Sound recording in the British folk revival: ideology, discourse and practice, 1950–1975

Matthew Ord

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Abstract

Although recent work in record production studies has advanced scholarly understandings of the contribution of sound recording to musical and social meaning, folk revival scholarship in Britain has yet to benefit from these insights. The revival's recording practice took in a range of approaches and contexts including radio documentary, commercial studio productions and amateur field recordings. This thesis considers how these practices were mediated by revivalist beliefs and values, how recording was represented in revivalist discourse, and how its semiotic resources were incorporated into multimodal discourses about music, technology and traditional culture.

Chapters 1 and 2 consider the role of recording in revivalist constructions of traditional culture and working class communities, contrasting the documentary realism of Topic's single-mic field recordings with the consciously avant-garde style of the BBC's *Radio Ballads*. The remaining three chapters explore how the sound of recorded folk was shaped by a mutually constitutive dialogue with popular music, with recordings constructing traditional performance as an authentic social practice in opposition to an Americanised studio sound equated with commercial/technological mediation. As the discourse of progressive rock elevated recording to an art practice associated with the global counterculture, however, opportunities arose for the incorporation of rock studio techniques in the interpretation of traditional song in the hybrid genre of folk-rock. Changes in studio practice and technical experiments with the semiotics of recorded sound experiments form the subject of the final two chapters.

Ethnographic, historical and semiotic approaches are combined with techniques from critical discourse analysis and conceptual metaphor theory to explore sound recording as a means of defining, expressing, and elaborating the revival as a socio-cultural movement. Recording, I will argue, offered a semiotic resource for interpreting traditional texts and repertoires, and for reimagining social space and the relationship of performance. As such, it constituted a highly significant dimension of the revival's cultural-political practice.

In memory of my grandfather

Raymond Allen Clarke

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Introduction: Recording technology, tradition and revival in Britain

Research context

Over the last decade or so, scholars in popular music studies, ethnomusicology and multimodal discourse analysis have begun to take a serious interest in the contribution of sound recording to the production and reception of musical and social meaning (van Leeuwen 1999; Machin 2010; Frith and Zagorski-Thomas 2012; Zagorski-Thomas 2014). Studies in this emerging field have included: semiotic analyses of recorded popular song (Lacasse 2010; Moore 2012); reconstructions of historical studio practice (Schmidt-Horning 2012); cultural histories of recording and biographies of leading practitioners (Sterne 2003; Moorefield 2005); and ethnographic studies from a multiplicity of contemporary and historical contexts (Scales 2012; Bayley 2010). This research has usefully complicated traditional notions of sound recording as a purely reflective process, revealing it as a complex form of social, technological, economic and artistic mediation which has a potentially transformative effect on musical texts and traditions. As this research has also begun to show, after nearly a century of technological and creative innovation, recording has evolved into a powerful resource for meaning-making in and through which textual meanings and cultural values are reflected, constructed and elaborated (Toynbee 2000; van Leeuwen 1999). This emerging interdisciplinary strand, which studies the intersection of recorded sound, subjective meaning and the social, constitutes the immediate research context within which this thesis is situated.

The study of folk and traditional music in Britain has yet to benefit significantly from this recent scholarship. Although sound recording has long been acknowledged as a crucial factor in shaping the specific character of revived folk music practices after 1945 (Laing *et al.* 1975; Sweers 2005), the impact of recording on the experience of meaning in traditional music has received little attention of the kind that has lately been turned upon other Western popular styles. In the substantial and still growing literature on folk revival in Britain, a lingering tendency to treat recording as a transparent process of capture has led scholars to neglect two potentially fertile areas of enquiry: firstly, the semiotic contribution of recording itself, how recordings translate traditional performance and contribute

to the meaning potential of texts; and secondly, the ways in which recording as a social practice, and recordings as cultural texts, connect with the subcultural values or ideologies implicit in both traditional music cultures and social movements.

While the counter-cultural aspect of the post-war revival is well-known (MacKinnon 1993; Richards 1992) the connection between ideology and the everyday social and semiotic practice of the movement has rarely been examined in detail and never with regard to sound recording. This thesis investigates the role of recording within the discursive practice through which the revival was defined and perpetuated as a cultural movement. The revival articulated an alternative model of socio-musical participation through a discourse that combined musical, verbal, textual, visual and sonic components. In what follows, I explore the idea that recording, often in dialogue with other semiotic modes (including text, talk, visual and musical material) provided a resource for reinterpreting traditional texts and repertoires, and for reimagining social space and its relationship to performance. As such, it constituted a highly significant (and so far unexplored) dimension of the revival's cultural-political practice.

Through a series of historical case studies I consider how recording practices changed as the revival movement developed; how recordings reflected and constructed revivalist values; how specific recording techniques, such as echo, reverb, or microphone placement, affected the possibilities for constructing textual and social meanings; and how recording as a creative/commercial process was constructed in the various verbal, textual and visual discourses that surrounded it. The central question at stake here is the ability of sound recording to participate in processes of meaning which go beyond the domain of specific musical texts, and I explore the hypothesis that in the revival (and in Western culture more widely) sound recording has constituted a resource for the construction of social relationships and the exploration of cultural values.

Research aims and methodology

My research combines a cultural-historical approach with ethnographic material drawn from my own interviews with producers and semiotic analyses of selected recordings. Each chapter considers a different aspect of revivalist recording practice within a specific historical moment; taken together the chapters unfold a

larger narrative of folk music's developing relationship with recording between c.1950 and c.1975. Throughout, the textual analyses are situated within broader social historical perspectives: while texts alone are insufficient to tell the story of a cultural moment, it is a conscious aim of this study not to let socio-historical factors explain away the meanings of individual texts. Putting texts into conversation with broader cultural discourses, and relating them to producers' accounts of their own practice not only enriches textual analysis but reveals creative decisions as answers to historically situated, culturally and politically inflected problems.

This study thus departs from previous cultural histories of the revival in at least two fundamental respects: firstly, in the attention given to recording as a meaningful component of revivalist social practice, and secondly, in the use of textual analyses of sound recordings (alongside lyrics, liner notes and other relevant paratext) to ground a historically situated account of the link between the movement's musical and technological practice and its underlying system of values and assumptions.

My analysis focusses primarily on three related aspects of recording as discourse. The first concerns recording as discursive practice, an activity and a set of social relationships which constitute a discourse about music, technology and society. The second deals with recording *in* discourse, looking at the ways in which recording is represented in other modes including talk, text and image. The third has to do with recordings themselves as texts. This has in itself two main aspects: firstly, how recordings as discourse manage perceptions of social factors such as interpersonal distance and agency, and secondly, how recording is used to interpret traditional material, words and music in creative ways - how it intervenes in narratives, constructs textual objects and personae. Of particular interest to this study is how these constructions can be linked to underlying ideological structures, assumptions and values. Answering these questions has involved combining material drawn from my own interviews with practitioners, analysis of text (recordings) and paratext (liner notes, cover art etc.) with information from secondary historical sources about practices, technological access and capacities, and the wider discursive contexts within which the texts were produced and creative decisions reached.

The epistemological framework draws on a number of theoretical approaches whose application reflects the technological, sociological and intellectual conditions unique to each historical moment. Basic theoretical problems include how to account for the significance of sonic (rather than strictly musical) characteristics of sound recordings; how to do this without unduly isolating these features from the other meaningful elements at work in the recorded performance as a whole; and how to connect these meaningful elements with the wider discursive context of which they form a part. Chapter 1 uses concepts from multimodal discourse theory to explore how the sonic characteristics of folk recordings supported ideological meanings through a productive relationship with text and image in the context of the album format. The insights of multimodal critical discourse analysis are, I believe, of particular value in the context of this research. Necessarily complicating conventional understandings of what constitutes cultural-political discourse, the approach offers a conceptual framework for articulating the ideological significance of non-verbal practices and allows the musical, sonic, visual and textual elements of musical discourse to be considered together using a unified conceptual toolkit. As such, it accords particularly well with my research goals of bringing recorded sound as a form of communicative discourse within the sphere of revivalist practice and of recovering the creative contributions of engineers and producers whose work might otherwise be considered merely technical in nature.

Chapter 2 explores how aspects of modernist film and dramaturgical theory informed the use of tape recording in the BBC's *Radio Ballads* and how the experience of the recording process itself fed into later understandings of the origins, stylistic character and radical significance of folk song. Chapter 3, following the work of Moore (2012) applies Hall's (1966) theory of *proxemics* to explore the ways in which revivalist recordings managed the relationship between recorded and social space, articulating an ideology of anti-commercialism through a revivalist aesthetics of sound. I return to this concept at various points in the thesis as a means of connecting the spatial qualities of sound recordings to the meaningful spaces and distances of everyday life.

Chapter 4 considers the commercial studio as a creative space and how countercultural notions of individualism and spontaneity intersected with notions of creative autonomy in the context of a rapidly professionalising folk scene.

Chapter 5 employs Lakoff and Johnson's (1980; 1999) *conceptual metaphor theory* to consider the ways in which the resources of multitrack studio recording changed approaches to the presentation of folk song texts in the music of the folk-rock movement. Lakoff and Johnson's work suggests that linguistic practices are structured by underlying cognitive metaphors which in turn are basic to specific cultures and their characteristic modes of thought. This approach, the implications of which for musical analysis have been further developed by Zbikowski (2002; 2009), suggests particularly intriguing possibilities for theorising the connection between the sonic structures of recorded song texts, group ideologies and the social meanings experienced by listeners. This makes it particularly relevant to the question of why, in the folk revival and the counter-culture of the 1960s, aesthetic choices appear so intimately connected with social values and the individuals and groups which espouse them. All of the theoretical approaches are applied so as to reflect the specific character of each case as illustrative of the evolving intersection of ideology, sound technology and folk music in the post-war period.

Fieldwork interviews and supplementary materials

In seeking to draw out the real complexity of recording as practice and recordings as cultural texts, this study also highlights the creative contribution of producers and engineers beyond their acknowledged role as collectors. Their work, I argue, was not simply reactive but innovative and creative, and as such, is deserving of a more detailed consideration by revival scholars than it has so far received. While my interviews with musicians and producers provided detailed information about the recording process largely absent from existing published histories of the revival, equally important is their value as revealing samples of ethnographic discourse in their own right. Producers' and musicians' descriptions of their own practice provide essential context for interpreting the social dimension of their work, and help us to understand it as a series of responses to concrete problems within a specific historical moment.[1] These commentaries are not only crucial to

[1] There is unlikely to be a better time to undertake research into this neglected corner of folk music history: many of the leading exponents of the post-war revival are still active in the fields of traditional music and recording, and some, as I found in the course of my interviews, are beginning to look back upon their careers in a spirit of re-evaluation. The personal archives of a number of prolific and influential recordists have found homes within national collections (notably the British Library sound archive) and provide a wealth of previously unavailable material on this topic, much of it open access; but time is running out to gather first-hand accounts from producers who were at

recovering the everyday detail of contemporary practice but give a necessary grounding to the semiotic analysis which along with the cultural-historical strand, forms the other major component of the thesis. Rather than simply reading off meanings through textual analysis, I have tried to recover as much relevant information as possible about the production context, the nature and capacities of the technologies used and the thought processes underlying creative decisions. At the same time, I have tried to retain a critical awareness of the interview process as a context in which interviewer and respondents co-produce narratives about practice according to their own pre-suppositions, concerns and strategies of self-construction.

The majority of the interview material is from my own fieldwork, with some additional material drawn from published and online interviews, including those from studies by MacKinnon (1993), Sweers (2005), Brocken (2003), and Bean (2014) as well as recorded material held in the British Library's digital sound archive. Chapter 2, which discusses leading revivalist Ewan MacColl's ideas about language and folk song, draws upon recently published interviews in Moore and Vacca (2014) as well as recordings of the meetings of MacColl's Critics Group[2] held in the Charles Parker Archive at the Library of Birmingham.

The interviews were carried out throughout the process of researching and writing the thesis. I began with a 'wish-list' of interviewees which included a number of well-known revival musicians, producers and engineers requesting interviews with as many of these as I could via email (where an address could be accessed through label websites, for example) in each case outlining the nature of the project and expressing my willingness to travel to them to conduct a recorded interview. If I received no response after a second attempt at making contact, I let the matter drop. Several of those I approached did not respond at all, while others who initially responded positively were ultimately unable to participate for reasons of scheduling, illness or other unavoidable constraints. Some of those I

work during the early period of the revival, and if the oral history of the recording culture of the period is to be told, then more research is urgently required.

[2] The Critics' Group, which met between 1964 and 1972, was an offshoot of MacColl's Singers' Club and drew heavily on his own particular synthesis of Marxism and modernist drama theory. In the group's meetings, MacColl and his followers applied the techniques developed in the many theatre companies he had founded over the previous decades to the interpretation of traditional song. The group, whose members included Charles Parker, Sandra Kerr, John Faulkner, Brian Byrne and Michael Rosen was initially founded in an attempt by MacColl to build a new folk theatre on the basis of the revival and involved a number of theatrical performances including the annual satirical review Festival of Fools (MacColl 1965a; 1990; Harker 2007).

contacted responded almost immediately, however, while further contacts developed out of successful interviews. Topic and Transatlantic Records producer Bill Leader, for example, I managed to contact through my first interviewee, Tony Engle, who was also able to put me in touch with the collector and academic Reg Hall. Thus as my list of contacts grew, the fieldwork process took on some momentum of its own with respondents frequently making their own suggestions as to possible sources and offering contact details unprompted.

I found my respondents sympathetic to the project and often generous with their time, a fact which I attribute in part to the timing of the study. Many of those I spoke to were retired or approaching retirement and as a result, had the time and inclination to offer me assistance which included follow up phone calls and emails, helping to confirm details such as dates, personnel and equipment used for specific sessions and so on. Most of the interviews were carried out in person, which involved a number of trips around the country to the interviewees' homes. Musician Ashley Hutchings and producer Shel Talmy (who is based in the US) agreed to be interviewed by telephone. While my own personal contacts in the field played a role in the process of setting up the interviews, I also had an advantage over previous researchers in conducting my research in the age of social media and at least one interview was arranged through Facebook.

The availability of respondents and the network of contacts that emerged inevitably shaped the thesis as it developed. I had decided at an early stage that Topic Records, the UK's leading revivalist label throughout the period would form a central case study and Tony Engle, recently retired as head of Topic, was therefore high on my list of desired interviewees. I also particularly wanted to interview Bill Leader, the label's recording manager during its early days as a fledgling independent (discussed in chapter 3). It is likely that, had these two not been willing or able to contribute, the thesis might have taken a different turn. As it was, in part thanks to Engle's participation, Leader proved both contactable and sympathetic to my research, which allowed me to gather substantial material not only on his work at Topic, but also his later studio work with folk-rock pioneers Pentangle. While I had always intended to devote at least one chapter to the studio practice of the folk-rock movement, the nature of the material obtained from Leader encouraged me to make Pentangle the focus of a chapter length case study. I then decided to contact the band's first producer Shel Talmy, whose work I had

not initially considered relevant to the study but whose approach to recording, so different from that of Leader, now seemed to offer a way of exploring the contrasting aesthetics of folk and commercial pop during the period. Talmy, fortunately, was also available and the two respondents' testimony, alongside that of band members Jacqui McShee and John Renbourn, helped to build up a vivid picture of the changes in the band's studio practice that took place over the busy four year period dealt with in Chapter 4.

The British folk revival has generated a vast range of texts including academic books and articles, magazine interviews and liner notes. Among the more rigorous academic studies of the revival are the work of Laing *et al* (1975), Boyes (1993), MacKinnon (1993), Brocken (2003) Sweers (2005) and Gregory (2000; 2002a; 2002b). A recent resurgence of interest in the revival and its wider cultural significance has also produced a scattering of imaginative, more journalistic treatments such as Young (2010), Hodgkinson (2012) and Bean (2014). The available biographies and autobiographies of leading figures within the revival,[3] though they represent widely varying standards of factual rigour, provide useful background and, like interviews, often reveal a great deal about the basic ideological assumptions and concerns of the revival movement. The archives of the British Library include copies of *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker* covering the entire period and offer a valuable insight into the place of folk within the broader popular field. The Charles Parker Archive in Birmingham contains a wealth of written, recorded and photographic source material on the early days of the post-war revival and its links to media and the theatre. Finally, the textual and visual discourse of revivalist albums provided a window on the ideology of the movement, information which was gathered in locations ranging from libraries and second hand shops, to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society and the digital catalogue of Topic Records.

[3] For example, the ballad singer, broadcaster and playwright Ewan MacColl's (1990) autobiography and Vacca's (2014) interviews with him provide entertaining if occasionally self-mythologizing first person accounts of MacColl's career and the folk revival more generally, while Harker (2007; 2009a; 2009b) provides a detailed and academically rigorous contextualisation of the same events. Cox (2008) gives a detailed and informative account of the BBC *Radio Ballads*; Harper (2000) and Arthur (2012) provide informative but more journalistic accounts of the careers of Bert Jansch and A.L. Lloyd respectively; Bean (2014) draws together a range of fascinating though largely anecdotal testimony from the folk club scene of the 1960s and 1970s.

Defining the revival

The post-war revival was, as Boyes (1993) notes, one of the most successful and influential revival movements of the twentieth century. It was also, initially at least, politically radical in its ethos and aims. The UK's contemporary folk scene still has strong roots in the revival of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of today's leading exponents of traditional music began their careers during the period, while others are connected to it through continuity in performance style and repertoire, or through family background, as attested to by the current crop of musicians who might be termed second (or even third) generation revivalists.[4] Despite the clearly traceable lines of influence, however, the radical nature of the movement and the extent of its early ambitions are not always apparent in today's highly commodified and professionalised scene.

Musical revivals, as 'social movements which strive to "restore" a musical system believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past for the benefit of contemporary society' are inherently oppositional in character (Livingston 1999: 66). Through the recreation of a 'musical system' defined in terms of 'shared repertoire, instrumentation, and performance-style', revivalists 'position themselves in opposition to aspects of the contemporary cultural mainstream, align themselves with a particular historical lineage, and offer a cultural alternative in which legitimacy is grounded in reference to authenticity and historical fidelity' (Livingston 1999: 66). The post-war folk revival in Britain was a reformist project whose adherents shared an overarching sense of cultural purpose. The movement, Boyes (2010) notes, had an unusually developed sense of internal cohesion making it:

> one of the few contemporary movements which a large number of individuals not only perceive discretely but regard themselves as having played a historical role in developing. In describing their activities as singers or dancers, members or organisers of folk clubs, researchers in folk song or folk musicians, Revivalists frequently express a sharp and direct sense of their contribution to the growth of the movement and the formation of its social and institutional bases. (Boyes 2010: vi-vii)

[4] For example: Eliza Carthy (Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson), Benji Kirkpatrick (John Kirkpatrick), Ben Paley (Tom Paley), Blair Dunlop (Ashley Hutchings) and many others.

Although post-war Britain saw a general resurgence of interest in older Anglo-American vernacular styles which encompassed phenomena as diverse as the London square-dance craze of the early 1950s, the revival of New Orleans jazz, and skiffle, what separated the folk revival proper from the general interest in past musical practices upon which it fed was the interpolation of folk music into discourses of social and cultural regeneration. More than simply a search for novel sounds and repertoire, the revival drew upon the allegiance and symbolic work of individuals and institutions in order to perpetuate itself as a movement and to promote a reformist agenda.

Although, as Boyes (2010: ix) argues, the performance of folk music supported 'a range of ideological purposes' during this period, ranging from a neo-Sharpian[5] cultural nationalism to utopian Marxism, its various strands shared a notion of folk music as a means of tackling problematic aspects of contemporary society. Among these were the sterility of modern art, social alienation, the commercialization of popular culture, the subjection of the working class and the appropriation of their traditions and the loss of a national cultural inheritance in the face of rampant transnational capitalism. The revival rested on a set of shared beliefs about (among other things) music, technology, commerce and authenticity that allowed it to cohere as a movement and fed into a range of discursive practices including performance, criticism, and song and tune collecting. The ways in which these beliefs were mediated by specific practices of sound recording is the principal concern of this thesis.

The question of authenticity in folk and popular music

A recurrent theme throughout this study is that of authenticity. Where folk music scholarship has often treated authenticity as an inherent property of traditional texts and practices, popular music studies has developed a generally sceptical orientation towards the concept, viewing it as an ascribed and constructed

[5] Cecil Sharp (1859-1924) was a musician, educator and prolific collector of folk song both in England and the Appalachian region of the United States. He was a leading member of the Folk Song Society and the author of *English Folk-song: Some Conclusions* (1907) which supplied the intellectual basis for the tripartite definition of folk song in terms of continuity, variation and selection adopted by the International Folk Music Council in 1954 (Karpeles 1954: 6-7). Boyes (1993: 76) argues that Sharp's interest in folk song was basically nationalist and culturally elitist, aimed at 'creating a national school of art music by educating rising generations into a shared culture of folksong'.

property of individuals, texts and practices (Moore 2001; Wald 2005; Barker and Taylor 2007). Despite widespread scholarly rejection of naive formulations, however, authenticity discourse continues to be of crucial significance within the everyday discourses that surround folk and popular music providing a crucial underpinning for the persistent claims to oppositional status made for both genres (Moore 2002). The dialectic of authentic and inauthentic forms a central pillar of rock and folk ideology whose significance goes far beyond questions of textual provenance: the authenticity judgements made by musicians and audiences can profoundly affect both the creative choices open to musicians and critical interpretations of their work. These judgements, which permeate the aesthetic discourses of popular music, reveal complex sets of values and assumptions which affect all areas and levels of musical practice.

As Bohlman (1988) notes, authenticity judgements involve the open or implicit rejection of inauthentic others. In the discourse of the second British folk revival the authentic and the traditional were often seen as synonymous, with the inauthentic other identified variously as industrial urban culture, commercial popular song or other, less authentic, versions of folk. This thesis traces the development within the revival of consciously authentic (and oppositional) technological practices linked to the creation of authentic spaces and modes of production such as the folk-club and the independent studio. Of particular interest is the mapping of the authentic/inauthentic binary onto technological practice in contemporary discourses on and *through* sound recording. Chapter 1, for example, deals not only with verbal descriptions of recording practice but with how recording itself participated in the construction of a sonic image of authentic traditional culture through the management of notions of intimacy and sincerity in the imagined performance space of the recording. Elsewhere, I look at how revivalist practice was defined against the inauthentic other of the commercial recording industry and how this opposition was articulated through discursive evocations of the industrial/scientific space of the studio which, as Doyle (2013) notes, had become a common trope within popular discourse by the mid-1950s.

As Frith (1981) has argued, the notions of authenticity that developed within the folk revival and the discourse of rock in the later 1960s were closely intertwined at their roots; nevertheless, they were often set against one another. As Gracyk (1996) argues, the notions of freedom and personal autonomy associated

with the political ideology of liberalism formed a powerful and recurring theme in the discourse of rock. This set rock authenticity at odds with the communitarian model developed within the folk revival, a dissonance which can be observed in critical responses to the folk-rock movement from within the revival itself (Watson 1983). Chapters 3, 4 and 5 hint at some of the tensions arising from these related but ultimately inconsistent formulations of the authenticity concept with regard to how they played out in the development of contemporary approaches to recording in folk and rock. Beliefs about authenticity were central to the ideologies, discourses and practices of both the folk revival and the musical counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, and recording, I will argue, was both a resource for the working out of these beliefs and a site at which controversies were audibly expressed.

Ideology

The revival had both a distinct oppositional ideology and a rich and varied discourse. Ideology is a term with a long and complex history and such a variety of uses that as Eagleton (2007: 1) points out it almost qualifies as a 'text' in its own right; as such, it requires some sifting. Williams (1983: 157) notes that ideology has been employed as 'a term of abuse' since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century and is typically used to connote unrealistic or mechanistic modes of socio-political thought. In common usage, ideology is generally taken to mean the opposite of true knowledge and as such is not a term one would readily apply to one's own beliefs; ideology in this sense, as Eagleton (2007) notes, is invariably something that other people have, and accusations of ideology remain a common rhetorical strategy across the political spectrum. In academia the term has played a central role in the intellectual development of Western Marxism, particularly the influential work of Gramsci and Althusser (Eagleton 2007).

The work of scholars in this latter tradition, with its emphasis on culture as a locus of ideological struggle is pertinent to the questions considered here, which concern the ways in which beliefs about the social feed into counterhegemonic cultural practices. Rather than applying a strictly Marxist approach, however, this study also draws on some more recent formulations of the ideology concept from the field of discourse studies in order to explore the relationship between musical practice, discourse and social cognition. In discourse studies, ideology is used to

denote the often tacit assumptions, values and beliefs that give coherence to the activities and discourse of a specific community of practice. For van Dijk (1998: 14) ideologies are 'the basic social representations of the beliefs shared by a group, and […] function as the framework that defines the overall coherence of those beliefs'. Group ideologies, he suggests, involve ideas about: membership criteria; typical activities; overall aims; norms and values; the relative position of the group to other groups; and the resources belonging to the group (van Dijk 1998: 20). Ideologies, van Dijk (1998: 21) suggests, ultimately rest on 'mental models', cognitive schemas which we use to imagine social relationships, and interpret the events and objects we encounter in everyday life. These schemas give coherence to actions, interpretations and attitudes within discourse and allow for ideologies to be 'applied' across a range of social contexts and in a variety of discursive settings (van Dijk 1998: 19).

Applying van Dijk's (1998) interpretation of the concept, an ideological schema for the revival would organise beliefs about aims (the revival of traditional styles and repertoires and the reform of popular culture), values (performance aesthetics and beliefs about the authenticity of practices) and activities (performance, collecting, researching), as well as beliefs about the position of the group in the social field (marginal or oppositional to the mainstream) and its proper resources (the tradition, collections, record labels, the network of venues and publications). Van Dijk's concept of ideology suggests something like an internalised grammar of practice or 'feel for the game' comparable to Bourdieu's (1986) notion of *habitus*. For Bourdieu, this term denotes an embodied, socially inculcated sense of the possibilities for social action which relates to unspoken cultural values as well as to questions of personal authenticity:

> When we rule out certain courses of action as not being 'true' to ourselves, because we 'know our place' or 'it's not for us' […] or say certain clothes or haircuts suit us, these are all expressions of habitus. The habitus is […] how we see ourselves in relation to others, what we pay attention to and what we do not habitually pay attention to, and it determines our attitudes towards not only other people, but toward the universe of cultural goods and practices which are formally or potentially available to us […] all of which are imbued with social significance. (Speller 2011: 60)

Rather than a set of inflexible doctrines – rules that are consciously adhered to – ideologies provide a means of mapping the social field and a set of principles for creative action within it. As with Bourdieu's habitus, these principles often go unstated and unquestioned; sustained through habits of thought and behaviour, they provide the basic conceptual ground upon which everyday discourses and practices rest.

Revivalist ideology structured attitudes about various general aspects of post-war British society including the role of technology, popular culture, consumerism, and Americanisation. Often these were shared with the various discourses and institutions that the revival built on, which included those of English communism, the labour movement; the international peace movement and CND. The texts and practices studied in this thesis were thus products of this variegated intellectual context. Post-war social history and cultural criticism provided an immediate context for the early revival but its roots went deeper: the *Radio Ballads* of the 1950s (the focus of Chapter 2) had roots in the modernist film, radio and theatre of the 1930s, while Topic Records developed directly out of the Communist Party of Great Britain and its cultural offshoot the Worker's Music Association, a creation of the Popular Front era. The intellectual traditions of the British Left exerted a crucial influence on the revival: its first steps were instigated by communists and socialists and Marxist cultural theory, in particular assumptions about the historical origins of folk music in class struggle, helped define the basic revivalist aim of recapturing an authentic popular tradition to set against the inauthentic patchwork of contemporary mass culture imposed upon the workers from above (Harker 2007). Key individuals associated with the Left also played a role in shaping the revival in this direction: the work of Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd, arguably the movement's most influential, prolific and versatile practitioners set the pattern for much of the movement's subsequent intellectual development, emphasising Marxist notions of class, industrial culture and the experience of labour, and interpreting folk performance as a mode of cultural-political activism. In their work, folk music was woven into a Leftist oppositional discourse which combined criticism of the mass society, nostalgia for Britain's industrial past and a strongly anti-commercial ethos.

