

ROCK MUSIC'S CRUSADE OF AUTHENTICITY

by

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A THESIS

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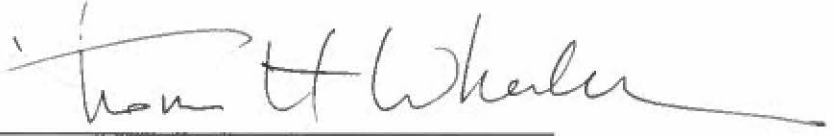
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This thesis attempts to define rock music's standards of authenticity and explore their origins. Included are comparison of rock's standards of authenticity to those of other genres and an exploration of how authenticity has been perceived throughout the history of rock music. This study argues that rock's standards of authenticity are unusual among pop music genres in that they entail artists both writing their own songs and playing their own instruments. This is in contrast to genres like hip hop, contemporary pop, and R&B, which have their own quite different standards of authenticity. Quotes from rock fans, critics, and musicians are used to provide insight into rock's standards of authenticity and how they developed over time.

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“Music is the ultimate power, love is simply the message and the truth will set you free.” –Prince Rogers Nelson

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Introduction / Chapter 1: Expressive & Nominal Authenticity

Every genre in popular music has its own standards of authenticity – and, by extension, its own standards of what it considers inauthentic. Most often, these standards have to do with what the late philosopher and art critic Denis Dutton calls *expressive authenticity*, namely “faithfulness to the performer’s own self, original, not derivative or aping of someone else’s way of playing.”¹ Expressive authenticity encompasses regionalism, as in certain genres of hip hop and dance music, where music not created in a certain area or conforming to a sound associated with a certain area can be dismissed as inauthentic. It encompasses genres with an emphasis on autobiography, such as mainstream hip hop, where a certain consistency between artist’s background and their lyrical content is often key to gaining respect among fans. And it encompasses subcultural movements, such as punk, goth, and extreme metal, where an artist’s failure to conform to rigid and insular codes of ethics or ignorance of certain aspects of the culture can result in them being marginalized.

Rock music, on the other hand, endeavors to impose standards of authenticity that mostly fit into what Dutton calls *nominal authenticity*, namely “the correct identification of the origins, authorship, or provenance of an object.”² Rock values self-containment: that the credited artists on a recording or performance play their own instruments and write their own songs. Rock artists who fail to adhere to this standard are in danger of being dismissed by fans and critics alike as inauthentic, phony, or

¹ Denis Dutton, “Authenticity in Art,” *The Oxford Handbook Of Aesthetics* (2003): 258-274

² Ibid.

lacking commitment. This criticism has been applied to genres like “bubblegum,” the producer-oriented variation on garage rock that dominated charts in the late 1960s, and artists like the Monkees, who did not write their own songs or play their own instruments.

More interesting still is rock’s desire to impose its standards of authenticity on other genres. Rock fans are contentious. Today, we can see on internet rock communities dozens of memes – bits of media intended to be shared and go “viral,” rapidly spreading across the internet – comparing the authenticity of rock musicians to the perceived inauthenticity of musicians working in pop or other genres more driven by producers and behind-the-scenes songwriters. And this is not a new phenomenon; in the late 1970s, mainstream rock culture targeted the then-ascending disco culture and its accompanying musical form, condemning it as inauthentic and hosting demonstrations at which disco records were ceremonially destroyed.

Rock has little focus on regionalism or on consistency between artists’ backgrounds and the claims made in their lyrics. It is not uncommon for rock acts to assume the personas of others – people from a different region, social class, or ethnicity, for example. Nor does it place much importance on regionalism, for the same reason; regional genres like Southern rock can be adopted by those from a different geographical area with little to no outcry over those artists’ authenticity.

Rock’s nominal ideal of authenticity is less common in popular music than an expressive ideal, although there are some notable instances in which the nominal ideal is imposed. For example, electronic dance music is currently embroiled in a controversy over DJs using “ghost producers,” uncredited producers hired to make original tracks

for DJ sets. Fans and musicians within the genre have both defended and criticized this practice, though mostly the latter. And pop occasionally finds itself in a controversy over the performers on a recording not being those credited, as when the members of the pop duo Milli Vanilli were exposed as lip-synchers.³

Rock has not always valued a nominal standard of authenticity. In the 1950s and much of the 1960s, many rock artists performed mostly covers or were reliant on behind-the-scenes songwriters. So where did these nominal values of authenticity come from, and when did they come to be associated with the rock? Why are they so linked with the genre today? And why is rock so aggressive in seeking to impose these values on other genres?

Before answering these questions, it is worth noting that “rock music” is a broad term. Fundamentally, it applies to a genre of music that evolved from the earlier rhythm and blues style known as rock ’n’ roll in the 1950s in the United States and United Kingdom. (A distinction between rock ’n’ roll and rock is often made, but I will treat them here as one and the same for the sake of convenience and to tie together the rock ’n’ roll tradition and the later “rock” tradition.)

The rock culture I will discuss here is mainstream rock culture. This applies to any genre of rock that has or has ever had a strong presence on the Billboard Top 10, including rock ’n’ roll, the “classic rock” of the 1960s through the 1980s, the arena rock of the 1970s and 1980s, the alternative rock popular in the 1990s, and 2000s hard rock, as exemplified by bands like Disturbed and Black Veil Brides. Rock has spawned

³ Spencer Kornhaber, “Milli Vanilli, Pop Music’s Original Fakes,” *The Atlantic*, November 27, 2015.

countless derivative subgenres, including subcultural genres like punk, heavy metal, indie rock, etc.; most of these are focused around underground scenes. Unless these genres have a strong chart presence, I consider them outside the rock mainstream. For example, Green Day is a mainstream pop-punk band, as they have repeatedly charted in the Top 10 and enjoy a following outside their community, while Wavves, a pop-punk band revered in the indie community but which has never charted that high, would not be mainstream.

Chapter 2: Defining Rock's Standards Of Authenticity

1. A Look At Rolling Stone's 100 Greatest Artists

In 2004, *Rolling Stone* – one of the first magazines to feature rock criticism – published a list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time. As expected from a magazine with a pop- and rock-oriented focus, 72 out of the 100 artists on the list are classified as rock on Wikipedia: 72 out of 100. Indeed, the magazine calls it a list of the greatest artists of the “rock ’n’ roll era.” The remainder are primarily hip hop, pop, and R&B artists. The list was compiled by a panel of musicians and music industry executives including Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones and Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson of the Roots.⁴

Of the 72 rock artists listed, only one is not credited with writing any songs or playing any instruments other than vocals on their records. That artist is the Four Tops, a Motown vocal quartet whose work can primarily be classified as R&B or soul and whose songs were almost exclusively written by the Motown songwriting team Holland-Dozier-Holland.⁵ Though they may have flirted enough with rock to be classified partially as such, they can be more accurately considered part of the Motown tradition alongside groups like the Supremes and Martha & the Vandellas (both also listed among *Rolling Stone's* 100 Greatest Artists, but not classified as rock). Most of the artists signed to Motown did not write their own songs or play their own instruments and were backed by the label's house band, The Funk Brothers.

