up at shows only to see and be seen.

Again, the reference to the Beatles—near the height of their popularity at the time—was a clever way to not only immediately get the audience humming along, but to have the listener filling in certain gaps in order to fully appreciate the song's intended message. "Plastic Jim" ends with the horns interpolating the familiar tune of "Mary had a Little Lamb," which serves to further characterize the Plastic Jim character as a naïve, mindless [white] follower. This coupling of "Eleanor Rigby" and "Mary had a Little Lamb" also seems to very subversively critique the high-art pretension of the Beatles output at that time by likening it to children's music.

More generally it is worth noting that, for the most part, early Family Stone albums do not deviate from basic verse-chorus pop song structures, or chord progressions. What was most unique about this material was how the band arranged the songs—incorporating syncopation and a jazz-influenced instrumental interplay—but not the song structures or recording techniques used (Lewis, Selvin). Sax player Jerry Martini later cited this rigid adherence to the formulas du jour as one of the reason's for Sly's frustration that ultimately boiled over on *There's a Riot Goin' On*. After several strong suggestions from the band's record label, Sly told Martini "'Okay, I'll give them something.' And that is when he took off with his formula style. He hated it. He just did it to sell records." (Selvin, 60).

In addition, Stone recorded and mixed the material in a fairly straightforward way, intended to sound "live." New effects such as reverb and echo which were finding their way onto more and more recordings–including psychedelic albums by the Family Stone's bay-area peers the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane—were used sparingly, if at all. As was the case with most other recordings before this era, Sly's straightforward production sought only to capture a good, clean sounding take of the Family Stone performing live, in the studio (Katz, 2005; Elborough, 2009; Milner, 2009).

To summarize, Sly and the Family Stone grew to become a unique group by virtue of their (calculated) kaleidoscopic image, and fusion of disparate pop music elements, but remained more-or-less bound to tried-and-true pop formulas. Musically and lyrically the group's studio work continued to employ live-performance formulas such as band member introductions; and mnemonic devices, like borrowing familiar musical phrases as a cue to listeners.

The end result is music that calls its audience to participation, and addresses its listener as if he or she is physically present with the band as the song is performed. More often than not these are songs about themselves: celebrations of music for music's sake.

And while the group's early work is not devoid of social commentary, topics are addressed either through episodic tales of fictitious caricatures like "Plastic Jim" and his female counterpart in "Jane is a Groupie," or slogan-like aphorisms such as "Everybody is a Star" or the "Love City" lyric: "listen to the future, tell me what you see? Brothers and sisters holding hands, and you sitting next to me."

Ong encourages any considerations of a work of literature to address the issue of "who is saying what to whom?" (1977, 274). Before *There's a Riot Goin' On* we may safely conclude that the music presented comes from Sly *and* the Family Stone as a collective—black, white, male and female—intended to represent everyone. Consistent with oral performance, this group of 'everyone' addresses everybody through music that copies and synthesizes everything else in a participatory fashion.

As it turns out, *There's a Riot Goin' On* is a significant departure from the music described above. At this point, it is important to discuss the group's career trajectory, and the social and technological circumstances leading into the production of the album. First, by addressing the mounting pressure on Stone which led to a heightened degree of self-consciousness about his relationship with, and responsibility to his music and audience; and second, by discussing the new creative possibilities being unlocked at this time by multi-track tape recording and stereo listening technology.

I WANT TO TAKE YOU HIGHER

Woodstock was arguably the pinnacle of Sly and the Family Stone's career, but also the beginning of their unraveling. Describing the 1969 festival as a "Battle of the Bands," *Rolling Stone* magazine concluded its review by saying that "Sly and the Family Stone, apart in their grandeur, won the battle, carrying to their own majestically freaked-out stratosphere."

The Family Stone agreed; drummer Gregg Errico described the enduring impact of the fest as follows:

> We got a lot of recognition after Woodstock. The band stood out. We increased our audience vastly from that performance and the exposure it gave the band. To me, the bigger our audiences got, the more intense things got. There was no middle ground…It depended on how Sly would handle it" (qtd. in Selvin, 79).

As Errico's assessment of Woodstock indicates, the pressure was on Sly to continue to deliver on stage and on record, but the demands of these two arenas were becoming increasingly distant by the end of the decade.

Discussing the impact of the Beatles ambitious multi-track productions in the mid-60s, Wald (2009) concludes that:

> "records were not a take-home equivalent or even a studio-enhanced improvement of live performances. They were, after 1966, the entirety of the group's musical oeuvre: fully conceived, finished objects in the same way that a book or painting is a fully conceived, finished object" (236).

Wald further elaborates that "The later Beatles LPs…were treated as musical novels, designed for individual contemplation in their entirety."

The album that carried the Family Stone into Woodstock, 1969's *Stand!*, actually straddled this growing divide between live and studio work quite well. As Lewis explains: "The eight-song *Stand!* is the first Sly and the Family Stone record without filler[13], a model that started controlling the record industry after *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* dropped two years prior. It's quite possibly the first soul record without filler, an LP full of strong potential singles" (62).

What is interesting about *Stand!* however are the few tracks that are not strong potential singles, but are aesthetically the most apparent precursors to *There's a Riot Goin' On.*: the searing "Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey" and the almost 14-minute "Sex Machine." With the former of these two, we find Sly tackling racial tensions head-on, and far less playfully than he had previously done with songs like "Underdog," while on the latter, the Family Stone seems to begin its sonic disassembly through a meandering, unstructured, and at times cacophonous jam.

DON'T CALL ME NIGGER, WHITEY

In the song "Don't Call Me Nigger, Whitey" Sly sings through a new device called a vocoder, making his voice sound robotic and somewhat unrecognizable. After singing the song’s title phrase, and its reverse (“don’t call me whitey, nigger”) he continues: “Well I was down, across the country, and I heard two voices ring. They were talking to each other, and neither one could change a thing.” Such lyrics provide a clear index of the growing racial divide in U.S. society.

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[13] As Lewis and Elborough (2009) explain, most LPs were intended to have the first song on Side A as a first radio-single, and the first song on Side B as a second single. The additional songs that followed these singles on each side of the LP were more-or-less superfluous 'filler' as far as the record company was concerned.

The struggle for racial equality in the United States had grown extraordinarily contentious by the end of the 1960s as blacks and whites struggled to determine whether long-standing cultural dividing lines ought to be erased, redrawn, or left alone. During this civil rights movement the black population has been characterized, very generally, as having been divided within, between two groups—exemplified by Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X—with regards to how to enact equality during this time period. The Martin Luther King Jr. model was one of non-violence, peaceful but impactful protests, and petitioning whites as peers to lend their support. Alternately Malcolm X’s approach was to seek more immediate change through more aggressive means, taking issue with King’s inference that blacks ought to conform and adapt to white culture (Doggett 2007, 70-76).

It is easy to imagine Sly and the Family Stone standing alongside King as an example of multi-racial harmony (literally and figuratively), but unfortunately for the Family Stone the bulk of the black artistic community found itself aligned with the more radical side of the spectrum. Doggett (2007) explains that “With their revolutionary culture under assault from every angle, black radicals were quick to claim artists of every hue as their spokesman, and just as primed to punish any sign of apostasy” (335).

As with most revolutionary movements, the artistic community was looked to for spokespeople, messengers, and torch-bearers. One influential 1968 book, "The Black Arts Movement" by Larry Neal, coalesced this call to artists and identified "the need to develop a Black aesthetic," unique from the white/Western system (qtd. in Y. Taylor 2009, 197). To name a few: James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, Funkadelic, and even several Motown acts joined the movement offering songs that both demanded equality from white listeners, and agreement within the black community.

The Family Stone's racially-mixed line-up and aesthetic became the target of increasing scrutiny from those aligned with The Black Arts Movement as the band was reaching its Woodstock plateau. "For black nationalist critics such as Amiri Baraka, the band's multi-racial approach was a sign of 'weakness'; the black members of the Family Stone were simply 'imitating imitations of ourselves'" (Doggett, 337). At the same time white members and management needed to be removed. David Kapralik, the Family Stone's [white] manager, recalled "in Boston some [Black] Panther members tried to get Syl[vester] to drop me, get rid of whitey, get rid of the devil. He wouldn't hear of it. The Panthers were after him" (qtd. in Selvin, 89).

Despite Sly's apparent disinterest in taking a firmer stand than "different strokes for different folks," the group was nevertheless aligned with the radical movement by its opposition. The most telling example was an infamous concert appearance to be held in Chicago's Grant Park which was canceled at the last minute for reasons that are still not entirely clear. Upon the show's cancelation a five hour riot ensued, ending in more than 150 arrests (Selvin, 105).

What is consistent in the disparate accounts of the Chicago riot is that the reasons for the cancelation were misrepresented in the press as being the band's decision, and not the City of Chicago's (see: Kaliss, Selvin, Doggett, Lewis). Regardless of what actually did happen, the group had gone from the heights of Woodstock—billed as three days of peace and music—to being identified with a city-wide race riot in less than a year. At the center of it all was Sly Stone, being pushed to move towards a more 'black aesthetic' on record, and a more black appearance in concert, even though he had designed his group to exemplify the kind of racial equality that at least he himself foresaw.

By all accounts it was also around this time period that Sly Stone began using cocaine on a regular basis. Many biographies of Stone assert that *There's a Riot Goin On* is poorly, or sloppily produced because of his drug use at the time—a kind of pharmacological determinism. My own opinion on this issue is that, while Stone's drug use undoubtedly impacted his relationships and music, it would not have 'impaired' his abilities to produce music.

Stone had college-level training as a producer, [the full-extent of which is not known], and presumably logged hundreds of hours editing segments during his tenure in the radio industry (Marcus, 69) More importantly, he had produced numerous records for the Family Stone and other acts. As the next section will discuss in greater detail, the studio was, for Sly, an instrument of sorts. Therefore I disagree with the characterization that Stone's cocaine-fueled production of *There's a Riot Goin' On* is careless as much as I'd disagree with someone saying Miles Davis' playing on *In a Silent Way* is shoddy, or Keith Moon's drumming on *The Who's Next* is slipshod.