As well as entailing beliefs concerning history and society, the revival was also in an important sense a discourse about technology. The revivalist

preoccupation with technology and its social effects reflected significant transformations of the contemporary techno-scape rather than simple nostalgia for a lost rural idyll. Anxieties about technology as a potentially destructive force informed not just the anti-nuclear movement but also fed into revivalist views of mainstream, industrial recording practices and their deleterious effect on working class culture (Parker 1975). Counter-discourses of recording as a supplementary, sympathetic 'craft' set an authentic revivalist practice against notions of record production as a manipulative, commercial process. They also fuelled controversies over the adoption of electronic instrumentation and studio production techniques in traditional song in the late 1960s onwards. Folk-rock, a hybrid of revivalist repertoire and the aesthetic practices of progressive rock, re-awakened debates about the commercial appropriation of folk music as rock posed a challenge to folk's special status as an essentially democratic, non-commercial music (Frith 1981). The changing status of the studio, and studio production in popular culture, and its effects on the presentation of traditional song, forms an important component of the background of this study and the focus of the last two chapters. The folk revival, as a discourse on technology, manifested a particular cultural response to wider changes in the place of technology in British society and culture during the period.

Discourse

Ideologies are realised through discursive activities including but not limited to linguistic practice. Like ideology, discourse is a term with a number of common interrelated meanings, some of which include: (a) verbal material (speech, text) often organised as dialogue; (b) a means of structuring linguistic activity related to a specific situational context or genre (as in 'tabloid discourse'); and (c) an area of knowledge-creating practice (e.g., 'science' or 'anthropology') (Fairclough 1992). For the tradition of discourse studies that builds upon the work of Foucault, discourses are constitutive; they do not simply reproduce pre-existing ideologies but create social objects and subjects and position them in different ways (Fairclough 1992). Although Foucault dispenses with ideology as the cognitive basis of discourse, in this study, I follow van Dijk (1998) and others by viewing discourse as rooted in pre-discursive mental models and by adopting an extended definition of the term which includes non-linguistic practices including the

organisation of social and interpersonal space (Hall 1966), physical and verbal gesture, visual images (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996), and sonic/musical practice (Machin 2010; van Leeuwen 1999; Forceville 2009; Zbikowski 2009).

The relationship between ideology and discourse is dialogic, and the latter plays a fundamental role in the inculcation of ideologies and the interpolation of individuals into groups and movements:

> Ideologies are not innate, but learnt, and precisely the content and form of such discourse may be more or less likely to form intended mental models of social events, which finally may be generalized and abstracted to social representations and ideologies. Indeed, in specific discourses (such as catechisms and propaganda) we may learn some fundamental ideological propositions more directly. The social function of ideologies is to control and coordinate the social practices of a group and between groups. (Van Dijk 1998: 88)

The folk revival was a discursively rich cultural movement. It was highly literate, producing text in a range of genres including magazine and journal articles, liner notes, journalism, history and criticism; but it also included a wealth of visual and sonic discourse, in the form of album and promotional art, photography and sound recordings. The role of this discourse was to promote certain values and beliefs about society. Through a range of semiotic practices, individuals came to learn about and become involved with the movement. One of the central questions considered here is how sound recording as not only a mode of discourse (a set of semiotic resources for communicating meaning) but as one mode of discourse among many, contributed to producing meaning through processes of cross-modal *collocation* (McKerrell and Way, in press). This involves considering how the relationship between music and the underlying cognitive structures of ideology is mediated by its relationship with other discourses, both verbal and non-verbal. 'Cognitive structures', Núñez-Perucha (2004: 182) argues, 'are reflected in linguistic expressions and at the same time these expressions invoke specific cognitive models, which, according to the tenets of cognitive linguistics, have an experiential basis […] ideology determines discourse and in turn, discourse shapes and transmits ideology' (Núñez-Perucha 2004: 183). Can recording also both reflect and evoke specific cognitive models? And can it, therefore, as a mode of discourse, influence and convey ideologies? The potential role of music and

recording in communicating ideologies and how this might be affected by the other modes with which music comes into constant contact is a central one for this study.

Connecting music and the social: theories of homology and metaphor

In the revival, the aesthetics of musical performance was often closely connected to social and political values, and yet the precise nature of this connection is not easy to categorise. The ideology of the revival valued the small-scale, interpersonal exchange over mass mediated forms of cultural experience, and this was enacted through its culture of live performance. In the folk clubs, performance underwent a rapid codification process during the period, instituting a model characterised by turn-taking and a flattening-out of the field of practice, suggesting a more porous boundary between performer and audience (Watson 1983; MacKinnon 1993). The spatial aspects of the performance space (the *proxemics* of performance) were also significant; through the use of non-specialised spaces (often without a stage), informal dress and the rejection of the apparatus of professional performance including lighting and amplification, folk club performance worked to dissolve the divide between performer and audience. The folk club constructed performance as an extension of social life, a form of conversation, valorising simplicity and craft over artifice and spectacle (MacKinnon 1993). Folk club performance as a genre of discourse translated the revival's conceptual schema into a set of reproducible musical and social relationships. The highly codified and therefore readily reproducible nature of the folk club performance model may have contributed to its rapid spread as a pattern for the organisation of traditional performance from the mid-1950s onwards.

The nature of the connection between the social structuring of musical performance and individual experiences of meaning, however, remains difficult to articulate. MacKinnon (1993) and O'Shea (2007) note that revivalist practices such as the folk club and the pub session have been thought to express shared values of community and idealised modes of interpersonal communication. But how does this relationship work in practice? Many accounts of music's role in constructing experiences of collectivity have begun with some notion of metaphor or structural homology (Hebdige 1979; Laing 1985), the assumption that music 'offers a means of thinking relationships, both within a work and between works,

and perhaps between these and non-musical structures. Musical patterns are saying: as this note is to that note, as tonic is to dominant, as ascent is to descent, as accent is to weak beat (and so on) so X is to Y' (Middleton 2000: 223). Small's (1998) concept of *musicking* suggests that the relationships instantiated by musical performance 'model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world' (Small 1998: 18-19).

Such accounts suggest that music is a means whereby groups represent themselves to themselves (and to others) in idealised form in order to continue to cohere as groups. The symphony concert, Small argues, *represents* the values of Western bourgeois society, its participants ritually acting out their shared vision of the good society in processes which are often unconscious. Blacking (1976) and Attali (1985) both suggest that musical performances can also be prophetic discourses which not only constitute the social synchronically but anticipate its future development (O'Shea 2007). Music, in other words, offers a means of reimagining social space through the setting up of metaphorical relationships in and through the act of performance.

According to this theoretical tradition, musical structure codifies group ideologies, and offers subject-positions from which participants can engage with each other and experience their place within the larger social field. But as O'Shea (2007) points out, in arguing for a homology between musical and social structure, such accounts can contradict real-world experiences of communal music-making as an encounter with resistance or difference which only rarely results in transcendent experiences of unity. In folk music practice, she argues, the promised utopia recedes the closer one approaches to it (O'Shea 2007). The appearance of homogeneity that collective performances such as the session or the folk club assume in both popular and scholarly readings is, she suggests, largely a function of outsider perspectives. Moreover, participants 'may share the pursuit of an ideal community, but this does not mean that their ideal communities will be the same' (O'Shea 2007: 18).

Accounts like Small's (1998) tend to assume an unconscious relationship between group identities and the structural dynamics of performance. But the folk club and the session did not emerge organically out of the shared values of

homogenous groups any more than did the symphony concert: they were consciously constructed and codified modes of performance which emerged as a result of negotiations in which performance values, repertoire and aesthetic criteria were often bitterly contested. Although musical performances can project a sense of ideal social organisation which audiences may perceive and participate in, this is always the result of much backstage work including the organisation of the space, the selection of repertoire, the training of individuals and the configuring of audience behaviours, work which may involve a great deal of struggle and disagreement. Performances construct an image of harmonious group experience which does not necessarily reflect the actual experiences of audiences or musicians. One cannot therefore access the values of a group through the structures of performance alone; it is necessary to pay attention to the other kinds of interpretive work that surround them. Ideologies do not causally determine the form of performances, allowing us to read off a meaning located behind specific instances of musical practice, but provide an interpretive frame through which the meaning potential of a performance is experienced.

Rather than determining or encoding meanings within itself, DeNora (2000) argues that music offers a range of practical resources for constructing social meanings: 'Music can be invoked as an ally for a variety of world-making activities, it is a workspace for semiotic activity, a resource for doing, being and naming the aspects of social reality' (DeNora 2000: 40). In order for folk music performance to express values of communality or egalitarianism, it is therefore necessary for the specific properties of musical performances to be connected to extra-musical values through various other interpretive practices. The importance of processes of interpretation to the stabilisation of meaning is demonstrated most vividly when contestation occurs between opposing ideological accounts of practices. As Spracklen (2013) records, attempts by the Right-wing British National Party to co-opt English folk music - viewed as an emblem of cultural purity - into their anti-multiculturalist narrative were met with resistance from the counter-movement Folk Against Fascism for whom the music just as surely expressed cultural diversity, a harmonious blend of disparate musical traditions emblematic of England's mongrel heritage. For both groups, these opposing meanings are supposed to rest on salient aspects of the music itself. Is music

therefore a blank space onto which pre-existing values can be projected? If not, then who can lay claim to its true meaning, and on what grounds?

Livingston (2014) has noted the particular importance of metaphor to understanding the relationship of performance and social in music revivals. But if musical relationships do not stand in a simple relationship of homology with social relationships, what role is there for the concept of metaphor in musicological analysis? I consider metaphor to be a particularly useful concept for understanding musical meaning as emerging out of other social practices and other forms of experience, rather than as the product of internal musical codes. The grounding of semiotic explanations in some form of embodiment theory provides one way of approaching the question of music's metaphorical relationship with other structures and communicative practices. Hall's (1966) notion of proxemics, which deals with the meaningful use of interpersonal space in social life, has proved attractive to a number of theorists interested in exploring how the spatial relationships of musical performance may be rooted in everyday interactions and meanings (Moore 2012). The work of Zbikowski (2002; 2009) and Johnson and Larson (2003) suggests that structures in musical texts and performances can be seen as standing metaphorically for higher level social structures because they derive from the same basic-level cognitive schemata. Zbikoswki (2002), Moore (2014), Windsor and de Bézenac (2012), DeNora (2000), Clarke (1999), Dibben (2003) and Zagorski-Thomas (2014) all draw on work in the psychology of perception and theories of embodiment and cognitive metaphor to ground semiotic analysis in conceptual structures which are in turn rooted in basic-level sensorimotor experience.

These scholars all move beyond Saussurean assumptions of an arbitrary relationship between musical signifier and signified, proposing instead that musical interpretation is a fundamentally embodied process, in which physical and cultural meaning are inseparable. Johnson and Larson (2003) argue that the perception of musical motion is based in the same neural functions that allow perception of movement in space, while Zbikowksi (2002) argues that the generation of potential meanings through the relationship of text and music in song is governed by the same processes of *conceptual blending* that underpin all of our abstract thought processes. Van Leeuwen (1999) uses the notion of *experiential meaning potential* (which rests on an embodied knowledge of the

necessary link between the aural qualities of sounds and the physical gestures and efforts necessary to produce them) to explain how sonic textures and timbres can viscerally convey embodied and cultural meanings, at the same time as more localised connotative meanings.

Music's capacity to enter into metaphorical relationships with other modes of experience is, I suggest, part of what makes it the incredibly rich resource for the production of social meaning that DeNora (2000) identifies. As DeNora (2000) emphasises, however, textual analysis is in itself insufficient to connect musical structures with social meaning. Through ethnographic work, interviews, reconstructions of performance and reception, and attention to the discourses surrounding music-making, I shall trace how connections between aspects of musical performances and non-musical meanings are created and stabilised. Further, I explore the ways in which sound recordings yield possibilities for the perception of metaphorical relationships in musical performance, and thus contribute to the social meaning potential of recorded music. The analysis of how musical performance expresses social meanings has rarely been extended to a consideration of how sound recordings participate in constructing idealised experiences of community. This, I suggest, is largely for two reasons: firstly, because of the dominance of accounts which construct recording as a reflective rather than performative practice; and secondly, because of a tendency among scholars to take at face value participant accounts of practice which emphasise an idealised version of practices as homogenous, organic and transcendent. Recordings by their very nature conceal much of the work that goes into producing them. In order to understand how recording intervenes in music's relationship with extra-musical values and ideas – and what effects it might have on listener interpretations – it is necessary to recover these hidden processes, taking into account technologies and their affordances, as well as questions of socio-spatial organisation, repertoire, and performance aesthetics as they appear in the form of the recorded song.

Sound recording in socio-historical context:

The second revival and its recording practice must be understood within a wider post-war context of rapid political, social and technological change. Between 1950 and 1975 the technologies of magnetic tape, stereo mixing, signal

processing, and multitracking transformed recording as a set of creative resources. As tape began to more closely resemble film as a plastic technology, recording allowed montage principles to be applied. Sound collage, whether in the form of the editing techniques used by radio producers in the 1950s, in overdubbing practices of early 1960s pop producers, or in the complex multitrack mixing of the 1970s, allowed recordists to take advantage of the virtual worlds that can be constructed through the layering of pieces of sound. Many innovations came from the sphere of commercial popular music. As studio technology became more sophisticated, pop recordings became not only far more complex, but further removed from both the sound and the social contexts of pre-phonographic performance (Zak 2012). In the 1950s and early 1960s the popular soundscape diversified as new genres established themselves within the expanding record market (thanks largely to the proliferation of small independent record labels made possible by portable tape recording). Totally new sounds emerged, including the electric guitar and the synthesiser, and new taste publics for recorded music were created, most significantly the youth market which came to dominate the industry by the early 1960s (Osgerby 1998).

As working contexts, practices and roles changed dramatically over the course of the 1960s, so too did the technology's perceived social, political and artistic significance. From the light industrial domain of lab-coated and studio-bound technicians in the 1950s, recording became simultaneously more democratic – as cheap, portable 'reel-to-reels' made recording a relatively familiar domestic activity – and more rarefied, a high art practice whose leading practitioners were ranked amongst the world's most respected and economically successful musicians.

The intersection of music, technology and society was a locus of controversy more widely during this period. Both folk music and recorded sound were deeply embedded within contemporary debates about national cultural sovereignty, dumbing-down, and the breakdown of traditional societal structures that fell under the rubric of Americanization. In the 1950s, the distinctive sound of commercial popular music was frequently associated in the public consciousness with American (and thus alien and imposed) cultural values, with the negative social effects of technology, and with the encroachment of passive, consumerist tendencies in Britain's cultural life. 'Echo', for example – a popular designation

for the artificial reverberation effect found on many iconic 1950s recordings – was often interpreted by critics as a primarily commercial treatment designed to mask poor quality performances (Zak 2012) or even as a reactionary force reproducing social difference (Hoggart 1957). Conversely, as the 1960s progressed, sonic experimentation, including the use of innovative studio techniques, became a hallmark of rock's newly acquired art status and symbolic of its progressive political affiliations (Whiteley 1990; Bennett 2014). The sounds made by recordists, whether in the studio or on location, had never been so audibly charged with political significance.

The post-war revival benefited both from the diversification of the record market and from the spread of new technologies; in particular, affordable tape recording led to a wave of private and institutional collecting which fed into and shaped the sound and repertoire of the revival. As a movement which consciously situated itself 'antithetically to the carefully orchestrated commercial manipulations of the Anglo-American popular music industry' (Keegan-Phipps 2008: 340), the revival was moved to adapt existing technologies and practices into new social and creative contexts; recordists, moving away from the studio paradigm, attempted to capture the folk club and the pub session (a relatively new phenomenon), taking an interest in the social milieu of traditional performance as well as the collection of traditional texts. Recording as a means of recovering a suppressed cultural heritage was itself a political practice, and one which new technologies put within reach of a generation of amateur and semi-professional collectors.

Technology and society

Understanding how new and existing sound technologies were incorporated into the revival's alternative 'technoculture' requires a social theory of music and technology (Lysloff and Gay 2003). Sociological approaches to technology, Hutchby (2001) notes, have tended to adopt a more-or-less technological determinist or social constructivist position. The former favour impact narratives which describe the introduction of new technologies as transformative moments in cultural practice, and rest on a realist view of technologies as possessing innate capacities which act upon a comparatively inert social field. The latter, at their most extreme, posit technological capacity as wholly discursively constituted

(Grint and Woolgar 1997). Somewhere in between are theories which posit technologies as encoding social values, pre-formatting users according to 'scripts', as for example, in feminist arguments about the gendered nature of certain technologies which combine a realist concept of innate technological capacity with the notion of technologies as concretizations of socially convened values (DeNora 2000: 34).

For the purposes of this study, I consider the relationship between technologies and users as one best understood through the concept of *affordance* developed by Gibson (Gibson 1986; DeNora 2000; Hutchby 2001; Windsor and de Bézenac 2012). Gibsonian 'ecological' approaches ground the understanding of technology in the everyday pragmatics of human-technology interaction and in human perceptions of the potentialities of technologies that have more to do with embodied knowledge and feel than innate technological capacity. Affordances are 'functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object' (Hutchby: 2001). In other words, objects are perceived by users not in terms of their objective capacity but in terms of the possibilities they afford for creative action within a concrete situation. Gibson's theory suggests that rather than following a predetermined script, or projecting socially constructed meanings onto technologies, users embedded in real situations encounter possibilities for strategic action which emerge in their unfolding relationship with technologies and the social environment.

Hutchby (2001) suggests that everyday experiences of technology are better characterised by feeling around for a cable connection than reading an instruction manual. This is perhaps nowhere more in evidence than in music, a field of practice in which technologies have notoriously failed to prescribe the behaviour of users and in which, as in the case of the analogue synthesiser, the introduction of a new technology has sometimes preceded any notion of a prescribed musical application (Pinch and Trocco 2002). New music technologies have often been taken up by musicians in unexpected ways: the electrical microphone that was designed to increase the clarity and public reach of the reproduced human voice actually helped to create a new paradigm of emotional intimacy when combined with singing style and the increasingly domestically oriented technology of radio in the post-phonographic technique of 'crooning'

(Toynbee 2000; Frith 2001). Similarly, Doyle (2005) records how pop producers in the 1940s and 1950s used echo, a technology intended to recreate the acoustics of large reflective spaces, in the dramatic interpretation of song performances, often using it as means of representing the inner lives of the recorded persona. The affordances of sound technologies were perceived and exploited differently according to context, and to the cultural assumptions, values and pre-occupations of users. Technologies which emerged as the solution to technical problems became the answer to aesthetic questions that had yet to be formulated. In my account of the revivalist uses of sound recording, I seek to describe the ways in which the affordances of technologies, such as tape, reverb, and multitracking were unlocked and appropriated by musicians in their work, and how these affordances emerged out of local creative contexts in which a range of historical, environmental, cultural and ideological factors intervened.

The post-war folk revival was greatly enabled by the emergence of new technologies, but its practice was by no means determined by them. My interviews with producers and the evidence of recordings suggested a pragmatic, dialogic relationship between users and technologies. Portable magnetic tape recording, for example, was arguably the most significant technology for the development of the revival movement: its introduction after the war meant that large quantities of material could be cheaply captured, stored and circulated by recordists before being played and replayed in high definition, allowing listeners who were so inclined to study traditional style at a forensic level of detail. For performers this meant a new standard of authenticity in performance style, but this 'effect' of tape was neither pre-determined by the innate properties of the technology, nor was it wholly socially constituted; instead, it was a result of the exploitation of the technology's culturally mediated affordances, the possibilities for action presented by the technology within the relational context of users and their socio-cultural environment. Amongst other cultural factors (including the existence of suitable contexts for the re-performance of traditional material) the revival's use of recording technology required the development of an ideological framework in which traditional performance could be viewed as a valid form of musical practice.[6] A revivalist ideology which included ideas about aesthetic

[6] Interestingly, the musician and collector Mike Seeger (1997) attributed his parents' initial appreciation of traditional music to their background in modernist composition.

values, was thus a crucial aspect of the cultural context in which the creative affordances of sound technologies were perceived and applied.

Chapter summaries

This study may be roughly divided into two halves, the first of which deals primarily with the place of recording in revivalist constructions of 'traditional culture'. The second shifts the focus onto the unfolding relationship between the revival and the wider popular music industry considering its evolving cultural significance as well its rapid technological development. Chapter 1 uses a number of concepts from multimodal discourse analysis to show how the revival's ideology was realised through a range of semiotic modes including the sonic as well as the visual and textual modes. It introduces some common tropes in the revival's discourse through an analysis of a single album, and considers how recording contributed to the objectification of traditional culture through the representation of traditional performance, and how this construction was achieved through the combination of different modes of discourse; image, music, text and sound.

Chapter 2 looks at the BBC's *Radio Ballads*, a series of creative radio documentaries which used the relatively new technology of tape recording to develop a complex and innovative compositional process in which recording played a vital and definitive role. It traces some of the theoretical and ideological points of continuity between the post-war revival movement and earlier cultural activism including work in film, theatre and modernist poetry. It considers how recording's analytical capacities (a microscopic technology capable of revealing the innate but undiscovered properties of working class speech) and its social function (a democratic, politically radical technology) were constructed through the framework of Leftist/revivalist discourse and framed by the producers' artistic goals, by their theories of language and traditional culture, and by their own political assumptions about the role of technology and the media in contemporary society. It also considers the programmes as examples of revivalist discourse, and how tape editing as a form of montage was used in the construction of working class culture.

Chapters 3 to 5 consider the relationship between the revival and the popular music mainstream. Chapter 3 looks at how the commercial recording

work of Topic Records reflected revivalist ideas about traditional performance as inseparable from communal contexts, shifting the centre of gravity away from the studio towards the locus of performance. It also reflected notions about the ideal performance relationship that emerged in direct opposition to mainstream recording practices perceived as distorting and inauthentic. This chapter traces how Topic's recordings, and specifically the developing recording practice of its recording manager Bill Leader, constructed an aesthetics of authenticity that posited a new more organic relationship between performer and listener, and how this process was itself represented by practitioners.

Chapter 4 looks at how musicians emerging from the revival into the professional setting and thus the professional studio negotiated with the existing working practices according to their own ideas of authenticity in practice. It looks at how perceptions of the producer, the studio and popular musicians shifted in this period and how this affected the authenticity value of studio recording practice, focussing on one case study, the band Pentangle. The final chapter looks at how the semiotic resources of the studio techniques were used in the presentation of traditional texts by folk-rock artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It builds upon work in conceptual metaphor theory to consider the hypothesis that both entrenched cultural metaphors and local, pragmatic metaphorical relationships can be observed in the use of production techniques to construct textual meanings, and that production, like other discursive practices such as language, can be linked to culturally specific conceptual structures that operate cross-modally and are based in pre-conceptual 'image schemata' (Lakoff and Johnson (1980); Zbikowski 2002; Moore 2014). As with all of the case studies presented here, it explores the notion that recording techniques and the local, strategic ways they are used in specific creative settings can also connect artists and their listeners with wider cultural discourses.

Chapter 1. 'The pure drop': Sound recording and the multimodal construction of traditional culture

Introduction

For many folk music enthusiasts in the early 1960s, the commercial releases of small independents such as London's Topic Records and the US label Folkways were a primary point of contact with the music of Britain's traditional singers. Tony Engle,[1] recently retired head of Topic Records, recalls his first encounter with England's home-grown tradition through recordings of source singers as a transformative experience that marked the beginning of a lifelong commitment to seeking out and recording the authentic tradition:

> I'd gone through that transition of The Spinners,[2] Joan Baez,[3] then the Dubliners,[4] more realist, on a pursuit of, if you like, honesty and realism, which ends up then when you hear Harry Cox[5] and the like, and you hear real traditional music and you can't doubt. This is, I keep calling it, as the Irish would say, the pure drop. These are people who are performing with ultimate integrity because that's all they can do. They're not trying to have

[1] Tony Engle (b.1946) musician and record producer began working at the label in 1969, taking over the management in 1973 upon the death of previous manager Gerry Sharp (Suff 2009: 58).
[2] The Spinners (originally The Liverpool Spinners) were a skiffle/folk group who played an eclectic range of material and recorded first for Topic in 1962. One of the first revival acts to achieve mainstream popularity, they were singled out by *The Observer* as 'one of the most successful folk groups in the country' in 1964 (Makins 1964: 2).
[3] Joan Baez (b.1941) folk singer and activist who emerged as leading figure in the American folk revival following an appearance at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival (Gavin 1992).
[4] Irish folk group The Dubliners (founded 1962) recorded prolifically and achieved worldwide popularity. They are perhaps best known for *Black Velvet Band* (1967) and *Seven Drunken Nights* (1967) a traditional song considered bawdy enough to be banned from radio play in Ireland (Hevesi 2012).
[5] Harry Fred Cox (1885-1971) was a folk singer and keen collector of songs from his local area of Barton Turf in Norfolk. Samples of his repertoire were included in the *Folk Song Journal* in 1922 and 1931 and he was recorded several times by the BBC for their magazine programme *Country Magazine* (1942) and *As I Roved Out* (1952-1958) (Palmer 2006b; Kennedy *et al* 1958). Like Engle, the collector and recordist Peter Kennedy (1958) describes Cox's style in terms of the powerful sense of authenticity it conveys:

> At the first hearing of Harry Cox you may remark on the 'dry' impersonality and monotony of his style; for many of us in the Society it has taken five, ten or even twenty years to appreciate the subtleties of his performances […] Each time you hear him the songs grow on you, for he presents them with complete selflessness and sincerity. To watch him, with his eyes closed or looking into the distance beyond the company, you realize that he is living the story of each song. Contrary to what so many have said of traditional singers he is, in fact, giving an artistic performance into which he pours as much, if not more nervous energy than the best stage singers. Each song is imbued, however, with the same dry cynicism as when he tells a story or speaks about his family background and hard-working country life (Kennedy *et al* 1958: 142).

> a hit record, they're not trying to get off with your girlfriend, all that kind of business. And that really resonated strongly with me. (Engle, fieldwork interview, February 2013)

For other leading revivalists recordings of source singers functioned as points of entry into the revival as a cultural-political movement: selecting the Willett Family's *The Roving Journeymen* as one of 'Ten Records that Changed My Life', Mike Yates, a prolific collector of music from the English traveller community, recalled how the record acted not only as a spur to his own collecting but as a passport into traveller culture. 'I used to take it with me to Gypsy camps, playing the tracks to any Gypsy who was interested in listening', he writes; 'It was a good way of finding out if any of the listeners knew any songs themselves, because they were soon singing along' (Yates 2006b).[6]

Engle and Yates both suggest that LPs such as *The Roving Journeymen* not only provided access to the authentic tradition for a generation of listeners but helped to enrol them in the revival movement's project of cultural salvage. Engle indicates that these recordings of traditional music offered him a powerful experience of honesty, integrity, and realism that stood in marked opposition to the world of mainstream entertainment. Yet the experience of unmediated expression he refers to belies the constructed nature of these key revivalist texts, which were the result of semiotic work by producers motivated by their own beliefs about the nature of traditional practice and its significance in contemporary British society. The critical edge of the post-war revival as a social movement consisted in its attempt to recover the kinds of social relationship believed to have existed in pre-industrial cultures through the recovery of the music of the past. In the recordings of source singers released by labels such as Topic, the tradition as a set of social relationships was encountered in imaginary form.

The current chapter looks at how revivalist albums of source singers constructed the tradition as authentic social practice through their visual, textual and sonic discourse. It examines particularly the role played by recording techniques such as mic placement, considering the strengths and weaknesses of recorded sound as a medium of discourse and how recordings were articulated

[6] Yates's published work in this area includes Mike Yates, *Traveller's joy: songs of English and Scottish travellers and gypsies 1965-2005*, (London: English Folk Song and Dance Society, 2006). He has also collected prolifically in the South Eastern United States.

with the visual and textual modes in the multimodal context of the album format. In addressing these questions I shall use a number of concepts from multimodal discourse analysis and record production studies, alongside original ethnographic research, to consider how *The Roving Journeymen* (1963), the first album of traditional English singers released by Topic, constructs the Willett family as authentically traditional, and their music as part of a natural, cohesive, English cultural inheritance. I also consider how surrounding discourses, such as the self-descriptions of producers in interviews and liner notes, work to construct their own practice and agency, and present sound recording as a neutral and objective process of capture. These discursive strategies, I argue, helped to legitimise revivalist representations of traditional practice, making sound recording a powerful rhetorical resource for advancing the revival's reformist agenda.