⁴ “The 100 Greatest Artists Of All Time,” last modified December 2, 2010, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/100-greatest-artists-of-all-time-19691231>

⁵ “Holland-Dozier-Holland,” <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/holland-dozier-holland-mn0000958916>

Of the remaining 71 rock artists on the list, those who did not write the majority of their own songs, or who wrote them mostly in collaboration with other songwriters, can be deemed outliers in terms of era or style. These include Fats Domino and Ricky Nelson, artists who were mostly active in the late 1950s and early 1960s before rock's shift to a singer-songwriter-oriented focus in the mid-1960s. (Tellingly, former teen idol Nelson only began writing the bulk of his own material when he formed The Stone Canyon Band in the early 1970s).⁶ Another example is Elvis Presley, who has writing credits on a handful of songs, though it is debated how much involvement he had in them; it is likely that, as with many pop singers in the contemporary industry, he was credited as a songwriter chiefly for royalty purposes.⁷

Of the artists listed who were active from the mid-1960s onward, there are only three artists who did not write or co-write the bulk of their material: Etta James, Tina Turner, and Janis Joplin. Etta James can primarily be considered an R&B or soul artist, though she worked in the rock 'n' roll medium; she is thus not necessarily subject to rock standards of authenticity. Janis Joplin has the sole writing credit on at least one song on each of the four albums she recorded during her lifetime, either by herself or as a member of Big Brother & The Holding Company, a largely democratic unit with songs credited to each member. However, she preferred to cover blues and soul songs, and the respect she is accorded among critics and musicians owes largely to her voice

⁶ "Ricky Nelson & The Stone Canyon Band," <https://www.discogs.com/artist/2281963-Rick-Nelson-The-Stone-Canyon-Band>

⁷ Susan Doll, *Understanding Elvis: Southern Roots Vs. Star Image* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), 28

and novelty (she was a white blues singer, after all).⁸ Of the three, Turner – who received less than ten songwriting credits in her career, and who mostly sang covers or songs by hired songwriters or her husband Ike Turner – is the only outlier. She was a crossover artist with a strong presence in the rock world, having appeared in the Who's *Tommy* and collaborated extensively with her husband, whose Kings of Rhythm (credited as Jackie Brenston & his Delta Cats) made "Rocket 88," often cited as a seminal rock record. Rock constituted a major part of her oeuvre, though she also recorded albums in country, soul, and pop styles. But irrespective of genre, she is widely regarded as a great singer and entertainer, which is likely why she made it onto the singer-songwriter-dominated list.⁹

Setting aside miscategorizations and outliers, the balance of the *Rolling Stone* list comprises widely revered rock artists. The magazine compiled this list through an extensive panel of writers, musicians, and industry executives working in multiple genres, so there is little chance of one panel member's underground favorite making the list based on their personal taste alone. Many of the panelists are not music critics, either, so critical favorites that have failed to attain widespread appeal are absent. It is thus safe to say that the *Rolling Stone* list represents a fairly comprehensive distillation of which artists are most revered within the mainstream rock community.

It is possible to glean standards of nominal authenticity from this list. Stated another way, we can use this list to figure out what qualities rock culture values and which it does not.

⁸ Various writers ed. Jonathan Lethem, "The 100 Greatest Singers Of All Time." *Rolling Stone*, November 7, 2008.

⁹ *Ibid.*

2. Expressive Authenticity

Looking at the list, the concept of expressive authenticity seems largely inapt. Dutton defines expressive authenticity as “faithfulness to the performer’s own self, original, not derivative or aping of someone else’s way of playing.” If this is the relevant standard, then expressive authenticity figures very minimally in rock history. Take the top three acts. The Beatles (no. 1) were not at all shy about their influences, both in terms of performers and songwriters they idolized (more on this later), and there is no shortage of self-deprecating quotes from the Beatles on the artists they were attempting to emulate on their songs.¹⁰ Bob Dylan (no. 2) was openly influenced by the Beatles on his pop fare and was such a devoted student of folk music that he visited folk legend Woody Guthrie in the hospital on his way to traveling from his native Duluth, MN to New York City.¹¹ And since his first interviews, Elvis Presley (no. 3) was not shy about his influences in blues and country, many of whom he admitted trying to emulate or imitate.¹² However, this is not exclusive to rock, and it is hard to think of a genre of music that does not cannibalize itself or in which it is frowned upon to be openly and explicitly influenced by other artists. Rock is not unique in this regard.

Most if not all of the artists on *Rolling Stone*’s list performed first-person songs whose lyric content reflected a culture, geographical location, social situation, or emotional state bearing little relation to their own lives. Autobiography is largely moot to rock, and autobiographical songs were fairly rare for much of its existence. The

¹⁰ “Beatles Interviews: With The Beatles,” <http://www.beatlesinterviews.org/dba02with.html>

¹¹ Caspar L. Smith, “Bob Dylan Visits Woody Guthrie,” *The Guardian*, June 15, 2011

¹² Peter Guralnick, *Last Train To Memphis: The Rise Of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little, Brown), 1994, 28-30

Beatles wrote songs about yearning for love while happily married.¹³ The Rolling Stones wrote several songs in which they claim to be American.¹⁴¹⁵ Led Zeppelin wrote extensively from the perspective of fantasy heroes in mystical settings.¹⁶ David Bowie put himself at the center of an elaborate mythology having little to do with his actual circumstances.¹⁷ (It is surprising that Creedence Clearwater Revival, a band of San Francisco-area suburbanites that frequently sang from the perspective of Southerners, is not on this list.¹⁸ Despite their apparent posturing, CCR was one of the most popular rock bands in the world during their brief existence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they are Rock 'n' Roll Hall Of Fame inductees and staples of classic rock radio.)¹⁹

Compare this to hip hop, which still places major emphasis on the singer's socio-economic background in some circles. It is not uncommon for a hip hop artist's career or reputation to suffer if their lyrics are revealed as incongruous with their background – as was the case with rappers Stitches and Rick Ross, both of whom wrote from the perspective of drug dealers despite having never actually sold drugs.²⁰²¹

Likewise, rappers are frequently criticized for their lyric content not matching up with

¹³ “Yer Blues,” <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beatles/yerblues.html>

¹⁴ “Dead Flowers,” <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/rollingstones/deadflowers.html>

¹⁵ “Sweet Virginia,” <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/rollingstones/sweetvirginia.html>

¹⁶ D.J. Palladino, “Interview: Robert Plant,” *The Independent*, June 26, 2013

¹⁷ Jon Pareles, “David Bowie Dies At 69; Star Transcended Music, Art, And Fashion,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2016

¹⁸ “Creedence Clearwater Revival,” <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/creedence-clearwater-revival-mn0000131627>

¹⁹ “Inductees: Creedence Clearwater Revival Biography,”

<https://rockhall.com/inductees/creedence-clearwater-revival/bio/>

²⁰ Francisco Alvarado, Allie Conti, “Viral Rapper Stitches: Some Truth, Many Questions,” *Miami New Times*, August 19, 2014

²¹ Omar Burgess, “Rick Ross Admits Correctional Officer Past,” *HipHopDx*, October 7, 2008

their background. An example is Drake and his song “Started From The Bottom,” in which he claims to have “started from the bottom” despite having launched his career as a rapper after being a well-established and well-paid child star.²²

Rock also imposes very little demand for regional purity. Genres like “Southern rock” often end up being performed, recorded, and marketed successfully by non-Southerners like Creedence Clearwater Revival (San Francisco area), Canned Heat (Los Angeles), or the Band (Toronto).²³ Ditto “Krautrock,” a genre of experimental rock developed in Germany whose name, based on an epithet for Germans, is often applied to non-German bands influenced by that scene.²⁴ Even a North American band like the New Pornographers might be described as “Britpop,” a genre developed in Britain and generally assumed to be exclusively British.²⁵

Compare this to dance music, a genre that remains so fiercely regional in certain circles that artists working in a certain genre – say, Chicago footwork – may be considered inauthentic if they do not hail from a certain city.²⁶ Even some circles of hip hop remain viciously regional; consider the criticism leveled at Harlem rapper A\$AP

²² Pigeons, “20 People Who Are Mad Because Drake Didn’t Really Start From The Bottom,” Pigeons And Planes, February 3, 2013, <http://pigeonsandplanes.com/2013/02/20-people-who-are-mad-because-drake-didnt-really-start-from-the-bottom/>

²³ Vladimir Bogdanov, *The Allmusic Guide To Rock* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2004), 1332-1333

²⁴ Stuart Berman, “Fujiya & Miyagi: Ventriloquizing,” *Pitchfork*, January 27, 2011, <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15013-ventriloquizing/>

²⁵ Richard M. Juzwiak, “The New Pornographers: Mass Romantic,” *Pitchfork*, March 30, 2001, <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/5771-mass-romantic/>

²⁶ Noel Gardner, “Machinedrum: Vapor City,” *NME*, September 20, 2013

Rocky within the New York hip hop community for incorporating elements of Southern hip hop into his debut mixtape *Live.Love.A\$AP*.²⁷

3. Nominal Authenticity

No other Western popular music genre besides rock puts such an emphasis on artists writing their own songs and playing their own instruments. Though many hip hop artists frown on ghostwriters,²⁸ some of the genre's most respected artists, including Dr. Dre, Wu-Tang Clan, and Sean Combs, have openly admitted to using ghostwriters.²⁹ Furthermore, rappers rarely play instruments, and those who do often work in a rock-influenced milieu (B.o.B.; Lil Wayne on his *Rebirth* album) or a live-band format (The Roots, The Coup). Pop and R&B impose no requirement that artists play their own instruments or write their own songs, despite scandals like Milli Vanilli.