Nevertheless, a parallel can be seen between Stone's growing drug habit, and his fears and anxieties about his next album. "Sing a Simple Song" and "Ride the Rhythm" would no longer suffice. The ability to speak as "everyone to everybody about everything," as the Family Stone had done so well up to this point, was dwindling as modernity fell out of focus.

SEX MACHINE

In many respects, Sly Stone went from wanting to sound like everyone to wanting to sound like no one. Artistically, he had become increasingly dissatisfied with the audience and record label appeasing pop music formulas he had been functioning from within. Despite forging a unique sound, the Family Stone had yet to deliver on the promise his first album's title made of *A Whole New Thing*. Meanwhile, Sly was being socially pressured to align himself, and his newfound celebrity, with some slice of an increasingly fragmented culture, which provided all the more incentive to distance himself even further from any existing "black" or "white" aesthetic, musical paradigms.

Stone has described his feelings at that time as follows:

> “People were coming from different kinds of record companies…people were talking to different people in the group, and telling me I didn’t need this person or that person, or telling [the group’s members] how they didn’t need this or that person. […] Those record companies have people…whose job it was to infiltrate inside an organized musical endeavor and separate and divide it up.” (qtd. in Kaliss, 96).

Whereas many artists at the time seemed to be embracing multi-track recording as a means of vastly enriching their sonic palette, for Stone it was a reflection of, or even an enabler to, the kind of Machiavellian band dismantling described above. As the previous section explained, a lot happened between Woodstock and the Chicago riot. “Don’t Call Me Nigger, Whitey” and “Sex Machine” stand in stark contrast to the rest of *Stand!*’s feel good singles like “You Can Make It If You Try,” “Everyday People,” and “Sing a Simple Song.”

However, these two outliers from *Stand!* speak to what lied ahead for an equally talented musician and producer like Sly Stone, as he explored the almost limitless possibilities promised by the shift to multi-track recording. While groups like the Beatles began enlisting ‘fifth-member’ producers—remnants from the days of separate musician/technician guilds—Stone was already wearing both hats.

Working as a musician *and* producer, Sly Stone had a unique opportunity to make music that would challenge the way new technologies were becoming a means through which the white and black musical aesthetics of the time were growing apart. Stone was a rare example of an artist who had already ascended into the control room to create his own work, but before *Riot* he had rarely seemed to indulge his creative impulses while working within his role as producer, preferring instead to capture a live performance like a good technician.

Moreover, as a black artist, Stone was also not unique in this respect. As Jonathan Eisen observed in a 1969 anthology on rock music:

> "The electronic music "bag" has been primarily confined to white musicians, with most blacks working in the area of jazz and soul…speaking to different constituencies in different idioms and with different meanings" (qtd. in Wald, 244).

What we begin to find on *Stand!*'s sprawling fourteen minute opus "Sex Machine" is Stone realizing the potential of the studio as a means to achieve his long-standing goal of merging black and white musical paradigms into a unique new sound. The aptly titled "Sex Machine" is a series of decidedly simple R&B chord progressions adorned with all the electronic, studio-engineered bells and whistles of a white rock record. Sly sings through a vocal effect called a vocoder while his brother, guitarist Freddie improvises (i.e. plays unrehearsed) solos through a series of guitar effect pedals (Kaliss, 69). Another, less audible, example of Stone beginning to exercise his editorial input as a producer is found in the punchy ending section of *Stand!*'s title track, in which "in a rare move" Stone re-recorded part of the song with session players and affixed it to the Family Stone's original (Kaliss, 68).

These subtle instances are a small but prophetic glance towards the production of *There's a Riot Goin' On*. The processes of 'improvise first and edit later', of not simply using multiple vocalists but manipulating the sounds of the vocals themselves, and more generally of constructing performances from multiple places and times, would be among the defining differences in Sly's forthcoming work.

RUNNIN' AWAY

By today's standards it is hard to imagine that *There's a Riot Goin' On* was marketed with the tagline "Two Years is a Short Time to Wait," referring to an unprecedented two-year interim between Family Stone albums, at the peak of their success no-less (Lewis, 69). As was customary for pop acts, Sly and the Family Stone had been on a schedule of releasing new music as often as possible. *A Whole New Thing* in 1967, *Dance to the Music* and *Life* in the spring and fall of '68 respectively, and the triple-platinum *Stand!* in May of '69 (Kayliss, 199-205); but by 1970 the demands of making an album were changing as "fans retooled their desires for and expectations of an LP" (Elborough, 245).

With this in mind Stone took up residence at783 Bel Air, a house best known as the mansion seen in the opening credits of the 1960s television hit *The Beverly Hillbillies*, which had since been converted into a home studio (Selvin, 2006). For just $12,000 a month, Sly lived and recorded both inside the home, "in the attic…accessible…by a hidden staircase behind a bookcase" and outside in a "Winnebago camper parked near the mansion and fitted with state-of-the-art recording gear" (Kayliss, 92). Ironically however, this was the first time that the Family Stone's members did not live together during a recording session, as they had done previously while working in professional studios (Selvin, 2006).

One of the primary appeals of a home recording environment, which led Sly Stone as well as the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and others at the time, to take up shop in repurposed estates, was the kind of informality one might expect from such a situation. An additional, somewhat unforeseen effect, however is that the sounds themselves are also impacted. For instance, the well-known, oft-imitated drum sound on Zeppelin's "When the Levee Breaks" was recorded in an entryway/stairwell at the home the band was recording in because of the space's unique reverberation, while the rest of the song's parts were captured in other, less echoic rooms (Milner, 15).

In Sly's case, as Kayliss (2009) puts it "The resulting music lacked the live, spacious ambience of the whole band playing together in real time" as compared to their earlier work, resulting in a "compressed, claustrophobic density" (91). Sonically, the sounds accurately reflect the fact that they were spawned in a small attic, and/or trailer.

The recordings undoubtedly also lacked the sense of 'the whole band playing together in real time' because the band did not, as a matter of fact, play any of the songs together. The bulk of the album's content was played by Stone himself, accompanied by a new drum machine, the Maestro Rhythm King MK-1 which Stone referred to as the "Funk Box" (Lewis, 74-76). The parts not played by Stone were assembled together by him, manipulating the tape to such an extent that he "actually threatened to wear out the magnetic oxide coating on the recording tape" (Kayliss, 91).

Uncertainty surrounding the album's personnel is as apparent in its accompanying artwork as its musical content. All songs are credited as having been "Written, Arranged, and Produced by Sylvester Stewart & Sly Stone." No other performers are identified by text, but appear instead as part of a collage on the back cover containing dozens of photos of Family Stone members, guest musicians (including Billy Preston and Bobby Womack), dogs, children, cars, etc. Perhaps more tellingly, the front cover of the LP was the first Family Stone album that did not feature a photo of the entire group, but rather an American flag—with stylized, 8-pointed stars/suns instead of the customary stars—which hung as decoration in the Bel Air mansion (Lewis, 70). By the group's next album, *Fresh*, it was just Sly on the cover.

Family Stone bass player Larry Graham has corroborated this evolution of the group's record-making habits, saying

> "the *Riot* album was for the most part overdubbed. I would say that generally the other stuff was us playing together with some overdubs. But *Riot* was recorded in a totally different way than we had recorded in that I didn't play anything…with the rest of the band" (qtd. in Selvin, 132).

Tom Donahue, an engineer who observed Stone's approach on *Fresh*, has also explained that "[Sly] was so innovative in the process of recording. He was the first guy to record piecemeal, one track at a time. […] He's hearing in his imagination the ultimate product, so he can understand what each individual thing is" (qtd. in Kayliss, 109).

Stone's use of the drum machine first appeared on a song he produced for the group Little Sister, which made its way into the Top Ten and is credited as having been "the first American pop song to feature a drum machine" (Lewis, 74). Beyond simply being the first, Sly's use of the drum machine has been cited as groundbreaking, and praised even by the drummer it replaced, Gregg Erricco.

According to Erricco the Rhythm King "was a lounge instrument that the guy at the bar at Holiday Inn might have used. Sly took the ticky-ticky-tacky [sounds produced by the machine], which started on the 'tick,' and he inverted it, turned it inside out, into something the ear wasn't used to" (qtd. in Kayliss, 92). Put another way, it is remarkable that Stone was able to wrangle surprisingly slinky, almost danceable grooves out of such a rigid device. Moreover, it's impressive and intriguing that he would elect to use a machine in place of Erricco, or any other human drummer, black or white.

In looking at the production process used to create *There's a Riot Goin' On* a theme emerges that would ultimately be reflected in the album's reception upon its November, 1971 release: confusion. Those who had criticized Stone for employing a white drummer would find…a drum machine? Fans looking to Stone's lyrics to hear his take on the volatile social climate in the United States would find…yodeling? Most incredibly, when the audience's record player needles got to the title track of the album…there was nothing. A song 0:00 in length[14]. End of Side A. What a riot.

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[14] But which is nevertheless available to be purchased and downloaded at the iTunes and Amazon online music stores.

THANK YOU (FALETTINME BE MICE ELF AGIN)

If one line seems to encapsulate the general response to *There's a Riot Goin' On* from critics, it's a feeling that is described midway through *Rolling Stone* magazine's review. "…at first I was appalled, now I'm fascinated." A similar uncertainty prompted *Creem* magazine (a popular music publication on par with *Rolling Stone* at the time) writer Greil Marcus, citing how confusing the album was upon first listening, to review it on three separate occasions (qtd. in Kayliss, 95).

In fact Marcus' enduring interest with the album eventually culminated in a (1974) chapter titled "Sly Stone: The Myth of Staggerlee" which remains one of the most insightful critiques on Stone's music, specifically addressing *Riot*. What Marcus unlocks in his analysis is that with this album "Sly questioned his earlier music and our love for it" (94). *Riot* was "a matrix of parody and vicious self-criticism" that "called all the old music and the reasons for claiming it into question" (72).

Rolling Stone and *Creem*'s reviews were actually unique in that while they express that they did not enjoy listening to the album like most of their peers, they did not dismiss it either (Marcus, 268). In fact the *Rolling Stone* review concludes by asserting that while it is "hard to take" *There's a Riot Goin' On* is nevertheless "one of the most important fucking albums this year."