Discourse and multimodality

Multimodal discourse analysis deals with how the agendas of individuals, groups and movements are articulated across the available range of material-semiotic resources. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 4-5) define discourses as 'socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality', 'a set of interpretations, evaluative judgements, [and] critical or justifying arguments' which shape the ways in which social reality is constructed and experienced by the producers and recipients of cultural texts. Discourses such as that of the folk revival do not simply represent reality but seek to manage the thoughts and actions of those addressed by it; representations of reality always entail 'ideas about why it is the way it is and what is to be done' (Machin 2013). The recognition that discourses are realised using a variety of semiotic modes has led to research which extends techniques originally developed in linguistic analysis into the visual, sonic and musical realms. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argue against what they see as a historical privileging of language as a locus of meaning, paying particular attention to how the visual and sonic modes are used to convey cultural meanings. Different modes have different semiotic affordances; 'Some meanings' they argue, 'may be more readily received in one mode rather than another' (ibid.: 30). In beer adverts, for example, the beads of condensation running down the side of a glass succinctly convey the desired meaning (whether or not this meaning is verbalised, or even capable of verbalisation), making a strong sensory appeal to

the viewer, while avoiding any explicit claims about the product itself.[7] Successful multimodal communication requires the ability to effectively distribute aspects of discourse across the available modes, entailing an understanding of the semiotic affordances of each, and the epistemological commitments that each requires.

Recorded sound has its own particular semiotic affordances within multimodal contexts. Recent research in record production studies has begun to explore the contribution made by sound technologies to music's social meaning, looking, for example, at how the spatial characteristics of recordings manage listeners' perceptions of identity, social distance and creative agency (Moylan 2012; Zagorski-Thomas 2014; Moore 2012). This approach poses a challenge to established ways of thinking about and doing sound recording in ethnomusicology, which often treat field recordings as objective reflections of ethnographic reality (Lysloff 2006). Instead it suggests approaching sound recordings as humanly produced representations of practices that organise the world according to a particular ideological perspective, and which are shaped by the values and assumptions of producers as well as by the technologies and techniques used in their production. They can therefore be analysed in terms of how they construct social reality as samples of strategic discourse. While the discursive dimension of sound recording is often overlooked in ethnographic studies of the folk revival I argue that sonic aspects of revivalist recordings, such as their spatial and textural characteristics, played a role in advancing the movement's cultural agenda by helping to construct traditional culture in accordance with revivalist ideas of the authentic tradition as a set of social relationships.

Revivalist discourse

Livingston (1999: 74) notes that revivalist discourses often construct traditional cultures as 'the opposite of contemporary society' – natural, intimate, and free from technological mediation – and that this is part of an overt cultural-political agenda. In the post-war British folk revival, the notion of a pre-industrial, organic folk tradition was held up as a model for the reform of contemporary popular

[7] See for example the work of the 'beer stylist' Ray Spencer, who has worked on over two-thousand commercials. Spencer (No date).

culture. This revival emerged out of a broader intellectual tradition concerned with the negative social and psychological impact of urbanisation and industrialisation and the threat posed by technologies of mass communication to traditional social forms and cultural practices.

The revival initiated by Cecil Sharp in the 1900s was one of a number of cultural-political movements across Europe whose interest in folk culture was 'motivated by a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with a dehumanized and dehumanizing industrial society' (Livingston 1999: 74). The collecting activities of Sharp and his followers aimed at recovering the authentic peasant music of England as the basis of a revived national musical culture (Boyes 1993: 41-62).[8] This early revival was primarily text oriented, with the informants seen as essentially conduits for cultural remainders (or 'survivals'). In the second revival, the source singers discovered to be still active (despite the predictions of early twentieth century collectors including Sharp) took on a more prominent role within revivalist ideology in which they were often treated as themselves survivals of an older working class culture. Post-war revivalist discourse, Livingston (1999: 75) argues, under the influence of Marxist cultural theory, instead 'interpreted [traditional music] as a political expression of the social conditions of the proletariat', with theorists such as Lloyd, MacColl and Parker advancing older cultural traditions as the model upon which a popular culture freed from the negative social effects of mass mediated forms could be built. Both revivals thus shared the notion of an earlier, less alienated form of artistic activity which was offered as an antidote to the negative social influence of modernity and urban culture. The post-war revival, however, was particularly concerned with reviving not only traditional material but the social relationships (particularly the '"intimate" forms of audience-performer relationship') the music was thought to enact (MacKinnon 1993: 58).

MacKinnon (1993: 30) argues that revivalists aimed ultimately 'to change the social role of music from one where the music making was in the hands of the music industry to one where the control of music-making was restored to ordinary people'. Source singers were valuable because of their experiences of tradition as a set of relationships. Boyes (1993: 185) links this post-war concern with folk

[8] For a discussion of the first revival's use of traditional material in art music contexts see Boyes (1993: 41-62).

music's social context to cultural developments of the pre-war era including the documentary movement in film and radio with its concern to present in unmediated fashion the lives of ordinary people. Recordings, as BBC sound librarian Marie Slocombe[9] argued in a 1952 edition of *English Dance and Song*, permitted listeners not only access to repertoire but to 'the actual style and personality of the performer', allowing 'the living tradition [to] be studied and experienced' (Boyes 1993: 212). As such, they were seen not just as phonographic transcriptions of folk repertoire but as idealised documents of the tradition as lived social practice.

As the post-war revival was concerned with the authenticity of singers as much as the origins of texts, its discourse constructed source singers as embedded within this living tradition. I argue that recordings, through their unique discursive affordances, and their reciprocal relationship with text and images, were an important means not only for the presentation of traditional texts, but a medium through which the 'living tradition' as social relationship was constructed and reified. In the following case study, The Willett Family's *The Roving Journeymen* (1963) I look at how revivalist notions of the tradition as a set of social relationships are articulated across the various semiotic modes that constitute it, before going on to discuss the particular semiotic affordances of sound recording and their use within revivalist discourse.

Iconography

The cover of *The Roving Journeymen* (Figure 1.1) features three trees grouped against the backdrop of the English countryside, so close to one another that their branches are intertwined. The date of the photograph is uncertain – no object within the picture allows the viewer to date it with any precision, although the sepia tint seems to indicate a late nineteenth or early twentieth century origin.[10]

[9] Marie Slocombe (1912-1995) was BBC Sound Archives Librarian and a member of EFDSS. From 1951-1957 she oversaw the corporation's Folk Song and Dialect Recording Scheme ensuring the public dissemination of much of the traditional material collected through the popular magazine series *As I Roved Out* on the Home Service. Her work at the BBC after her appointment to the archive in 1941, argue Stewart and Fees (1996: 272), 'presented a radical vision of a BBC sound archive which would not only serve the corporation but become a national sound archive, to seek out and record for posterity a picture in sound of the life of the nation'.

[10] In fact the picture was taken by artist and graphic designer Brian Shuel in the 1960s. Shuel's work featured on a number of Topic and Transatlantic releases in the 1960s and 1970s.

The photograph is grainy rather than sharp, softened by the use of a lower resolution than might

Figure 1.1: Front cover of The Roving Journeymen (1963)

be expected if the image were illustrating a textbook or a newspaper article. This property of graininess invites a certain interpretive response, beyond its evocation of an unspecified oldness. Van Leeuwen (1999: 208) uses the concept of *modality* to refer to semiotic 'resources for indicating the truth of presentations/representations'. This concept, derived from linguistics, has been extended by multimodal discourse analysis into the visual and sonic modes (van Leeuwen 1999; 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen 2004).

Modality describes how the level of detail in a particular representation affects the degree of realism or 'truth' we ascribe to it. Where a high level of detail invites a realistic interpretation, a low level of detail encourages a more abstract interpretation; as Machin and Mayr (2012: 50) argue, the less detailed and thus the more abstract an image becomes, 'the more overt and foregrounded its connotative and communicative purpose'. Production, or post-production techniques which have the effect of reducing detail effectively empty an image of specificity, leaving space for more associative readings, which information from other modes can help to shape. This image, in providing a reduced level of realistic detail, invites a more abstract reading: it is not this particular landscape

with trees that is important, but what such a landscape connotes within the given representational context. The subtitle of the album, however – 'English Traditional Songs' – invites us to view this landscape as typically English and symbolic of the tradition itself, which is located in an unspecified rural past, almost out of living memory as the sepia colouring of the image suggests. In asserting the 'Englishness' of this music, in turn, the cover makes claims about how 'England' should be understood: rural, ancient, and rooted in the soil. This meaning is established multimodally: the meaning of the photographic image is framed by the text, while the text (including the concepts of 'tradition', and 'England') is elaborated and enriched through its association with the image.

The central figure of the three trees which dominates the composition also helps to construct a notion of traditional music through multimodal metaphor. Research building upon the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) has suggested that one of the ways in which multimodal discourses generate associations is through the setting up of cross-modal metaphorical relationships between elements. Conceptual metaphor theory posits a unidirectional relationship between a source domain, generally drawn from concrete physical experience, and a more abstract target domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). These domains may be specified within a single mode, as in the case of everyday sayings (such as 'LIFE IS A JOURNEY'), or across different modes, constructing multimodal metaphors (Forceville 2009; Zbikowski 2009).

In this case, a multimodal metaphor is constructed in which the source domain ('trees') is located in the visual mode and the target domain ('The Willett Family') in the textual mode. The text 'The Willett Family' which appears directly below the three trees, invites the interpretation that they stand for the Willett family themselves – Tom, Chris and Ben. The multimodal metaphor set up here ('THE WILLETT FAMILY ARE TREES') allows us to import a complex of associations to do with the image of trees into our understanding of the singers and their music. The tree metaphor sets up notions of the natural, the enduring, the rooted, and suggests that these qualities can also be applied to the Willetts themselves. Aspects of the specific image play a role: the trees are shown isolated against a stark landscape; they are not part of a thriving forest, but look as if they are surviving against time and the elements. The notion of the Willetts and their music as survivals from an earlier period is supported if we identify the Willetts as

these same trees from the past, still standing up to our own time. Finally the metaphor as well as inviting us to attribute certain qualities such as 'natural', 'enduring', 'rooted', 'English' to the performers, also asks us to see the performers less as individuals than as symbols, suggesting that what is interesting about the Willetts is their traditional status, not their individual traits, intentions, or experiences.

As Machin (2013: 352) notes, 'a representation cannot represent all the aspects of a social practice, so it is important to ask what has been deleted'. What the cover image does not show is therefore as potentially revealing as what it does. It is a timeless image of the English countryside that is presented here; there are no aeroplanes, railway lines, pylons, dual carriageways, cars or mechanised farm equipment. The cover deletes evidence of modernity, hiding the fact that the English countryside (even in 1963) was a landscape crossed by railways, road and telephone lines, that farmers used highly rationalised production practices and that country people watched television and learned songs off the radio. The cover image is one of the ways in which the album constructs the musical culture of the Willett family as a survival of an older way of life all but extinguished by the encroachment of urban modernity.

As already noted, the cover does not include an image of the Willett family themselves. As Forceville (2009: 397) notes, 'the genre to which a representation belongs steers the possible or most plausible interpretations of any element in it'. As the image of the trees is encountered in the album format, in a location where we might expect to find the image of the singers, this substitution arguably runs contrary to contemporary genre expectations. Many albums in the popular genre during this period featured close-up shots of the singers featured on the recording, often looking in the direction of the viewer, suggesting potential intimacy and demanding an emotional response (Figure 1.2). Topic releases of source singers, by contrast (Figure 1.3), repeatedly used the technique of substituting the image of the singer for one of a natural object or a landscape, using multimodal metaphor to make implicit claims about the relationship of the singer and their music to nature, or to a particular social or working context. This aspect of signs which allows them to 'signify the ideas and values associated with [another] context' - what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) call 'provenance' - helps to construct the musicians and their music as authentically traditional. A

comparison with the cover images used for releases by revivalist singers on the Topic label during the same period indicates that they were more likely to have their faces displayed on the cover, shown outside of a realistic context, in the manner of popular singers, than were traditional singers.

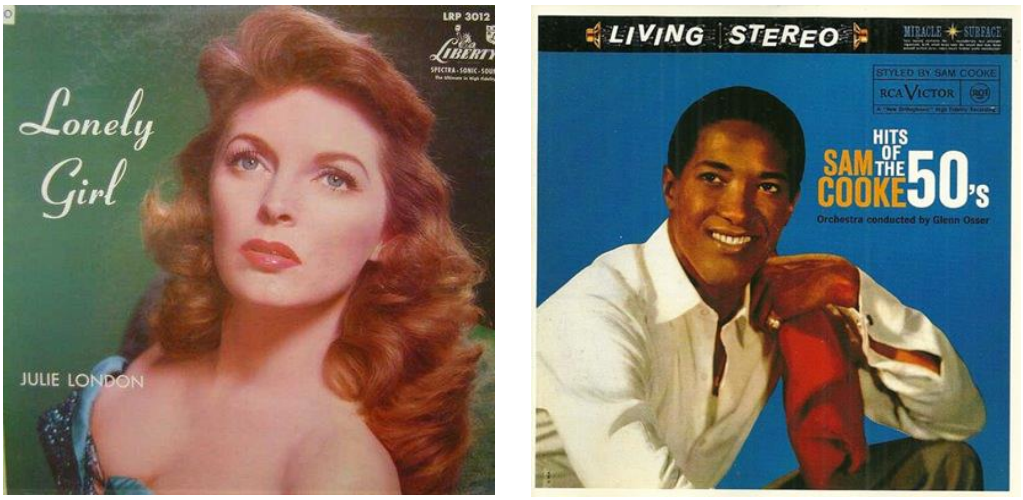

Figure 1.2: Idealised images of pop performers. The singers are shown against a plain background, outside of any realistic context.

There are no images of the recording team who conducted the sessions, their equipment, or of the recording process itself. This contrasts with the shots of artists in the studio that were becoming increasingly commonplace in the iconography of popular music in this period, when recording itself was starting to be recognised as part of popular musicians' legitimate creative practice (Doyle 2013: 905).[11] The visual absence of recording as an activity signals that it is not to be considered an integral part of the creative life of the traditional musicians in the way that it is for popular musicians. The purpose of the recording is ostensibly to provide a glimpse into a musical culture that is independent of technology and in fact pre-dates it, and also, that the process of recording is to be considered neutral and reflective, rather than actively creative. In short, the album's iconography emphasises the unmediated quality of the singers and their music and works to separate traditional musical practice on the one hand, and the technological

[11] The promotional material and album art of pop and rock musicians during this period, often showed them in the studio context; and Doyle (2013) notes that the studio was a staple of pop-film from the 1950s onwards.

apparatus used to produce the recording on the other. Crucially, it does so using multimodal strategies which avoid explicitly verbalising these claims about traditional practice.

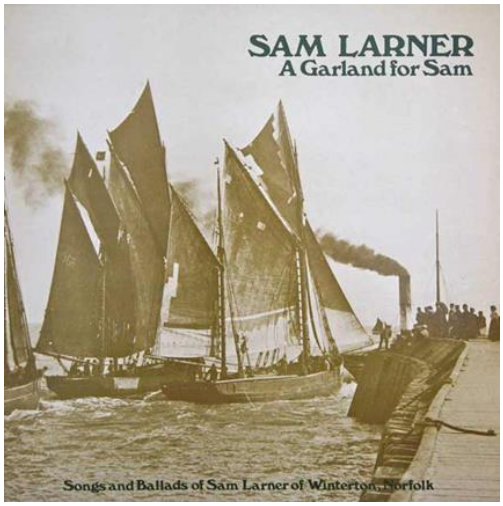

Figure 1.3: Substituting the image of the performer for images which relate to ideas of tradition, the past or nature. Objects and scenes from everyday life are shown – but treated so as to remove them slightly from reality, encouraging a more abstract interpretation.

Text

Text provides a number of unique semiotic resources for constructing meaning in discourse. As indicated above, where the album's subtitle identifies the Willetts as the bearers of the properties of naturalism and rurality of the cover image, text affords a high degree of specification, providing the means to correlate verbal information with visual, sonic or musical information' (Forceville 2009: 395). Text also allows practice to be characterised using a range of verb choices which manage how the behaviour, thoughts and identities of subjects are perceived. Folk recordings in the 1960s often featured extensive liner notes written by people considered to be particularly authoritative, such as folklorists or ethnomusicologists. The notes for *The Roving Journeymen* were contributed by A. L. Lloyd, Topic's artistic director, author of the influential *Folksong in England* (1967) and a key theorist of the revival.[12] As well as providing basic information,

[12] Albert Lancaster Lloyd (1908-1982) was an English ethnomusicologist, musician and broadcaster whose work and ideas were a key influence on the folk song revival of the 1960s, most notably *The Singing Englishman* (1944) and *Folksong in England* (1967). Lloyd began to take an interest in folk song while working as a farm labourer in Australia. He later worked as a correspondent for the popular magazine *Picture Post* before his political inclinations (he was a lifelong communist with strong contacts in the Eastern Bloc) caused him to lose his position at the

such as track listings, personnel and transcriptions of the song lyrics, the notes provided with Topic LPs acted to frame the recordings in terms of their perceived social significance and characterise the musicians and their practice.

As in the visual mode, metaphor plays an important role. The album's title is taken from one of the songs featured on the album, 'The Roving Journeyman', and its use in this context serves the album's overall representative strategy by metaphorically constructing the Willetts as masters of a craft. Ascribing the title of journeyman (a craftsman who has served his apprenticeship) to the Willetts associates them with set of underlying metaphors ('TRADITIONAL MUSIC IS A CRAFT', 'TRADITIONAL SINGERS ARE CRAFTSPEOPLE') evoking notions of skill, gradual development, and attention to detail, inviting us to conceptualise traditional singing as a form of expertise slowly and carefully acquired over time. It also suggests the notion of knowledge being passed on down an unbroken lineage stretching back into the past, recalling the International Folk Music Council's 1954 of folk music as 'the product of evolution […] dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation and selection' (Karpeles 1954: 6-7). The selection of this metaphor of apprenticeship attempts to situate the Willetts firmly within this unbroken cultural lineage, their music as traditional and themselves as 'traditional singers'. The implied metaphor the 'tradition is a journey' translates the notion of motion across space into the domain of time, allowing us to conceive of the tradition as a continuous journey from the past into the future.

Another concept derived from linguistic analysis (although it is also used by Kress and van Leeuwen (2004) in their analysis of visual images) is that of *transitivity*. This concept, which relates to what actors are shown doing and how, is particularly useful in looking at the way the verbal mode is used here. Transitivity can be indicated using verb phrases to describe how someone speaks ('he explained' has a very different set of associations than 'he fumed', for example), as well as what they think, what they do, and how they do it. The liner notes to *The Roving Journeymen* use a number of verbal techniques to play down the level of agency ascribed to the Willetts in terms of their own practices of

magazine (Gammon 2011). From the 1930s onwards he worked intermittently for the BBC as a writer and later broadcaster, producing several documentaries on folk song. His appointment as Topic's artistic director in 1958 officially lasted only one year, although he continued to exert an influence on the label's output over a much longer period (Suff 2009).

learning and understanding, particularly through the selection of passive verb formations. 'The Willetts', Lloyd (1963) states, '*have* their songs from the aural tradition, *from the singing of* relatives or of people in common meeting places, at public houses, fairs and markets' [my italics]. On one hand, it might be argued that 'having' implies a deeper level of ownership; the Willetts have the songs in the same sense that they might have grey hair and brown eyes. On the other, the agency of the singers is reduced by the selection of 'have' over 'learned', suggesting a process of osmosis rather than active acquisition; the Willetts 'have' their songs, rather than 'learning' them. Additionally, they also 'have' rather than 'know' the songs, which implies a passive or even unconscious relationship to the material. The fact that they have the songs 'from the singing of relatives' also implies orality; the songs were not learned from the radio or from books. This implied sense of closeness to the material, and of having come by it unconsciously or by osmosis constructs the Willetts as authentically traditional and implicitly valorises these kinds of learning and transmission processes over those directly mediated by print or technology.

The sense of unconscious transmission is also supported by other constructions which imply that the Willetts do not fully understand the material or are in some way leaky containers for the songs. In describing the track 'Lord Bateman' Lloyd (1963) states that 'the singer [Tom Willetts] has lost the verses', metaphorically constructing the singer as an imperfect container for information. Use of the verb 'lose' suggests passivity, where another interpretation might allow Willetts some agency in himself rearranging the text to suit his own purposes. Lloyd's analysis suggests that traditional culture is not an active process but one that has more to do with the retention or unconscious conservation of older material. As a result, like perishable materials stored in a flawed or damaged container, the texts that are retained are subject to corruption; as Lloyd remarks with regard to another of Tom Willett's performances, 'the text here is a little jumbled … Mr. Willett's version is obviously somewhat degraded'. Elsewhere, we are told that 'the elaborate symbolism' of one song, is 'slightly confused in Tom Willett's version'. Constructions such as these downplay the agency, reliability and level of understanding of the singers. By contrast, the knowledgeability and erudition of Lloyd himself is played up through his deployment of musicological concepts, which seems to have more to do with

demonstrating a command of obscure terminology than informing his readers. One song, 'The Blacksmith Courted Me' (described in the notes as 'the prize piece' of the record) is described in the following terms:

> Basically, it is an Aeolian-type hexatonic (six-note scale) melody; the seventh step appears only once and then as a passing note merely, constitutes what ethnomusicologists, borrowing a term from Chinese theory, called a 'pyen' note. (Lloyd 1963: n.p.)

Lloyd's description is not completely accurate, as the tune makes repeated use of the minor seventh as a melody note (it is the minor sixth which appears only as a passing note in some of the vocal ornaments). But the sense of detailed scholarship conveyed helps to construct a discourse of connoisseurship around the act of listening, presenting the producers (Topic) as authoritative, and the listeners as knowledgeable collectors, engaged in a process of learning and classification and comfortable with some fairly obscure ethnomusicological terminology. The text imposes a separation between a traditional orientation towards the repertoire that is intimately possessive but also passive and instinctual, and an active, rational, and analytical, revivalist understanding. Where the singers 'have' the material, and either 'retain' or 'lose it', scholars like Lloyd, it is implied, approach it logically and systematically. Using verb choices, the text plays down the responsibility of the singers for their own practice, which is determined by the property of traditionality defined in terms of orality and the communal mode of learning and sharing material. Their relationship to 'the Tradition' is ultimately what drives their musical practice, rather than individual creativity.

The text is able to provide a lot of specific information about the musicians, their repertoire and their practice, but it stops short of making fully explicit the claims about the musicians' relationship to nature that the cover image conveys so effectively. While it makes a number of implicit claims about the Willetts' authenticity as traditional singers, it does not say explicitly that the Willetts are closer to nature than their urban counterparts, or that they are true representatives of English rural culture. These aspects of the revival's discourse are effectively implied by the album's iconography but are absent from the text in explicit form. This shows how locating discourse in the visual mode allows claims to be made obliquely which might appear naïve, ideological or otherwise questionable if expressed as verbal statements; by locating certain aspects of

discourse in particular modes, the producers of the text can simultaneously make their argument with greater immediacy and pre-empt possible objections.

Sound recording as a semiotic resource

How does the sound of the recording itself construct the Willetts and their music? I suggest that the way that recording helps construct traditional music depends on both the specific techniques used by the recordists and the ways in which the sounds contained on the recording are articulated with the images and text that accompany them as part of a larger discourse. Moore's (2012) application of Hall's theory of proxemics suggests that sound recordings can provide listeners with vivid experiences of interpersonal distance. Hall's (1966) theory posits a gradation of socially meaningful distances used in everyday social interactions which imply certain interactional affordances between individuals. An intimate distance suggests interactions of a physically intimate kind and implies a level of trust, confidence and emotional sympathy (conversation). A public distance suggests a broadcast style of address, an individual talking to many listeners who are less well known and conveying information in a monologic way that is of a more general, impersonal kind.

Applying this to recording, a soft, close-miked vocal for example, can connote intimacy by drawing on everyday cultural experiences of physical closeness. For this sonic experience of intimacy to acquire counter-cultural significance for a community of practice, however, it must be articulated within a broader discourse (such as that of the revival) in which social intimacy is associated with older (perhaps pre-industrial) forms of intersubjectivity perceived to be particularly socially valuable. Understanding how semantically relevant aspects of musical and sonic texts generate discursive meanings for listeners thus demands attention to how they are articulated with the visual, textual and verbal modes, as well as to their innate spatial, textural and timbral properties.

The album's liner notes give an account of the recording process which constructs it as both informal and appropriate to the singers' practice:

> These recordings were made on location and therefore a certain amount of extraneous noise was unavoidable, though we believe we have achieved an acceptable minimum. The aim during recording was to maintain an

> informal atmosphere and yet capture the presence of the singers. Tom and Ben Willett were recorded at a caravan site in Middlesex, Chris Willett was recorded in a public house near Paddock Wood, Kent. (Lloyd 1963: n.p.)

In an interview with the author the album's producer and engineer Bill Leader conceded that 'there was an element of formality' to the recording session but that this was 'because there were guests, there were visitors, and they'd come down for a purpose. And the Willett family were responding by putting on the best performance they can, but we tried to run it as informally as possible' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Leader's characterisation of the recordists as 'visitors' or 'guests', suggests that we ought to interpret the session as something close to an ordinary social visit, and that the presence of the recordists and their equipment was not particularly disruptive to the ordinary routine of the Willett family's everyday lives. As well as minimising the role of the recordists and their technology in defining the nature of the event, this statement reflects the assumption that this is essentially informal music, closely linked to everyday domestic life, and that this being the case, the quality of the performance, and the value of the recording could potentially have been diminished if an informal atmosphere was not maintained.

According to Leader, the recording set-up for the session was extremely basic, consisting of a single Reslo ribbon mic and a portable tape recorder hired from the audio firm Magnegraph (Bill Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). The Reslo was a relatively inexpensive multi-purpose mic with a figure-eight polar pattern, and was used in a variety of live and studio contexts at this period. The mic's polar pattern, picking up sound bi-directionally through 180 degrees, allowed it to capture a higher level of ambient detail than, for example, a unidirectional dynamic mic. This makes ribbon mics useful for making recordings in which the direct sound of an instrument or other sound source is blended with reflections from the room to create a live, 'roomy' feel.

On the Willett Family recording, the single mic captures a significant amount of reflected sound as well as the singer's voice, suggesting a small, even cramped interior space. Occasionally the domestic setting of the performances makes itself known through extraneous noises such as a creaking hinge or a cough. Faint sounds of the outside world can be discerned, like the horn of a large

goods vehicle in the distance which can be heard at 0.47 on the song 'The Gamekeepers Lie Sleeping'. Aside from some microphone handling noise the extra-musical sounds on the recordings mostly consist of murmured interjections from other family members at the beginning and end of performances. A high level of vocal detail, the sounds of articulation, vocal grit and breathing add to a sense of physical closeness and emotional intimacy, suggesting that singing here is closely related to speech in context, meaning and function.

This sense of interpersonal space and interactivity supports the notion that the music-making captured here is an integral part of the performers' domestic lives. Leader remarked that during the session, rather than excluding non-performers from the space, 'all the family that were going to sing anything were there all the time' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). The opening seconds of 'The Blacksmith Courted Me' include sounds of speech off-mic and a creaking noise (possibly a chair or door hinge). The audible presence of non-performing family members during takes suggests strongly that this is social music, and linked to the heightened atmosphere of family celebrations rather than performance to an audience of strangers. On the track 'Lord Bateman', an inaudible commentary from one of the listeners spills onto the track, suggesting that the boundary between performance and social interaction is more porous than in other genres. The 'acceptable minimum' of extraneous noise on this recording referred to in the notes is thus much higher than on a studio recording of jazz or classical music where the leaking of speech from a non-performer onto a track would almost certainly lead to a take being rejected. The inclusion of the speech of family members, however, suggests that it should be considered part of the 'atmosphere' which the notes state the recordists consciously set out to capture.