Bubblegum is an unusual anomaly in that it is perhaps the only rock genre after the 1960s developed by producers. The production team Kasenetz-Katz originally coined the term to describe the music they created for children and teenagers, which took the template of 1960s garage rock and softened its edges with catchy melodies and lyrics about crushes and puppy love.³⁰ Bubblegum bands were frequently studio concoctions. Ohio Express singer and songwriter Joey Levine never met the band that backed him up.³¹ The Partridge Family was an assembled TV "family" whose music

²⁷ Jon Caramanica, "Thinking Globally, Rapping Locally," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2011

²⁸ "King Kunta," <http://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-king-kunta-lyrics>

²⁹ Various writers, "10 ghostwritten hip-hop tracks – and the surprising ghostwriters behind them," *Fact Mag*, January 20, 2014, <http://www.factmag.com/2014/01/20/ghostwritten-hip-hop-tracks-ghostwriters-behind-them/11/>

³⁰ Carl Cafarelli, "An Informal History Of Bubblegum Music," *Goldmine* #437, 16

³¹ David Smay, *Bubble Gum Music Is The Naked Truth* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 1

was played by the Wrecking Crew studio band.³² The Archies were a conglomeration of studio musicians whose music was played by cartoon characters on a Saturday morning TV show. (The same musicians had a hit as the Cuff Links, “Tracy,” on the charts at the same time as the Archies’ “Sugar, Sugar.”)³³ As a result, rock fans have frequently viewed bubblegum as inauthentic, and it is unsurprising that bubblegum smashes “Sugar, Sugar” and the Ohio Express’s “Yummy Yummy” both appeared on Rolling Stone’s “Worst Songs Of The 1960s” readers’ poll.³⁴

³² Chip Deffaa, *C'mon Get Happy: Fear And Loathing On The Partridge Family Train* (New York: Warner Books, 1994), 56-60

³³ Bogdanov, *The AllMusic Guide To Rock*, 1331-2

³⁴ “Reader’s Poll: The Worst Songs Of The 1960s,” last modified November 6, 2011, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/pictures/readers-poll-the-worst-songs-of-the-sixties-20111116>

Chapter 3: Online Rock Fandom, Internet Memes, And Authenticity

1. Comparative Memes

Rock critic Simon Frith claims “the ideology of rock – the arguments about what records mean, what rock is for – has always been articulated more clearly by fans than by musicians.”³⁵ The biggest conglomeration of rock fans today can be found on the internet, in music forums as well as online communities such as Tumblr, Pinterest, and Reddit. These rock fans share music recommendations and viewpoints on various artists and genres with one another. They also share memes – images, bits of text, videos, or combinations thereof that are meant to be funny or relatable and thus go viral by being shared rapidly across the internet. From these interactions between internet rock fans and from the viral content they produce, we can glean much about contemporary rock culture and how it feels about “authenticity.” Memes are a good way to gauge cultural attitudes because they are meant to be disseminated and reach a wide audience. If a meme is widely spread and widely duplicated, it is likely many people relate to agree with that meme, and it can thus serve as a reflection of a certain cultural attitude.

Type “real music” into Google Image Search and four suggestions on how to complete your search will appear: “real music quotes,” “real music isn’t on the radio,” “real music rock,” and “real music memes.”³⁶ The fact that rock is the only genre listed

³⁵ Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Social Effects of Rock 'n' Roll* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1983), 2

³⁶ “real music,”

https://www.google.com/search?q=real+music&espv=2&biw=1267&bih=598&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBvq3r59jMAhUX7WMKHVEpCzoQ_AUIBygC

among the suggestions speaks volumes about rock's attitude towards its place in the musical firmament. The "real music" search also yields a wealth of images comparing rock to other genres. One of the first images to appear in "real music" image search is a picture of the Beatles overlaid with a caption saying "real music doesn't go out of style in three months." Most variations of this image show either the Beatles or Queen, two rock bands that remain culturally relevant and ubiquitous on radio despite being defunct. Though this isn't an explicitly anti-pop jab, it is likely that the creators of this image are comparing the enduring appeal of these rock bands to the often fleeting appeal of pop, which is frequently described with terms like "ephemeral" and "disposable" due to the genre's prevalence of one-hit wonders and propensity for following short-lived trends. The Beatles themselves were subject to this criticism early on, often described by critics purely in terms of their appeal to teenage girls and the likelihood their popularity would quickly fade.

We can see more explicit jabs against pop in memes comparing "music then" to "music now," or rock musicians to pop artists. Perhaps the most frequently referenced rock band in such memes is Led Zeppelin. The band's lyrics, particularly those written by singer Robert Plant, are heavily inspired by fantasy literature and European folk mythology and thus make strong use of metaphors, similes, and epic imagery. As such, it is common to find memes contrasting the complexity of Zeppelin's lyrics with the simplicity and repetition of pop lyrics.

The three memes shown below compare Led Zeppelin lyrics – the first two from "Kashmir," the latter from "Stairway to Heaven" – with pop lyrics from, respectively, Far East Movement ("Like A G6"), Rebecca Black ("Friday,") and Nicki Minaj

(“Anaconda”). (A note: unlike the other songs referenced in these comparative memes, Rebecca Black’s “Friday” garnered viral attention primarily due to how bad it was perceived to be, and it only peaked at #38.)

LYRICS IN THE 70'S
 "Oh, let the sun beat down upon my face, stars fill my dream
 I am a traveler of both time and space, to be where I have been
 To sit with elders of the gentle race, this world has seldom seen
 They talk of days for which they sit and wait, all will be revealed."
 - Led Zeppelin - Kashmir [1975]



v/s

Lyrics in 2010
 "They be actin like they drunk, actin-actin like they drunk
 When sober girls around me actin-actin like they drunk
 Poppin bottles in the ice, like a blizzard
 When we drink we do it right gettin sizzard
 Sippin sizzurp in my ride, like Three 6
 Now I'm feelin so fly like a G6"
 - Far East Movement - Like a G6 [2010]

<http://go.funpic.hu>

Lyrics in the 70's
 On let the sun beat down upon my face, stars to fill my dream
 I am a traveler of both time and space, to be where I have been
 To sit with elders of the gentle race, this world has seldom seen
 They talk of days for which they sit and wait and all will be revealed
 Led Zeppelin - Kashmir




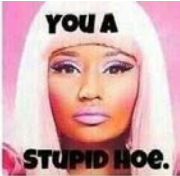
Lyrics today
 Yesterday was thursday
 Today it is friday
 tomorrow is saturday
 and sunday comes afterwards
 Rebecca Black - Friday

TOP CHART HIT SONGS THEN	TOP CHART HIT SONGS NOW
 There's a Lady Who's sure, All That Glitters is Gold, And She's Buying a Stairway To Heaven, ----- There's a Feelin' I get, When I look to the West, And my spirit is crying for Leaving.....	 Yeah, he love this fat ass Yeah, this one is for my bitches with a fat ass in the [redacted] club I said, where my fat ass big bitches in the club? [redacted] those skinny bitches, [redacted] those skinny bitches in the club I wanna see all the big fat ass bitches in the [redacted] club

We can see some common threads here. The Zeppelin lyrics are poetic, dense, and full of literary allusion with a narrative bent. The pop lyrics are repetitive, simple, and functional. It is worth noting that each of these memes posits Zeppelin as an avatar of a superior “then,” while the pop artists represent inferior “now.” The latter of the three explicitly posits Led Zeppelin as an example not of what was being made at the time the song was recorded but what was popular among listeners (“top chart hit songs then/now”). This can be seen as a nostalgic yearning for a return to the popularity rock enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s and a lament that its commercial success has waned in recent decades relative to pop.

In memes, perhaps the most commonly cited example of the deficiency of “music now” is “Stupid Hoe” by Nicki Minaj, which was reviled upon its release and

currently has 823,052 dislikes on YouTube to 509,531 likes.³⁷ Its confrontational, repetitive lyrics are frequently compared unfavorably to lyrics by rock acts. These following three memes all compare “Stupid Hoe” to rock lyrics.