To some extent its puzzling that an album considered un-enjoyable could also be hailed as among the most important. The next section will explore this question of why enjoyment took a backseat as Sly and the Family Stone's audience grappled with *There's a Riot Goin' On* by addressing the music itself. In particular, this analysis will highlight a few of the ways that Sly seems to prod at his listeners, often using himself as the brunt of a few sly (for lack of a better word) jokes.

My hope is that by illustrating these aspects of *There's a Riot Goin' On* it will become clear that Sly and the Family Stone was moving from a mimetic group that performed inherently participatory music which synthesized the pop music spectrum of the day, to a vehicle through which Sly Stone could craft an ironic text. Beyond simply exemplifying an ironic text *There's a Riot Goin' On*, like *Don Quixote*, is useful to examine because it happens to take aim, subversively, at its own medium, audience, and creator.

THERE'S A RIOT GOIN' ON

The story of *There's a Riot Goin' On* can almost be told by the album's lead-off track, "Luv N' Haight," the title of which playfully refers to a district in the Family Stone's home city, San Francisco, which became an epicenter of the counterculture movement in the late 1960s. The song begins with thirteen seconds of the drums and bass not necessarily playing but getting ready to play. What follows is a hook that bears a striking resemblance to one of the main melodic phrases from aforementioned, "Underdog" which began the Family Stone's first album.

In both cases the melodic phrase is building a chord, ascending to the next note with each step, but whereas "Underdog" resolves the chord by having the horns and female vocalists leap up an octave, which packs a dramatic punch, "Luv N' Haight" takes a seemingly insecure step back down. In comparing these two it's also worth highlighting the fact that the introduction of "Underdog" incorporates a familiar melodic phrase from the song "Ba Ba Black Sheep" while during this introduction of "Luv N' Haight" that brings "Underdog" to mind, Stone sings "yes sir, yes sir" as though finishing the lyric from his 1967 paraphrasing: "yes sir, yes sir, three bags full."

The main lyric of "Luv N' Haight" pretty well sums up Stone's mood for the rest of the album as he sings "feel so good inside myself, don't want to move" a few (dozen) times. As the song progresses the female vocalists take the line over, appearing on the left and right side of the studio mix while a centered Stone squeals and screams. As compared to the heavy use of reverb applied to many of Marvin Gaye's vocals throughout *What's Going On*, Stone's vocals are extremely flat. Not only do they lack the kind of ambience of being recorded in a larger room, there are times when Sly breathes onto and into the microphone to an almost unsettling degree.

"Luv N' Haight" also sets the structural precedent for the album, which is chaos. What we might call the first verse finds Stone repeating the "feel so good…" lyric twice, which comes across as only half a verse, before segueing into the chorus—sung by the female background vocalists who we'll assume are the Family Stone's Cynthia Robinson and Rose Stone.

After a barely audible chorus, the song goes skittering back into the somewhat chaotic, heavily syncopated verse for two more lines from Sly, then back to an instrumental chorus, then another run through the opening phrase, and finally back into the verse. The first two bars of the verse this time—and remember the previous verses have only been two bars long—are instrumental, before Sly jumps back in with "feels so good…" as if he had missed his cue. A third chorus then appears with different lyrics than the first, before leading back to the left and right channel call and response between female vocalists.

The song is a far cry from "Dance to the Music" to say the least. Instead of inviting us to "get up and dance" Sly is now informing us that he's staying inside himself and "don't wanna move." What appears to be the chorus of the song musically is lyrically different each time, while the space that one might expect to be filled by verses contains a single phrase repeated over and over. The strange thing about listening to the song is that it has all the pieces of a good, run-of-the-mill Sly and the Family Stone song, but it's as if the parts have been misassembled.

"Luv N' Haight" also points to a much different lyrical tone throughout the album, with Stone either facing inward to either talk about himself, or turning back out to the audience to spew banalities, as with the nonsensical "p'wow wow wow" chants on "Africa Talks to You "The Asphalt Jungle,"" or the yodeling on "Spaced Cowboy." Stone's self-consciousness is perhaps most pronounced on "Poet," which gets back to his habit of writing songs about music, but this time writes a song about writing songs. Sly sings lines like “My only weapon is my pen, I’m a songwriter, a poet” for about the first minute and a half of the song before it becomes an instrumental for its remaining minute and a half.

After letting listeners anxiously wait over a minute for Stone to brandish his lyrical weapon, “Family Affair” begins with the voice of Stone’s sister, Rose. Another curious thing about *There’s a Riot Goin’ On* is that it does have a few straightforward songs, several of which became some of the group’s biggest hits including “Family Affair,” “(You Caught Me) Smilin’,” and “Runnin’ Away,” but in each case these songs are sung by Rose, and/or Cynthia (Robinson). In a sense, the sound of the female singer’s feels like a relief as opposed to Sly, positioning him as something of an antagonist throughout the album.

Lyrically, the female voices also seem to be the voice of reason amid Stone’s ramblings. Rose brings us out of Sly’s self-important “Poet” with “Family Affair,” and remedies the paranoid “Brave and Strong”—in which Stone sternly tells us he “Ain’t got a friend”—with her warm delivery on “(You Caught Me) Smilin’.” Finally, Rose seems to poke fun at her brother’s absurd, drug-inspired “Spaced Cowboy” with its follow-up “Runnin’ Away” on which she sings: “Running Away, to get away, Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!...look at you foolin’ you” and “Making blues of night and day, Hee! Hee! Hee! Hee! You’re stretching out your dues, look at you foolin’ you.” In each instance, it’s easy to lose sight of the fact that, even though Rose is singing the words, Sly wrote them (he is after all, a songwriter).

Similarly, there are instances of Sly himself singing seemingly self-referential lyrics that allude to the Family Stone's past. In particular, he takes two of the band's most recent and most successful songs before *There's a Riot Goin' On*; the album-less singles, "Hot Fun in the Summertime" and "Thank You (Falletinme Be Mice Elf Agin)." First, on "Africa Talks to You," Sly blurs the lines between which lyrics have to do with himself and the band, and which are directed at society at large when he sings "summer gets cold, when today gets old" within a repeated refrain of "Timber! All falls down!"

On the one hand this could refer to the summer of love, as with the song title "Luv N' Haight," while on the other, it could just as easily refer to Stone's own frustration with having to stay fashionable by churning out a new single each season, such as "Hot Sun in the Summertime," a perfunctory pop ode to the summertime with lyrics that are prosaic even by Family Stone standards.

A more obvious instance of Sly taking on his older material like this is *There's a Riot Goin' On*'s closing track "Thank You for Talkin' to Me Africa." The song begins as a kind of slow-motion rehashing of the original, upbeat "Thank You," and even recycles the lyrics verbatim in the opening minutes of the song. Midway through however, Stone names several of his band's most well-known singles, as he lethargically sings "Dance to the music, all night long, Everyday people, Sing a simple song."

Shortly after this invocation of his own song titles, Sly closes *There's a Riot Goin' On* with the lyric "Dyin' young is hard to take, Sellin' out is harder" before returning to the chorus of "Thank you for lettin' me be myself again." These lyrics are particularly impactful in light of the then-recent deaths of, among others, Jimi Hendrix with whom Stone bonded as a fellow counterculture star and with whom he had planned to collaborate. It is almost as though by surviving, Stone has sold-out—a strangely enduring myth in popular music which has again been seen more recently with grunge (for instance criticisms aimed at groups like Pearl Jam and Soundgarden after the deaths of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain, Blind Melon's Shannon Hoon, and Alice in Chains' Layne Staley, among others) and rap (directed at rappers including Ice Cube and Dr. Dre following the deaths of Eazy-E, Tupac Shakur, Notorious B.I.G., and others).

Regardless what Stone sings however, it is the music on *There's a Riot Goin' On* that is ultimately the most unsettling, or at the least confusing. As described earlier with regards to the structure of "Luv N' Haight," songs throughout the album skew the usual pop song verse-chorus templates, opting at times for a unstructured, free-jazz sounding excursions instead. Most notable among these are the lengthy "Africa Talks to You "The Asphalt Jungle," and "Thank You for Talkin' to me Africa."

Both songs appear tedious at first listen, adhering to a rigid beat built around the ticking 'Funk Box' drum machine. What is strange is that, particularly in "Africa Talks to You," Stone makes a habit of foregrounding certain sound throughout the song's lengthy instrumental passages. What I mean by this is that the sound of the bass for instance becomes louder, and moves toward the center of the stereo mix around the 2:55 mark. Later, the keyboard takes a turn, then the guitar. In a way it is not unlike the band's former practice of taking turns for each member to introduce his or herself, only the effect of this new method is far more confounding.

Furthermore, while this kind of foregrounding would make sense if each instrument was taking a solo for a few bars, there does not seem to be a rhyme or reason to when Stone chooses to turn the sounds up. In my own listening to the album something I've found is that having an awareness of this makes for a much more active, but in my opinion more enjoyable, listening experience. The instrument that is loudest in the mix at any given moment usually drowns out a much more interesting melody being played by an instrument that is lower in the mix.

Stone's strange mixing also seems to play off of his own misgivings about celebrity, and the notion that "Everybody is a Star." For a moment the bass part becomes the focal point of the song, even though there's nothing terribly special about it. The interesting thing is the interplay of all the instruments and how precariously the sounds teeter between tight funk and cacophonous chaos, but as listeners we're baited into focusing on whichever voice is the loudest, which tends to distort our overall impression of the music. A comparable visual metaphor might be focusing a camera's lens on a single tree, rendering the forest behind it a blur.

Many reviews then and now still describe the album in this way: murky, swampy, blurring, and so on. My own feeling is that were *There's a Riot Goin' On* recorded more clearly, and mixed more evenly it might be considered one of the sharpest, tightest funk or rock albums of its time. However Stone's unlikely production choices seem to demand our attention above and beyond the songs themselves, and the audience is either left to wonder what he was thinking, or to project their own interpretations onto the exceedingly ambiguous material.

To return to the initial question posed at the start of this section, how could a pop album that was at first listen confusing and un-enjoyable be somehow considered important at the same time? Even the high-art pretensions of The Beatles still delivered appetizing music, for the most part. Sly and the Family Stone's *There's a Riot Goin' On* was and is an important album because it challenged the audience's assumptions about popular music in general.