The sense of eavesdropping on a traditional performance is belied, however, by one comment in particular which draws attention to the fact that the performances were not produced within the context of an informal gathering, but within the context of a pre-arranged recording session aimed at producing useable performances for repeated listening via recordings. The interjection, 'you make him drunk and he'll sing better!' on the track 'The Game of Cards', alludes directly to the hidden stake of the recordists themselves, their obvious interest in eliciting a performance of a suitable quality for commercial release. The comment is revealing, firstly because the speaker directly addresses the recordists, who

have been made invisible and inaudible by the representational process, revealing that this is not really everyday informal practice but a recording session, and secondly, because it acknowledges that the interests of informal music-making and the relative standards required for traditional performance and commercial folk releases are not necessarily the same. When the speaker jokingly suggests that the current conditions are in fact not conducive to the highest quality performance that the singer is capable of due to the absence of alcohol, the hidden tension between the ideal of unmediated traditional performance and the reality of revivalist practice is revealed. It also suggests that there is a tension at work between the notion of the tradition as social practice and as a body of canonical texts. The recordists are pursuing a compromise between capturing something close to traditional performance and obtaining the fullest versions of the material they can.

Like the visual and textual modes, sound recording offers a number of possibilities for constructing representations of traditional practice. As already indicated, the recordings help to manage the listener's relationship to the singers by setting up a sense of distance. Van Leeuwen (1999: 12), developing Hall's (1966) proxemics theory in the context of film, argues that shot framing in visual images sets up a distance between the viewer and what is portrayed on screen and that, 'the relations expressed by these distances derive from our everyday experience, from the distances we keep from different kinds of people, places and things in everyday life'. Microphone positioning, by aurally framing the scene of action, also constructs a socially meaningful distance between the singer and the listener. In this case, the relationship is close, intimate and conversational. The Willetts family recording, through mic positioning, suggests a social distance, a dialogic style of interaction (a notion supported by the occasional interjections from the listeners present) and an implied degree of confidentiality.

Reflecting or feeding off assumptions about the nature of traditional performance, the recordings convey spatial cues for interpreting social distance that help construct traditional performance as informal and intimate. This sense of intimacy is a result of decisions about how to organise the recording space as well as mic selection and placement; but perhaps the single most important aspect of sound recording as a discursive medium is its apparently neutral relation to reality. The sounds heard on documentary recordings such as these are often heard

as transparent reflections of the real, even though they are in fact constructions which organise the sonic reality they represent according to a particular perspective.

Views of recording as transparent

Recording has often been considered by ethnomusicologists as well as revivalists not just as a reliable transcription tool but as a faithful guide to social context. Myers argues that field recordings capture not only the content but the 'natural ambience' of musical performance; 'audience, traffic, animals, conversation, discussion, cooking, eating, drinking – life' (Myers 1992 cited in Lysloff and Gay 2003: 5). Lysloff and Gay (2003) point out, however, that even supposedly objective approaches to field recording can encode the cultural assumptions and epistemological hierarchies of producers. They cite the example of American scholarly recordings of Javanese shadow puppet performances which used mic placement and mixing to 'flatten out' the musicians' practice, aurally suggesting an equality of musical parts that does not pertain in Javanese views of the practice. The producers' approach, which was aimed at capturing an 'authentic' sound (that is, one free from technological interference – seen as contaminating - at the site of performance) effectively privileged Western experiences of Gamelan over indigenous conceptualisations of the music and indigenous recordings which, they argue, typically privilege the vocals over the instrumental background, often using amplification to do so, an aspect of performance practice which the American scholars' recordings in fact actively concealed.

Field recordings are often seen as 'windows on practice' (Nimmo 2011) and the notion of sound recording as unquestionably objective helps to shift responsibility for constructing representations from the producers of sound recordings onto the technology itself. Although recordings are humanly produced representations of events and practices worked up using a range of discursive techniques, widespread belief in recording as a neutral process allows this work to be effectively hidden. Latour (2008: 154-155) argues that humans delegate crucial social functions to technologies and this argument can be extended to include technologies from door hinges, to telephones, or microphones. Latour's work suggests that technologies not only reflect the values and desires of the people that design, build and operate them, but continue and even replace aspects of human

agency, constituting a crucial means of sustaining discourses and achieving social, moral and political programmes. In the case of sound recording, this delegation of representation onto the technology underpins the perceived value of recordings as evidence of reality. Like the camera, the microphone never lies: faith in the technology's transparency obviates the need to question the truthfulness of the image or the political motivation of its producers, making sound recording a powerfully persuasive rhetorical tool.

Managing agency: producers' descriptions of practice

Viewing sound recordings as humanly constructed texts allows us to apply some of the techniques of discourse analysis introduced above. The concept of deletion advanced by Machin (2013), for instance, is something that recordings accomplish particularly well. The recording process allows producers to cover up the traces of production, deleting the messy reality of social practice within which texts are produced and obscuring the agency of producers. Recordings like other edited texts 'flatten out' a practice which is 'messy, multiple and materially heterogeneous' (Nimmo 2011: 113). This 'flattening out' of practice can be seen as a key function of recording as discourse, facilitating the construction of the represented object as natural and complete by removing the traces of production. This is particularly important for the discourse of revivalism, in which technology is used strategically to construct an image of a pre-technological traditional culture. The modern/traditional binary at the centre of revivalist discourse is effectively re-inscribed through the recording's effacement of the technologically mediated reality of production.

This process is helped along by the ways in which producers describe their own practice as a straightforward technical procedure, in which all decisions are described in terms of technical problems or as determined by the nature of the object itself. Jarrett (2012) has explored the verbal techniques producers of recordings use to manage perceptions of agency and motivation in describing their own practice, suggesting that producers tend to efface their own creative contribution. In their own narratives recordists, engineers and even musicians become 'invisible' producers. In reality, however, rather than simply 'capturing music […] producers have to work hard to enable and to record sounds that, when listeners hear them, convey the impression of having escaped (better, of not

needing to escape) the clutches of production and the constraints of recording technologies' (Jarrett 2012: 129).

As Potter (1996: 150) argues, in both verbal and textual accounts, techniques for managing agency are necessary for building descriptions with the required quality of 'out-there-ness' – a sense of the described object as 'independent of the agent doing the describing'. In a successful account, 'expectations about agency are moved from the producer of the factual account to the entity that is being constructed' (ibid.). 'Externalising devices', Potter argues, are discursive procedures which '[provide] for the reading that the phenomenon described has an existence by virtue of action beyond the realm of human agency' (ibid.). One of the most important of these is what he calls the 'empiricist repertoire', a 'coherent and distinctive set of linguistic and rhetorical features' used in scientific texts which has three key features: firstly, it creates a sense of impersonality by using the passive tense in constructions such as 'it was found that' or 'the evidence suggests'; secondly, it uses formations that emphasise the primacy of data; thirdly, it tends to depict laboratory work as strictly governed by the application of well-established (and thus by implication neutral) routines and procedures (Potter 1996: 151). By removing human agency from the work of construction, the empiricist repertoire confers agency on the object of study while '[t]he scientist becomes passive, virtually a bystander, or evaporates altogether […] the data take on a life of their own. They become rhetorically live actors, who can do suggesting, pointing, showing and implying' (ibid.: 153).

Jarrett's (2012) series of interviews with record producers working in the fields of jazz and country music produced accounts in which the concern with conveying impersonality, the primacy of data, and the conventional nature of practice suggest comparison with those given by scientists of their laboratory practice. As with the latter, these aspects were articulated using a repertoire of ideological tropes specific to the field of practice. The notion of data primacy, for example, might be seen to correspond to the priority of performance tradition, the work, or the artist's creative vision. Recording, like scientific research, is constructed as responding to its object and its conventions of practice are constructed as a logical outcome of the nature of the music itself. In these 'well-rehearsed' and (in Jarrett's sample at least) highly consistent verbal accounts of their practice, record producers worked to '[inhibit] the emergence of "the

producer" as an animated body – a self or subjectivity who breathes life into sound' (Jarrett 2012: 129). Instead, they summon into being an external presence, that of the artist-as-creator with whom, ultimately, true agency resides. As Jarrett notes, their statements on practice merge a discourse of aesthetics with one of ethics – there is the suggestion of a moral imperative guiding production decisions, an underlying concern with the 'proper use of the recording medium' (ibid.: 129).

Folk's ideology of creativity

As in rock, the production ideologies of jazz and country music are founded, Jarrett (2012: 129) argues, on 'Romantic notions of musicianship' and draw on a model of inspired creativity that harks back to at least the late nineteenth century. In traditional music, however, traces of the Romantic artist do not pervade representations of creative practice to the same extent. Here the singer or musician is herself an intermediary: if not completely neutral, still to some extent a conduit for some external agency, deferred one stage further – 'the Tradition' perhaps, the voice of a community, or of 'the people'. This difference aside, however, accounts of production by commercial folk producers might be expected to share some of the features observed in other genres, such as a concern with the invisibility and passivity of the producer, even if they do not fully share the Romantic vocabulary of the artist-creator.

Tony Engle's (2009: 47) descriptions of his work for Topic from the 1970s onwards support this idea: Engle describes the task of recording revivalist acts like The Watersons,[13] a group he describes as 'very close to the tradition', as 'overseeing rather than "producing"' (ibid.). As the artists 'are their own producers' the producer's role is simply 'to make things run as smoothly as possible […] you need a fairly dead room, you don't want to leave reverb to chance. You always need to be friendly and supportive […] always trying to record what the performer sounded like, not trying to make Sergeant Pepper' (ibid.). Other production duties, such as programming the running order, he

[13] The Watersons, a vocal group from Humberside, first recorded for Topic in 1965 with their original line up of siblings Norma, Mike and Elaine and their cousin John Harrison, appearing on the compilation *New Voices* (1965) and a debut album *Frost and Fire* (1965). After two further recordings, *The Watersons* (1966) and *A Yorkshire Garland* (1966), the band split reforming in 1972, with Martin Carthy taking the place of Harrison, to record *For Pence and Spicy Ale* (1975).

describes as 'relatively instinctive' (ibid.). Like the producers interviewed by Jarrett, Engle uses a passivating strategy to construct the process as one driven by the artist's agency, and his own role as that of a facilitator, rather than a creative participant.

In revivalist accounts of recording practice, a belief in the objectivity of sound recording – that it faithfully conveys the unmediated sound of traditional practice – is combined with self-descriptions of producers as neutral witnesses whose practice is wholly determined by the object they are seeking to capture, in order to reify the tradition as something that precedes and exceeds revivalist constructions of it. It is in the relationship between the spatial, textural and proxemic aspects of the recording and the recording's paratext, however, that the recording is able to convey revivalist discourse.

Recording and the semantic loop

Kramer's (2002) notion of the *semantic loop* can be usefully applied here to describe how the sounds on the recording help to convey revivalist discourse through a reciprocal relationship with the album's visual and textual components. In his discussion of music in multimedia settings, Kramer (2002) argues that music does not simply reflect meanings already present in what he calls the *imagetext* (the visual or textual discourses with which it enters into dialogue) but in fact absorbs and transforms meaning from it. Although the imagetext enjoys 'a semantic authority that music is denied' (logically, meaning flows into music from it) when listening to and interpreting music, our experience 'tends to proceed contrariwise' with music itself becoming the apparent origin of meaning (Kramer 2002: 153). 'As soon as meaning effectively runs from the imagetext to music along the semantic loop', Kramer argues, 'the music seems to convey that meaning to and through the imagetext in preconceptual, prerepresentational form' (ibid.).

In the case of revivalist field recordings like *The Roving Journeymen*, the immediate 'imagetext' constituted by the album's visual and textual components frames the meaning of the sounds on the recording (the sonic details of intimate social space) as markers of traditionality. In the process of listening, however, the immediate qualities of the sonic material, the sense of proxemic closeness in the recordings, is what we seem to encounter first and the sound, although it receives

meaning from the surrounding discourse, acts to justify and exemplify this meaning. The recording 'seems to emit a meaning that it actually returns, and what it returns, it enriches and transforms' (Kramer 2002: 153).

As I have argued, this sound text is constructed, not cynically, or deliberately, but through being founded in assumptions about the nature of traditional practice that leave the recording process and the interpretive process open to notions of informality, intimacy and social proximity. Though not conscious simulations, the recordings are nevertheless part of a constructive process. By virtue of their apparent immediacy the recorded sounds function as anchoring points in revivalist discourse, a discourse that relies on the notion of sound recording as objective; the sense, identified by Kramer, of picking up on a prerepresentational meaning is particularly powerful because of the perception of sound recording as having a particularly strong claim to representational objectivity. The text and images that accompany the traditional singing presented on this album describe a traditional world characterised by natural relationships, proxemic closeness and personal authenticity, the very qualities which according to revivalist discourse, have been lost in contemporary urban society. In this context, the recordings afford a vivid encounter with what has been lost, seeming to signify the end point of the quest for ever greater honesty and realism imagined by Engle in the opening quote of the chapter – the 'pure drop'. The sounds on the recording come to stand for traditional practice, the tradition as something that exceeds individual instances, only by absorbing the meanings of the paratextual definition of tradition, and in the process seeming to embody the qualities described in the surrounding discourse. The sounds of the recording itself, the experience of social intimacy and unvarnished realism that it affords, becomes evidence for the truth of the claims about traditional culture, both explicit and implicit, the surrounding discourse sets up.

Conclusion

In the post-war revival authenticity was redefined in terms of the social relationships thought to be enacted by the performance of traditional music. The aim of this chapter has been, firstly, to explore the discursive techniques used by revivalist albums such as *The Roving Journeymen* to construct an image of traditional practice as informal and intimate with a porous boundary between

everyday social interaction and performance, and secondly, to understand the correlation between the sounds on the records and their discursive function, and how this relationship is constructed and sustained within the context of a wider revivalist discourse.

The multimodal discourse of the album constructs a traditional culture in which song and speech are closely related, where family and inheritance remain the basis for the handing down of cultural knowledge, and technology is kept firmly in its proper place. The album's visual and textual paratext is crucial to the construction of this image, but sound recording as a semiotic resource also contributes to this discourse, affording a vivid experience of social intimacy through the way the recording is organised, in particular, how it manages perceptions of social distance through mic selection and placement.

The perceived neutrality of sound recording as a technical process is a crucial component of the discourse, supporting the notion that the recording presents us with an objective picture of traditional practice. This is established partly as a function of the surrounding discourses, including producers' descriptions of their own practice and the way in which the liner notes describe recording as a process. But it is also sustained by the innate semiotic resources of the technology itself, the way recordings cover the traces of their own construction. The power of recording as a rhetorical tool, I suggest, rests on the elision of two senses of objectivity. In one sense it is correct to say that the recording process is objective insofar as the sounds it re-presents are a result of sounds made at the time of recording. Although it is not strictly true to say that the recording captures the sound that was there (it presents only a limited perspective on the original sonic event), there is an undeniable causal link between Tom Willett singing 'The Game of Cards' and the recording of him singing it. In the sense that it might be thought to provide a transparent window on traditional practice, however, the recording process is far from objective. The field recordings made by revivalists were constructed, the result of decisions based on assumptions about the nature of traditional practice and, as such, reflect the revival's cultural-political agenda. Producers selected locations, organised the recording space and selected the technologies they used based on these assumptions. Presenting the recordings in the context of the LP format, they also employed a range of additional discursive strategies, verbal and visual, to

downplay their own agency in its construction, as well as making other tacit claims about the music represented on the recording.

The recordings, I suggest, following the work of Kramer (2002) absorb meaning from these other modes. They carry certain social connotations through the way they capture and convey spatial information about the place in which they are made, and through being articulated with other modes of discourse whose meaning they absorb, reflect, and transform. Their objectivity (the fact that they are causally linked to the original sonic event) supports the notion that they 'contain' the ascribed meanings they reflect from the imagetext.

The single mic approach, editing, and mic placement, help to construct the notion of an unmediated social reality that precedes the recording process. It is also used to construct a sense of the music as natural through the picking up of vocal grit and ambient detail, and as uniquely socially embedded through the recording of social interactions and extraneous, extra-musical sounds. Yet ultimately the meaning of the recordings emerges within the semantic context provided by the album's iconography and the notes supplied by Lloyd, which frame the sounds captured on the recording, allowing the recording to afford a vivid encounter with 'the tradition' conceived as a pure, unmediated culture of practice. We hear *The Roving Journeymen* multimodally: the imagery and the text tell us how we should interpret the sounds we hear; in turn, the sounds act as evidence for the meanings conveyed in the imagetext, made all the more powerful because of our cultural belief that sound recording somehow allows us to confront the unmediated real.

Chapter 2. The BBC *Radio Ballads*: The tape recorder, modernism and working class identity

Introduction

In the late 1950s and early 1960s a series of radio programmes on the BBC became the first to combine recorded interviews with ordinary people and music derived from traditional sources using the new technology of magnetic tape. The *Radio Ballads*, broadcast on the BBC Home Service between 1958 and 1964, were amongst the most expensive, labour intensive and technically demanding radio programmes of the post-war era. The programmes could be considered a late flowering of the creative radio documentary movement of the 1930s, adopting a narrative-free, associative approach which drew on modernist technique and theory to reimagine radio's social role. With their combination of unscripted testimony and newly composed folk song they represented a totally new approach to the presentation of working class voices on British radio (Cox 2008; Vacca 2014). They also made a strong case for the cultural importance of working class traditions. The writer and folk singer Fred McCormick, a young working class revivalist at the time the programmes were first broadcast, felt that working people had previously been 'deemed incapable of independent thought or action' by those who controlled the media:

> They could not lead, they could only follow. They could not create, they could only absorb. They were not capable of articulating or appreciating anything of artistic or cultural worth. Above all, they had no individual or collective history or culture or identity. (McCormick 1999: n.p.)

The *Radio Ballads* offered McCormick a more positive vision of his own identity and cultural inheritance:

> When I first heard these programmes they shocked me into realising that I, as an overall wearing [sic] member of the working class, had a history and a culture and an identity far more valid than that which had been heaped upon me by the State education system. They made

> me realise that the job I did, that the life I led, that my very existence as a member of the human race, were things possessed of intrinsic value, and that the same goes for every other single member of humanity. That is not something any schoolbook ever taught me. (McCormick 1999: n.p.)

This championing of native vernacular traditions came at a time of perceived cultural crisis when the commercialisation of popular culture and the decline of traditional industries seemed to threaten stable working class culture and identity (Harker 2009b; Strangleman 2004: 100). In exploring the language and lore of ordinary citizens, including workers in Britain's traditional industries, the programme makers sought to recapture and reinvent an authentic popular tradition which they felt offered a way forward in a society bereft of cultural unity and artistic vision.

Research by Harker (2007; 2009), Verrier (2004) and Vacca (2014) has hinted at the influence of interwar modernism on the post-war revival. Vacca (2014) in particular has argued that the central place accorded to the technique of montage in the work of the programmes' songwriter Ewan MacColl indicates the crucial influence of Soviet cinema and theatre techniques on the development of his individual approach. The current chapter begins by exploring the prehistory of the programmes and how elements of modernist thought, in particular the principle of montage, which Vacca (2014) identifies as key to MacColl's compositional style, came to frame the producers' understanding of traditional song and its relationship to speech. It then goes on to consider how this complex of ideas filtered into the producers' understanding of sound recording's artistic and social potential, and how their experiences of the technology of tape itself influenced their practice and their perceptions of traditional culture. The second half then considers how the programmes, as key texts within revivalist discourse, used sound recording in their articulation of core revivalist assumptions about contemporary society, the role of labour, the origins and significance of the folk tradition and its future role within a more democratic popular culture. The chapter concludes by considering some of the ethical questions raised by the programmes' creative use of recorded testimony and how the makers

developed their ideas about tape's social role in subsequent work outside the institutional context of the BBC.

Origins and modernist influences

The notion of a 'Radio Ballad', 'a form of narrative documentary' which combined cutting-edge techniques with '"folk-song" modes of expression', was originally conceived by Charles Parker, a senior features editor for BBC Midlands region (Parker 1965: n.p.). The first four programmes looked at the experiences of workers in the traditional industries of rail, construction, fishing and coalmining. Later programmes applied the same techniques to other marginalised groups – polio sufferers, teenagers, professional fighters and travellers. The range of topics selected and of the groups they chose to represent indicates that the programme makers were engaged in a project that exceeded the bounds of standard radio documentary; they were in search of a poetic language capable of representing the whole of contemporary social reality (MacColl 1990).

Charles Parker, the series' producer, had become interested in the creative possibilities of radio while working for the BBC's North American Service where he encountered the work of Norman Corwin, 'the American Shakespeare of radio' (Crook 2014). Corwin's 'folk cantata' *The Lonesome Train* (1944), which used folk music and layered sound to create an impressionistic account of the last journey of Abraham Lincoln's funeral train provided the initial inspiration for the first *Radio Ballad* 'The Ballad of John Axon' (1958). Axon was a Lancashire engine driver killed while attempting to regain control of his runaway engine. Parker had been moved by the story and felt that it could benefit from a musical approach similar to Corwin's (Cox 2008). Impressed by the emerging folk revival movement Parker recruited two of its leading lights, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, to provide the musical component of the programme. Seeger, the daughter of US musicologists Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, was an established performer and recording artist; MacColl, selected for his skills as a songwriter and interpreter of traditional material, also brought with him a theoretical

toolkit developed over the course of two decades working alongside some of the leading exponents of radio features-making and experimental drama.

While Parker provided the initial impetus the artistic direction of the programmes was supplied by MacColl. When Parker approached him as a potential collaborator in 1957, MacColl was forty-two with a prolific career as a dramatist and broadcaster behind him. MacColl had been a member of the communist party since leaving school at fourteen and began his theatre career in various agitprop groups in Manchester, gaining his first broadcasting experience at BBC North Region in the mid-1930s (Harker 2007). MacColl's work with the radio producer A.E. Harding during this period had involved him in an intellectual milieu in which the search for a more democratic media was closely intertwined with formal experimentation. The influence of modernist film and literature on interwar radio generated successive attempts to produce content which represented the interests and opinions of working people as well as experiments with form aimed at encouraging non-linear or dialectic modes of thought. For McColl, steeped in the culture of interwar modernism, the fundamental problem of the *Radio Ballads* was the same one that had concerned him for much of his career: how to develop an artistic language 'capable of dealing with the twentieth century in whatever guise it appeared' (MacColl 1990: 316).

When MacColl began his radio career in 1934 the voices of working class people were almost totally absent from British radio. This absence was bound up with dominant perceptions of the nature and political significance of the medium itself. Broadcasting was held by Britain's political establishment to be a crucial means of securing social cohesion and BBC cultural policy aimed at fulfilling this role tended towards a Reithian, paternalist approach centred around the notion of a homogenous, metropolitan-centred national culture (Robertson 2008: 463). The power and reach of radio had grown rapidly after 1922, and by 1935 the General Post Office film unit's *BBC: the Voice of Britain* (1935) depicted a nation in thrall to the wireless from London to the Outer Hebrides, its citizens already beginning to experience themselves as part of a 'mediated collectivity' (Frith 2003: 96). Radio 'transformed the use of domestic space, blurring the boundary between the public and the

private, idealising the family hearth as the site of ease and entertainment, establishing the rhythm of everydayness' (Frith 2002: 41).

Despite its penetration into domestic life, the majority of radio content was highly formalised, studio-bound and scripted with access to the microphone reserved for experts or politicians. There was resistance to the coverage of social or political issues from a political establishment which 'feared the power of the new medium to disturb the *status quo*' (Crisell 1997: 37). *Time to Spare* (1934), a series of talks by working class people about their own experiences of unemployment was felt to be so inflammatory by the National Government that the prime minister Ramsay MacDonald tried (unsuccessfully) to have the transmissions stopped (Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 59).

For many on the Left, the BBC represented a tool of social and intellectual repression, a platform for 'old men to lecture us' as the *Daily Worker*'s radio critic George Audit put it (Harker 2013: 89). British socialists tended to see the BBC as:

> both an insidious institution exercising baleful influence on behalf of the ruling class and a ready-made cultural apparatus whose monopoly status and presence in millions of homes made it of great relevance to the rising class and its self-styled representatives. (Harker 2013: 85)

Leftist critics attacked the use of radio in state propaganda as well its perceived encouragement of passive forms of thought. In 1939 Charles Madge, a poet and one of the co-founders of Mass-Observation,[1] accused the BBC of spreading a distorted picture of social relationships and world events, 'foisting on the mass […] ideas developed by men apart from it, irrespective

[1] Mass-Observation was the attempt led by a group of Cambridge University educated poets, artists and anthropologists to undertake an 'anthropology of ourselves', turning an anthropological lens onto everyday life in Britain (Highmore 2002: 87). Their techniques, influenced as much by surrealism as by academic methodologies included the collation of 'day surveys' – phenomenological accounts of everyday experience – from thousands of volunteers as well as photography, and the analysis of radio and newspaper reports (Highmore 2002: 75-112). The project included a detailed analysis of media coverage of the Munich crisis in 1938 which problematised the BBC's deployment of the notion of 'public opinion' to make the case for Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, despite widespread popular support for military intervention against Hitler (Harrison and Madge 1939: 23-109).

of its capacities, [causing] mass misery [and] intellectual despair' (Highmore 2002b: 148).

As well as spreading deliberate distortions in order to legitimate the interests of the political elite, Madge saw radio joining with film, newspapers and popular music in articulating a popular culture that, he argued, was 'no more about reality than Hitler's speeches' encouraging 'the same surrender of personal decision as that of uniformed Nazis' (Highmore 2002a: 109). If a descent into fascism was to be avoided, the broadcast media's powerful capacity to shape subjectivity had to be turned away from individualist fantasy and social atomism into more progressive, socially oriented forms.

Finch (1999: 98) argues that the carefully controlled, monologic character of pre-war broadcasting was due to assumptions on the part of the ruling elite about the irrationality, impressionability and potential unruliness of the masses. Factual broadcasting was kept deliberately simple in both form and content as it was felt that ordinary listeners lacked the capacity to comprehend complex, ambiguous messages. The keyword was uniformity: the BBC, one producer wrote approvingly:

> has many voices but one mouth […] It is a commonplace that all announcers sound alike. That is a tribute to their training. 'A' announcing a symphony concert should sound like 'B' announcing the next in the series […] Captain 'X' of the regiment giving an order should and does sound like Captain 'Y' giving the same order. (Briggs 1961: 123)

The use of such militaristic language in the context of the corporation's cultural policy must have signalled to contemporaries on the Left a paternalism shading into something far more sinister. For the BBC governors, it seemed, the listeners were a mass to be managed; for British socialists they were a people denied a voice.

Advances in documentary film and radio

The documentary film movement which gathered around the General Post Office (GPO) film unit was comparatively free from the strict controls

imposed upon the BBC and had entered an era of fertile experimentation (Nichols 2001). British film makers such as John Grierson inspired by technical innovations in the US, France and the Soviet Union adopted modernist techniques such as montage in their representations of work and leisure. Although the development of new representational techniques was a significant artistic goal for British film makers, their technical experimentation was closely connected with a broadly patriotic Leftist agenda: Nichols (2001: 582) argues that for Grierson, 'the value of cinema lay in its capacity to document, demonstrate, or, at most, enact the proper, or improper, terms of individual citizenship and state responsibility'. In their concern to represent the dignity and interest of working life, the films of the GPO tended towards the monumental with 'the male body […] depicted as a "heroic figure" representative of "the ardour and bravery of common labour"' (Beattie 2010: 40). Although Humphrey Jennings's *Spare Time* (1939) and *Diary for Timothy* (1945) display a more oblique, meditative fascination with the rhythms of working class life, the tone of the movement as a whole is perhaps better reflected by Edgar Anstey's remark that 'the workingman can only be a heroic figure. If he's not heroic, he can't be a working man' (Swann 1989: 88).