		Music Today				
		Pop/Hip-Hop/Rap		Rock/Metalcore		
Led Zepplin-1975:	If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you. When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and me. Kind woman, I give you my all, Kind woman, nothing more.					
Nicki Minaj-2012:	You a stupid hoe, you a, you a stupid hoe, you a stupid hoe, you a stupid hoe, (yeah) you a, you a stupid hoe, you a stupid hoe, you a, you a stupid hoe (stupid, stupid), you a stupid hoe, you a, you a stupid hoe (stupid, stupid), you a stupid hoe, you a, you a stupid hoe (stupid, stupid) (stupid, stupid)	Stupid Hoe You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe You a stupid hoe, yeah you a you a stupid hoe You a stupid hoe you a you a stupid hoe You stupid stupid, you a stupid hoe (Stupid, stupid)		Second & Sebring Come back to I can say thank you for this, Home cooked meals and a place to rest, My troubled head when you're away, I've passed the test, I've earned an A, Not just in school, but in life, You'll always be right by my side, To help me show, hope to all, That are lost and sick in this dying world. I'll out the love you left behind, I'll change their minds, I'll change their minds.		
		<small>Message: For the Stupid hitches.</small>		<small>Message: For his mother who died and took care of him.</small>		
		Songs defines a musician. The message of the song is more important than fame.				
				Emo. Gay. Faggot. Bad examples. Terrible music.	YOU A STUPID HOE. acceptable. Good role Model. Inspiration. Good music.	
				<small>The future of humor: FUNSUBSTANCE.COM</small>		

The first of these three memes does not explicitly condemn pop music. Rather, it implies music has declined in quality over time by prefacing the lyrics with the respective years in which the two songs were released. (The Led Zepplin song in question, “Thank You,” was actually released in 1969).³⁸ The second of these explicitly compares genres: “pop/hip hop/rap” (an accurate description of Minaj’s style) and “rock/metalcore” (metalcore being a commercially lucrative genre of contemporary rock). The third does not necessarily condemn pop music but rather contrasts “society’s” negative opinions of the rock band Pierce the Veil with positive opinions about Minaj. (This latter approach to comparison memes, in which negative perceptions of rock and positive perceptions of pop are contrasted, is fairly common. Metalcore and other post-hardcore genres have been a major part of the mainstream rock market for

³⁷ “Stupid Hoe,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6j4f8cHBIM>

³⁸ “Led Zepplin II,” <https://www.discogs.com/Led-Zepplin-Led-Zepplin-II/master/4170>

about a decade, and due to the often androgynous garb and emotional lyricism of these groups, the genre is often seen as less masculine than other genres of rock and thus “gay.”³⁹ Thus, the third Minaj meme – and those below – serve as rebuttals to

MCR:	I am not afraid to keep on living
Society:	emo
A Day to Remember:	Keep your hopes up high and your head down low
Society:	emo
Avenged Sevenfold:	You had my heart, at least for the most part.
Society:	emo
Nicki Minaj:	Imma slap you if you a hoe
Society:	OMG she is so inspirational!!1111111!!!



accusations that metalcore bands are somehow inferior by positing that their lyricism is more complex and topically engaging than is typical of pop.)

Lyrics are not always the only factor compared in these memes. One oft-shared meme contrasts the number of producers and writers who had a hand in the crafting of Beyoncé’s “Run The World (Girls)” with those involved in Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody.” The former involved six writers and four producers, the latter just one writer and one producer. As expected, the “Run The World” lyrics cited are repetitive and simple, while Queen’s are literary, poetic, complex, and dense. The implication is that Beyoncé “needs” these producers and writers in order to make even a simple song, while Queen’s Freddie Mercury was talented enough to write a complex piece of

³⁹ Tom, “Heavy Metal Is Gay,” Terrorizer, July 23, 2014, <http://www.terrorizer.com/news/features-2/heavy-metal-is-gay-need-tackle-homophobia/>

literary art and record it for posterity with a single producer. This sentiment is common in comparative memes; another compares Will.I.Am and Britney Spears’ collaborative song “Scream And Shout” with Bob Dylan’s “Tangled Up In Blue,” also credited to only one writer and one producer. Similarly, Will.I.Am’s lyrics are simple and

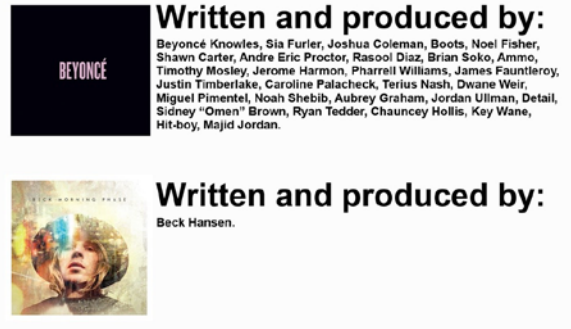
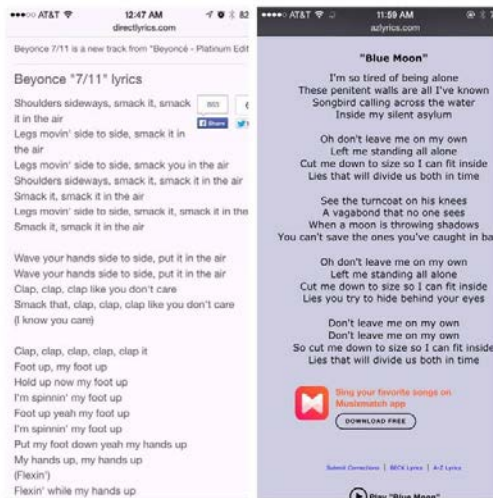
 <p>somanymp3s.com</p> <p>Beyoncé "Run, The World (Girls)"</p> <p>6 Writers / 4 Producers</p> <p>Girls, we run this motha (yeah!) Girls, we run this motha (yeah!) Girls, we run this motha (yeah!) Girls, we run this motha (yeah!) Who run the world? Girls! Who run the world? Girls! Who run the world? Girls! Who run the world? Girls! Who run this motha? Girls! Who run this motha? Girls! Who run this motha? Girls! Who run this motha? Girls! Who run the world? Girls! Who run the world? Girls! Who run the world? Girls! Who run the world? Girls!</p> <p>somanymp3s.com</p>	 <p>somanymp3s.com</p> <p>Queen "Bohemian Rhapsody"</p> <p>1 Writer / 1 Producer</p> <p>Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy? Caught in a landslide, No escape from reality Open your eyes, Look up to the skies and see, I'm just a poor boy, I need no sympathy, Because I'm easy come, easy go, Little high, little low, Any way the wind blows doesn't really matter to me, to me Mama, Just killed a man, Put a gun against his head, pulled my trigger now he's dead Mama... she had just begun, But now I've gone and thrown it all away Mamaaaa ooooh, Daddy, I'm afraid you're right, Daddy, I'm not back again this time tomorrow, Carry on, carry on as if nothing really matters</p> <p>somanymp3s.com</p>	 <p>SCREAM & SHOUT Will.I.Am, Britney Spears</p> <p>4 Writers, 2 Producers</p> <p>When you hear us in the club You gotta turn the shit up You gotta turn the shit up You gotta turn the shit up When we up in the club All eyes on us All eyes on us All eyes on us All eyes on us See the boys in the club They watching us They watching us They watching us</p>	 <p>BOB DYLAN "Tangled Up In Blue"</p> <p>1 Writer/Producer</p> <p>Early one morning the sun was shining I was laying in bed Wond'ring if she'd changed it all If her hair was still red Her folks they said our lives together Sure was gonna be rough They never did like Mama's homemade dress Papa's bankbook wasn't big enough And I was standing on the side of the road Rain falling on my shoes Heading out for the East Coast Lord knows I've paid some dues getting through Tangled up in blue.</p>
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repetitive, while Dylan’s have strong narrative gravitas and are poetic and literary.