Moreover, Sly Stone mocked these expectations by delivering an album that still has listeners guessing as to whether it is overwrought with, or totally devoid of, any meaning whatsoever. Whichever side of that argument you fall on, what remains important to the current research is the question itself. Just a few short years earlier Sly and the Family Stone were content telling their fans to "get up and dance to the music" and their fans were content to do so. But by 1971 we find Sly constructing a text that could be scoured for meaning, both musically, and with regards to the ideological commitments of the artist's therein.

POET

In conclusion, Ong provides the very useful query “who is saying what to whom” as a means of analyzing a text (1977, 274). Specifically, he concludes that this question “becomes confusingly and sometimes devastatingly complicated” following “the invention of writing, and much more after the invention” (1977, 279). *Don Quixote* is of particular interest to Ong and others because it a story in which a man is driven to madness by reading novels, told through a novel. Published in two parts, readers are also led to believe that Quixote himself read part one, the fallout of which he must deal with in part two of the story.

In much the same way *There’s a Riot Goin’ On* is an album through which Sylvester Stewart has to struggle through the ramifications of being Sly Stone, a character of his own invention. Just as Quixote denounces his own madness from his deathbed, Stone concludes the album with the heartbreaking line “Dyin’ out is hard to take, selling out is harder.” Feeling the same pressures that led to the implosion of many bands and artists at the turn of the decade between 1960 and 1970, Stone seems to be similarly denouncing his own alter-ego.

The next chapter will return to another Motown prodigy, Stevie Wonder, who was in the midst of an incredible burst of creativity as Gaye and Stone released the albums that have been previously discussed. With Marvin Gaye we saw an artist aspiring to be respected as such and to be given the agency to pursue his own creative vision. With Sly Stone that same agency became a burden as he grappled with how to address a fragmenting society whose expectations from pop stars were influx. Ultimately Stone's response was to turn the question back on his audience.

The third and final analysis that follows will focus on how Stevie Wonder was able to split the difference between Gaye and Stone. In addition it will address the role of the synthesizer in Wonder's work, and how the seeming newness of the sounds impacted the artist's conceptualizations of them.

STEVIE WONDER - TALKING BOOK

Up to this point, this research has had something a forward trajectory. Through the story of Marvin Gaye we saw a struggle for agency, or a process through which Gaye secured enough artistic control that he could produce a unique and personal album without Motown's sonic stamp or editorial oversight. From there we explored Sly Stone's struggle with agency as he produced a self-conscious and subversive album that provided a demanding audience with more questions than answers, reflecting the fragmented zeitgeist of the time. In both cases we have seen these issues reflecting in the processes of producing *What's Going On* and *There's a Riot Goin' On*, as well as in the musical texts themselves.

Stevie Wonder provides an excellent final case study because in many respects Wonder was able to reach a kind of equilibrium, and own his agency more successfully than Gaye and Stone. However as this section will show, while Wonder continued along a similar path in some respects, part of the reason he was able to wear his agency so comfortably was because he also took a few important steps backward.

In the introductory section of this research I described an apparent disconnect in writing on popular music—and it's social and technological history—between the break-up of the Beatles in 1970 and Michael Jackson's *Thriller* in 1982. Stevie Wonder is additionally useful because in many ways his own career arc from 1970 to 1976 bridges this gap[15]. This chapter will therefore examine this period in Wonder's career: from his 1970 cover of the Beatles "We Can Work it Out," "the first track he performed, produced and arranged completely by himself" to 1976's sprawling masterpiece "Songs in the Key of Life" (Lundy, 44).

Whereas *What's Going On* and *There's a Riot Goin' On* were considered more radical stylistic departures from their creators' earlier work, Wonder's evolution was not as instantaneous. Therefore *Talking Book* will not be analyzed as closely, or as a point of departure, but instead as a turning point when Wonder started to split the difference between an artist-as-author model in which he was solely responsible for every aspect of an album's production, to an artist-as-auteur arrangement wherein roles are re-delegated in accordance with the artist's overarching vision.

This process for Stevie Wonder actually covers a staggering six albums released in as many years: 1971's *Where I'm Coming From*, 1972's *Music of My Mind* and *Talking Book*, 73's *Innervisions*, 74's *Fulfillingness' First Finale*, and finally the double and a half LP[16], 1976's *Songs in the Key of Life*. This section will discuss aspects of each of these albums while focusing specifically on a few key components. First, it will address Wonder's contractual disputes with Motown, which were inspired largely by Gaye's fight but had a few very interesting distinctions.

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[15] Coincidentally there are a number of connections between Wonder, McCartney, and Jackson, all three of whom collaborated on various songs and projects together during the late 1970s.

[16] *Songs in the Key of Life* was released as two LP (long playing) records and an EP, which is short for an 'extended play' single, slightly longer than the traditional two-song single disc but shorter than a full album.

Second, it will explore Wonder's relationship with engineer/producers Bob Margouleff and Malcolm Cecil who helped Wonder wrangle a massive assemblage of analog synthesizers called TONTO, both in terms of this trios unique work regimen, and how the assignment of credit for Margouleff and Cecil's contributions became a confusing and contentious issue.

Finally, this section will explore Wonder's intriguing relationship with synthesizers throughout this period, and the impressive degree to which the artist conceptualized the perceived 'new' sounds produced by the devices as divinely inspired extensions of himself. We'll see that whereas Gaye employed his newfound agency to oversee a particular arrangement of sounds, and Stone chose to manipulate the musical material available to him, Wonder aimed instead at creating a sound that was inextricably fused with himself, and a kind of embodied voice within the sounds themselves.

THE 12 YEAR OLD GENIUS

In 1961 an eleven year old boy named Steveland Morris joined the then-two year old Motown record label (Davis, 21). By 1963 the label had transformed this boy into Stevie Wonder, "The 12 Year Old Genius" according to the title of his album released that year. Regardless whether the boy was born a genius or not, his signing with Motown was an enrollment in the most prestigious pop music academy imaginable. It could be said that Stevie Wonder, more than any song, album, or group, is the greatest thing Berry Gordy's assembly line every produced.

Davis (2003) recounts how

> "During Wonder's grooming process, he was given free run of the Motown building, but spent most of his time in and around the studio. Many songs, therefore, actually feature an uncredited Wonder as a vocalist, drummer, hand-clapper, box banger or chain rattler" (24).

It also became apparent that the young studio fixture was a fast learner. A gift for mimicry became apparent as young Stevie began sneaking into label president Berry Gordy's office to "issue edicts over the intercom, speaking in a dead-on imitation" (Ribowsky 2010, 63). In much the same way Wonder spent his formative years assimilating through what Lundy calls "proximate osmosis" the unique timbres, inflections, and various other idiosyncrasies of his fellow musicians and singers at Motown (41). Even by the time Wonder recorded his very first single for the label in 1962 he had already "not only stockpiled his own compositions, but had mastered the drums, harmonica and piano" (Davis, 26).

These personality traits, already obvious in the 12 year old, are worth highlighting because in many ways they are the very characteristics that inform the rest of this chapter. The restless spirit that kept Stevie constantly wandering around his home away from home, the studio; the indefatigable curiosity that led him from instrument to instrument, and the ear to learn them all; and an impish demeanor, coupled with a boy-genius sized ego, that would eventually find him back in Gordy's office issuing edicts of a much more serious nature.

Stevie Wonder's talent continued to blossom throughout the 1960s at Motown, eventually prompting the label to allow him to, in some respects, beat Marvin Gaye to the punch by producing *Where I'm Coming From*. As the previous chapters have explained, multi-track recording had become ubiquitous by the late 1960s, and was allowing multi-instrumentalists like Wonder to bounce around the studio, recording each and every part of a given song. Such was the case on Wonder's 1970 album *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered* which was recorded by the artist with very little outside support, but nevertheless stuck with Motown's familiar song-style and overall aesthetic.

Thanks in part to that albums success, Gordy decided to roll the dice for its follow-up and let Wonder follow his muse. *Where I'm Coming From* was an entirely self-produced, (hyper) socially conscious, and decidedly un-Motown sounding album released in April of 1971, a little over a month before *What's Going On*.

Rolling Stone magazine's Vince Aletti reviewed the albums together, saying:

> "Ambitious, personal albums may be a glut on the market elsewhere, but at Motown they're something new. These, from two of the Corporation's Finest [sic], represent a subversive concept, allowed only to producers, the overseer/stars of Motown's corporate plantation…Both Gaye and Wonder have been relatively independent at Motown, their careers following their own fluctuations outside the mainstream studio trends, but these latest albums are departures even for them" (qtd. in Ribowski, 191-192).

Unfortunately Aletti's review diverges from there, assigning high praise to Gaye while condemning Wonder's work as both a lyrical and musical misfire (Ribowski, 192). But it wasn't all bad that *Where I'm Coming From* turned out to be a commercial failure because it would be Wonder's last album under his contract with Motown at the time. Following Gaye's lead, Stevie Wonder—whose mother had signed his original contracts while he was just eleven years old—had his lawyers send the label a letter on his 21st birthday demanding that he be paid monies due to him, including a sizeable trust fund (Lodder, 71).

Accounts differ as to how much Stevie Wonder actually received, but it is certain he was paid a sum of money somewhere between 1 and 3.5 million dollars by the label.[17] Despite having settled on past debts however Wonder and Motown were not finding any common ground on a future relationship, and so Stevie exercised an option to void the contract. It wouldn't take too long for a phalanx of lawyers to get Wonder back on the

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[17] Motown owed Wonder both the trust fund, and unpaid royalties. It's my impression that the amount Wonder actually received is reported differently by most sources because some include only the trust fund, others include the trust, plus a guess as to the value of the royalties, while a third group simply misquotes original sources. Based on what I've read, I'd align myself with the account that Wonder received a 1 million trust fund, and an unknown but relatively insufficient amount of unpaid royalties.

Motown roster, but in the interim the free-agent artist left Hitsville USA almost immediately to head to New York City in search of a new sound (Ribowsky, 196).