Although inspired by innovations in film, initial attempts to apply modernist techniques in radio were far more introspective in their orientation. Lance Sieveking's features of the late 1920s and early 1930s adopted an individualistic, phenomenological and avowedly apolitical approach: his experiments in 'pure radio' made expressionistic use of music, sound effects and montage in the attempt to map the 'inner topography of the self' and evoke the 'subjective experience of a mind bombarded with sensations and memories,' an approach which owed a conscious debt to the literary and cinematic modernism of Pound, Joyce, and Pudovkin (Hendy 2012: 176).

In the work of A.E. Harding, which built on Sieveking's technical innovations, formal experimentation and political radicalism were inseparably linked. His challenge to the BBC's monologic character stemmed from an awareness of radio's political role (Scannell 1991: 138). Where Sieveking's experimental productions were aimed at an elite metropolitan listenership,

Harding's dealt with questions of immediate social and political significance, a fact which led to his alleged 'banishment' from London to BBC North Region in Manchester (where Director General Lord Reith felt he would 'do less damage') (Scannell 1991: 140). Harding's *Crisis in Spain* (1931), an account of the events leading to the declaration of the Republic in Spain, used the techniques of juxtaposition developed by Sieveking to facilitate listener's understanding of a political event of global significance: 'by using filmic principles of montage (contrast, close-up and distance "shots", superimposition, juxtaposition, and interruption) [Harding] was able to create an impressionistic collage of sound that transpired in "altered" time' (Fisher 2001: 79). Harding's piece aimed not just at representing mental processes but at training the critical faculties of listeners; 'to promote the listener's own psychological involvement so that the listener formed impressions as if he or she had experienced events directly rather than through a producer or a narrator' (ibid.). The programme, Scannell (1991: 139) argues, 'succeeded in realizing a contemporary event as a dynamic, historical process by a complex cross-cutting between events taking place in different parts of Spain and, at the same time the global distribution of accounts of those events via modern media and communications systems'.

In Harding's work with Olive Shapley and Geoffrey Bridson following his banishment to Manchester, modernist technique was combined with an outwardly focussed social perspective inspired by the British documentary film movement. In addition to explorations of Northern identity which touched on both the region's industrial heritage and its rural traditions, Harding *et al.* were committed to presenting working class voices in their programmes. *Harry Hopeful* (1935), a series with a genuine working class star and in which members of the public spoke their own (re-scripted) words in a live studio setting, found an enthusiastic northern audience (Scannell 1991: 340-342; Crisell 1997: 36).[2]

Ewan MacColl (then using his given name of James Miller) joined BBC North Region in 1934 and was soon contributing as a script writer to

[2] Frank Nicolls, 'a clock-mender from Irlam' with the 'rare ability to put people at their ease and draw them out in conversation' (Scannell 1986: 15).

features including *Westwards from Liverpool* (1937) and *Homeless People* (1938) (Harker 2007: 51). Miller found Harding supportive of his ambitions as a writer (MacColl 1990: 231) and having listened 'with tremendous excitement' to *Crisis in Spain* which he felt had the 'sweep and intellectual passion of Eisenstein at his best' (ibid.: 229) enthusiastically absorbed the latter's ideas about radio as an 'art form which could assist the forward march of mankind' (ibid.: 321).

In the programmes of BBC North Region, as in the work of the documentary film movement, ordinary people appeared as heroes of labour, as victims of social policy, and as citizens exercising their democratic right to express their opinions. Advances in recording technology were central to these developments. Moves towards more democratic radio forms were initially hampered by the lumbering condition of pre-war audio technology (Crisell 1997: 36).[3] It was only with the availability of mobile recording technology that newer and more flexible production practices could be adopted, and radio began to catch up with film as a documentary medium. By 1937, mobile units allowed Harding's team to incorporate 'actuality' material – recorded speech drawn from interviews with the general public – into their programmes. As Scannell (1986: 13) argues, for the first time, radio was able to go out 'into everyday life to capture the "essence" of […] reality as lived by those who speak of it' and 're-present this experience to listeners'. These advances in radio were hailed by Grierson: the microphone, he noted approvingly, could finally 'get about in the world', and had:

> the same power over reality as the camera had before it […] to bring to the hands of the creative artist a thousand and one vernacular elements, and the million and one sounds which ordinarily attend the working world (Young 2010: 118).

[3] Where the camera's portability gave filmmakers relative ease of movement, the size of disc-cutting machines (the only means of sound recording available to radio producers until the introduction of the equally huge 'Blattnerphone' which recorded audio onto magnetic steel tape) coupled with the prohibitive cost of making and storing sound recordings meant that location recording or 'outside broadcasting' was out of the question until the mid-1930s, when mobile recording units (in the form of converted laundry vans weighing several tonnes) were introduced.

For Grierson, this new mobility was a crucial aspect of recording's democratic potential, decentralising a medium previously located in the studio, but it also transformed the significance of content. With mobile recording, the audible textures of everyday life and the speech of ordinary people could become in Scannell's (1986: 1-29) phrase, 'the stuff of radio', a new artistic raw material.

MacColl and worker's theatre

Throughout his time at BBC Manchester MacColl's main focus of activity remained the theatre. MacColl's career in drama began in the early 1930s with an agitprop group, the Red Megaphones, performing short sketches and 'mass declamations' promoting socialist ideas or voicing support for local union actions (MacColl 1990; Goorney and MacColl 1986; Moore and Vacca 2014).[4] MacColl read 'voraciously' during this period, absorbing the ideas of Brecht and Stanislavsky and taking a particular interest in the ideas of Appia and Moussinac on lighting and set design (Harker 2007: 39). After the group's disbandment in 1934 MacColl began a lengthy creative partnership with another Harding protégé, Joan Littlewood,[5] with whom he founded the company Theatre of Action in 1935. Technological experimentation was at the forefront of their work: in a 1965 lecture to the Critics' Group, MacColl explained how he and Littlewood had incorporated film techniques in their attempt to produce a theatre capable of competing with new media forms:

> One of the things about film for example is that you can move from 1930 to 1960 in a cut. Bang! We said the theatre should be able to do this […] so we began to devise forms which would be terrifically fast-moving. I remember at this period we coined a phrase which I've

[4] The name was borrowed from a German group, Das Rote Sprachrohr. An early piece, *Meerut*, protested against the jailing of workers for union activity following the Meerut rail strike of 1931. (Goorney and MacColl 1986: xxii). The group's work emphasised spontaneity and flexibility, with pieces often semi-improvised and deigned for performance outdoors without costumes or staging. (Moore and Vacca 2014: 18).

[5] Joan Littlewood (1914-2002) actor, writer and dramatist. Her collaboration with Miller/MacColl lasted from 1934 until the early 1950s when the latter's interest in the folksong movement began to overshadow his commitment to workers' theatre. She continued writing for Theatre Workshop (the company founded with MacColl in 1945 and still extant), finding mainstream success with *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963), until her retirement in 1975 (Rankin 2004).

> since used many times because it's still enormously valid, we said 'our objective is to create a theatre which will be so fast-moving, which will be so flexible, that it's capable of reflecting the constantly changing twentieth century scene'. (MacColl 1965a)

MacColl and Littlewood's experiences of sound montage in radio were also an important influence on their theatre practice:

> Pudovkin had said that film technique is based upon montage, the super-imposition and the juxtaposition of images creates a rhythmic response in the audience. And I reasoned that radio was the same except that the images which were juxtaposed and super-imposed upon each other were not visual images but auditory images, the image of the ear. And so we reasoned that by […] using sound in this way in the theatre we could create this extra dimension which was going to give us the flexibility which was needed. (MacColl 1965b)

Their play *John Bullion* (1935) announced the group's technically experimental direction, a 'frenetic fifteen minutes of dazzling lighting, roaring music, stylised acting, robotic dancing and disorienting sound effects' (Harker 2007: 44). 1935 saw the pair further cement their international modernist credentials by hosting a conference in Manchester with a keynote by Andre von Gyseghem, a colleague of Meyerhold and Eisenstein (ibid.: 46). *Last Edition* (1940) reviewed the events of 1934-1939 adopting the Soviet form of the living newspaper. It was a 'lavishly multimedia' production, which left reviewer Anthony Burgess in 'no doubt about the strength of [its] technique and the thoroughness of its modernity […] the plot [was] complex and oiled like machinery [and] Amplified gramophone records swelled in on split second cues' (Burgess 1987: 80-1 cited in Harker, 58-9). *Last Edition* evoked 'innovations in radio communications to re-imagine time and space: a modern telephone dialling board and a rapid medley of microphone voices were used to represent events in different places simultaneously, creating onstage the breaking news of a country in the grip of civil war' (Harker 2009a: 33). The play juxtaposed media genres (the conventions of the Hollywood gangster film were used in a segment depicting the negotiations between Chamberlain, Hitler and Mussolini), while elements of radio documentary such as voice-

over were incorporated alongside an exaggerated theatrical realism in a dialogic blend which aimed to challenge both the supposed neutrality of the print media and the claims of social realism to present reality unmediated (Harker 2009a: 32).

In 1940, *Last Edition* was suppressed by the censors and Miller was drafted into the army. Following his desertion and a period in hiding, MacColl and Littlewood formed Theatre Workshop in 1946 with a pledge to continue their experiments with 'cutting edge sound technology […] to bring theatre into the age of the motion picture' (Harker 2007: 71). *Johnny Noble* (1946) presaged the *Radio Ballads* by combining technical experimentation (including over 200 lighting cues) with folk song to describe the effects of the economic slump and the war on a northern fishing community (Harker 2009: 71-72).

MacColl's theatre work, which attempted to denaturalise the familiar conventions of radio reportage and cinematic realism, showed an already well-established awareness of the link between language and ideology and the power of the media to shape perceptions of social reality. By 1956, however, MacColl, who had begun to focus increasingly on a burgeoning career as a folk singer and whose broadcasting career had begun to pick up following his blacklisting during the war, parted company with Littlewood and Theatre Workshop, citing the groups' abandonment of their working class audience in favour of a metropolitan elite by settling at London's Stratford East Theatre (MacColl 1990: 266).

Richards (1992: 92) has suggested (and his own statements and writings make clear) that MacColl perceived his turn to the folk revival not as an abandonment of his earlier work but as a continuation of his search for an artistic language, traditional in its basis, modern in its ambitions (Moore and Vacca 2014; MacColl 1990). MacColl (1965a: n.p.) claims that by the late 1940s he had become aware that the worker's theatre movement, largely built upon Brechtian ideas, had failed because it remained out of touch with the vernacular: 'they were taking too much of their impetus, their dynamic quality from literature and not from life'. It was out of this realisation, he later claimed, that his own interest in traditional forms developed:

> I already had an idea that the way through was – I didn't think in the terms of folk – but the way through was in the kind of language that everybody spoke but crystallised to an enormous extent. Sieved, refined, so that only the most pertinent part of the language of the streets became the poetry of the theatre and so on. (MacColl 1965a: n.p.)

MacColl's commitment to the revival was undoubtedly encouraged around this time by the influence of the US musicologist Alan Lomax,[6] with whom he collaborated on a number of radio programmes and concerts throughout the 1950s, and by that of A.L. Lloyd, with whom MacColl made several folk song recordings for Topic Records in the 1950s (Laing 2014; Gregory 2000; 2002). As MacColl saw it, his interest in folk music was a natural career progression. The *Radio Ballads* (and the figure of MacColl himself) thus constitute a point at which the discourses which shaped MacColl's earlier career flowed into the revival; and the tape recorder, and the techniques of tape editing which radio producers such as Charles Parker were beginning to develop, provided MacColl with a new channel for pursuing his long established goal of incorporating vernacular sources into a modern poetic repertoire.

Montage, the ballad tradition and everyday speech

Eisenstein (1943: 59) remarks that by the early 1930s, 'montage thinking and montage principles had become widely current in all the border-arts of literature: in the theatre, in the film, in photo-montage, and so on'. Although sound was a late developer in terms of its editing capability, by the 1950s, tape allowed a similar level of plasticity to sound recording and opened up

[6] Alan Lomax (1915-2002) US ethnomusicologist and song collector. Lomax lived in the UK from 1950 until 1958 performing, collecting and working as a broadcaster for the BBC, producing or contributing to a stream of radio features on world folk music including the three-part series *Adventure in Folksong* (1951), *The Art of the Negro* (1951) and the Charles Parker-produced feature *Sing Christmas and the Turn of the Year* (1957) (Gregory 2002b). In his autobiography, MacColl (1990) devotes an entire chapter to Lomax's influence, describing his encounters with Lomax and his musical archive as formative and a crucial spur to his own commitment to a British folk revival on the US model.

these techniques to recordists working in the mainstream of radio production. Philip Donnellan, a contemporary of Parker at BBC Midland Region:

> With the coming of the tape recorder, we were more and more structuring radio programmes in a filmic form. […] because we were using very similar plastic materials, cutting them together and, whether we knew it or not, started to handle things in the form of a montage. (Donnellan cited in Pettitt 2000: 354)

The ideas of Soviet film makers and theorists clearly exerted a profound influence on MacColl's interwar intellectual milieu, both directly and as filtered through the work of British documentarians such as Grierson, Jennings and Harding (Cox 2008; MacColl 1990; Harker 2007; Vacca 2014). MacColl (1990: 330-331) records that he began to use the term 'montage' consciously in the *Radio Ballads* by the time production began on the second programme 'Song of a Road' in 1960, although he applies the term primarily to the combination of sound effects in order to produce a 'stream-of-consciousness effect'. Vacca (2014: 175) has argued that the influence of montage on the programmes goes beyond the juxtaposition of sound effects and 'is used in the *Radio Ballads* not only to link songs and voices but to penetrate the very mode of writing the songs'. Montage, he suggests, was a basic principle in the *Radio Ballads*' construction (ibid.). I suggest that the notion of productive juxtaposition also informed the programme makers' thinking about the nature of vernacular speech and traditional song and that the capacities of the magnetic tape recorder played a decisive role in this. The technology of tape offered a conceptual purchase on the actuality providing a means of both identifying 'characteristic' working class speech and creatively re-combining the musical, verbal and sonic elements that made up the programmes. The montage principle framed the artistic and social affordances of tape as a technology: tape was seen as tool with which to analyse and recombine elements of reality into a poetic language, and the technique of tape montage was the basic means whereby the ideological content of the programmes was articulated.

In its simplest form, montage concerns 'the act of putting sounds and images together' (Tsivian 2015: 306). The technique as it developed in early

Hollywood was used to convey narrative more efficiently through fast cutting between scenes, 'discovering' actors in the midst of action, and the use of sudden close-ups to convey the emotions of characters vividly (Tsivian 2015). In the Soviet context *montazh* was a term with connotations of building, and had more to do with the virtual meanings that could be produced between shots (ibid.: 316). Filmmakers such as Vertov were concerned less with how montage could be used to produce seamless narrative than with how to 'build a new city out of two cities or to assemble a perfect person out of parts' (Tsivian 2015: 316). For the documentarian Vertov, music provided a useful analogy for understanding how the interrelationship of shots could produce meanings beyond the narrative dimension, and he used the notion of metre to consider visual sequences as musical phrases, frames as measures, drawing upon the concept of the harmonic interval to conceive of shots as co-productive of new, abstract meanings (ibid.: 317).

For the Soviet theorists the montage principle was more than a theory of film editing: Eisenstein (1943: 29) argued that montage was a basic principle of artistic composition across all temporal and spatial media. In the art process, as in human memory, an 'image' is produced through the building up of 'representations'. In the process of forming a memory these are folded together to form an instantaneous association between the sign and the concept to which it refers. In the construction of the art image the process is one of gradual unfolding; the producer of the image and its receiver must go through the same process of building up representations in the joint production of an abstract image. For Eisenstein this process was as much a part of pre-technological forms such as painting and the theatre as cinema: in his essay 'Word and Image' (1943), he described how the stage actor, in the selection and re-combination of 'details of actuality', assembles a montage of 'attractions':

> The fused effective piece of acting is nothing but a juxtaposition of determining close-ups of this kind; combined, they create the image of the acting's content. Even though his performance be shot entirely from a single set-up (or even from a single seat in a theatre

> auditorium), none the less – in a felicitous case – the performance will itself be 'montage' in character. (Eisenstein 1943: 29)

As Vacca (2014) notes, the link between the ballad form and film technique had been made before the *Radio Ballads*. In his study of the Child ballads, Hodgart (1950) drew on Eisenstein's discussion of montage in the poetry of Milton to argue that the technique was a defining characteristic of the ballad form. The ballad, he argued, presents 'the narrative not as a continuous sequence of events but as a series of rapid flashes, and their art lies in the juxtaposition of these flashes' (ibid.: 28). The border ballad 'Sir Patrick Spence', he suggested, provided an illustration of the ballad tendency to articulate character and build narrative through a tightly organised series of 'shots':

> Sir Patrick's character is revealed by the two shots of the fourth stanza. In the next three stanzas, the tension is rapidly worked up by the dialogue between Sir Patrick and the sailor: one vivid image of a natural portent is enough to create a sense of doom. The disaster is barely pictured at all; instead we get an ironic comment on the behaviour of the noble lords as the ship founders and a rapid and highly imaginative shot of their hats bobbing about on the water. (Hodgart 1950: 30)

Where Hodgart identified montage as the defining formal characteristic of ballad poetry, for MacColl and Parker, this characteristic clash of images had its origins in the vernacular out of which the ballads were thought to have developed. Parker argued that this quality was retained in the speech of ordinary working class people up to the present day:

> If you go into the nearest pub on a Saturday night and hear the story of Saturday's match, people don't tell the narrative in a linked line, like a short story spoken. They create a vigorous image, then they create another vigorous image right up against it and they clash ... between those two little images is a 'spark gap' for you as the listener to jump in and fill in, so that you participate in the creative experience. (Parker 1975, cited in Cox 2008: 165)

MacColl believed that the strength of imagery and tightness of construction in working class language was more than simply an accidental feature. Instead, it was a function of the relationship of working people to processes of production. Language renewed itself, MacColl argued, not in the abstract verbal constructions of artists and philosophers but in the archetypal creative activity of meaningful labour:

> I believe that if language is to develop, language always develops in the areas where work is made, where things are created. You know, the language […] the officialese that we give to a new instrument, a new piece of machinery, is never the terminology which is used by the men who make that instrument in the factories. Within a month of the instrument, of the tools being created, they've already got new names for them; they really do! Idiomatic terms are used, and in this way language extends itself. Language extends itself at the base, not at the top. (MacColl in Moore and Vacca 2014: 48)

As MacColl saw it, working class speech was 'a language of expertise' rooted in physical experience. In an early meeting of the Critics' Group, he outlined his theory of the centrality of experiences of collective labour to the development of language and identity. He conjured up a primordial scene in which pre-linguistic humans built a stockade to protect themselves from predators:

> To lift […] a log requires great energy. One man can't do it, ten men can't do it, if they're all lifting at different periods with different impulses and different rhythms. But if they discover that they do it like – eurngh! [loud, high-pitched grunting sound, repeated three times] and if they find that before you lift the log it's possible to knock off the branches with a heavier dead branch or maybe a convenient piece of stone shaped so […] and by going agh, which is a different sound from eurngh! Agh! Two different kind of vowel formations - we have the beginning of speech. But we have the beginning of something more important, we have the beginning of poetry, rhythm. (MacColl 1965a: n.p.)

The experience of skilled manual work, MacColl believed, generated not only a vocabulary specific to the job, but a proprietary knowledge from which flowed powerful images beyond the reach of those who have not directly experienced that which is being described. He cited the example of the Gaelic of Scottish fishermen which he argued was:

> full of enormous tricks with the language itself […] There are so many different words for the 'sea' for example […] there are something like thirteen different words for a wave! And each describes a wave in its different size, different mood, different shape, you know. So that, obviously, it's a language out of which songs can be made very, very easily, and brilliant songs can be made. (Moore and Vacca 2014: 83)

For MacColl, working class speech was poetic not just because of the richness of its vocabulary, but because it retained the dialectic of direct experience and intellectual knowledge that was absent from official language. It was rooted in a specific community of experience, which made it a valuable source of strong poetic images. MacColl felt that the actuality gathered in the *Radio Ballads* proved this point: the process of actuality gathering for 'Song of a Road' (1960) seemed to him to reveal the contrasting the ways in which management, geological surveyors and the migrant 'muck-shifters' who carry out the 'pick and shovel work' expressed themselves:

> The labourers [...] used both similes and metaphors liberally. They changed tense constantly, often to emphasize a point or to sharpen an argument. They made use of extended analogies and emphasized verbs in such a way as to give every sentence an effort-peak. Almost all of them used the first person singular and the present historical with equal effect. (MacColl 1990: 317)

By contrast the managers' use of language appeared an impoverished form of expression:

> Our managerial informants tended to use an extremely small area of the vocal effort spectrum. [...] Irrespective of the subject under discussion they scarcely ever varied the tempo of delivery. Almost all of them made constant use of the impersonal pronoun [...] Verbs were

> given no more vocal weight than nouns, and similes and metaphors were almost totally eschewed. (MacColl 1990: 317)

It is their closeness to the character and rhythms of vernacular speech which gives the ballads their descriptive power and their political relevance – they are structured in the way that ordinary people experience and describe the world. This in turn makes a tacit argument for the potential of any contemporary form (such as the Radio Ballad) that was able to harness this element of everyday speech.

It is clear that MacColl was viewing vernacular culture as an artistic resource, returning, as his friend and mentor Hugh MacDiarmid had done, to the source of linguistic innovation in the pursuit of a renewed artistic language. In *The Scottish Chapbook* (1922-23) MacDiarmid identified vernacular Scots as 'a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking' (Grieve 1923 cited in McCulloch 2009: 19). MacDiarmid sought to reunite the twin poles of intellectual and physical experience that modernity had radically separated. In the work of medieval 'makars'[7] such as Dunbar, Henryson, and Douglas, poets whose work remained in touch with the popular tradition, MacDiarmid reasoned that the complex of binaries set in place by advancing industrialisation, the familiar dualisms of modernity, (mind/body, subject/object, art/science) had not yet been established. As a result, vernacular Scots represented 'a great untapped reservoir of the pre-Renaissance or anti-Renaissance potentialities which English has progressively forgone' (Murison 1980: 94-5). Scots for MacDiarmid was 'an inexhaustible quarry of subtle and significant sound' which could form the basis for an enhanced descriptive language that drew on the languages, vocabularies, discourses and epistemological traditions of English and Scots, from across the arts and sciences (ibid.). Ultimately, he aimed to produce a 'universal scientific language […] an illimitable extension and melange of national vocabularies to encompass the exploding bounds of human

[7] 'Makar' is a Scots literary term meaning a poet, particularly a court poet of the early Renaissance period, but also applied to eighteenth century revivalists such as Allan Ramsay (author of the *Tea Table Miscellany*) and Hugh MacDiarmid's fellow Lallans enthusiasts of the Scots literary renaissance of the early twentieth century.

knowledge' (ibid.: 90).[8] Both MacColl and MacDiarmid thus clearly shared a belief in the descriptive power of vernacular speech and there are strong parallels between MacDiarmid's 'Lallans' – a synthesis of Scots vernacular vocabularies – and the use of working class speech developed by MacColl in the *Radio Ballads*. But where MacDiarmid drew on the dictionaries and word-books of Romantic era linguistic scholars for his material, MacColl used actuality, the recorded speech of living individuals recorded for documentary purposes.[9]

Recording actuality

Although MacColl and Parker both came to see the tape recorder as the key to unlocking the descriptive storehouse of everyday speech, 'The Ballad of John Axon' (1958) was originally conceived as a more-or-less conventional musical feature which would use actuality primarily as a research tool. As MacColl (1990: 312-3) remembered it, however, at a very early stage the project took a different direction as a result of the team's experiences during the recording and selection process with Axon's colleagues at Edgley locomotive shed. The team recorded a larger than usual amount of actuality – over 40 hours (MacColl 1990: 312). The tapes, MacColl later recalled, revealed 'a remarkable way of life, a picture in words charged with the special kind of vitality and excitement which derives from involvement in a work-process' (ibid.: 313).

> I played through the tapes for several hours a day for a fortnight, running through some of the more striking statements over and over

[8] Murison (1980) sees the intellectual roots of MacDiarmid's synthetic Scots in the 'bookishness' of the Scottish literary tradition, its 'fascination in dictionaries, encyclopaedias, textbooks and the like'. MacDiarmid, he argues, was characteristically well-read, ransacking dictionaries and word-books in search of 'the abstruser vocabulary of English'. His first collection *Sangschaw* (1925) drew heavily on John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808-9); other sources included Wilson's *Lowland Scotch*, and the *Scottish National Dictionary* (begun in 1929). MacDiarmid's concern with extending the poetic field of Scots through an expanded vocabulary echoed John Davidson's synthesis of poetic and scientific vocabulary, while his fusion of modern spoken Scots and elements of forgotten vocabulary of the period before 1700 had important antecedents in the work of Robert Louis Stevenson and Lewis Spence, but can be seen as part of a tradition dating from before the time of Robert Burns, in the Scots poetry of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson.

[9] In the final section I will discuss some of the ethical issues that this important difference between the two approaches throws up.

> again. Their impact was tremendous; the flat, deliberate northern voices evoking the past, paying laconic tribute to a dead comrade and encapsulating a lifetime's experience in a simile. (MacColl 1990: 313)

Over the course of pre-production it was decided that the actuality material, rather than merely providing a 'ring of spontaneity' to the programme, should drive the entire writing process, and MacColl began to write songs that responded directly to the selected actuality, 'extending' it, as he put it, reflecting its vocabulary, textures and rhythms (ibid.: 313).

Parker, as the programmes' producer, initially took the lead in interviewing subjects, although he preferred the less formal term 'conversation' to 'interview'. 'The recordist', Parker (1965) noted:

> must evince the passionate engagement of the good listener while yet directing the conversation to those channels most likely to be fruitful. Above all he must communicate a belief in the capacity of the person he is with to speak well and tellingly of his experience of the subject at issue, and this usually in the teeth of all the pre-conditioning that our society engages in as if to convince ordinary people that they cannot express themselves adequately! (Parker 1965: n.p.)

Later, however, the actuality gathering process appears to have become much more intensive. MacColl and Seeger took on more of the interviewing, developing an idiosyncratic interviewing style that was often both exhausting and infuriating for their subjects, repeating the same questions on up to three separate visits. The team believed this technique projected 'the informant back into the moment', releasing a flow of vivid imagery on which the songs could be built (Young 2010: 151). MacColl and Seeger interviewed informants such as the Norfolk fisherman Sam Larner (recorded for 'Singing the Fishing' in 1960) with relentless thoroughness:

> We then played back the recordings and noted carefully which type of question and method of questioning elicited the best response […] Then there followed a fortnight's intensive recording period, during which specific areas of Sam's life were dealt with in some detail. For three or four days, for example, we listened to him recalling the days

> of his early childhood. We probed and constantly changed the perspective of our questions, until his emotion- memory was in full flight and he began to relive and refeel the experiences and emotions of three quarters of a century earlier. (MacColl 1990: 319)

MacColl believed that the more informants could be persuaded to relive their experiences, the more vivid their language would become:

> At the same time, the more deeply he entered into his past, the more rich and varied became his verbal imagery, similes, metaphors, proverbs, biblical quotations, weather rhymes, bawdy aphorisms, all combined to make his speech as active as his life had been. (MacColl 1990: 319)

As a dramatist and actor, MacColl was familiar with the method of Stanislavsky as a means of building performances (Harker 2007; Vacca 2014). MacColl and Seeger's guiding of their informants through a process of remembering is also reminiscent of Eisenstein's (1943) description of the actor's task. For Eisenstein, actors needed to re-experience the feeling associated with an event in the life of the character in order to produce concrete pieces of actuality – physical and verbal gestures – which would evoke the right response in an audience. Rather than a feat of pure imagination, the performance was painstakingly constructed out of these pieces of reality:

> Instead of sweating and straining to imagine how a man would behave under such circumstances […] we should compel the appropriate consciousness and the appropriate feeling to take possession of us. And the authentically felt state, sensation, experience would, in direct consequence, 'manifest' itself in true and emotionally correct movements, actions, general behaviour, correct in the sense that it is appropriate to a genuinely experienced state or feeling. (Eisenstein 1943: 39)

MacColl and Seeger seem to have been working through a similar process with their informants in the production of a performance, albeit with the important difference that their subjects really had experienced the events and

the emotions they describe. It is this basis in what MacColl (1965b) called 'emotion memory', which gives the actuality its characteristic quality and value:

> You draw upon what they call in the theatre emotion memory. You draw upon emotions that have moved you profoundly. And they may be somewhat removed from the artistic experience that you're about to undergo. But they have to imbue that experience on the stage, they have to inform it with truth, invest it with reality. (MacColl 1965c)

In his Critics' Group lectures, MacColl cited a passage from 'The Big Hewer' (1961) in which miners and their wives discussed the ravages of silicosis in order to illustrate the rootedness of working class speech in experience and its value to artists in terms of building an expressive repertoire:

> 'My husband died from dust', a woman says. As simple a statement as you could have, absolutely charged with feeling, with bitterness, with experience – all the things that artists spend all their lives trying to achieve. (MacColl 1965c)

Rather than simply gathering testimony, MacColl and Seeger saw themselves as building a poetic vocabulary of 'usages, turns of expression, rhythms, pulses, idioms' which would form the medium of the programmes' construction (Young 2010: 151).