Beyoncé is a frequent target of these memes. This is likely due to the fact that her recent albums have received critical and commercial success, and she has received wide praise for her musical and visual projects and feminist politics, yet she does not play any instruments on her records and employs a cadre of co-writers and producers for each. This was particularly evident during the 2015 Grammy Awards, when rock artist Beck’s *Morning Phase* beat out Beyoncé’s self-titled album for album of the year. In response, musician Kanye West gave a controversial post-ceremony interview in which he claimed Beck “should have given his award to Beyoncé.”⁴⁰ This launched a firestorm over who should have won the award, much of it focused on Beck’s self-containment; after his win, his Grammy page was vandalized by fans of both artists,

⁴⁰ Laura Stampler, “Kanye Says Beck Should Have Given Beyonce His Grammy,” February 9, 2015, <http://time.com/3700870/2015-grammy-awards-kanye-beck-beyonce/>

with the redirect link vandalized to: “This article is about a man who had achieved 3 decades of musical success mainly by himself. For The [sic] woman who needed 5 songwriters and 2 of [sic] vocalists behind her to achieve any decent level of success,



see Beyoncé.”⁴¹

One of the most prominent pro-Beck opinions was voiced by Copyblogger founder Brian Clark, who tweeted: “Beyoncé: 27 writers and 19 producers, Kanye: 49 writers and 25 producers. Beck: 1 writer, 1 producer.”⁴² This was quickly transformed into a meme, which was then shared by prominent publications such as BuzzFeed and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The former also shared memes comparing the two artists’ lyrics and the number of instruments they play on their respectively nominated

⁴¹ Monique Melendez, “Beyonce And Beck’s Fans Got In A Full-Scale Wikipedia War Over The Grammys,” February 9, 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/moniquemelendez/beyonce-and-becks-fans-got-into-a-full-scale-wikipedia-war-o?utm_term=.vtbPIZe0W#.cko8qQv1b

⁴² “Brian Clark,” <https://twitter.com/brianclark/status/565366097978097664>

albums.⁴³ Here, we can see a lot of the same rhetoric we've seen in these other memes: poetic, literary lyrics valued above functional, repetitive ones; fewer producers favored over more; more instruments over fewer. Note also the use of the word “needed” in the Wikipedia vandalism. The implication is the same as the “Run The World”/“Bohemian Rhapsody” meme: that Beyoncé does not have the ability to write, produce or play her



**Dear Beliebers,
Learn the difference between an idiot and an idol.
Sincerely, The Rock/Punk Community**

Andrew Biersack fell off a 15ft wall, shattered 3 ribs, got up, and continued to play. Frank Iero played an entire show hooked up to an oxygen tank. Alex Gaskarth hit his head hard on an overhanging speaker, fell off the stage, split open his forehead and got a concussion, then got up and finished the set. And Justin Bieber broke his toe on stage and stopped the whole show.

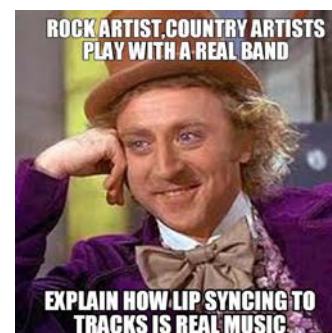
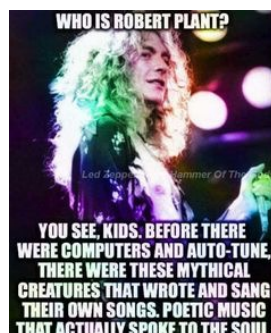
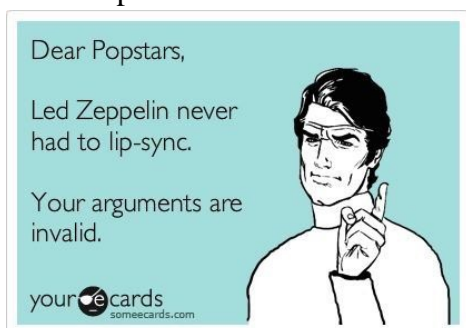
own songs and must instead rely on producers, songwriters, and outside instrumentalists.

Performers' grit is sometimes compared in memes as well. On the “real music” image search, a comparison contrasting three rock band performances with one by pop singer Justin Bieber shows up after a few rows. The rock bands whose members are described below are, respectively, Black Veil Brides, My Chemical Romance, and All Time Low – all part of the post-hardcore contingent of mainstream rock. The former of the two variations on this meme explicitly aligns the “Rock/Punk Community” in opposition to Bieber’s fanbase, directly appealing to “Beliebers” to learn the “difference

⁴³ Jack Shepherd, “5 Reasons Why Beck Beat Beyonce,” February 9, 2015, https://www.buzzfeed.com/expresident/why-beck-beat-beyonce?utm_term=.oqW18YLrB#.emv81Z964

between an idiot and an idol.” This is an explicit entreaty for pop fans to disavow their preferred genre for rock. The word “learn” suggests Bieber’s cancellation of his show due to illness makes him objectively an “idiot” rather than an “idol” and that the knowledge of this “fact” is something that must be learned. The creator of this meme would presumably prefer Beliebers idolize these rock musicians due to their ability (or choice) to continue performing after suffering otherwise-debilitating injuries.

Lip-synching is frowned upon as well and is often associated with pop stars in comparative memes. This goes hand-in-hand with a general loathing of Auto-Tune, the vocal pitch correction software frequently employed in pop either as a stylistic effect or to mask pitch deficiencies.



It is not only memes that feature these sorts of sentiments; we can hear them from the mouths of rock musicians as well. An infamous video of Iggy Pop at the Caprices Festival in Switzerland shows him ranting in anger about techno music, which he calls “fake” for involving “button-pushing” and “drum machines,” presumably in contrast to the live, non-electronic music he makes with his band The Stooges.⁴⁴ Dave Grohl, best known for his work as a member of rock bands Nirvana and the Foo Fighters, gave a speech at the electronic dance music-dominated 2012 Grammys in which he claimed that “singing into a microphone and learning to play an instrument

⁴⁴ “Iggy Pop Hates Techno (Full Clip),” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4yicKTgt8E>

and learning to do your craft, that's the most important thing for people to do." After being subject to much criticism from the electronic dance music community, many of whom interpreted his speech as a jab against that genre, Grohl walked back his remarks, praising the Grammy-nominated electronic dance artist Skrillex but maintaining a pro-“real instrument” stance: “I try really fucking hard so that I don't have to rely on anything but my hands and my heart to play a song [...] It should be real, right? Everybody wants something real.”⁴⁵

2. Commitment

The common thread tying together all these criticisms is they have to do with the level of commitment the credited artist is perceived to show in their work.

We see this in the frequent accusation that pop stars “need” to lip-sync, use Auto-Tune, or employ a large number of producers to accomplish their work. In lyrical-comparison memes where the numbers of writers and producers are listed, the implication is that it is more difficult to write poetic and complex lyrics than simple, repetitive pop lyrics. The gist is that it is more impressive for Freddie Mercury to write a “Bohemian Rhapsody” or Bob Dylan to write a “Tangled Up In Blue” by themselves than for a small army of writers to create a “Run The World” or “Scream And Shout.”

We also see this in the comparisons of performers' grit. It presumably takes far more commitment to play a show in an iron lung or with broken ribs than to play a show with a cold, which is why Bieber is seen as an “idiot” while the ordeals of Frank

⁴⁵ Dennis Romero, “Dave Grohl: His Grammys Speech About Electronic Music Was Bullshit,” *LA Weekly*, February 12, 2016, <http://www.laweekly.com/music/dave-grohl-his-grammys-speech-about-electronic-music-was-bullshit-2401149>

Iero and Andy Biersack are seen as worthy of an “idol” status. The same logic applies to rock’s denigration of lip-synching and Auto-Tune.

3. Rebuttals

This is not to say that rock has a monopoly on lyrical creativity. Nicki Minaj has written personal, complex, and literary lyrics (“All Things Go”), while Led Zeppelin has written repetitive, simple lyrics (“Boogie With Stu”), as have Beck (“No Money No Honey”) and The Beatles (“Love Me Do,” arguably most of their early hits). And most pop stars receive songwriting credits on all or most of their songs, though it is difficult to determine how much input they actually had due to the practice of crediting performers as songwriters for royalty purposes.

There is no shortage of rebuttal memes pointing this out. Many of these are comparative. Some rebuttals to the “Thank You/Stupid Hoe” meme compare equally simple or equally complex lyrics by artists “then” and “now.” More still compare complex, literary lyrics by contemporary pop artists with repetitive, functional pop lyrics by rock bands. But the fact remains that rock culture is far and away the most persistent and vigorous source of criticism regarding the perceived quality and authenticity in other musical genres. Why is that?