Before rejoining Wonder in New York to discuss the music he made there with Bob Margouleff and Malcolm Cecil, I'd like to continue on through to the resolution of this contractual issue. One of the more concise explanations of the rights guaranteed to songwriters by the U.S. copyright system is that these rights are like a bundle of sticks; that is to say the multiple avenues through which a song can make money (i.e. live performance, radio play, album sales, film and television licensing, etc.) and the multiple roles involved in a song's creation, recording and release (i.e. writer, arranger, performers, producer, promotion, etc.) are considered as separate entities according to copyright law and may be grouped together as dictated by the song. An artist's contract therefore determines which sticks go to whom.

Marvin Gaye explains how Motown handled this distribution:

> "Berry [Gordy] had the publishing wrapped up from the beginning. You could write songs at Motown, but you'd never own any of your copyrights…You'd get paid as an employee—paid very little—but no one except Berry kept any ownership…We were all helping Berry build his catalogue" (Ritz, 61).

The disputes between Marvin Gaye and Motown discussed in an earlier chapter resulted from Gaye producing *What's Going On* more-or-less behind the label's back, then demanding they release the finished product. The creative control he obtained therefore was first forced, then granted when Gaye signed an extremely lucrative contract in 1973 before the release of *Let's Get it On* (Ritz, 184). In addition, by circumventing the label's usual production process Gaye was able to keep performer, producer, and songwriter royalties for most of the album, which was both successful enough and unique enough that Motown knew better than to challenge Gaye's rights to the material.

Stevie Wonder wanted the same degree of autonomy as Gaye had exercised, but with an up-front guarantee that he could produce what he wanted and the label had to release it, and that's exactly what he got. It is difficult not to understate just how substantial the contract Wonder eventually re-signed with Motown in 1975 was. Stevie received: "complete creative control for five years, including the content of each album and its packaging," the right to "work with any other artist he desired," "control of his publishing and…generous royalties—including back royalties for previous releases," and an advance upon signing that "bested what he had earned in the previous decade" (Lundy, 15, 74).

While Paul McCartney and Elton John were receiving in the neighborhood of 8 million dollars, and 12 to 15 percent of their royalties, Wonder was promised 13 million dollars and 20 percent (Ribowski, 257). Johanan Vigoda, the attorney who was primarily responsible for negotiating the contract on Wonder's behalf, describes its significance at the time:

> "He broke tradition with the deal, legally, professionally—in terms of how he could cut his records and where he could cut—and in breaking tradition he opened up the future…[Motown] had single records, they managed to create a name in certain areas, but they never came through with a major, major artist" (qtd. in Lundy, 74-75).

Perhaps most astonishingly of all, “Wonder’s approval was required should Gordy ever decide to sell Motown,” a right which “Wonder exercised…twice in the early 80s” (Lundy, 15).

So, as was explained in an earlier chapter, record companies began as record *labels*, an identifying mark indicating which larger company, in the interest of bolstering the sales of a more substantial product, had recorded the music. Next the labels became entities unto themselves, built and branded to cater to a particular niche within the music buying pubic. The shift we have now seen started with Marvin Gaye and carried to a greater degree by Stevie Wonder, is an arrangement in which artists are in the seat of power, producing recordings autonomously as labels compete for the right to release the results.

Obviously this is not an across-the-board, fixed and permanent change to the music industry which still produces its perennial pop produce, but it does seem indicative of a changed perception of the recording artist which I would contend is largely the result of the consolidation of roles, and expanded aesthetic possibilities, in the music production process. Songs were no longer written then recorded live in the studio; music was now created in the studio.

These contractual issues are additionally interesting in the case of Stevie Wonder because, as the next section will explain, Wonder truly felt that the sounds he had already begun to form on *Where I’m Coming From*, and would go on to create with Bob Margouleff and Cecil Malcolm in New York City, were altogether new and had not simply been uttered as by playing an instrument, but created, in a more divine sense, out of his own subconscious.

The next section will first explain, then analyze to some extent, the synthesizer devices which became a defining characteristic of Stevie Wonder's sound in the 1970s. From there it will turn specifically to TONTO, a large assemblage of synthesizers built by Bob Margouleff and Malcolm Cecil, and used to great effect by Stevie Wonder.

SWITCHED-ON: SONOROUS OBJECTS

Karl Stockhausen, called "the most important and influential of the European avant-garde composers who emerged after World War II" identified 1953 as the birth-date of electronic music (Stockhausen, 370). In his 1958 article "Electronic and Instrumental Music," Stockhausen explains the post-war interest in "the sound material employed," in addition to what he calls "musical language" or the traditional elements of a musical composition (ed. Cox and Warner, 371). He notes that prior to the development of electronic music "existing instrumental sounds are…dependent on the construction of the instruments and the manner of playing them: they are objects (Stockhausen, 371)."

Therefore, Stockhausen states what might be considered an underlying goal in the development of electronic instruments: that the "structure of material and structure of work ought to be one" (Stockhausen, 372). Stated another way, "In electronic music…the composer, in collaboration with some technicians, realizes the entire work” (Stockhausen, 373).

It is important at this point to briefly explain what exactly a ‘synthesized’ sound is. A sound is a vibration in the air. When a microphone records, it translates these vibrations into an electronic signal, or current, which is then translated back into vibrations by amplifiers, or speakers. Through the research of Stockhausen and others, scientists began to determine various attributes of this intermediary electrical current, and how it could be manipulated to alter what was reproduced by the speakers on the other end.

This eventually led them to begin manipulating raw electrical currents, independent from any microphone source, which produced what another theorist, Pierre Schaeffer, dubbed a “sonorous object,” or a sound “contained entirely in our perceptive consciousness” (Schaeffer, 79). However Stockhausen, Schaeffer, and their peers’ experiments with synthesized sound were primarily just that: experiments, and/or extremely avant-garde musical compositions. Early synthesizer devices were “largely built for academic composition studios,” and remained inaccessible to most musicians (Lodder, 67). The incorporation of these instruments and sounds into the broader context of popular music took several decades.

The Monterey Pop Festival, held in Monterey California in 1967, is perhaps best remembered by its explosive finale. The festival’s two headlining acts, Jimi Hendrix and The Who, both ended their performances by destroying their instruments. First, Hendrix kneeled on the stage and set his guitar on fire, followed by The Who, who smashed practically every piece of equipment within reach including guitars, drums, and amplifiers. Ironically, not far from this destructive climax was a small display booth for the Moog Synthesizer which attracted a few of the festival's performers and would soon become "the player's synth that the rest of the competition had to beat" (Lodder, 69).

Although several different entrepreneurs and small companies had begun to produce increasingly portable and affordable synthesizers in the mid-to-late 1960s, Robert Moog's great innovation was to include a conventional 'ebony and ivory' keyboard, like that on a piano or organ, in the design of his synthesizers (Pinch and Trocco, 7; Lodder, 69). The familiar sight and feel of a keyboard was not only enticing to musicians, who had previously found the knobs, dials, and switches of synthesizers unapproachable, but gave Moog's designs "a more intuitive feel, better suited to a keyboard player" (Lodder, 69).

The Moog company was small however, so while their increasingly musician-friendly designs were beginning to gain traction, it took something more to launch the unique sound of the Moog into the popular consciousness. That something was an album released in 1968 called *Switched-On Bach*, which featured Walter[18] Carlos performing the music of J.S. Bach on a Moog. The album went on to become the first and only classical music album ever to go platinum, selling more than one million copies (Pinch and Trocco, 132).

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[18] The male Walter later became a female named Wendy. Some subsequent reissues of *Switched-On Bach* reflect the change.

More importantly, as Pinch and Trocco explain, *Switched-On Bach* “would finally release electronic music from sounding like “some obnoxious use in ‘cheesy invader-from-Mars movies.’ Somehow its creator had managed to square the circle, producing electronic music that was dramatically innovative while at the same time being ‘music you could really listen to.’” (Pinch and Trocco, 132).

Thanks in large part to *Switched-On Bach,* synthesizers (particularly the Moog) became a fixture in most studios and started to find their way onto recordings by a number of popular artists by the end of the 1960s (Lodder, 69). In addition, Moog capitalized on the growing popularity of their unique sound with the Minimoog. Introduced around the turn of the decade, the Minimoog, was “the first synthesizer to be sold in retail music stores,” at the retail price of $1,195, and grew popular enough that it has since been called “the definitive analog sound” (Pinch and Trocco, 214, 229, 234).

As the following section will explain however, Stevie Wonder’s use of this technology far exceeded that of his peers in popular music. While his peers were primarily using their synthesizers for “a lead line sound for solos or fills in a backing texture, or sound effects that weren’t necessarily very musical,” Wonder, with the help of Malcolm Cecil and Robert Margouleff, would employ this technology to independently record “as many self-generated parts as possible,” and create a unique, multi-layered sound consisting almost entirely of synthesized tones (Lodder, 70).

MUSIC OF MY MIND

Malcolm Cecil was originally a bass player, but eventually found more work as an engineer, responsible for selecting which equipment to use on a given recording while maintaining the various equipment and instruments in the studio (Pinch and Trocco 173). Robert Margouleff meanwhile was a filmmaker who became interested in the Moog as a means of generating unique soundtracks for his avant-garde films (Pinch and Trocco 169).

Cecil has described his first encounter with both the Moog, and Margouleff as follows:

> "I walk into Media Sound [recording studio] and Studio A…I look up and see this big piece of equipment, weird. I look at it and it says 'Moog' on it…I'm looking at it, and I saw it has filters, envelope generator—what the hell is all this stuff? So I go and I asked the people. 'Oh this belongs to a guy called Bob Margouleff. Very weird guy, comes in at midnight, nobody likes him.'" (Pinch and Trocco, 175).

Thanks to Cecil's expertise as a recording engineer, and Margouleff's familiarity with synthesizers, the two began collaborating after-hours at Media Sound. Interestingly, the pair never initially aspired to produce an album, or find a way to sell what they were producing, but rather worked "simply for the exhilaration of producing inimitable soundscapes" (Pinch and Trocco, 176). They have since described the experience as "an exchange of ideas between person and machine" which they have likened to sex, as opposed to a more conventional recording session (Pinch and Trocco, 177).