Writing, recording and editing

Once the interviews were complete, a painstaking analysis of the material was conducted. MacColl deployed a vocabulary which, as Cox (2008) notes, consciously adapted that of the choreographer Rudolph Laban to map the actuality as a pattern of movements, gestures and 'efforts' (ibid.: 168-9). The vocabulary supplied by the actuality material was then used by MacColl to construct the programmes' songs. As noted above, Vacca (2014: 176) has identified montage as central to MacColl's lyric writing: in 'Song of the Iron Road', which 'describes the fireman on the running train, the movements, the contractions and the spasms of the body are juxtaposed, frame to frame, with

the imperturbable and mechanical operation of the machine with an effect not dissimilar to the uncanny scenes of Eisenstein'.

Tape allowed the recombination of the actuality material, often very short phrases, with musical sounds, lyrics or sound effects. Where pre-war documentary makers had had to rely on disc-cutting machines to record and store actuality, tape allowed for precision editing, sometimes involving tiny slivers which could be reassembled in the desired order to produce complex sequences of audio material. Parker realised early on that the project would require a literally hands-on approach to editing, and this meant breaking with institutional protocol. Producers and tape engineers at the BBC were considered separate and unequal, as different from one another, as Parker's contemporary Philip Donnellan put it, as the 'commissionaires and the canteen ladies' (Donnellan quoted in Cox 2008: 91). This implicitly classed separation of roles forced Parker to edit in secret: 'I broke in to the BBC in Broad Street every night at half past twelve when the night shift went on', he claimed; 'took over the three tape machines there, and edited the programme till seven in the morning for about two months' (Cox 2008: 49). Parker, in charge of assembling the tape sequences, clearly saw the recombination of tape segments as an art process and insisted to his superiors that the editing component of the *Radio Ballads* was inseparable from the writing of the work itself and therefore could not be entrusted to anyone else. It was, he argued:

> ultimately a question of unconsciously applied rhythms and the achievement of an organic synthesis between natural rhythms of speech and the singer, and natural rhythms of the piece of actuality […] to be used. Such subtleties of rhythm can only reside in the fingers of he who feels the rhythm […] it's like asking a painter to paint with a brush in someone else's hand. (Cox 2008: 91)

In this picture of the editing process, Parker equates the composed elements with the actuality as parts of an artistic medium in the hands of a craftsman whose combination of intellectual and physical expertise alone allows them to be recombined into an integrated vision. It is an image which dissolves the institutionally enshrined distinction between the intellectual and the worker.

Once Parker had assembled the actuality sequences they had to be re-recorded to tape along with the musical sections which were performed live in the studio. The BBC's recording facilities were less advanced than commercial counterparts at this time: 'We had no 8 channel or 16 channel recording then', Seeger recalled, 'it was all done at once onto one piece of quarter-inch tape' (Seeger and MacColl 1985: n.p.). Philip Donnellan remembered Seeger as 'a constant and sharp participant in the whole technical process of setting up the studio, creating the balance, and of course, the complete musical director' (ibid.). The musical sequences were initially recorded with musicians performing 'blind', while Seeger (or Parker) directed the players using headphone monitoring (Cox 2008). At later sessions for 'Singing the Fishing' the studio musicians were able to hear and respond to the actuality while recording their parts. This introduced an element of improvisation into their role. Parker:

> To be asking men of the calibre of Alf Edwards or Bruce Turner to make music in conjunction with the tape recorder seemed, at first, inconceivable and verging on the insulting! But, by the time the recording session had ended, the artists without exception had become gripped by the challenge presented by the form and were themselves beginning to improvise in relation to the speech and effects, as well as to their fellow musicians. (Parker 1965)

The studio recording sessions were in themselves performances, and as Cox (2008) notes, made performers out of non-creative engineering staff. Engineers Alan Ward and Gillian Reeves became 'incredibly adept' at triggering actuality sequences and sound effects on TR90 tape machines, 'heavy 3 foot cube[s]' used as for playback (Cox 2008: 94). Mary Baker compiled first assemblies of the programmes in a studio half a mile away, and 'did most of the hard graft', part of which involved compiling suitable silences for linking passages (ibid.: 95).

Sound recording, montage and ideology

Tape allowed actuality material to be collected in unprecedented volume and to be analysed to a degree that was previously impossible. But how did tape montage help to convey the programmes' ideological content? As already noted, the experience of work was crucial to MacColl's theory of language and is a recurring theme in the programmes. In the *Radio Ballads*, work forms the ultimate bedrock of working class identity, superseding all other aspects of everyday life, including family and leisure activities. Apprenticeship is a key trope in the programmes, and 'training montages' feature prominently in 'The Big Hewer' (1961), 'The Fight Game' (1963) and 'Singing the Fishing' (1960). The first programme 'The Ballad of John Axon' is, Vacca (2014: 182) argues, a kind of working class *Bildungsroman*, concerned with learning, cumulative experience and proving oneself.

The universe of the *Radio Ballads* is also strongly gendered: *John Axon* evokes an almost wholly male-dominated, heterosexual world in which the heroic male protagonists (invariably called 'Johnny') struggle heroically to master life, nature, and their trade, while their women watch from the side-lines like a Greek chorus, lamenting their husbands' inscrutable ways:

> Oh Johnny, oh Johnny,
>
> What makes you do the things you do, Johnny?
>
> Oh why do you have to see it through, Johnny?
>
> Oh, oh, oh, Johnny.

The worker in 'John Axon' is married to his machine: Axon's whole life, we are told, was built 'round the engine', a 'she', 'a puller', an 'iron horse' who 'answers to every touch'. The relationship of Axon and his engine is cast as a tragic love story in which man and machine end up literally fused in a 'welter of blood and oil'; the programme's image of a cohesive working class group habitus is best summed up by one driver's insistence that 'the old railwayman,

it was a tradition, it was part of your life, it went through – railways went through the back of your spine like Blackpool went through rock'.

The centrality of the railway in the driver's life is continually emphasised by Seeger's musical underscoring. Seeger's banjo, played in a fast, frailing style is the first sound we hear in the programme, introducing the notion of speed, repetition and, with its occasional dissonances, foreshadowing the tragic character of the piece.[10] A particularly effective passage is the song 'Come all you young maidens', which warns prospective wives that they will always come a poor second to their husband's trade:

> I once loved a fireman, he said he loved me.
>
> He took me out walking into the country,
>
> He hugged me and kissed me and gazed in my eyes,
>
> And said, 'you're as nice as the eight forty-five'

Throughout the song, a harmonica chugs rhythmically in the background, evoking the blues tradition of train impersonations to express the fireman's obsession with his job.

Tape allowed this synthesis of human and machine to be illustrated through the layering and blending of musical material, lyrical images and actuality sound. At various points the sounds of the banjo and other instruments are blended with fragments of actuality through the use of cross-fading. After the introductory verse, for example, Seeger's banjo is double-tracked and treated with echo, merging with the actuality sound of a speeding locomotive. The effect is a metaphorical transformation: the banjo, which has

[10] Frailing is a traditional Appalachian five-string banjo technique in which the fingernail of the index or middle finger is used to strike out melody notes on down beats. The same finger (or the middle and ring fingers) is then used to brush the other open strings drone on the offbeat. Simultaneously, the thumb catches the high 'g' string producing a pedal tone on the 'and' of beats 2 and 4. This can be doubled up to every 'and' for certain passages using the special technique of 'double thumbing'. The thumb can also be used to pick melody notes instead of drone notes using a technique called drop thumbing. The technique produces an intricate yet driving sound that is often used to accompany songs, traditional ballads and the Appalachian old time fiddle repertoire.

been used to suggest the speed and power of the train in the context of the ballad section literally *becomes* the train itself. Thus tape montage is used to produce a shift from the epic register of the folk ballad to that of reportage and establish a tacit correspondence between the ballad form and radio documentary. Instead of remaining within this documentary register, however, the programme quickly shifts again. Following a declamatory section in which a choir with trumpet and snare-drum accompaniment foreshadow the programme's climactic crash, another instrument (a trumpet this time) merges with the actuality sound of an oncoming train horn. The effect is subtly kaleidoscopic: the programme uses tape-editing to continually shift between ballad-epic, realist, official and informal narrative registers, creating a constant switching of viewpoint which undermines the right of any single register (in particular the 'official version') to fully account for the events depicted.

Actuality is used as a rhythmic component in blended sequences, perhaps most strikingly in the song 'Long handled shovel', whose call and response structure recalls the style of an American prison work song:

Mac: You bend your back almost double.

Feed that coal-hungry fire, swing that shovel, that's a fireman's trade.

You've got your long-handled shovel.

Three and a half feet of sweat-polished wood and a narrow steel blade.

A rhythmic sequence of actuality shovel sounds enters after the phrase 'narrow steel blade', and provides an off-beat pulse which falls on the last syllable of each line. This syllable is the focal point of the physical effort and heavily emphasised in the singers' articulation. MacColl's lead vocal is answered by a male chorus in a call and response pattern:

Ch: Swing your long-handled shovel.

Mac: Hear that shovel ring.

Ch: Swing your steel-bladed shovel.

Mac: Hear that fire sing. Give us some rock, a round at a time, fire your signal along the line.

With MacColl's sung imperative to 'hear that fire sing' the sound of a locomotive is heard, gradually picking up speed, falling into sync with the chorus on the phrase '…along the line'. A variation on the vocal melody is then whistled over the accelerating pulse of the engine, which continues to set the pace for the main vocal in the following verse:

Mac: Put your weight behind your shovel.

Ch: From your middle, swing.

Mac: Swing your steel-bladed shovel.

Ch: From your shoulders, swing.

One at the front, one at the back,

One at each side, and that's the knack.

The juxtaposition of actuality machine sounds with the human voices whose effort pattern rises with the speed of the actuality suggests an intimate relationship between the workers and the engine, equating human with mechanical power. Elsewhere, lyrical metaphors continually hammer home this message of the railwayman as a hybrid of man and machine:

He said 'My dear Molly, Oh won't you be mine,

Just give me the signal and let's clear the line.

My fires are all burning, me steam it is high,

If you don't take the brake off I think I shall die.

The final crash is treated as the culmination of the programme's central notion that train and man are essentially one being with a shared destiny. Described first separately, the two poles of human and machine begin to lyrically merge as the crash approaches in images which present the train as a straining human body, 'restless', 'tired', 'exploring' and 'watching':

The restless steam,
Watches the tired metal,
Explores the worn thread,

Watching, watching,
Every turn of the four-foot wheels,
Every lunge of the smooth-armed piston,
Every thrust in the two great cylinders
Weakens the joint's resistance.
And the brazed flange crumbles.
The pipe is parted -
IT BLOWS!

At the final moment, John Axon and his train end up fused:

In a welter of blood and oil,
Twisted metal, splintered bone.

A variety of lyrical, sonic and verbal actuality material is combined to convey the centrality of work to the railwayman's sense of identity. This is established using musical underscoring, in the selection of actuality as the basis for lyrics but also through the use of tape editing techniques which suggest an intimate connection between the work process, affect, and a sense of masculine pride. This is achieved through a succession of lyrical metaphors which highlight this sense of oneness, but the repeated juxtaposition of train actuality with images of the male labouring body in sequences such as that described above also strongly suggests a profound identification between 'man' and machine' and the montage techniques made available by magnetic tape powerfully underscore this fundamental ideological position.[11]

Tape and heteroglossia

Tape editing is used in the *Radio Ballads* not only to construct extended sequences of images but to juxtapose different linguistic repertoires often with subversive effect. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of *heteroglossia* describes language as a stratified system of different languages that are intimately related to specific positions within discourse. According to Bakhtin, language

[11] In the early years of the twentieth century, Strangleman (2004: 19) notes, the working culture of the railways was 'a byword for stability in urban and rural settings alike'. The railwayman belonged to the 'super-aristocracy of labour' defined by Hobsbawm (1986) in terms of wages, social security, living and working conditions, relationships with other grades, and chances of promotion (ibid.: 21). This perceived stability, however, masked a 'Byzantine caste system of competing identities' and large differences in status and earning potential between 'footplate grades' such as fireman and driver, and the lower grades including cleaners (ibid.: 28).
Most of the former belonged to the railway union ASLEF which 'differentiated itself from its rivals … by way of an appeal to craft pride and the sense of "calling" of its membership' (Strangleman 2004: 37). In addition, after the introduction of the British Transport Commission's modernisation plan in 1955, which 'aimed at complete eradication of steam traction … within 15 years', traditional skills were lost along with much of the 'glamour' of the job' (89). With the post-war period of affluence, wages in railway jobs didn't rise that much and the defection of railway workers to highly-paid, unskilled jobs fed fears that 'the positive aspects of occupational pride were being eroded, replaced by a new type of worker less concerned with the intrinsic value of work itself than with monetary reward' (ibid.: 103). The end of steam was characterised in terms of an impact narrative whereby sudden technological change brings about the end of a stable identity and a period of long term stability is superseded (after 'modernity') by one of instability and decline, 'the sense that modernity has somehow disrupted an equilibrium that should ideally be restored' (100). This was the context within which Parker and MacColl undertook their actuality gathering, which throws a different light on the statements by drivers about the job as a calling and their own assertions of commitment to the role.

is continually pulled in opposing directions by both *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces. The former seek to close down the inherently dialogic character of linguistic utterances and are associated with 'official' or monologic forms of discourse. Centrifugal forces, in contrast, tend towards polysemy, opening up a plurality of meaning and are related to 'unofficial' discourses. Heteroglossia is a feature of literary genres which combine these various social languages, both official and unofficial, in ways which reveal their origins in specific social positions and interests:

> The existence of heteroglossia constituted of multiple social discourses allows speakers to achieve a […] position of outsidedness to language. It is possible to recognise the ideological contours of one social discourse by outlining it against other discourses. In this way any monological truth claims made by one language will be relativized by the existence of other views of the world. (Morris 1994: 16)

For Bakhtin, who was interested primarily in literary language, the author takes up a position at the centre of the clamour of stratified social voices that make up language (in the sense of *parole*). Dostoyevsky, he argued, 'heard both the loud, recognized reigning voices of the epoch, that is the reigning dominant ideas […] as well as voices still weak, ideas not yet fully emerged, latent ideas […] and ideas which were just beginning to ripen, embryos of future world views' (Bakhtin cited in Morris 1994: 15). Heteroglossic forms like the novel continually ironise particular ideological perspectives by contrasting them with others, revealing their interested nature. This is what, for Bakhtin, made the novel different from monologic forms like the epic poem, which presents a unified viewpoint and value system, reflecting its origins in a less stratified society. The successful novelist is able to identify and to recombine the various ideological voices that constitute discourse in such a way as to present a true and yet highly condensed picture of a given society at a specific historical moment.

MacColl likewise imagines language as inseparable from social position, arguing that different class positions manifest different ideological positions and thus different speech forms (MacColl 1990; Moore and Vacca 2014). For MacColl, this class difference is expressed as a relative wealth or

paucity of linguistic expression: he continually contrasts the authenticity and richness of worker's speech with the alienated nature of official forms of representation and emphasises both the poverty of official discourses and their role in social control. In 'John Axon', the contrast between official reports with their skeletal detail, and the unofficial accounts of those interviewed, which emphasise strong visual imagery, sensation and affect is reflected in MacColl's lyrics. Compare the official accident report by the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation (quoted at the beginning of the programme) with MacColl's lyrical treatment of the same basic narrative:

> the 11.05 am freight train from Buxton to Arpley got out of control as it was descending a steep incline on the down line and overtook and collided violently with the rear of the 8.45 am freight train from Rowsley to Edgley. I regret to report that driver Axon, and the guard of the Rowsley freight train, were killed.

> The year was 1957, the morning bright and gay,
> On the ninth of February John Axon drove away.
> In a Class 8 locomotive from Buxton he did go,
> On the road to Chapel en le Frith his steam brake pipe did blow.

Where the official account adopts a passive orientation and a thoroughly materialistic vocabulary, playing down human agency in favour of a description of the temporal and spatial relationship of objects, MacColl's version freely mixes fact with sensory and affective content ('11.05am' becomes 'the morning bright and gay') and, by employing active rather than the passive constructions, affords agency to both humans and machines alike ('from Buxton he did go'; 'His steam brake pipe did blow'). Most importantly, the driver John Axon, is the unifying principle of the entire process rather than a mere victim of the interplay of material forces; the story MacColl wants to tell has a human being at its heart.

This point is made most strikingly in a scene from 'Singing the Fishing' (1960), in which tape is used to juxtapose four separate modes of representation. A storm at sea is described first in terms of the Beaufort scale, then in terms of the crashing violence of the waves, the terror and physical exertions of the crew under the threat of death. Music builds to a slow crescendo to suggest increasingly dangerous and chaotic conditions while the voice of an auctioneer continually reels off the price of the catch as it arrives at market. By comparing the language of economics and science with the series of striking images drawn from the actuality, the specific character of each social language is revealed. In doing so, the specialised repertoires constitutive of the capitalist worldview are shown to obscure the truth of relationships of production as they are experienced at the level of the individual:

> BBC announcer: Biscay. Winds south to south west force four to six, gradually veering north-west and increasing to force seven tomorrow afternoon.
>
> Ch: When the breeze is freshening to a gale.
> And climbing up the Beaufort scale
> And the wind is streaming,
> Your mind's not on the market then,
> The buying then and the selling men
> And the market prices.
>
> Actuality: They went in this boat and that come on a gale of wind, that came down the Saturday night, and that blew for three or four days a living gale and we were in these little boats. We had a good breeze when we finished hauling, and when he dished out the six o'clock weather forecast we had then got it very bad, where we were in the

North Sea. We'd be somewhere about fifty miles from Lowestoft when that struck us. First of all she, she broke the side windows in the wheelhouse. I eased the ship in and head up to wind and diced her, time we patched these side windows up, when she took a tremendous sea and I shall never forget that sea as long as I live.

Auctioneer: five pound eight now, five eight ten, five pound ten at five ten now…

Mac: Beaufort five, Beaufort five

Ch: – to blow the ships alive.

Waves going on, running high, snow white horses passing by.

Mac: Beaufort six, Beaufort six,

Now the wind is playing tricks,

Bigger waves, lots of foam, flying spray, our luff is blown.

Auctioneer: Six pounds, six pounds fourteen, now sixteen, six pounds sixteen, now eighteen, six pounds eighteen …

Mac: Gale force seven, gale force seven,

Ch: Now it's blowing like the devil,

Broken waves pile up in heaps,

Foaming tops are blown in streaks.

Mac: Gale force eight, gale force eight,

Ch: Getting rough to navigate.

It's high along the waves are boiled,

Into burning strips and coils.

Auctioneer: Seven four and six, seven pound and eight now, eight pound ten

Ch: Gale force nine, gale force nine,

Fighting for the nets and lines,

Water black and white and grey,

Now the air is full of spray.

Gale force ten on the Beaufort scale,

Now it blows a living gale.

Force eleven, force eleven,

Close your eyes and pray to heaven.

Auctioneer: [Voice becomes unintelligible]

Actuality: And there's great seas a-coming now and again they'd peel you know and break and once they break, look out. So I was stood in the wheelhouse long of the skipper, I was there the whole blessed night, me and the skipper. The chaps down below are crying – they were these young chaps, you know. Well, once she shipped this sea I said, Ted, look out, I say, there's one a-going to get us, they that come roaring along. I bet you our boat stood on our end like that. I bet she stood up like that!

This section juxtaposes these different linguistic registers to make a powerful point about the arbitrary relationship between price (exchange value) and the

labour power expended in industrial production. Throughout the sequence, the relentless, mechanical voice of the auctioneer impassively valuing the catch illustrates the gulf between the human cost of labour and the anti-human abstraction of the exchange relation, and emphasises the way in which the discourses of capitalism act to replace a sense of completeness with partial and distorted views of worth. Official language and associated forms of knowledge are shown to be as effective at serving the spread of exploitative structures as they are useless for the purposes of poetic description.

More importantly, however, the sequence makes a larger point about the connection between artistic viewpoint and class position. MacColl felt that the working class by virtue of their position at the nexus of various official and unofficial discourses were better placed than most artists to experience and thus to represent the complexity of modern society. By placing the fisherman at the centre of various competing discourses (like Bakhtin's novelist) the sequence demonstrates the crucial importance of the working class viewpoint for understanding and representing modernity. The sequence underlines the social value of traditional forms such as the ballad which are believed to originate from this position at the centre of various discourses. It also makes a strong case for the possibility of new forms, such as the Radio Ballad, to extend the power of traditional form by constructing a productive unity out of the chaotic polyphony of the modern world.

Ethical questions

The *Radio Ballads* constituted a compromise between the documentary and the poetic approaches to features making. Instead of turning an objective gaze on working class problems they emphasised the memories and affective experiences of their informants. They were interested in working class people as thinking subjects as well as citizens, in their desires as well as their demands, their aesthetics as well as their politics. This was arguably a radical position in itself, but the programmes were also concerned with formal experimentation, treating working class speech as a raw material in a way comparable to the found sound of Sieveking and the Lallans Scots of

MacDiarmid. This attempt at balancing social realism with modernist experimentation leads to an ambiguity about just who exactly is speaking. Cox (2008: 87) insists that 'the Radio Ballads aren't polemics' and that the makers 'deliberately let working people have their say, rather than speaking for them'. But while it is true that the proselytising approach of MacColl's agitprop days had yielded some ground in the *Radio Ballads* to a more sophisticated mode of argument, the authorial (as well as the literal) voice of MacColl still dominates the programmes. He is still voicing the working class as he did in his days as a radio actor and narrator, and in the end, it is his own political interpretation of the subject matter that is foremost, and his artistic vision that is realised.

The extent to which the *Radio Ballads*' informants really are 'having their say' or are being spoken for is a question that continually troubles the programmes: while they display a sensitivity to the concerns of ordinary people and the beauty of everyday speech unprecedented in the history of British radio, there is a marked tension between their value as documentary record and as a vehicle for the producers' creativity and personal beliefs. Through the selection and use of actuality, the programmes construct an image of working class language and culture which supports the authors own theories about the potential role of vernacular language and electronic media in social and political regeneration, and in which the identity of their sources threatens to disappear in favour of an ahistorical archetype. Harker (1980) is damning in his evaluation of the makers' claims to represent real working class experience:

> Their attitude towards the men and women who gave them the interviews, and towards the interviews themselves, was almost entirely instrumental. As privileged mediators, Parker and MacColl set out to 'fit' this novel kind of raw material into their own preconceptions about working class life, work and culture. (Harker 1980: 182-3)

Pegg (1999) is similarly scathing, and also suggests that the programmes are a form of cultural appropriation by MacColl and Parker as members of a privileged class:

> Paradoxically, the radio ballads have affinities both with the cultural policies in communist countries of the time and with classical music composers and collectors of the nineteenth centuries (Bela Bartok, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Percy Grainger, Cecil Sharp). Marxist policies created a new form of music from indigenous traditional musics, and attempted to give them back to 'the people', as did nationalist composers and collectors. Similarly, these are not the creations of the working class and marginalized people themselves but creations from the raw material of their lives by those who had dipped into but not shared those lives. (Pegg 1999: 135)

Alongside the influence of various strands of modernist theory, MacColl and Parker's thoughts on language and culture also bear a lingering trace of nineteenth century survivals theory, the notion that all human cultures pass in a unilinear fashion through a series of predictable stages. As this evolution does not happen uniformly across the social spectrum, some members of a society will advance slower than others. For late Victorian antiquarians, those on the cultural margins – the rural 'folk', for example – were thought to unconsciously cling to cultural forms long-since abandoned by 'the foremost of the nation' (Gomme 1916 cited in Boyes 1993: 4). The culture of the folk could thus be read as evidence of the past culture of the nation as a whole. According to this doctrine, Boyes (1993: 13) notes, '[f]orms of social organisation and belief systems within groups taking part in formally similar activities in all places and times and at all times had to be assumed to be identical'. Different cultures at different times were thus thought to share characteristics depending on their evolutionary stage, allowing diverse cultures to be compared across space and time.

This tacit assumption of cultural equivalence allowed MacColl and Parker to perceive an affinity between pre-modern cultures and the marginal sub-cultures of modern Britain. While MacDiarmid heard the echoes of a common culture in the vocabulary of vernacular Scots, he stopped far short of equating modern day working class Scots speakers with pre-modern bards. MacColl (1990: 321), however, has a tendency to liken his modern-day informants with the poets of earlier ages, citing for example, the epic quality

of the speech of Ronnie Balls, informant on 'Singing the Fishing' in whose speech 'there echoed the voice of Deor, court singer of the Heodenings' and comparing the testimony of Sam Larner to the medieval prose of Langland (ibid.: 320).

Parker too appears to have been particularly struck with the notion of the pre-modern character of working class speech and liked to compare working class speakers with the poets of an earlier age (Donnellan 1981). However, he saw modern workers as estranged from an aesthetic appreciation of their own linguistic capacity, a fact which he said, 'racks me with frustration every time I record a working class speaker who gives me language with the pith and immediacy of Chaucer and Shakespeare – and then apologises for doing so' (Parker quoted in Donnellan 1981: 188). The comparison justifies the value of vernacular culture by equating it with the roots of high-culture, but at the same time suggests that the working classes are themselves incapable of appreciating this value for themselves. In order for them to be re-awakened to the power of their own words, the imaginative mediation of an artist is required.

Having established the 'folk' as the unwitting bearers of a forgotten cultural heritage, Boyes (2010) argues that nineteenth century folklorists felt comfortable in rejecting as uncharacteristic anything which did not seem to have the authentic folk flavour, and explained derivation from this arbitrary standard as evidence of degeneration.[12] Similarly, the makers of the *Radio Ballads*, while keen to emphasise the innate richness of working class speech, seem to give little credence to the idea that speakers might adopt different registers consciously or even strategically, and explain such usage as evidence of corruption. MacColl described one traveller woman who, in the midst of describing the death of her daughter, switched from an expressive style

[12] Boyes (1993) argues that the notion of an unconscious folk was a necessary linchpin of survivals theory: the 'cardinal premiss in survivals theory' she notes, 'was […] a definition of the Folk as manifesting comprehensive absence of creativity' (12). In effect, this meant that the folk were not to be trusted with the cultural legacy they unconsciously preserved, necessitating educated mediators in the form of antiquarians to identify, catalogue and preserve the cultural fragments contained in traditional practices.

reminiscent of pre-modern poetry to the flat, modern vocabulary of the hospital:

> She dreams that a quarry is full of tears and she sees a small body put into a coffin and drawn through the water like a coach, but drawn by a team of rats – it's straight out of Webster. But when she gets to the hospital she begins to change her terminology and delivery style, and becomes pedestrian and very much infected by city speech, the words become […] the clichés of hospital and the whole thing falls to pieces. (Cox 2008: 167)

Rather than recognising that, like himself, his informants had a command of multiple linguistic registers, MacColl assigns one particular register – what might be called the epic narrative mode – as the subject's natural style of expression, and sees all others as evidence of contamination. This logic allowed MacColl to reject as uncharacteristic any actuality which did not display the kinds of poetic quality that he saw as natural to the group, resulting in a circularity whereby the authenticity of working class speech was guaranteed by its accordance with MacColl's own pre-established criteria. MacColl and Parker, it seems, saw themselves as revealing, beneath the surface of language, a truth hidden from the subjects themselves that only an analyst armed with a tape recorder, a razor blade and a repertoire of modernist theories could unpick.