Chapter 4: Authenticity, Bob Dylan, Rebellion, And “Meaning”

1. History

During rock’s first decade, it was largely a teen-oriented genre played by a combination of performers, singer-songwriters, and studio musicians. Most of the genre’s stars could be said to inhabit a “teenager in love” persona – even those who were well into their twenties at the time of their rise to stardom, such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard. The most common themes were love, sex (usually expressed through innuendo, of course), and youth culture, including partying, dancing, surfing, or the act of listening to or making music. Lyrics were mostly simple and functional, the most prominent exception being Berry’s, which were often narratively rich but which used simple, vernacular language and generally focused on the same themes as other rock artists (e.g. “Maybellene,” “Memphis”). Political rock songs were almost unheard of.⁴⁶

Concurrent with the rise of rock was the American folk revival. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the folk revival was in full swing, with artists like the Kingston Trio and Joan Baez selling millions of copies and festivals like the Newport Folk Festival attracting large crowds. The Kingston Trio is widely credited with popularizing the folk revival through their clean-cut image and apolitical songs, though they were criticized within the folk community for not taking a political stance.⁴⁷ More polemic but no less popular artists included Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, both outspoken advocates of civil rights and opponents of the Vietnam War during an era when such issues were still

⁴⁶ Hugh Barker, Yuval Taylor, “Faking It: The Quest For Authenticity In Popular Music” (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 169-173

⁴⁷ Peter Dreier, “The Kingston Trio And The Red Scare,” *The Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/the-kingston-trio-and-the_b_134683.html

controversial. In 1963, Baez and Dylan sang “We Shall Overcome” at Martin Luther King Jr.’s March On Washington, and their commercial success did not suffer.⁴⁸

Rock’s equation of authenticity with effort stems directly from the folk music revival, and the merger of the two movements in the mid-1960s – and the subsequent effect of this hybridization on the 1960s counterculture driven by the two genres – are key to the genre’s emphasis on musicianship, self-containment, and “meaningful” lyricism. It also helped define a key part of rock’s ethos: no matter how successful rock bands become, rock ideally maintains a non-commercial, “countercultural” ethos. This helps explain why explicitly commercial, studio-borne genres that emerged after rock, including bubblegum, disco, contemporary R&B, and what we now know as “pop,” are targeted by fans of rock music as inauthentic. It also helps explain why the majority of subcultural movements in rock began with a focus on non-commerciality and a conscious rebellion against the mainstream they would later alternately join or distance themselves from.

2. Rock, Rebellion, And Youth Culture

Rock has always been rebel music. Since its early days, it has posited itself as an independent youth movement in opposition to the “establishment,” which was early on represented by authority figures from the previous generation. Early rock songs like Eddie Cochran’s “C’mon Everybody” and Chuck Berry’s “School Days” glorified

⁴⁸ Various writers, “Dream Songs: The Music Of The March On Washington,” *The New Yorker*, August 28, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/dream-songs-the-music-of-the-march-on-washington>

rebellion against authority figures like parents and teachers,^{49 50} while the provocative performances, suggestive lyrics, and strong representation of African-American performers in the rock genre engendered revulsion among white parents, lawmakers, and teachers across the U.S. Early rock criticism, even well into the days of the Beatles, was rife with references to delinquency and moral degradation. In 1956, the small city of Santa Cruz, California banned the genre, largely due to fears of white teenagers socializing with the black community; similar bans were proposed in San Antonio, Texas and Asbury Park, New Jersey.⁵¹ Rock was so synonymous with youth culture and rebellion in its early days that “Rock Around The Clock,” a flop Bill Haley B-side from 1954, was used in the opening credits to the cautionary, anti-delinquent 1956 film *Blackboard Jungle*. Ironically, the song became a massive hit among the students presumably forced to watch the film at assemblies.⁵² The fact that these songs became hits did not affect the perception of the genre as something in opposition to mainstream culture.

Rock did not attract the same backlash in the early 1960s, when the genre is sometimes said to have temporarily “died” due to a number of the genre’s major stars dying or suffering major career setbacks.⁵³ This paved the way for a brief period dominated by boy bands and girl groups on labels like Philles and Motown. These

⁴⁹ “C’Mon Everybody,”

http://www.lyricsfreak.com/e/eddie+cochran/cmon+everybody_20171183.html

⁵⁰ “School Days,” <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/chuckberry/schooldays.html>

⁵¹ Linda Martin, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition To Rock ’n’ Roll* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1993), 31-39

⁵² Martin Chilton, “Rock Around The Clock: How Bill Haley’s Song Became A Hit,” *Telegraph*, April 17, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/artists/rock-around-the-clock-how-bill-haleys-song-became-a-hit/>

⁵³ Dave Marsh, *New Book Of Rock Lists* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 129

artists sang chaste, simple songs about puppy love and marriage, even when singing about dangerous love interests (as on the Crystals' "He's A Rebel"). Though there was undoubtedly some ire about these groups' racially integrated lineups, there was no wide-scale moral panic as with the first wave of rock. It took the American folk revival – then largely in opposition to rock, which it saw as phony – to inject a more humanistic, socially conscious form of rebellion into the rock music scene.

3. Bob Dylan And Folk Rock

The key bridge between the two was Bob Dylan, a folk singer who controversially integrated rock into his sound to massive commercial success.

At the time, rock was seen by many figures in the folk revival as inauthentic, commercial music easily consumable for young people. Peter Yarrow of popular folk group Peter, Paul, and Mary called the typical rocker an “unscrupulous modifier of folk songs whose business it is to make this type of song palatable for the teenage delinquent mother-my-dog instinct.” Scholar Jeff Todd Titon advocated for folk as a “meaningful musical alternative to rock ’n’ roll’s vapid insistency.”⁵⁴ As critic Richie Unterberger writes: “In the early 1960s, any suggestion that the folk and rock & roll worlds would intertwine to create a hybrid called folk-rock would be met with utter disbelief.”⁵⁵

The hostile reaction to rock within the folk community is exemplified by its response to Dylan's hybridization with rock music. Dylan, born Robert Zimmerman in 1941, started out as a fan of Little Richard and Elvis Presley but became interested in folk in the late 1950s for reasons that aren't too out of line with how folk and rock were

⁵⁴ Barker, Taylor, “Faking It,” 150-151

⁵⁵ Bogdanov, *AllMusic Guide To Rock*, 1331

respectively perceived in that era. “I knew that when I got into folk music, it was more of a serious type of thing,” he said in the liner notes to his 1985 box set *Biograph*. “The songs are filled with more despair, more sadness, more triumph, more faith in the supernatural, much deeper feelings.”⁵⁶ He moved to New York and immersed himself in the folk scene, recording four acoustic, self-accompanied albums before his decision to integrate his early rock influences on his fifth, *Bringing It All Back Home*.

This album was promoted in part by a performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, a key gathering for the American folk revival, at which Bob Dylan performed with a full rock band to a chorus of boos and heavy criticism. Though some have cited poor sound quality or the brevity of Dylan’s set as a reason for the booing, there is no doubt that Dylan’s performance polarized his audience. Folk music-oriented magazine *Sing Out!* (which had already written an “Open Letter To Bob Dylan” criticizing his move away from political songwriting) called his new sound “watery pap,” suggesting his music was light on substance but easily consumable by a young audience.⁵⁷ This is an obvious jab against Dylan’s increasing pop inclinations, contrasting the political bent of the folk revival with Dylan’s more personal and love-oriented songs. And he was mercilessly booed throughout his world tour later that year, with one British audience member calling him “Judas.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Bob Dylan, liner notes to: *Biograph*, Bob Dylan, Columbia, 1985

⁵⁷ Richie Unterberger, *Eight Miles High: Folk Rock’s Flight From Haight-Ashbury To Woodstock* (Milwaukee: Backbeat, 2003), 136

⁵⁸ Chris Nelson, “Man Who Called Dylan Judas Breaks 33 Years Of Silence,” MTV News, March 9, 1999, <http://www.mtv.com/news/512709/fan-who-called-dylan-judas-breaks-33-years-of-silence/>

Dylan originally prepared an acoustic set for Newport, but his decision to assemble an electric band at the last minute was sparked in part due to musicologist Alan Lomax's disparaging introduction of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, an electric blues band who had played two days before Dylan at the festival (and several of whose members Dylan recruited for his band). "Used to be a time when a farmer would take a box, glue an axe handle to it, put some strings on it, sit down in the shade of a tree and play some blues for himself and his friends," Ulrich Adelt quotes Lomax as saying. "Now we've got these guys, and they need all this fancy hardware to play the blues."⁵⁹

Lomax's suggestion that the Paul Butterfield Blues Band "needed" electricity to play the blues suggests he believed they were not skilled enough to do otherwise. This quote points out how closely the folk revival's ideal of authenticity mirrors rock's contemporary ideals. Lomax's claims are not dissimilar to the dismissal of technology inherent in criticisms of Auto-Tune, electronic production, and other rock taboos.