At this time Cecil and Margouleff were working with what were called synthesizer "modules," self-contained machines each of which had just several unique features but could be connected or chained together to one another. Eventually the system they built and named TONTO was a large system of modules, housed in arched cabinets which kept "every control within reach…so that [the] Moogists felt as though they were inside the machine" (Pinch and Trocco, 178). Lundy (2007) describes TONTO more colorfully as "a colossal specimen befitting even the most jaded techie's wet dream, a structure so enormous that its operator would literally sit inside of it, surrounded by a spate of controls" (50).

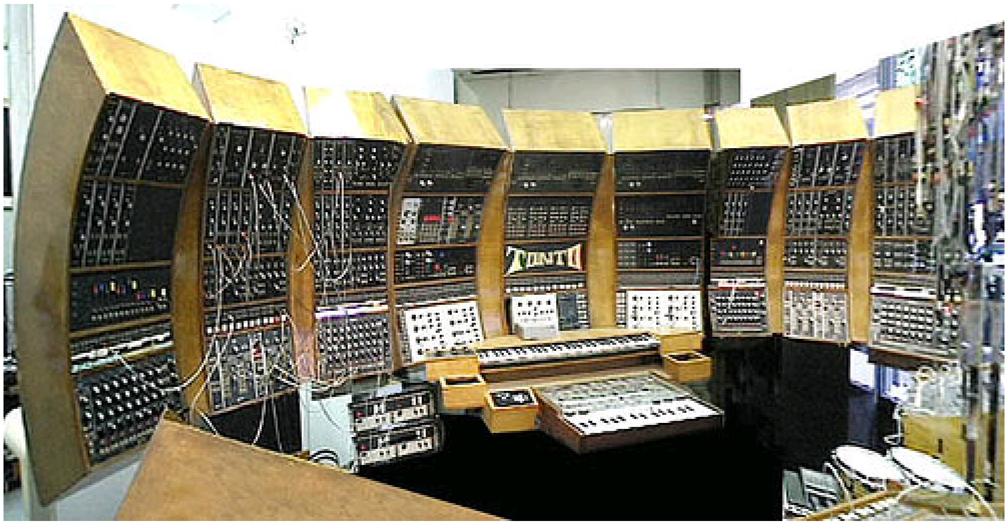

Figure 2.1.
A cross-section of Cecil and Margouleff's TONTO[19]

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[19] Accessed online at: < http://www.synthtopia.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/tontos-expanding-head-band.jpg> on 4/28/10.

Ultimately Cecil and Margouleff did produce one album, called *Zero Time* under the moniker Tonto's Expanding Head Band. *Zero Time*, which, not unlike *Switched-On Bach,* was praised by critics for being an album that took "the synthesizer to the limits of its liberating possibilities while still making music that laymen could enjoy" (Lodder quoting Diliberto at 74). In fact it was *Zero Time* that attracted the interest of Stevie Wonder, who according to Cecil arrived unannounced one day "with the Tonto LP under his arm" asking, with some disbelief, for a demonstration of the instrument that had produced all the sounds on *Zero Time* (Lodder, 74).

This initial meeting, at the start of Memorial Day weekend 1971, wound up turning into a four-day recording session, yielding 17 songs according to Margouleff (Lundy, 51). Wonder promptly had TONTO, and its engineers, installed at Electric Lady Studios in which he had booked ample time (along with a room at the motel closest to the studio) upon his departure from Detroit (Lundy, 46). It is important to point out at this point that whereas Gordy's Motown Studio A was an early example of a label owned recording studio, Jimi Hendrix's Electric Lady Studios was one of the earliest artist-owned facilities and without a doubt one of the best.

Sadly, Jimi Hendrix spent relatively little time—about a month—at the studio he had designed, but its creation again points to a shift in the power structures and production methods of the popular music industry around this time. A home recording situation, like what Sly Stone set-up, had its advantages, but could not accommodate cumbersome new technologies like TONTO.

An everything-state-of-the-art, label-owned studio, meanwhile, operating on an hourly rate, was equally inconvenient for artists who wanted to spend countless hours experimenting—like Hendrix who was prompted to create Electric Lady after accumulating a $300,000 tab for studio time in 1967 (Lundy, 46; Lodder, 71). Lundy (2007) also points out that studios began adding amenities such as “an apartment for artists, a gym, even a steam room on premises,” all of which contributed an “environment that seemed more a spa retreat than a workplace where music was made” (47).

While this shift in studio ownership and atmosphere is useful to highlight, the spa-treatment aspect is nevertheless inapplicable to Stevie Wonder who, flanked by Cecil and Margouleff, maintained Motown’s industriousness, and then some. In addition to TONTO, Electric Lady was outfitted with various instruments all in close proximity and almost every inch of the space remained ‘hot,’ or ready to be recorded at the flip of a switch without any additional set-up. This streamlined the process used on *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered*, and *Where I’m Coming From,* allowing Wonder to move from instrument to instrument to play every part on every song while Cecil and Margouleff manipulated the various controls of the synthesizers and recording equipment.

Beyond merely over-dubbing (or recording each part of the song separately and combining them into a final, single track) himself on different instruments however, the synthesizers also allowed Wonder to play parts on the keyboard that would have previously required additional musicians such as a bass or a horn player. What is interesting about Wonder’s work with TONTO however is that while he did use the devices to give his music a fuller, polyphonic sound as though it was produced by a much larger ensemble of musicians, his interest in the synthesizers was rooted in their ability to produce novel new sounds that did not imitate other instruments.

What's more, Stevie Wonder came to claim ownership over these sounds as something he had created in a kind of divine way, or had given birth to from out of his subconscious. In this regard Stevie seems to assign a degree of agency to the synthesizer-produced sonorous objects. The next section will explore Wonder's relationship with Margouleff and Cecil in greater detail as it relates to this issue of agency and ownership of synthesized sounds.

INNERVISIONS

Renowned producer Brian Eno (1985) described the two primary effects of the technological changes to the recording studio in the 1960s as follows: first, "…you got an additive approach to recording, the idea that composition is the process of adding more" and second, "in-studio composition, where you no longer come to the studio with a conception of the finished piece. Instead, you come with actually a rather bare skeleton of the piece, or perhaps with nothing at all" (129). These effects described by Eno are interesting because in a sense they harken back to Stockhausen's notion of the "structure of material and structure of work" as being one" (Stockhausen, 372).

The question that arises from Wonder's relationship with Cecil and Margouleff then is how substantive these additive producer-contributions are, as well as whether the design of the structure of the material (or the sounds), somehow supersede the structure of the work (or the songs). For Wonder, the answer to both questions seems to have been increasingly "yes" as he collaborated with Cecil and Margouleff.

Cecil has described the situation as follows:

> "We got a Grammy award in engineering, and two nominations. But our credits kept getting smaller and smaller, Stevie's kept getting bigger and bigger, and we were never taken care of from a royalty standpoint…we were called co-producers. And then it turned into associate producers, and then our names started getting smaller and smaller" (Pinch and Trocco, 186).

In Wonder's case there is the obvious issue of his blindness, to which even Cecil and Margouleff have attributed the under appreciation of their contributions (Pinch and Trocco, 186). However, this leads to a more intriguing issue of Wonder's perception of his self, and the sounds that he was producing; sounds he felt were 'new,' and were extensions of his own mind, and imagination.

Wonder has attributed the title of his first album utilizing TONTO—*Music Of My Mind*—to this, saying "The moog itself is a way to directly express what comes from your mind" (Lodder, 82). The album's packaging underscored this idea as well, saying "The sounds themselves come from inside [Wonder's] mind" (Lodder, 79). This kind of language continued and seemed to escalate in grandeur throughout the album notes accompanying Wonder's early 1970s work. By 1976's *Songs in the Key of Life* Wonder's music wasn't simply an expression of the sounds within the artist's own mind, but a "conglomerate of thoughts in my subconscious that my Maker decided to give me" (Lodder, 97).

It is interesting to compare Wonder once again to Marvin Gaye and Sly Stone. The agency afforded to Wonder by the synthesizer seems, at least in part, to have fostered this feeling that he alone was solely responsible for his work, and that this autonomous creation of such a rich soundscape was so remarkable a feat that he should be venerated for it. Although Marvin Gaye had made an effort to properly credit everyone who contributed to *What's Going On* on its sleeve, he later told *Rolling Stone* that "he conceived every bit of the music," which Edmonds (2002) found out was "an assertion that still rankles the arranger [David Van De Pitte], and rightly so" (169). Similarly, Sly Stone didn't credit anyone in print for *There's a Riot Goin' On* except himself (twice, as Sylvester and Sly), opting instead for a collage of photos that is actually more evocative of how the album was created than a proper listing might have been.

What is curious about this is not that the issue of assigning credit was unclear, but that it was an issue at all. Just a few decades prior producers and engineers were technicians, like scribes whose sole responsibility was to capture performances, played by musicians. The claims of genius, divine inspiration, and the like are nothing new, but the conceptualization of produced, mediated sounds as being intertwined with one's identity is unique.

Wonder’s zeal for synthesizer produced sounds also provides an interesting commentary about the musician’s perceptions of the other instruments at his disposal. It is unclear what about the harmonica, piano, drums, and countless other instruments with which Wonder was proficient, especially his own voice, prevented them too from providing “a way to directly express what comes from [his] mind” (Lodder, 82). In both the crediting of the album’s production team, and Wonder’s descriptions of the recording’s ‘new’ sounds there seems to be a high degree of ownership ascribed to not simply the songs but the sounds themselves, the tones and timbres, heard on each album.

This concept of the synthesized sound, and/or malleable sonic material as a more ‘pure’ palette from which to create a more uniquely individual and expressive sound seems to be a recurring theme with electronic music in general harkening all the way back to Stockhausen. Additionally, this notion of producing sounds distinct from the ‘real’ world may be extended to imply that one of the aims of the development of post-war music-technologies has been to move away from the mere documentation of performances into the realm of an art form to be studied, contemplated, and treated as though it were a painting, or literary work.