Beyond the ballads: Parker's vision for popular culture

It would not be fair to conclude this chapter without some discussion of other projects in which attempts were made to redress the imbalance ingrained within the sender-receiver institutional structure of the BBC. I will therefore turn briefly to consider some later work which gives some insight into the vision that the *Radio Ballads* team began to develop for the future of media technology in society and the role of the artist in reforming popular culture.

Although the *Radio Ballads* suggested to their makers the potentially transformative role that new technologies such as tape might play in a reformed popular culture, the difficulty of operating within the organisational

structures of the BBC meant that the programmes were necessarily limited in the role they could give to informants in the treatment of their own recorded speech. However, Parker's revelatory discovery of 'the power, the truth, and the elemental poetry of working class speech' led to subsequent work in which the theory and techniques developed in the *Radio Ballads* were more fully explored (Donnellan 1981: 188). Once outside of the BBC's rigid hierarchy Parker was able to experiment with a production style which began to break down the demarcation between artist and audience.

Centre 42, a series of arts festivals in selected industrial towns in the midlands initiated by the TUC in 1961 presented Parker with a major opportunity. The project was a result of the re-focussing of attention in the British Left on Americanisation and the growth of consumer culture. Harker (2009: 344) notes that the 'penetration of corrosive and brain-softening American culture into Britain – via jazz, movies and comic books', was symptomatic of 'global political domination by a US, in a uniquely strong position after 1945'. In *Roots* (1959), Arnold Wesker, one of the project's founders argued stridently that the victory of Americanised commercial culture in Britain had come at the expense of the working class, who were increasingly estranged from aesthetic experience. In 1962, Wesker spoke of the urgent need for artists to take the lead in creating a more robust popular culture. 'If we do not succeed' he predicted:

> a vast army of highly powered commercial enterprises are going to sweep into the leisure hours of future generations and create a cultural mediocrity the result of which can only be a nation emotionally and intellectually immature, capable of enjoying nothing, creating nothing and effecting nothing. (Hall 1962: 12)

Wesker was one of a number of Left-wing British artists calling for urgent action on behalf of an embattled working class. 'The people are inarticulate', argued the playwright Clive Barker; 'we as professional artists must be ready and willing to help them to find their new ways of expression' (Watt 2003: 43).

Parker saw the tape recorder and the Radio Ballad concept as having the potential to contribute to this cultural struggle and began a long correspondence with Wesker in 1959 about the role of a new media in cultural reform. Parker took issue with the notion, implicit in Wesker's work, that ordinary people were incapable of self-expression or of understanding their place in the world: '[C]orrupt and morronic [sic] though the common people seemingly are becoming', he told Wesker:

> yet only in the common people can the true work be rooted, the true tradition rediscovered and re-informed. […] I have myself spent a long time wandering around East Anglia[13] with a Midget Tape Recorder, appalled at the brute materialism of the countrymen and then humbled by a use of language or a directness of talk that makes nonsence [sic] of my own intellectual superiority […] two outstanding folk singers come from that very part of the world – Sam Larner of Winterton and Harry Cox of Catfield and as a de-tribalised Englishman myself seeking desperately for roots, I have just to sit at the feet of these men to learn what I am. (Parker 1959: n.p.)

Radio and the tape recorder, Parker argued, had the potential to reconnect art with the vernacular tradition. 'My position', he wrote, (again to Wesker):

> is increasingly that of insisting upon recognition for the new media as the true vehicles for art which has its roots in the common people, and these radio/ballads [sic] are an attempt to give tangible expression to those passionate pleas of mine for, in this case, radio. (Parker 1960: n.p.)

'The fact is', Parker continued:

> that with a midget tape recorder and the flexibilities of modern tape editing techniques, one can, I believe, strike out a form which, whatever its crudities and present imperfections, is yet one step nearer to the actuality, and this ultimately will prove to be a force which must

[13] The region had been the setting for Wesker's *Roots* (1959) which emphasised the stultifying character of English rural life. The emergence of Wesker's play coincided with the early stages of *Singing the Fishing* (1960) the actuality recording for which was partly carried out on the East Anglian coast.

be reckoned with by the orthodox arts as by society at large. (Parker 1960: n.p.)

The Maker and the Tool

When Centre 42 was launched in 1961, Parker's main contribution (in addition to overseeing a live staging of *The Lonesome Train*, the piece that had inspired *John Axon*) was *The Maker and the Tool*, described as a 'Theatre Folk Ballad' which developed the basic ideas about the relationship between art, language and work which had informed the *Radio Ballads* (Reeves 1963). The important difference, however, was that it was produced with the collaboration of local amateur actors, musicians and technicians who, although under the ultimate direction of Parker, were involved in every stage of the production process. The play was described by a reviewer in terms which are strongly reminiscent of MacColl's interwar work with Littlewood:

> [T]he form it takes is a basic cutting and interaction of various media. A large series of rostra extend in front of a wide screen, on which can be projected two slide images side by side, or one large slide or cine film (or a mixture of all). On the rostra appear two narrators, a group of dancers (schoolboys aged 13 and 14 from one of the toughest quarters of Birmingham), folk singers and various soloists. There is a choir off-stage […] The piece begins with the choir singing the beginning of the *Creation*; the dancers, lowly lit, respond to this; on the screen appears a slide of a gas retort and in between the choral passages are cut actuality of the directions for burning a gas retort. On 'light' the screen flashes into a gas flame and we begin the study of a gas worker, backed with tapes recorded in the gas works. (Reeves 1963: 13)

The play's title combined the senses of 'maker' as poet and as manual worker. Parker felt that manual work provided a mediating point between the abstract representations of art and the universal processes they sought to represent. In a letter to one of his critics, Parker wrote:

> Perhaps the analogy between a gesture made in painting and the theatre, and the gesture made by lava in a volcanic explosion acknowledges of no intermediate analogy, so to speak, i.e. with a man fettling a blast furnace or a farm worker using a pitchfork with the artistry of ancient custom and absolute efficiency. […] I must be clear here, I am not saying that events of such a titanic natural order do not stand in an absolutely organic relationship to events of art; I do say that these must be mediated through the living reality of contemporary society as it is. (Parker 1963)

In promulgating his vision of a re-alignment of existing manual and technological skills in the service of a more integrated understanding of the world, Parker harked back to the ideas of Ruskin and Morris. Religious tradition also informed his thought: a High-Church Anglican by upbringing, Parker looked to the liturgy of the Church of England as an example of organic popular art rooted in the shared experience of its creator/audience.

> I am convinced that the genius of the Anglican liturgy, as of the English theatre, truly derive from the period when artist, scholar and people were intimately connected and shared a common belief in a common language, and when a cultural expression of the people in mystery plays, pageant, folk songs, etc., was at once popular and profound. (Watt 2003: 50)

In *The Maker and the Tool*, technology is seen as offering the promise of a revived orality with the audience as communicants, rather than consumers. It is modernist in its assertion of the positive role to be played by technologies such as tape and cine film, which by the early 1960s were becoming more portable, cheaper and more accessible. Parker wanted to draw on the existing structure of clubs and hobby groups – camera clubs, amateur tape recording experts and film makers, to produce a network of artists capable of generating their own genuinely popular artistic movement (Watt 2003: 64). These popular forms of artistic expression through the democratising influence of technology were intimately connected in Parker's mind with the 'folk styles of composition' he saw at work in the old traditions of ballad making and medieval religious pageants, forms which he felt could be revived in order to

solve the problems of modern representation. A truly popular culture was one in which participation in the art process was open to all:

> I think that we have stumbled on the truth in the folk tradition, namely that the richest cultural tradition is one in which the least gifted member of society can well participate in […] the folk forms, of song and dance for instance, which are capable of very high development on [sic] terms of the gifted performer, also allow the average performer to 'walk with the gods' for the period of the performance, and to communicate this to his audience. (Watt 2003: 50)

If Wesker and Barker were driven by a sense that ordinary people were inarticulate, incapable of understanding their place in society or of expressing themselves, both the *Radio Ballads* and *The Maker and the Tool* made an impassioned argument against this position. They also argued for the capacity of technology to transform the creative capacities of ordinary people. Parker hoped that the democratisation of recording technology would eventually open up participation in the art process to a British public currently excluded from the means of representation:

> Every community has its hi-fi buffs and super-8 cineastes and the rest, revealing an expertise which, I believe, has only to be channelled in a creative direction – and we could be in for a renaissance of Elizabethan proportions. The technology must be anchored in working class experience, which is where the folk-revival, the ballad form and vernacular speech come in, to create a genuinely popular theatre ... The ultimate remedy […] can only be the root-and-branch transformation of our national culture. (Parker 1974 cited in Donnellan 1981: 188)

The *Radio Ballads* were thus imagined by Parker as the beginning of a much larger project of cultural reform that involved the bottom-up transformation of the cultural life of the nation, and in which recording technology, traditional music and working class language would each play a decisive role.

Conclusion

The *Radio Ballads* provide an illustration of how sound recording technologies shaped revivalist notions of traditional culture. By helping to construct the notion of a working class language characterised by the clash of strong images, the technology of tape recording offered a return to vernacular culture which had the potential to revolutionise contemporary art practice. Insofar as the *Radio Ballads* were a microcosm for the revival as a whole, articulating in a concentrated form many of its basic problems (something of which MacColl himself was clearly aware) they were a test case for the revival's grand scheme of cultural renewal (MacColl 1990: 328). The ideas developed in the project about the nature of folk song and its relationship to speech, about work and the social destiny of the working class and their culture, underpinned the basic rationale for revivalist practices of collecting and of composing new material. The *Radio Ballads* also used sound recording to convey a revivalist ideology which argued for the centrality of labour in working class life and asserted the superior descriptive quality of art forms (such as the ballads) that were rooted in vernacular tradition. The programmes strongly associated 'the folk' with the modern working class, who were seen as at the forefront of social change and in a uniquely privileged position to understand and represent society.

As the work of Vacca (2014) has begun to show, modernist theories and techniques were a key influence on the work of Ewan MacColl and, through him, the post-war revival more broadly. The *Radio Ballads*, and later work such as *The Maker and the Tool*, indicate the extent to which modernist ideas not only shaped MacColl and Parker's understanding of traditional poetry (and by extension, working class speech) but their perception of the creative affordances of sound recording. Recording, I argue, was perceived by them both as a microscopic technology which could reveal the hidden poetic dimension of vernacular speech, and a technology of montage which allowed it to be preserved and recombined in ways which could provide radical insights into the workings of political discourse.

Also carried forward from the interwar period, however, was an overly romanticised view of the workers reminiscent of Grierson's documentary film

movement. As Watt (2003) notes, the programmes were arguably a throw-back to the more paternalistic and Romantic conceptions of working class culture of the 1930s. If the working class culture of the 1930s had been expressed through collective activity, the era of the Lambeth Walk, Mass-Observation, clubs, movements and institutions had given way to one in which music, television and cinema offered a myriad of attractive images of working class cool centred on notions of individualism and rebellion, and a working class audience who found little to entice them in MacColl and Parker's world of camera and cycling clubs, brass bands, church choirs and folk-singing ramblers (Watt 2003: 45). It is the clash between Parker and MacColl's vision of a new folk culture and the emerging commercial youth culture of the 1960s which provides the context of the next chapter.

Chapter 3. 'The real sound of folk music': Topic Records and the dialectic of folk and pop culture, 1955–1970

> The family sing-song is pretty well dead, buried in a box with a 21" glass panel. And the pub sing-song is stifled rather than assisted by electric organs and amplified accordions where it isn't actually obliterated by push-button pop on the juke box. Happily today, the room over many saloon bars is used by a folk club, and there the ghost of Tommy Armstrong would feel at home.[1] (Bill Leader 1966: n.p.)

Introduction

In the 1950s, many on the British Left shared a sense that traditional working class identities were under threat from a newer urban mass culture (Harker 2009b; Savage 2005). In *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) Richard Hoggart,[2] an English tutor at the University of Hull and himself the product of a working class Leeds childhood remarked:

> it is often said that there are no working-classes in England now, that a 'bloodless revolution' has taken place, which has so reduced social differences that already most of us inhabit an almost flat plain, the plain of the lower middle- to middle-classes. (Hoggart 1957: 13)

Hoggart felt that a mass-produced culture of juke boxes, milk bars and cheap paperbacks was sweeping away the remnants of an authentic working class culture, whose survivals he traced in the speech and attitudes of his mother's generation, and that this process was accelerating:

> My argument is […] that the appeals made by mass publicists are for a great number of reasons made more insistently, effectively, and in a more comprehensive and centralized form today than they were

[1] Tommy Armstrong (1848-1920) of Shotley Bridge, Co. Durham was a miner and poet, and composer of topical songs many of which chronicled industrial disputes between miners and management. Songs of Armstrong's popular in the post-war revival include 'The Trimdon Grange Explosion', 'The Durham Strike' and 'Wor Nanny's a Mazer' (Palmer 2006a).
[2] Richard Hoggart (1918-2014) was a British writer, academic and founder of the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1962.

> earlier; that we are moving towards the creation of a mass culture; that the remnants of what was at least in parts an urban culture 'of the people' are being destroyed; and that the new mass culture is in some important ways less healthy than the often crude culture it is replacing. (Hoggart 1957: 24)

Hoggart was not alone in believing that alien ideologies were beginning to infect British working class thought and behaviour, although where he located the source of this new mentality in the United States, others perceived a trickling down of class values. The Polish economist Ferdynand Zweig remarked that in Britain:

> working-class life finds itself on the move towards more middle-class values and middle-class existence … the change can only be described as a deep transformation of values, as the development of new ways of thinking and feeling, a new ethos, new aspirations and cravings. (Zweig cited in Brooke 2001: 793)

For sociologists Abrams and Rose this shift had the potential to transform not just working class culture but the entire political landscape, and they attributed the failure of the Labour Party to hold on to power after the war to 'embourgoisement', the working classes' unconscious adoption of ruling-class values in a period of comparative affluence (Savage 2005: 931). From a traditional Leftist perspective, however, embourgoisement was simply another word for false consciousness, at the root of which was a plethora of new mass-produced materials – songs, films, novels and advertising images – that stood ready to replace older modes of thought and belonging with an empty, transnational and mediatised identity.

Cutting across traditional class boundaries, the relatively new social phenomenon of youth culture became a primary focus of these concerns. The emergence of a youth market for music, film and literature that was distinct from the popular culture of the previous generation was treated with extreme ambiguity by the Left, associated, on the one hand, with notions of healthy cultural opposition, and on the other, with American-style consumerism. Young people were constructed simultaneously as a quasi-folk collective,

defined by shared values and experiences, and as the beleaguered victims of a rapacious culture industry.

The growth of mass culture and its alleged negative socio-political effects was one of the central arguments for the urgency of the revival of folk music in the post-war era. It is therefore in the light of contemporary debates about youth, mass culture, Americanisation, and the loss of working class cultural heritage that the post-war revival and its aesthetics of performance and recording should be understood. The ways in which the sound of recorded songs during this period was interpreted reflected contemporary imaginings of class identities in flux: on the one hand, the new Americanised pop aesthetic acted as a synecdoche for the new consumerist working class culture; on the other, the sonic aesthetic of folk represented all that was worth salvaging from an older, more authentic working class culture; values of collectivity, directness, and personal authenticity felt to be under threat.

The first section of this chapter applies a cultural-historical lens to post-war discourses on popular and folk music, showing how pop music culture was constructed by revivalists such as Ewan MacColl as the inauthentic other of a genuine working class folk heritage. I argue that the sonic aesthetic of post-war pop recording, particularly its use of studio techniques such as echo, was seen as indexical of this inauthentic otherness and of the negative social effects of mass culture. Mass-produced pop, conceived as a commercial imposition upon the older structures of working class culture, provided a model against which revivalist practice came to be negatively defined. The second section combines interview material with semiotic analysis of recordings to consider the evolving recording style of Topic Records, the UK's leading revivalist folk label, and how it reflected contemporary revivalist understandings of folk (as opposed to 'mass') culture, and dystopian notions of the technologically mediated society as symbolised by commercial studio recording.

Part 1

Revivalist views on youth culture in Britain

The concept of a 'youth culture' opposed to both the 'parent culture' and to other modes of collective identity rooted in class or locality, became increasingly visible from the mid-1950s onwards, when a spate of corporate research into the teenage market in the US and UK was followed by a proliferation of cultural and leisure products aimed specifically at young people (Osgerby 1998: 24).[3] The period saw a relative increase in spending power for a significant section of the young urban working class (Osgerby 1998: 31). At the same time, the image of a newly affluent younger generation became a highly visible trope in political discourse, advertising and the media, encouraging a sense of an experientially-defined generation gap (ibid.: 17-29). If young people were 'the outstanding financial beneficiaries of the postwar situation', they were also frequently constructed as *victims* of mass culture (Frith *et al.* 2013: 121). There were perhaps good strategic reasons for the visibility of youth in contemporary political discourse: in their classic study, Hall and Jefferson (1993: 37) suggested that from the mid-1950s onwards, Conservative rhetoric deliberately conflated the experience of a small, affluent section of the urban working class with 'British youth', a strategy which allowed continuing socio-economic inequalities to be glossed-over.

In advertising and the media young people were cast as the vanguard of an emerging consumer culture (Osgerby 1998: 33-37). Television, a relatively new medium in the UK, began to deliberately court younger audiences, reproducing the image of a hedonistic youth culture driven by pop music and fashion in programmes such as *Oh Boy!* (1958), *Juke Box Jury* (1960), *Dad, You're a Square* (1963) and *Ready Steady Go!* (1963) (ibid.: 39-40). The pop record market expanded and in 1963 45rpm singles (the leading youth format) began to outsell albums for the first time (ibid.: 38).[4] For

[3] Particularly influential was Mark Abram's research for the London Press Commission which contributed greatly to the notion of a distinct teenage market. (Osgerby 1998: 24).
[4] Osgerby states that sales of 45 rpm singles constituted 80% of total UK record sales in 1963 (Osgerby 1998: 38).

politicians, advertisers and the culture industry alike, the 'affluent youth' concept was a rich source of political and economic capital. But however politically expedient such narratives were, they concealed profound tensions: if MacMillan's 1957 claim that Britons had 'never had it so good' resonated with the experience of one section of Britain's young urban working class, for others, the new age of affluence amounted to a tenuous prosperity paid for on short-term credit and hire-purchase. There was a marked increase in personal debt during the period as those less well-off struggled to maintain the living standards now supposedly available to all (ibid.: 31). Osgerby (1998: 37) argues that the image of youth promoted in adverts and the media tended to exclude young people from non-urban locales, those with more traditional working class jobs, and the middle class, whose economic situation had changed relatively little, and who were thus able to participate in the 'youth revolution' only vicariously. Despite the rhetoric of classlessness, then, class experience was still a major factor in British cultural life.

'Derek Bentley' and 'On the Edge'

Like Hoggart, leading revivalists Ewan MacColl and A. L. Lloyd associated these developments with a tightening of capitalism's grip on popular culture and the breakdown of traditional communities and values. Young people were constructed as victims of these changes: Karl Dallas's song 'Derek Bentley', recorded by MacColl for the album *Chorus from the Gallows* (1960), narrated the events leading up to the execution of the teenager Derek Bentley for murder in 1953. The song concludes with the following lines:

> It's true as you have often heard, that in this land today,
>
> They hang the little criminals and let the big go free.
>
> It was guns and comics, films of war that made his education.

Although Bentley's trial became an infamous miscarriage of justice (his conviction was posthumously reversed in 1998), the song's refrain makes

clear that the 'big criminals' in this case are not the police or the legal system who conspired to deny Bentley a fair trial, but the mass culture industry. The song makes no mention of the trial, choosing to lay the blame for Bentley's death squarely on the cheap imported literature and cinema which were widely supposed to have influenced his actions. Rather than the victim of a flawed political system, Bentley is chosen to symbolise a generation at the mercy of an exploitative culture industry, eroding traditional values in favour of an amoral and individualistic ideology. Additionally, by choosing the traditional form of the ballad to tell this story, the song makes a tacit claim for the social value of folk song as a medium associated with truth and social comment, as well as situating the form in opposition to the socially damaging culture alluded to in the lyric.

The theme of Britain's youth as the victims of mass culture – and folk song as a potential saviour – received a more sustained if less dramatic treatment in the seventh BBC *Radio Ballad* 'On the Edge' (1963). Drawing upon a series of interviews with teenagers in England and Scotland 'On the Edge' attempted to translate their testimony into the form and vocabulary of the traditional ballad. MacColl's 'The Children of a Troubled World' forms a bleak backdrop for the recorded interview material, framing adolescence as a journey through a harsh and hostile landscape. The programme is dominated by themes of loneliness, uncertainty, loss (of childhood, of security, of identity) and the sense that, as one informant put it, 'there is something to be had [but] I don't know what I'm searching for'. The programme suggests that the condition in which the informants find themselves – 'youth' – is something profoundly new and linked to wider social changes. As the informants hover on the threshold of the adult world, the nation emerges into a new regime of individualism and consumerism, and the world stands at the brink of potential nuclear annihilation. As MacColl (1990: 321) notes, the threat of the bomb hangs over the programme, 'like a great big dustbin-lid covering the sky' in the words of one informant. Another bleakly estimates that 'unless the situation changes radically, for the better' she has 'about ten years to live'.

The first generation to grow up in the shadow of the bomb is also the first to find itself defined almost exclusively through consumption. MacColl and Parker present the subcultures of 'modernists' and 'rock and rollers' alike in terms of a desperate conformity, the pressure to consume and to be 'with it'. Although the powerful discourses of media and advertising ('the mummies and daddies of today' according to one informant) continually hold out the promise of escape into a dream-world of effortless style and freedom through commodities like the motorbike paid for on 'the never-never', such longed-for fulfilment is endlessly deferred. MacColl's informants are presented as perpetually caught in a nowhere-place between the tired 'Enid Blyton' world of home and family and the gaudy illusions of advertising rhetoric.

It is a view which finds hope only in a recovery of traditional modes of thought and expression, based in a belief in the residual 'folk' character of the young people's mode of expressing themselves. The programme's producer Charles Parker held steadfastly to the opinion that where US-influenced pop was fundamentally incapable of reflecting the real lives of British youth, the native folk tradition offered some possibility for launching a cultural counter-offensive. The programme's informants 'do not talk in that mid-Atlantic Americanese of pop', he insisted; 'their language is still akin to the language of the traditional ballads' (Harker 2007: 169). Parker felt that the use of traditional forms to translate the young informants' testimony, posed a strong challenge to 'the pop song idiom so closely associated with the teenager' (ibid.).[5]

Popular culture as folk's inauthentic other

In 1967 Parker and MacColl co-produced the BBC radio series *Vox Pop* in which teenagers, critics and academics discussed pop music and its social

[5] Harker (2007: 169) accuses the programme of imposing 'a folk music idiom remote from the lives depicted', and ignoring the testimony of one of the programme's informants who, as Harker notes, 'was forthright in the opinion that only "beatniks" and "girls who wear really long skirts, no make-up" would bother with music other than pop' (ibid.). Peggy Seeger was also hesitant about the programme's success, citing the team's inability to reproduce the idiolect of contemporary pop, and remarking that 'we should have gotten in some advisors' (Harker 2007: 169).

effects (Parker (1975: 135). In the programme, MacColl outlined his position as follows:

> I see pop music, and indeed pop art generally, as a defiant relinquishing of responsibility towards this society. The responsibility of thinking, the responsibility of being committed to any idea, to any point of view, to any course of action. And it's this negative attitude to society, to human thought, to historical processes, and all the rest of it, which it seems to me, permeates the whole of beat music, whole of pop. (MacColl quoted in Parker 1975: 136)

MacColl remained convinced of the alien character and destructive influence of popular music, despite the profound changes that occurred in its production and reception over the course of his career. It is possible that he was largely unaware of many of these changes: 'MacColl', writes his biographer Ben Harker, 'loathed contemporary pop music so much that he couldn't bear to listen to it' (Harker 2007: 169). Speaking to Giovanni Vacca in 1987, MacColl remained unequivocal:

> The most fearsome tool that man has ever created, I think more fearsome than the atom bomb, is television … and perhaps pop music! I consider both ultimately to be destructive forces. (Moore and Vacca 2014: 70)

MacColl also remained ideologically committed to 'folk' and 'popular' as a priori categories which were irreconcilably opposed. Harker (2007: 108) suggests that this unshakeable view of 'mass culture', as 'the enemy of the folk culture' combined with an unwillingness to recognise any progressive potential in 'commercial' music, caused MacColl's vision of revival to wane in popularity and relevance after the mid-1960s, by which time even central figures within the revival such as Karl Dallas were willing to concede that 'pop' had become 'increasingly vital, creative and really popular, for the first time since mass-produced entertainment killed off the music halls' (Dallas cited in Harker 2007: 108).

Although MacColl recognised no real distinction between The Beatles and the commercial songs of his own youth in the hey-day of tin pan alley,

pop during the 1960s was in the process of being reclaimed as music of counter-cultural significance, as Frith (1981) argues, taking on some of the features of a 'folk' music, to represent the authentic expression, first, of urban, working class youth, and then, in the form of progressive rock, of the global counterculture.[6] Through all these developments, MacColl continued to insist on a home-grown folk tradition as the only legitimate source of a reformed popular music culture in Britain, and his own version of revival as the only authentic response to an essentially alien and commercially-determined popular music. For this project to succeed, however, the two categories had to be clearly defined, and the authentic version of folk separated not only from pop but from what MacColl saw as the unauthentic, commercial travesties of folk in the charts.

The boundaries of folk and popular

In the early 1960s, folk music was encountered by readers of the weekly pop press as one strand within the larger popular genre, a loosely defined subgenre which had grown out of earlier bursts of enthusiasm for New Orleans jazz and skiffle, the home-grown version of American folk which 'took off after the success of Lonnie Donegan's hit single "Rock Island Line"' in 1957 (Laing 2014: 27-28). Folk acts had established a presence on major labels by 1960 and were starting to gain some attention from TV as well as regular coverage in the popular music weeklies *Melody Maker* and the *New Musical Express*.

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[6] Perceived changes in the power relations of pop production contributed to this perception. Alan Beckett in the *New Left Review* (where some interest in the political significance of pop and rock started to develop around the mid-1960s), suggested that in contemporary pop, an earlier production-line model had given way to a small-scale, artisanal model. In the music of post-beat era groups such as the Beatles, he proposed, 'a pathway is created between professionalism and private, recreational activity' which 'results in a move away from standardisation':

> … because it is small group music, the musicians themselves are in greater control of the musical resources, and, often, there is no need of an arranger, imposed from the outside as the representative of a supposedly higher musical culture. There is a great difference between Paul McCartney's use of strings or French horns and their appearance on a Frank Sinatra record. (Beckett 1966: 89)

In a critique of Adornian notions of a monolithic 'culture industry', Beckett held that popular music production had moved toward a more organic unity. As Frith (1981) suggests, in accounts which formulate pop/rock as in some sense 'folk' music, the old distinction between mass and folk categories as a basis for aesthetic judgements is carried forward. A sub-category of pop (later designated as 'rock') is afforded 'folk' status, defined against a low 'commercial' other. Folk proper yields ground to pop/rock, separated from the popular by the issue of commerciality, and increasingly, in terms of age, origin, instrumentation and geographically determined stylistic features.

Decca, one of Britain's 'big three' labels, carried material by the Carter Family and US folk singer Josh White, even releasing an EP by Lloyd and MacColl's short-lived skiffle group The Ramblers. They later acknowledged the transatlantic 'hootenanny craze' with the release of *Hootenanny in London* (1963) a 'midnight folk concert' recorded live in the studio which was an early recorded outing for Martin Carthy and also yielded spin-off EPs by Davy Graham and skiffle group The Thamesiders.