The influence of *Bringing It All Back Home* and its even more rock-leaning follow-up *Highway 61 Revisited* would extend far beyond the folk movement. One of the songs on the former, "Mr. Tambourine Man," was quickly made a hit by the Byrds, spawning a boom in folk-influenced rock. The success of this cover enabled Dylan, whose *Bringing It All Back Home* singles reached only the lower echelons of the Top 40, to achieve a No. 2 hit in 1965 with "Like A Rolling Stone" from *Highway 61 Revisited*. The song was unprecedented on the charts due to its elaborate lyricism and six-minute length. Radio stations refused to play it, but when Columbia executive

⁵⁹ Ulrich Adelt, *Blues Music In The Sixties: A Story Of Black And White* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 52

Shaun Considine tested it at a New York rock club to positive reception, he was able to convince his superiors to release it. It stayed on the charts for three months.⁶⁰

Few of Dylan's rock songs were explicitly political. But they were lyrically complex and resistant to many conventions in the pop world. Some of his songs stretched well past ten minutes ("Desolation Row," "Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands"), and he was fond of giving his songs obtuse and lengthy titles that do not actually appear within the song's lyrics. Nonetheless, his studio albums charted in the Top 10 until the abysmally reviewed *Dylan*, released in 1973.⁶¹

The success of Dylan's albums meant they reached a wide audience of both musicians and non-musicians. Many of the 1960s' biggest rock artists were openly influenced by Dylan, including the Beatles (with whom Dylan had a friendship and mutual admiration),⁶² the Jimi Hendrix Experience (who made Dylan's "All Along The Watchtower" a hit), and the Who (whose leader Pete Townshend credits Dylan with "open[ing] the door for rock to say bigger and better things").⁶³

The folk influence caused the popularity of simple party and love songs to wane, and the 1960s counterculture accelerated this change. Rock became associated with the rising, politically active youth culture, and the music thus was increasingly seen as a tool for social change. Critics, audiences, and record executives alike increasingly favored political music as the decade wore on. The Beatles would be criticized for the

⁶⁰ Shaun Considine, "The Hit We Almost Missed," *New York Times*, December 3, 2004

⁶¹ "Bob Dylan Chart History," <http://www.billboard.com/artist/293235/bob-dylan/chart>

⁶² Andrew Harrison, "When Dylan met the Beatles: history in a handshake?" *The Guardian*, August 27, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/aug/27/when-bob-dylan-met-the-beatles>

⁶³ Geoffrey Giuliano, *Behind Blue Eyes: The Life Of Pete Townshend* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002), 40

prevalence of apolitical joke songs on their 1968 self-titled album.⁶⁴ And many previously apolitical bands began recording political songs, including the Doors, the Rolling Stones, and the Beatles themselves – especially John Lennon, who would immerse himself in activism after the band’s 1970 split and write dozens of protest songs. Some even recorded political songs as a commercial strategy. The Beach Boys, recovering from the commercial failure of 1970’s *Sunflower*, were advised by their manager Jack Rieley to write political songs, several of which appeared on 1971’s far more successful *Surf’s Up*.⁶⁵ Though simple songs about love and partying were still a major part of rock, most of the most popular British and American rock bands in the late 1960s were increasingly writing elaborate narratives and/or topical songs.

⁶⁴ Jon Wiener, *Come Together: John Lennon In His Time* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 134

⁶⁵ Peter Ames Carlin, *Catch A Wave: The Rise, Fall And Redemption Of Brian Wilson* (Emmaus: Rodale, 2006), 81

Chapter 5: Authenticity, The Beatles, And Self-Containment

1. Before the Beatles

Rock's emphasis on writing original songs did not spawn from within the rock genre. In fact, when Dylan first rose to popularity in the first half of the 1960s, rock songs were rarely written by the performers but rather by behind-the-scenes songwriters tethered to labels. Most rock bands did covers of R&B songs or older standards well into the 1960s. There were a few auteurs: Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, and Jerry Lee Lewis all wrote songs. But they mostly wrote either a minority of their own work or were typically assisted by outside songwriters.

Dylan and the Beatles were the two major catalysts for rock's shift towards focusing on singer-songwriters and developing the standards of authenticity to which it still adheres. Both wrote original songs with no input from outside songwriters. Both had as much reverence for great songwriters as great performers – Dylan for his folk forebears, the Beatles for the studio songwriting teams who penned their favorite pop songs. Both enjoyed high degrees of commercial and critical success. And both experimented with the pop format in unprecedented ways, changing what was acceptable within the industry and influencing countless artists to follow. Dylan and the Beatles proved to both the pop industry and the musicians within it that the performer-as-auteur was a commercially viable market model.

2. The Beatles, A Self-Contained Rock Band

The Beatles did not initially anticipate the scale of their fame, as few bands do. Indeed, John Lennon and Paul McCartney intended to work as songwriters for a label or

publishing company if the Beatles didn't work out. The Lennon-McCartney team wrote a number of songs in the early sixties for other artists, most notably Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas.⁶⁶ The Beatles certainly were aware of and admired the behind-the-scenes movers and shakers behind their favorite records. Lennon has been quoted as saying he and Paul McCartney planned to be "the Goffin-King of England" – referring to the songwriting team of Gerry Goffin and Carole King, who wrote dozens of hits for other artists in the early 1960s.⁶⁷ Peter Asher, a close friend of the Beatles, recalled that "when the Beatles first came to America, that's who they wanted to meet: Goffin and King."⁶⁸ In retrospect, this seems like a strange choice given the wealth of American star performers they idolized and to whom they would have likely had access. But we can see the Beatles' deep admiration for these songwriters in the way McCartney extolled the virtues of Elvis Presley's main songwriting team, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller: "They didn't just write 'Jailhouse Rock' or 'All Shook Up,' they also wrote 'I Who Have Nothing,' a completely different type of song."⁶⁹ This latter song was performed not by Presley but Ben E. King, and McCartney's knowledge of its origin suggests he followed songwriters as much as performers.

The future Beatles composed a number of songs in the late 1950s, including a song co-written by Paul McCartney and George Harrison called "In Spite Of All The

⁶⁶ Barker, Taylor, "Faking It," 171

⁶⁷ Adam Bernstein, "Gerry Goffin, lyricist who co-wrote seminal '60s hits, dies at 75," *Washington Post*, June 20, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/gerry-goffin-lyricist-who-co-wrote-seminal-60s-hits-dies-at-75/2014/06/20/>

⁶⁸ Sheila Weller, *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon – And the Journey of a Generation* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2009), 175

⁶⁹ "Get Back: An Interview With Paul McCartney," <http://web.ncf.ca/fl512/beatles/interviews/2000-09-28.htm>

Danger” that they recorded as the Quarrymen in 1958.⁷⁰ It seems they started writing songs for fun; “it was a very interesting thing to try and learn to do, to become songwriters,” McCartney would say later.⁷¹ When the band first presented their original work to their producer George Martin, he was not impressed. He had signed the Beatles to EMI based on their personalities and did not like “Love Me Do,” the first original the band brought to him. Rather, he preferred that they record “How Do You Do It?,” a single written by hired songwriter Mitch Murray, and threatened to not allow the Beatles to write their own songs if they could not come up with anything “commercial.” But the Beatles’ poor performance of “How Do You Do It?” at their sessions meant “Love Me Do” was released instead. It peaked at number 17, and their next five singles, which all reached number one or two in the UK pop charts, would be originals.⁷²