In this regard Wonder carries Gaye and Stone's ambitions another step forward. Not only should the sequence of songs and lyrics of an album be complex but so should the individual timbres that comprise the sound of the album. Gaye stepped up this overall complexity, Stone took to manipulating the sounds on a more micro level, and Wonder finally began building them from the ground up. As a result, Stevie Wonder—more than the previous two artists—felt that he truly owned his material; that it was a part of him, and he was a part of it.

SONGS IN THE KEY OF LIFE

The release of Stevie Wonder's final album to be released in the 1970s—*Songs in the Key of Life* (*Songs*)—was a big deal. Motown put up a $75,000 billboard up in Times Square for four months to generate excitement, and threw a $30,000 destination listening party for critics on a farm in rural Massachusetts (Lundy, 1-3). Considering Wonder had released five increasingly successful albums between 1970 and 1974, one could only imagine what was taking him two years to complete. In fact, Paul Simon even thanked Stevie in a Grammy Award acceptance speech for not releasing an album in 1975 "to give the rest of us a chance" (qtd. in Lodder, 102).

What's Going On may have been the product of Marvin Gaye's overarching creative vision, but the album itself is the product of a large cast of co-writers, arrangers, and musicians. Stevie Wonder's early 70s output with Cecil and Margouleff was much more akin to Sly Stone's do-it-yourself approach: Wonder was writing, arranging, and performing songs in their entirety, utilizing the broad timbral palette constructed by Cecil and Margouleff. By *Songs* Stevie is still writing and arranging a bulk of the material, but begins to utilize a larger group of musicians to achieve his vision.

Aesthetically this contrast becomes an interesting dimension of the album: the use of synthesizers juxtaposed with more familiar instruments. Take for instance the difference between the live horns employed on "Sir Duke," a rousing tribute to Duke Ellington and great music of the past, or "I Wish," an equally nostalgic song about longing to return to childhood, versus the synthesized strings on "Village Ghetto Land." As Lundy (2007) explains, "a synthesizer…with its dispassionate imitations of actual instruments, could easily call attention to its own fakeness" (78). In the case of "Village Ghetto Land" then the synthetic strings become a "darkly satirical soundtrack of upper-class refinement" at a time when strings were "ubiquitous in…soul music" (Lundy, 78).

Another excellent example of this is *Talking Book*'s "Maybe your Baby" the tone of which is encapsulated in the lyric: "I feel like I'm slippin' deeper, slippin' deeper into myself , and I can't take it." As the song descends into this paranoid lyric, Wonder begins singing in multiple voices as Marvin Gaye had done, with a bevy of effects—most notably a vocoder—within a Sly Stone-styled stereo mix that puts the voices in a kind of cacophonous conflict with one another.

In addition to employing multiple vocal overdubs like Gaye, Wonder also continued to deal with socio-political issues (e.g. “You Haven’t Done Nothing,” an attack on then-President Nixon), and spiritual issues (e.g. “Have a Talk with God”). But for Wonder the connection with his audience seems to have grown even more intimate for both the artist and listener. Stevie described the feeling to one music magazine in 1976 by saying, “Sometimes I feel that the people who listen to my music, or the fans that I have, are closer to me than some of the people who are my close acquaintances or friends” (qtd. in Lodder, 103).

To conclude, all these roads lead back to the issue of agency: Wonder may now choose whether or not to use additional performers or producers as he sees fit in keeping with his artistic vision for the work. Songs, and the sonorous objects therein, have become things unto themselves, assigned to a single creator. As listeners, we enter a sonic world created by Stevie Wonder and an intimate conversation with him.

Such a different kind of listening experience from just several years earlier inevitably demanded a radical alteration of how pop music was recorded. The process in which one person wrote a song, another arranged it, a group of musicians learned and performed the piece together live in a studio for producers capture in the highest fidelity possible had become the exception to the rule of how music was produced. One of Wonder’s more frequent instrumentalist collaborators, guitarist Michel Sembello, sums this change up well:

> “With Stevie…the song is out there in the universe, you just have to find it. It was an entirely new way of making music. It was all instinctual. It sure wasn’t Motown where it was A goes into B goes into C. *Nothing* fit when we went in to record, none of it made sense to anyone but Stevie” (Ribowsky, 222).

With the concluding chapter that follows I hope to synthesize (for lack of a better word) the issues discussed in this, and the preceding chapters, in a more concise manner, and attempt to offer some theoretical hypotheses about this developmental moment in the history of recording and its similarities to the development of text and print as described by Ong, Havelock, and others.

CONCLUSION

In my introduction I identified a useful term that comes from probability theory called the theory of stochastic processes, and cited Parzen's (1999) explanation of this theory as being "generally defined as the "dynamic" part of probability theory, in which one studies a collection of random variables (called a stochastic process) from the point of view of their interdependence and limiting behavior. One is observing a stochastic process whenever one examines a process developing in time" (Parzen 1999, xvii). In a sense this is not unlike a question posed at the beginning of this research:

My hope is that this research has depicted the evolution of musical texts from the mid-1960s through the mid 1970s as a dynamic, stochastic process in which a number of random variables aligned in such a way as to produce several groundbreaking albums that we may now see as having used new technologies in a vanguard way while capturing the zeitgeist of the time in which they were created.

The stochastic process is also useful as it relates to both media ecology and actor-network theory, and by extension practice theory. In both cases there is an economy of power at play: with media ecology the question becomes whether technology reshapes society or visa versa, while with actor-network theory there is an antagonism between the agency of actors and limitations imposed by structures. The appeal of both Ong and

Innis' work, as well as Taylor's application of Practice Theory, to me is that each seems to prefer to avoid claims that a single factor in these dynamic relationships necessarily has an ability to influence or change another directly or intentionally.

In both cases I think we are dealing with what Blondheim (2003) has called "communication determinists" who look at the medium, the message, and the larger ecology—the historical, technological, and social context—in the hopes of considering the meaning of certain changes on a more macro-level. Needless to say however, meaning becomes a difficult issue to address.

For many within media ecology this meaningfulness becomes a catalyst for critical reflection and qualitative value judgments, perhaps most notably with McLuhan, and Postman. In Ong's case, I think it's clear that the differences between orality and literacy, and the cultural shift towards the latter, were meaningful for theological reasons. Meanwhile for Taylor it seems to have more to do with the social functions of music, and how the production and consumption of different types of music reflects the culture from which it came.

This also leads us back to Adorno and Walter Benjamin who, like Ong and Taylor, looked at technologies, the roles of producers and performers, consumption habits, and so on. However, I think a shared weakness, particularly with Ong and Adorno, is that they tend to over-generalize the findings of very specific case studies dealing with unique situations, and stochastic processes like the ones I have described with the current research. In Adorno's case this meant making broad-stroke critical accusations against all of popular music as a condemnable, low-art form.

Meanwhile, Ong tends to characterize the evolution of literacy as a process that is in opposition to orality, or as one that is at least defined against orality. In addition, I think Ong tends to render this evolution as a somewhat linear process from one point to another; that is to say, literacy is directed towards being a kind of antithesis of orality.

One of my primary interests therefore, in likening the history of recorded sound to that of text and print, is to consider whether some of the similarities that have been discussed between the orality/literacy evolution and that of recording music are not coincidental, but point to a kind of life cycle that other media might also undergo. In a sense this fits well with the overriding metaphor of a media ecology: individual actors may be born, live, and die, while species can similarly evolve, adapt, and/or even become extinct.

At the same time, as I have discussed in the introductory chapter, I am discontent with the terms "orality" and "literacy" as well as the derivative "secondary orality," and their application because mediums tend to be categorized based on their physiological reception. That is to say, if it's a sound it's orality, if it's a sight it is literacy, and if it's some electronically (or digitally) mediated version of either/or it is secondary orality.

In my own interpretation of Ong's work I feel these categorizations have more to do with the process of a text's creation, and the phenomenological dimensions of its creation, which become evident via the aesthetic qualities of a given work, as well as an exploration of the socio-cultural context in which the work was produced. The changes that have been discussed therefore may be more aptly described in terms such as a shift from youth to adolescence, rather than from orality to literacy. The changes seem more comparable to a growth, with (sometimes painful) stages along the way, than a metamorphosis.

With this conclusion then, I would like to revisit each of the previous chapters to highlight the most significant parts of each. In doing so I hope to reinforce this idea that a very similar change, of a particular nature—in this case relating to the issue of authorship and agency—occurred in the history of both print, and recorded music. From there, I will identify some of the major limitations of the current research, as well as some suggestions for future research.

The first chapter began by addressing the development of records themselves from somewhat perishable, low fidelity artifacts that only held about four minutes of music, to a much more durable, longer playing, high fidelity medium. Concurrently we saw how these technologies coalesced into the home stereo, which found its way into many American homes during the 1960s.

In addition, several new recording technologies emerged during this time that changed the way music was produced, most notably multi-track tape recording. By the latter half of the decade, artists began exploring the potential beyond mere convenience—

most notably The Beatles, Beach Boys, and others who used multi-tracking to overdub a multitude of parts far beyond what was previously possible.

At the same time, Berry Gordy's independent Motown label was continuing to succeed with a more conventional approach that merged Phil Spector's producer-as-auteur approach with an assembly line approach to the recording process. But by the turn of the decade, we find Marvin Gaye increasingly discontent playing the part of cog in Gordy's machine. Confronted by the death of his duet partner, Tammi Terrell, and his brother Frankie's harrowing accounts of the atrocities happening in Vietnam, Marvin Gaye, as a recording artist, finally decides to take action.

He did so by blending two significant musical trends at the time: singer-songwriters, and concept albums, into *What's Going On*. Although Motown's leadership loathed the album at first listen, Gaye was able to leverage his own celebrity against them to force the album's release (in an elaborate package no less). The popular response was the opposite of Motown's disdain, and the album was a huge success critically and commercially.

More importantly than its success however was the fact that the album radically changed the public's perceptions of Gaye almost instantaneously, from a caricature-like Motown pop performer, to a mature recording artist. One of the ways Gaye was able to establish himself as such was through his album's dynamic use of multi-tracked vocals, and the way it was stitched together into one long suite of music, but what's more important in Gaye's case, is his struggle for agency. Regardless what the music ultimately sounded like, the singer had grown discontent with anything less than total artistic, creative control over his music and his image.

This leads us to Sly Stone who had this kind of control from the start of his career, but did not begin to utilize multi-track recording and tape editing as the means to an aesthetic end until the turn of the decade. Similarly, we saw a fragmentation of Stone's audience, segments of which began demanding that Stone take a stand as the band's popularity soared as social tensions reached a fever pitch.

What Stone ultimately delivered was *There's a Riot Goin' On*, a confounding album that took multi-track tape editing to a whole new level, and dodged expectations of a racially identifiable sound with the help of a drum machine, vocoder, and other electronic effects. More importantly the album was an extraordinarily self-conscious one that called attention to how the music was produced to such an extent that the music itself became a secondary concern.

I likened this to Ong's idea of a shift from episodic, immediately accessible oral poetry which employs a series of pneumonic devices and encourages audience participation, to the post-print ironic text—rich with multiple layers of meaning. More specifically I likened Stone's work to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* which also calls attention to itself and its medium in an interesting way. Ultimately though, Stone's story—like Quixote's—is one of conflict, as the star struggled with how to address an audience whose expectations had taken on a much different character than just a few years prior.

The final case study presented by this research addressed Stevie Wonder's creative apex during the first half of the 1970s. Wonder, more than Gaye and Stone, was able to take ownership of the high degree of agency he obtained. I argue that this was in-part because of Wonder's dynamic relationship with Cecil and Margouleff and the synthesizer technologies that were being introduced at the time. More than Gaye and Stone whose music was in many respects a reaction against their pasts, Wonder was able to produce future-facing sounds unique enough at the time that his claims of owning the sounds was not entirely without merit.

Wonder's six album arc during this time is also useful because we can see him first move towards working alone, then back to a more collaborative process, but one in which Wonder is calling the shots—not his producers, label executives, or anyone else. In doing so, Wonder is able to facilitate a more perfect union between the aesthetic ambitions of his work and the sonorous objects it is comprised of. That is to say—he has total control over the music he produced including the very timbres and what we might call the overall sound design of the work. In Wonder's case this meant an extremely personal connection, constructed through a very comfortable sonic environment, to accompany very personal lyrics.

In conclusion, I would like to propose that this shift may be described as follows: first, recording fosters a struggle for agency most directly between the producer—or the technician responsible for recording a performance and binding it to a medium—and the performer. Additionally, control over the means to manufacture and disseminate the work becomes an issue between those who control these channels and those who performed and produced the work.

Second, there is a kind of crisis of agency, which is similar to, and seems to stem from, the anxieties—of either a non-existent or exceedingly large mass audience—identified by Peters and Sterne, which were discussed in the introduction. Performers and producers start to merge into single authors, and become increasingly aware of the potential cultural impact of a widely disseminated text. I would argue this fosters the kind of introspection that has been previously discussed as a characteristic of printed works as authors, when posed with this heightened responsibility as communicators, tend to turn back inward to ask themselves "who am I to be wielding something like this?" Furthermore, I feel this is responsible in many ways for the shift towards more complex, ironic texts, as it increases the producers' awareness of the medium itself, and his or her relationship with it.

Thirdly, authors reach a degree of ownership with their agency as the result of full control over their work. In this case, an author's work becomes a more proactive product, produced in pursuit of a personal artistic vision, and not a reactionary one that necessarily needs to challenge structural constraints such as the limitations of the medium itself (i.e. the lower-quality LP records described previously), or corporate, contractual obligations. This is not to say that this type of authorship is not without conflict, but these issues are predicated by an assumption or authorship, or a personal attachment and control over the work in some regard.

Needless to say, in each stage of this shift new technologies become a significant part of the equation. It is hard to characterize this significance more specifically, but I would offer that three things have stood out to me as consistent between the developments of print technology and music recording technology. First and perhaps most obviously: mass production. The ability to reach a mass audience seems to prompt a struggle for agency as I have described. Second, is the malleability of materials; the more a medium can be manipulated, the more it seems like the process of editing takes on an authorial tone, and similarly, performers look back with intentions to edit. Finally, a merging of instruments in such a way that performers and technicians no longer need to be separate seems crucial for an idea of sole authorship and ownership to emerge.

My hope is that the preceding chapters have served to illustrate some of these conclusions with regards to the history of recorded music around the turn of the decade between the 1960s and 1970s. In addition I hope to have illustrated how these changes in music production bear a strikingly similar to the history of writing from text to print as described by Ong, Havelock, McLuhan and others. The following sections will briefly address some of the limitations of this current research, followed by a final section offering some suggestions for further research that would build on the ideas which have been presented.

LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH

In short, I think the most significant limitations to this research have to do with its scope, methods, and the fact that it deals with popular music in particular. Additionally, I think the topic of race is something I addressed but did not fully explore the significance of as it relates to this topic. This section will briefly explain these limitations, how I sought to address them, and what I might do different with regards to future research.

First, the scope of this project actually began as being far too expansive as I was considered taking the entirety of popular music into consideration. My reasons for narrowing my focus were initially practical as I began to realize how unreasonable it would be to address such a large topic in a concise manner. As I began to study primarily the work of Ong, McLuhan, and Havelock with regards to this topic, I discovered that their more substantial contributions were really reviews that took into account the findings of myriad studies that dealt with much more specialized niche topics.

Some such studies do exist with regards to the history and evolution of popular music. Those that I consider the most substantial have been cited often throughout this research, most notably the following trilogy, which I'd recommend to anyone interested in this topic: first Suisman (2009), who focuses on issues of ownership and authorship of musical material from a more (U.S.) legal perspective, beginning with some of the earliest pre-recording copyright cases involving music; then Wald (2009), whose thesis is in many ways similar to the current research but focuses on the history of recording leading up to The Beatles, and the changes that took place during their illustrious career. Finally, as mentioned in the introduction Milner (2009) provides perhaps the best look at the evolution of recording from its invention to the present, but is somewhat technologically deterministic in doing so, and remains relatively non-critical.

These studies and others do however seem to more-or-less avoid the 1970s, which was the final determining factor as I narrowed the focus of this research. Although even within the narrower time period it was difficult to select which artists to focus on. While I would contend that the artists I chose to study with the current research were excellent by virtue of how well their stories simultaneously fill several gaps in the existing research, I don't doubt that this research might be stronger were it to include a wider supporting cast of musicians who were following a similar creative path around this same time.

This also calls attention to the fact that this research has excluded other musical genres, including jazz—which would be well-worth looking at considering the work Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, and others were producing around this time—and the broader histories of both Western and African musical styles that preclude American popular music. But again, in the interest of providing an in-depth study highlighting perceivable changes within the careers of just a handful of artists, I felt it important to isolate them within a narrower historical frame. More importantly, I think one of the strengths of this research lies in its specificity with regards to these artists.

This leads to another significant issue that I feel this research has not fully plumbed the depths of as it relates to the overall topic, which is race. Another factor that led me to choose these three artists was a discovery that in most histories of technology and popular music[20] few, if any, black artists are mentioned. There is no discussion on how Gaye edited an entire album together as one long piece, very few mentions of Stone for his pioneering use of a drum machine and tape editing, and occasional mentions of Stevie Wonder as a "humanizer of the machine," speaking of course of his use of synthesizers (Lodder, 86).

I do feel that I have adequately addressed the racial tensions that characterized this time period, and how technology was becoming a means through which black and white aesthetic paradigms were being constructed, but not how race in a more general sense relates to issues of orality and literacy. To be honest, I have tended to avoid this issue because I feel it is worthy of its own equally thorough research project.

Finally, the methodology used to take on this project was in some respects one of my primary goals for the project, but also one of its most significant limitations. Covach (1997) does an excellent job explaining the tensions within scholarly musical analysis between a musicological approach which tends to focus very narrowly on the material itself at a structural level, and a critical/cultural studies approach which tends to either focus on fan cultures and reception, or comes across as overly subjective or uninformed when dealing with a musical text.

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[20] Veal's *Dub*, and Nelson's (2002) *Afrofuturism: A Special Issue of Social Text* are a few exceptions, but deal with relatively obscure musical genres and artists.

One of my methodological aims then, entering into this research, was to find a way to meaningfully address the aesthetics of a piece of music with only a miniscule[21] amount of training in music composition and theory. This seemed to naturally lead to issues of music and technology as production effects like reverb, echo, or distortion, and their aesthetic impact cannot be easily addressed through a musicological analysis but are nevertheless significant. Moreover, I'm confident that while some of my own interpretations regarding the meaning of how these effects were used may be debatable; anyone would be able to hear and identify the effects and sounds I've described.

In conclusion, I will concede that this research has focused very narrowly on a trio of musically similar artists from a particular historical moment, but I feel this kind of limited scope was necessary. My hope is that by doing so I have not only filled a gap in the existing literature, but provided specific, very clear examples of a stochastic process, and a shift that I feel was occurring with many popular musicians around this time. While this work does not necessarily adhere to an accepted methodological approach in a particular field, I'm confident that this research has been presented in a way that is accessible to those interested in the study of popular music, orality and literacy studies, and media ecology in general. Hopefully, this research will be of value to scholars in these areas as well.

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[21] By miniscule I mean piano lessons as a child, and singing in a choir in high school; nothing at a collegiate level beyond hours and hours of listening, and extracurricular readings on the topic.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As mentioned in the previous section on the limitations of this project, I think its scope could be expanded in a variety of ways. Chronologically I think it'd be worthwhile to look at other significant moments in the history of popular music as related to the evolution of text and print. Our current moment, in fact, and the past decade or so would be worth considering in this regard as digital music technology continues to radically change the way artists create and record music.

From a media ecology standpoint I think this research has not fully explored the relationship between recorded sound and other media developing around this same time. I have provided only a few scant mentions of the rise of television and its profound significance on the popular music industry in the 1960s and beyond.

Finally, as it relates to media ecology, I hope that this kind of analysis might be applied to other mediums. For instance, I think Ong's discussion of the shift from mimetic to ironic texts would have some intriguing implications for a number of current television programs such as Stephen Colbert's pundit parody *The Colbert Report* which calls attention to itself and its genre in interesting ways, or the prime-time drama *Lost* which demands such a close reading that many viewers seek out secondary texts just to exegete the show, and follow its complex narrative.

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