Numerous Sixties bands were directly or indirectly inspired by the Beatles to write their own songs. The Young Rascals explicitly started writing their own songs due to the Beatles’ influence.⁷³ The Kinks’ Ray Davies didn’t write songs until his label demanded “Beatle-type material,” to which he responded by writing his first five songs, including the hit “You Really Got Me.”⁷⁴ The Kinks, in turn, inspired the Who to write their own songs.⁷⁵ And it’s hard to imagine the Animals deliberately leaving Columbia for MGM to write their own songs if not for the Beatles; a few years before, they would

⁷⁰ “The Beatles Bible: In Spite Of All The Danger,” <http://www.beatlesbible.com/songs/in-spite-of-all-the-danger/>

⁷¹ Barry Miles, *Many Years From Now* (New York: Holt, 1997), 37

⁷² “The Beatles Chart History,” <http://www.billboard.com/artist/383540/beatles/chart>

⁷³ Richie Unterberger, liner notes: The Rascals, *The Young Rascals*, Atlantic, 1966 (reissued 2012)

⁷⁴ Doug Hinman, *The Kinks: All Day And All Of The Night* (Milwaukee: Backbeat, 2004), 25

⁷⁵ John Baldie, “B-Nanngg,” *Q*, September 1994, 90

have likely been content covering R&B fodder like “Long Tall Sally” and “Good Morning Little Schoolgirl” for good pay and enthusiastic audiences.⁷⁶

The success of the Beatles and Bob Dylan did not kill the hired-songwriter system. It was still common for soul artists to sing songs prepared for them by staff songwriters; Motown artists rarely played their own instruments or wrote their own material, even into the seventies. But within rock, standards of authenticity changed practically overnight. It was (and is) still acceptable to do covers. But by 1967, less than half a decade after “Love Me Do,” a rock band like the Monkees could be torn apart by the press after being accused of not writing their own songs or playing their own instruments,⁷⁷ and a genre like bubblegum could attract the ire of the rock community for following precisely the same production model that produced beloved hits by Elvis Presley.

⁷⁶ Writer uncredited, “Animals to Switch to MGM,” *Billboard*, September 25, 1965, retrieved September 11, 2011

⁷⁷ Barker, Taylor, “Faking It,” 161-169

Chapter 6: Rock's Self-Defense Against Pop

1. Anti-Commercial Rock vs. Commercial Pop

Rock never quite let go of the values of authenticity it developed during the folk-rock boom and 1960s counterculture. Most underground movements in rock are explicitly anti-commercial, from the Swedish do-it-yourself “progg” scene of the late 1960s to punk rock to post-punk genres like no wave indie rock to the alternative rock movement of the 1980s. And most of the genres rock culture has historically maligned – bubblegum, disco, contemporary pop music – are explicitly commercial, more in tandem with the “establishment” and the profit motive than the anti-establishment attitude common in rock. This may also help explain why producer-driven music made after the Beatles’ and Dylan’s heyday is so maligned in rock; music made by producers and songwriters hired by a company is inherently designed to sell. This is as opposed to the ideal of the rock band starting from simple origins and managing to make it big. We can see this ideal in films like *Rock Star* and rock songs like Tom Petty’s “Into The Great Wide Open,” Bad Company’s “Shooting Star,” or Boston’s “Rock ‘n’ Roll Band,” all of which focus on average schmoes who worked hard and made sacrifices to get on the charts. Of course, artists are picked by record labels based on their commercial potential, and accepting a recording contract is inherently a commercial move. But the mythology persists: as historian Keir Knightley puts it: “rock somehow emerges prior to the involvement of the record industry, mass media, or large audiences.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Jim Elledge, *Queers In American Popular Culture, Vol. 1* (Westport: Praeger, 2010), 165

Commercialism versus anti-commercialism played a major role in the conflict between rock and disco. Disco began as a subcultural phenomenon in New York dance clubs in the 1970s and was primarily a producer's medium; it could be considered an extension of the producer-oriented tradition that carried on in soul music after rock's shift to self-containment. As disco rose beyond clubs to massive popularity, rock fans became disillusioned by the genre's naked commercialism, exemplified by novelty songs like Rick Dees' "Disco Duck" or cash grabs like Meco's disco version of the *Star Wars* theme. "The disco decade is one of glitter and gloss, without substance, subtlety or more than surface sexuality," said Robert Vare in his New York Times article "Discophobia."⁷⁹ The disco backlash eventually led to anti-disco songs and anti-disco demonstrations, including Chicago's 50,000-strong "Disco Demolition Night" at Comiskey Park, organized by Chicago rock DJ Steve Dahl.

2. Rock Under Threat

The disco backlash was also a product of the fact that many rock stations were forced to play disco alongside or instead of rock in order to survive. Prior to organizing Disco Demolition Night, Dahl had been fired from his gig at Chicago station WDAI, which was then switching from rock to disco.⁸⁰ Rock and disco were, quite literally, competing. This points to another possible reason why pop is so maligned among rock fans: it has grown, while rock has not. Rock is nowhere near as popular now as it was in the 1950s through the 1990s. It has largely been eclipsed by pop, EDM, hip hop, and

⁷⁹ Robert Vare, "Discophobia," *New York Times*, July 10, 1979

⁸⁰ Robert Channick, "Dahl ready to be 'part of daily conversation,'" *Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 2014, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-steve-dahl-1010-biz-20141009-story.html>

R&B. Even popular recent rock bands like All Time Low, Black Veil Brides, and Disturbed do not regularly chart in the Top 10. No rock “movement” has had a major impact on the Top 10 since rap metal in the late 1990s. And the most popular rock bands in America right now were formed decades ago in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s: U2, Coldplay, the Foo Fighters, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Radiohead, Green Day, etc.. Occasionally a rock song bubbles up to the upper echelons of the charts. And pop artists occasionally chart rock songs; at the time of this writing, Beyoncé’s blues-rock song “Don’t Hurt Yourself” is riding high on the charts. But Beyoncé did not get famous singing rock, and had the song been written by a new artist, it is unlikely it would have succeeded to such a degree.

Rock’s backlash against disco was in no small part due to the threat the former perceived from the latter, and its current backlash against pop may very well stem from the same fear – hence the preference for the “then”-versus-“now” so often expressed in comparative memes. And rock fans are prepared to level the same accusation against contemporary pop as they did against disco: it’s inauthentic. And it’s not a stretch to call this a new front in the war between rock and disco. The genres popular on the charts right now – dance music, R&B, hip hop, and contemporary pop – all evolved to some degree out of soul music, as disco did, and retain that genre’s production-driven model. Rock still loves its self-containment and will fight for it until the end.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Rock's ideals of authenticity were not born into the genre. Its focus on self-containment developed from the influence of Bob Dylan and the Beatles, the two self-contained rock acts who made it big in the 1960s while lyrically and sonically pushing the limits of what could be commercially viable within the genre. And rock's focus on maintaining an anti-commercial, "meaningful" posture developed through hybridization with the folk revival, which Dylan initially embodied and then alienated by developing a lucrative fusion of the rock music he loved with the folk music he'd always made.

Rock's contentiousness, however, stems from the commercial threats to which rock has been subjected. Before disco, when rock was in a comfortable position, most of the genres maligned for not conforming to rock's standards of authenticity were within rock music itself, namely bubblegum and the boy-band format exemplified by the Monkees. Rock's first major crusade against another genre was disco, an action taken largely in self-defense. Because rock was increasingly threatened by a newly popular genre that not only went against its values of authenticity but was replacing it in clubs and on the radio, it was understandable rock fans would wage a large-scale campaign against it. And as rock has commercially stagnated in comparison to pop genres that likewise do not conform to rock's values of authenticity, it has once again decided to go to war, this time not through radio or public demonstrations but through viral internet content – the rhetorical language employed in the primary meeting place for rock fans in the 21st century.

Rock's essential nature is not to be contentious. This aggression is a by-product of the genre being threatened by other, increasingly commercially popular genres, and it

is likely this anger that prompts rock fans to compare music “then” and “now” in spite of there being countless examples of repetitive, functional rock songs from the 1960s and literary, poetic pop songs from the 2010s. Perhaps if labels and producers were to make a conscious effort to construct a form of rock that appealed to audiences’ tastes, as they attempted to do with bubblegum in the 1960s, rock might experience a revival of public interest. But this would go against the values rock holds most dear, and this will likely never happen.

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