Scottish folk duo Robin Hall and Jimmie McGregor were the first TV breakthrough act, debuting on BBC Scotland's *Tonight* in 1960, while folk acts appeared on programmes such as *Easybeat*, *Hullabaloo, Barndance* and *The Hootenanny Show* (Bean 2014: 55). As these programme titles suggest, folk was still associated largely with the wave of US roots-based music entering the UK, including 'country blues' artists such as Sonny and Brownie, Leadbelly, and American revivalists like Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul and Mary.[7] The polished, transatlantic folk sound of acts such as Harry Belafonte and The Kingston Trio sat comfortably alongside the music of Helen Shapiro, Pat Boone and Elvis Presley in the pop charts as a subgenre of pop (albeit with a more authentic flavour) rather than representing a diametrically opposed musical category.

Contemporary audiences did not divide naturally along pop and folk lines, although in Jan 1964 *Melody Maker* felt it necessary to challenge a recent *Observer* article on the folk scene which had described teenage folk-fans as 'dedicated non-twisters', arguing that, 'if most teenage folk fans do not twist it is because the twist is out of date', adding, 'they jive, shake or snog like anybody else. But they do listen to folk song and they sing' (Melody Maker 1964: 11). Musician Dave Allen's account of his musical life growing up in the provincial city of Portsmouth reveals a complex network of social and musical affiliations that defies attempts to divide it along commercial or

[7] The genre of country blues refers to the pre-war acoustic styles associated with the Delta region and the Piedmont regions of the southern US. Set against the post-war electric styles considered to be an urban, commercial popular music. For an extended discussion of the construction in the 1960s of an authentic 'folk' version of the blues, closely associated with the figure of Robert Johnson see Wald (2005).

non-commercial lines, although tacit notions of personal authenticity are clearly in play:

> I loved Little Richard, Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran and some of my best mates wore chukka boots and quiffs. I used to play snooker with them up in Copnor Road … at the same time I was going off to folk clubs with Pete and discovering a world of live acoustic music, politics and beer […] the challenge then was to sustain a sufficiently credible relationship with other ways of living at the same time. I wanted to be a Mod most of the time while protecting bits for snooker, Gene Vincent and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. (Allen quoted in Frith *et al.* 2013: 136)

For teenagers like Allen, popular music culture at the turn of the 1960s offered a variety of 'ways of living' that were different but far from incompatible. Authenticity, which Allen defines as the establishing of a 'sufficiently credible relationship' with the choices on offer, was a matter to be negotiated by the individual, rather than a quality that could be ascribed to any one musical repertoire or 'way of living' over another. In the aesthetics of folk club performance, however, an ideology was being developed in which folk music, progressive politics and anti-commercialism were closely interlinked.

Folk clubs and the aesthetics of anti-commercialism

The folk club movement gained momentum quickly from the mid-1950s onwards. The first clubs opened in London around 1954 before spreading to other British cities, a handful soon growing to around 70 by 1962 and 300 by 1965 (Harker 2007: 156-157).[8] The movement was initially a youthful phenomenon. MacColl recalled that 'the clubs were packed to suffocation with young men and women, "all with shining faces" as the Newcastle

[8] Laing (2014: 156-158) records that John Hasted's Good Earth club was the first to open in 1954. This was followed shortly afterwards by MacColl's Ballads and Blues Club, while Bradford's Topic Folk Club, named after the London-based record label, opened in 1956.

anthem would have it' (MacColl 2009: 283).[9] For MacColl the audience at Ballads and Blues may have represented the politically aware working class audience he had always striven to attract with his theatre work, 'young, eager, denim-clad, ready for anything we could give them in terms of songs and information' and he later claimed that the club attracted an overwhelmingly working class audience (MacColl 1990: 283).[10] As MacColl took as read the emotionally and creatively barren nature of popular music, he was able to interpret the youth interest in folk music as indicative of a developing political consciousness. In turning to folk, MacColl argued, audiences were demanding a more emotionally satisfying musical experience than that provided by the Top 40. 'We were very fortunate', he told Giovanni Vacca:

> because we were dealing with a population of young people who had come back from the army, from the wars, and they were absolutely fed up with the stuff which had been churned out of the conveyor-belt music-making machine over all those war years. They wanted something new! (Moore and Vacca 2014: 27-28)

For many young enthusiasts, folk did indeed represent a welcome contrast to the mainstream sounds emanating from the major labels. Singer/guitarist Martin Carthy remarked that, aside from Bill Haley, Lonnie Donegan and Elvis Presley:

> all the other music around at that time seemed to be, 'I'm a pink tooth-brush, you're a blue tooth-brush, won't you marry me some day' […] or 'How much is that doggy in the window'. That was the general thrust. (Carthy quoted in Sweers 2004: 213)

[9] The phrase 'all with shining faces' alludes to George Ridley's music hall song 'The Blaydon Races' now best known as the anthem of Newcastle United football club.
[10] MacColl claimed that a survey of clubs conducted by himself and Peggy Seeger had shown a figure of 78% working class youth below the age of 25 in British folk clubs (Moore and Vacca 2014: 28-29). MacKinnon (1993) who undertook a sociological survey of folk club membership in the 1990s, casts doubt on his claims, arguing that the movement reflected a broadly middle class demographic, while Brocken (2003: 38) simply dismisses MacColl's claims as 'a political PR exercise'. Contemporary perceptions of folk tended to associate it with an educated, middle class and vaguely Bohemian audience: a survey conducted by the Harold Davidson talent agency in 1964 remarked upon the predominance of 'students' within the movement, speculating that the 'folk boom' would be spearheaded by the 'thousands of students in British Universities' who had 'helped spark off the skiffle and trad crazes' (Coleman 1964: 14).

Carthy's sentiments were echoed by Sandra Kerr, another early convert to the folk movement and later a member of MacColl's Critics' Group, who said that folk's appeal to her and her peers stemmed from a dissatisfaction with 'what the popular ear was being fed at that time':

> I mean post-war, as you well know, the stuff was on the whole pap, you know, 'lay down your arms and surrender to mine' for God's sake, give us a break! Not just give us a break from the war but give us a break from that saccharine stuff. I think that what the music that we were discovering spoke to was an earthiness and a sense of a search for some kind of reality in the music that we listened to. (Kerr, fieldwork interview, February 2014)

In the folk clubs, music and Left-wing politics were closely intertwined. Folk, jazz and skiffle had provided the soundtrack of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's Aldermaston march of 1958 and for some early club organisers the folk movement represented a cultural extension, or even a sublimation of their political activism. Myra Abbott, a communist, CND member and organiser of the Hoy at Anchor folk club in Southend recalled that her group initially had:

> very little idea of what constituted folk music and its strands. We were very into causes but disillusioned after '56.[11] The revival of the folk scene took this place. Its main ethos was uncommercial music – we wanted to provide an alternative'. (MacKinnon 1993: 25)

As the revival developed, the rediscovery and performance of traditional song became a political end in itself rather than an adjunct to more direct, institutionalised forms of dissent, a conscious effort to free music from the machinery and artifice of the all-powerful 'entertainment business' and stem what MacColl termed the 'plasticization of popular culture' (Harker 2007: 155).

[11] With the reference to ''56', Abbott is presumably alluding to the Communist Party of Great Britain's support for the brutal suppression of the Hungarian uprising of that year by Soviet troops which caused a large drop in party membership.

In order to fashion the kind of revival that he wanted, it was necessary for MacColl to distinguish folk music not only from pop but from less authentic versions of folk. He launched his Singers' Club in 1961, an event which was presented as a response to the 'legion of smooth operators, five and ten per centers, top twentiers, goons, gimmickers, gagmen, third rate comics' that MacColl claimed were 'doing their best to debase the meaning of folk song' (Harker 2007: 156-159). In constructing any music claiming folk status (apart from his own) that appeared on television or on a major label as a debasement of the authentic tradition, MacColl retroactively posited the existence of (and laid claim to) an authentic, non-commercial folk style, which was the only legitimate basis for a reformed people's culture.

In musical terms, this rejection of commercialism translated into a deliberate transformation of the rules of performance. MacKinnon (1993) notes that the codification of a self-consciously unadorned performance style was achieved quickly in the early clubs. Myra Abbott's club, the Hoy at Anchor, established a rigid organisational structure, appointing a committee to decide on music policy and to 'vet' prospective singers. In similar clubs around the UK, the space of performance was systematically reconfigured, behavioural conventions (including tacit though rigidly enforced rules regarding heckling and acceptable language) were enforced and audiences purged of unsuitable elements; MacKinnon (1993: 25-26) calls this 'an extremely self-conscious attempt to change the social dynamics of performance' and suggests that the social-political aspect of the folk club ethos (its anti-commercialism, its adherence to democratic principles and commitment to providing an alternative to commercially mediated music) initially took precedence over questions of repertoire and style; 'the aim was not to reconstruct the past from its songs and music but to change the social role of music from one where music making was in the hands of the music industry to one where the control of music making was restored to ordinary people' (MacKinnon 1993: 30). Folk club style re-imagined performance as a form of direct interpersonal exchange, a kind of conversation between equal

members of a community, and as such, it was a direct negation of pop's supposedly passive and individualised mode of consumption.[12]

Sonic space as social space: critiquing pop's sonic aesthetic

The sonic aesthetic of pop studio recordings was a frequent object of criticism from journalists, cultural critics and fans during the period.[13] Hoggart (1957) conflated the music's sonic and spatial characteristics with their role in engendering passivity, individualism and a sense of unreality. In the brief treatment of popular music in *The Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart refers to the 'empty cosmos' created by commercial popular recordings through their use of techniques such as artificial echo. His position is an Adornian one, viewing the content of popular music as generic and ephemeral, subservient to its form (in this case defined by its echo-laden impersonality).[14] Hoggart (1957) read the social significance of the new production in the distorted interpersonal dynamics of crooning (pop's 'extremely "internal" style' of delivery) and in the use of 'echo-chambers' to produce:

> a huge public effect […] more impressive than the effect which can be gained in a large variety hall; and there is an enforced intimacy like a close-up on an immense screen. The singer is reaching millions but pretends that he is reaching only "you". (Hoggart 2007: 227)

In contrast with the genuine community of experience which he believed was reflected and even nurtured by the urban song culture of earlier eras, Hoggart explicitly connected the spatial character of pop recording with an imposed false consciousness, and thus with the threat posed to traditional working class culture by mass-technologies capable of producing mass effects on a

[12] Brocken (2003: 111-112), however, points out the irony of a supposedly democratic form which in reality was often governed by self-styled experts, and suggests that this could result in an atmosphere of exaggerated reverence, and regimented rituals of quasi-democratic interaction.

[13] For discussion of the discourse of hi-fi as opposed to the use of sound effects as a novelty see Zak (2012).

[14] Beckett (1966) summarised the Adornian position that in popular music:

> the form remains aloof, a mere container in which the details are mechanically concatenated, it gives no ulterior logic to the details, and in turn, is not actualized in them. Form exerts a repressive influence on detail. The detail is never allowed to develop and so becomes "a caricature of its own potentialities"' (Beckett 1966: 87).

passive and pacified audience.[15] Ultimately Hoggart suggested that mass cultural forms such as pop records eclipsed any genuine sense of the collective in favour of a solipsistic individualism, privileging fantasy over reality and the interior over the social.

In 1975 Parker (1975) echoed Hoggart's position, interpreting the spread of pop music culture since the 1950s as a factor in the general erosion of community and collective values:

> In the past eighteen years we have seen the ethical standards of our society overturned; the humanist values involving respect for the individual and the cherishing of community relationships, and affections and loyalties, the unselfishness, the concern for others; the rich humour and laconic strength found in the working class, all the values which in the teeth of an acquisitive society, yet made social relationships meaningful for the mass of the people […] all have been attacked and discredited by the cynical 'I'm All Right Jack', anti-community attitudes of the world of pop. (Parker 1975: 140)

Like Hoggart, Parker (1975) attacked pop recordings specifically as sound. Although bands such as The Beatles were sometimes praised for their lyrical expression of real social issues,[16] Parker (1975: 159) argued that pop recordings constructed a sound-world divorced from the everyday: 'As a documentary radio producer […] I found that the sounds and rhythms and tonalities, expressive of the actual human communities in which people work struggle, and live together, bear no relation to those of "Sergeant Pepper"'. Parker felt that pop producers used sound to provoke awe rather than understanding and to distort the reality of social experience, comparing them to pagan priests or shaman:

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[15] Parker saw pop as a form of false consciousness, describing the pop scene as 'like some latter day slave-market – but with the ultimate hideous twist that the victims were conditioned to enslave themselves by some monstrous invertion [sic] of group therapy, which led them to publicly defile themselves and so be trapped and exposed on this altar of anarchic democracy, to go through the motions of exerting choice by buying the disc in such numbers as to send it to the top of the charts' (1975: 141).

[16] Parker (1975: 159) cites the Beatles' 'She's Leaving Home' (1967), from *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, as an example.

> The social objectives of […] Shaman and medicine men, priests and monks and religious howlers, in developing their outlandish and perverted vocal techniques, was to engender fear in their audience by emulating the voice of God – an abstraction whose modern counterpart is surely the brilliant but dangerously potent electronic sounds of electric guitar and recording studio. These can have a psychological effect as devastating, and indeed as terror-inducing, as the voice of the Gods – but amplified to overwhelming proportions and capable of inducing hysteria on a mass scale […] this is the death of community'. (1975: 157)

Interestingly, Parker suggests that the tactile, or haptic appeal of rock music as a sonic practice sound is proof of its irresponsibility as art (1975: 158). 'This total aural possession' Parker argued, 'is […] the more or less desperate attempt to conceal and compensate for the absence of the true community of shared experience'; Pop, 'in seeming to combat loneliness and the loss of community, in fact intensifies their effects' (ibid.: 158).

Innovation versus conservatism in pop production

The new pop production style criticised by Hoggart and Parker was a result of changes in the production and aesthetics of pop after 1945 as recording gradually abandoned any commitment to the reproduction of live performance. Zak (2012: 43) notes that 'pop records went from documentary snapshots representing past events of remote provenance to aesthetic artefacts in their own right', and that recordists increasingly aimed at producing a unique combination of sounds and musical/textual elements, abandoning fidelity to performance in favour of 'hybrid mixtures of musical styles and instrumentation put together in studios' (ibid.: 46). 'The new way of record production' he argues, 'more resembled movie making' than traditional mimetic approaches to sound recording (ibid.: 47)

Toynbee (2000) argues that, in the post-war period, the total apparatus of sound production and recording was increasingly treated as an expressive instrument in its own right. He points to techniques such as crooning,

extended saxophone technique in R&B, and scat singing as early examples of the performative use of music technology itself as musicians and producers sought to cross the communicative space between the studio-based performer and the audience at home. Spatial effects such as tape echo and reverb went from occasional novelties in the late 1940s to a basic feature of most pop recordings by the end of the following decade. Toynbee (2000: 69-70) suggests that this new use of effects marked the beginning of the current era in which pop records typically construct complex 'virtual dimensionalities' with little reference to any space existing in reality.

Rather than this break with tradition being construed as positive, however, this period has been linked to an intensification of pop's reactionary political tendencies. Middleton (2000: 85) argues that while the history of popular music has seen periodic bursts of innovation and polysemy (such as the initial wave of 'rock and roll') this has generally been followed by a return of market dominance and a closing down of meaning, and points to the apparent ease with which the new recording techniques that emerged mid-century were rapidly co-opted into mainstream aesthetic discourses, as the industry shored up a 'new symbiosis, recognisably related to the old dominant model'. 'Elvis Presley's early records with their novel use of echo,' Middleton remarks:

> may have represented a watershed in the abandonment of attempts to reproduce live performance in favour of a specifically studio sound; but the effect is used largely to intensify an old pop characteristic – 'star presence': Elvis becomes 'larger than life'. (Middleton 2000: 89)

By freeing itself from fidelity to performance, pop recording was, in one sense, more alive to the performative possibilities of the recording medium itself, but it was still governed by rationalised production practices and the demands of a conservative industry. As a result, contemporary critics of popular music production were to some extent justified in emphasising the homogeneity of pop production beneath the incessant search for novelty. Just as new production methods could be used to disrupt the status quo, they also afforded new ways to shore it up.

The uses of echo in pop

The question of echo as a means of technologically 'doctoring' songs for commercial purposes was a recurring topic in the UK music press circa 1960: 'Pop Singer John Leyton Denies Gimmick Charges', the *Melody Maker* reported in January 1962, asking 'will record companies "ditch" powerhouse echo chambers in favour of more accurate sounds from singers?' (Melody Maker 1962: 2). In separate interviews, producers Norrie Paramor (1963: iii) and Joe Meek (Melody Maker 1963: 10-11) defended 'modern studio methods' against criticism of gimmickry and studio 'cook-ups'. One article (accompanied by a photograph of 'robot' musicians under the headline 'Popland: The machines are taking over!') announced: 'We are entering the era of deep-frozen, pre-packaged music. The machines are starting to take over, and the shadow of a 1984 record world hangs over show business' (Melody Maker 1964: 20) The 'real talents' of contemporary pop, the article claimed, were 'the factory workers on the conveyor belt of pop – recording engineers, sound mixers, recording managers – assembling the record like a new car' (ibid.). It was perhaps only natural that *Melody Maker*, a magazine whose readership included an older generation of dance band musicians, should voice concerns about how new technologies and production methods might affect their employment prospects, but clearly fears about the effects of technological mediation on popular music culture were not confined to folk musicians and Left-wing academics.

A brief glance at some contemporary pop recordings can help to illuminate these debates. The chief negative aspect of the echo chamber approach as Hoggart saw it, lay in its distortion of real space and thus of real social relationships; the technique artificially amplified the vocal presence and charisma of the singer at the expense of the listener in order to compensate for the absence of any genuine commonality of experience or emotional connection between them.[17] Pop recordings are false consciousness

[17] In this, Hoggart approaches an Althusserian definition of ideology as the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. (See Althusser 2008: 39).

in material form, and the technology of echo is used to sustain the illusion, replacing real intimacy with a technologically enhanced simulacrum.

All the recordings considered here make use of artificially produced echo. Although they exhibit marked similarities in instrumentation, mix, arrangement and even subject matter, at the textual level their spatial elements operate in a variety of ways, ranging from localised effects unique to individual sound sources, to complex narrative schemes, or highly detailed scenes (including parodic evocations of Western American, Mexican or Alpine landscapes), and evocations of the various psychic states of personae within the narrative space of the song.

The best-selling single of 1962 was Frank Ifield's *I Remember You*, a song which for Harker (1980) symbolised the 'deadest phase of British and American recorded song since at least 1945':

> [R]ock 'n' roll had been bought up, neutered and repackaged, as a large-scale commercial phenomenon at any rate. In Britain, some people turned to 'trad' jazz or folk; but the whole dreary time is symbolized by the fact that a contrived thing like *I Remember You* by Frank Ifield was successful in chart terms. (Harker 1980: 73)

The song is an easy-listening country number which makes a feature of Ifield's vocal dexterity and adopts a nostalgic, thoughtful tone. The singer's transatlantic-accented voice is comparatively loud and pushed forward in the mix against a backdrop of strings. A harmonica occasionally shares the spotlight with the lead vocal, its sharp timbre pushing it forward against the soft, string-laden and reverberant background. The harmonica comments on the lyrics, following the vocal phrasing and at one point mimicking the 'distant bell' alluded to in the lyric of the song's bridge section.

I Remember You resembles the production style caricatured by Hoggart (1957) in featuring a heavily echoic male voice which moves between a relatively intimate space and a public interpersonal space; but rather than lending an artificial authority to the vocal, the lyrical text with its theme of remembrance and its evocation of open space, inflects the spatial use of echo differently at various points in the song. The echo on the vocal and

the harmonica frame the song in a space of memory, but the act of remembering takes place at different points in time; first the singer remembers the 'you' of the song 'a few kisses ago' (the central temporal point in the narrative), then considers another time and place, a remembered 'Western' outdoor space of stars, falling rain and distant bells, before remembering the first moment from the point of view of 'when my life is through and the angels ask me to recall/ the thrill of them all'. At various points then, echo, as well as adding prominence to the voice and depth of field to the recording, suggests distance in time, the open space of outdoors, and the acoustic conditions of an imagined afterlife. The vocal moves progressively from a light effort and intimate orientation in the first verse (reflecting the 'kissing distance' suggested by the line 'yes I do, didn't you know?'), before the narrative moves up in scale, effecting a change in the scene of action by pulling out for an audible 'wide shot' which takes in the larger and possibly distantly remembered space of the second verse, while the vocal becomes fuller, louder and more distant from the listener, suggesting a more public, declamatory register.

The sense of space constructed using echo is also continually inflected by the musical elements of the recording: the drums begin to suggest a double-time rhythm on the bridge section ('I remember too, a distant bell…') which by suggesting a change in scene, allows the echoic characteristic of the recording to evoke a real space. The rising contour of the melody as Ifield approaches the line 'like the rain out of the blue', stretching out the last word of the phrase to ascend into his falsetto range, before dropping down again with the next phrase 'when my life is through', suggests an ascending movement through this space through a combination of musical and production elements. Throughout the song, there is an ongoing dialogue between musical-textual and production elements, in which characteristics of the recorded environment, and aspects of the implied spatial relationship between performer and listener inflect the meaning-potential of the recorded performance.

These effects are not limited to recordings with lyrical content. Acker Bilk's *Stranger on the Shore* (1962) a clarinet instrumental which again sets

its subject (this time Bilk's lead clarinet) against a backdrop of strings laden with echo, again constructs a nostalgic, melancholy space through which the subject seems to slowly and steadily drift. Despite the absence of a lead vocal there is a clear and distinct subject/object split, which seems to pit the thinking, suffering, individual against the musically delineated environment. The Shadows' single *Wonderful Land* (1962) another instrumental, positions Hank Marvin's electric guitar (the ventriloquial subject of the song) as an explorer in a new world conjured by a dark reverb, tape echo and soaring strings. It is once again a hallucinogenic Western landscape through which the guitar is travelling, driven forward by galloping drums and bass while the harmonic sequence, with its flattened VII, recalls western film soundtracks of the era.

The Tornados' *Telstar* (1962)[18] produced for Decca by Joe Meek celebrates the launch of the Telstar communications satellite, and begins with echoing bursts of white noise which build to a 'blast-off' sound effect, launching the lead melody (played on a clavioline) into the musical stratosphere.[19] Despite its futuristic subject matter, the track is conventionally mixed, all the instruments closely grouped, with the guitar and electric organ positioned slightly forward of the bass and drums. A space is opened up at the back of the mix by harp glissandos which give a sense of indeterminate depth. The overall track is slightly overdriven, the input signal from bass and drums in particular beginning to distort suggesting power and loudness (regardless of the actual playback volume) but also, perhaps, to listeners familiar with attempting to access the European commercial radio stations of the period, the characteristic sound of a radio signal crossing great distance.

Swiss Maid (1962) by Del Shannon uses echo and female yodelling to establish a virtual alpine landscape as the setting for a glib tale of unrequited feminine longing. The Pat Boone track *Speedy Gonzales* (1962) sets the scene with its spoken word intro; 'It was a moonlit night in old Mexico; I walked

[18] Although Meek is now best known for his eccentric space-themed productions such as 'I Hear a New World' and for the murder of his landlady, he was one of the UK's most successful independent pop producers in 1962.
[19] Developed by Selmer, the clavioline was 'the first electronic instrument to reach a mass market' and also features on Del Shannon's 'Runaway' (1961) and The Beatles 'Baby You're a Rich Man' (1965) (Reid 2007: n.p.).

alone between some old adobe haciendas. Suddenly, I heard the plaintive cry of a young Mexican girl.' A heavily reverberant female vocal enters with a wordless parody of a folk or ethnic singing style. Both tracks pastiche the genre of conventional pictorial space/place recordings and are a kind of musical tourism. Electronically mediated instruments are used (as in all the tracks here) as sonic material, to represent physical space, objects and movement), and metonymically to evoke a stereotypical cultural otherness.

In these recordings, reverb and echo are frequently used to conjure up a world of dreams, memory, far-off places, and epic landscapes. Everyday soundscapes and the realistic portrayal of social relationships are notable by their absence. In parting company with real space, these recordings often seem to have an overwhelmingly dreamlike, even solipsistic quality, sonically referring only to other recordings. They use space metaphorically, dealing with the internal space of the individual, rather than the intersubjective space of the social, and as such, relationships between objects are governed by the logic of the protagonist's viewpoint. Criticism of popular song as disproportionately concerned with interiority at the expense of the social was common from the 1930s onwards. These critiques mapped the song's apparent solipsistic individualism onto political narratives of individualism over collectivism, resulting in the conclusion that pop music was inherently reactionary. Lloyd (1967) argued that, unlike bourgeois cultural forms, the creation of folk song was not driven by introspective urges. Pop music, however, *was* interested in exploring private, affective experience and since the technological innovations of the late 1940s when techniques from cinema had entered the sonic arsenal of pop producers had been increasingly interested in the sonic exploration of the private, the interior and the affective, rather than with social experience or with narrative. All of these records place a central persona within a multi-faceted aural/musical environment which can be hostile or mysterious, foreign, quaint and archaic as in *Swiss Maid* or exciting and futuristic as in *Telstar*. It can be a metaphorical or a literal space – a theatrical backdrop or a psychic topos. Echo is used to lend weight to vocals, increasing the image size of the sound source within the mix, but also to suggest the origin of the voice in a distant location, spatially or

metaphorically, the inner space of consciousness. Moreover, freed from any real fidelity to performance tradition, genres are often referenced stereotypically to produce a momentary flavour of cultural otherness and then discarded.

Far from conveying a uniform message, however, and given the limited technical means at their disposal and the almost identical instrumentation, the range of meaning-effects achieved through the use of technologies in these records is remarkably varied, and the use of echo and other studio techniques arguably act to enrich, rather than close down, the interpretive possibilities afforded by the recordings. They deal with varied subject matter, and if many of them tend towards the fantastical, introspective and dreamlike, that is not to say they are incapable of being appropriated by listeners in ways which allowed them to work out their concerns, fears and desires, as well as anchoring a meaningful sense of identity and belonging. The later work of Birmingham school theorists would propose alternative readings of popular culture which positioned the individual consumer as bricoleur, able to draw on 'a rich iconography, a set of symbols, objects and artefacts which can be assembled and re-assembled by different groups in a literally limitless number of combinations' (Hebdige cited in Strinati 1995: 34). A sense of the importance of listening context is missing from mass culture accounts such as Hoggart's: although on a cursory semiotic reading, a great number of pop records during the period appear concerned with the exploration of inner experience, not only through lyrical and textual devices but in sound, Frith *et al.* (2013) in their study of live music during the period show how these recordings were taken up and used by audiences in a variety of ways, in particular through dancing and other traditional processes of socialisation. Recordings, rather than engendering a more introspective or solipsistic response, found their way into the system of existing social relationships.

This recent research supports Williams's (1958) contemporary view that rather than one form of culture replacing another during the period (television watching replacing conversation, for example) the range of cultural experience was broadening and that there was 'no form of social

activity which the use of these techniques has replaced' (Williams 1958: 291). There was, Williams (1958: 290) remarked, 'a general tendency to confuse the techniques themselves with the uses to which, in a given society, they have been put', e.g. the technique of using echo on a recording, or certain mixing strategies, being conflated with certain social effects thought to be related. Such techniques were 'at worst neutral' (ibid.): 'the idea of mass communication,' Williams argued, 'depends very much on the more on the intention of the speaker or writer, than on the particular technique employed' (ibid.: 292). Although the producers of a sound recording might envision public or private consumption, it was not the technology that was inherently public or private, but the ways in which it is used. However, this did not stop folk club performance and pop consumption being presented using oppositional metaphors of 'music as conversation' versus 'music as passive consumption'; revivalist rhetoric imposed a conceptual schema of opposition, an either/or relationship, on what were in practice separate categories of cultural activity.

Part 2

Topic Records and the revivalist recording aesthetic

The cultural debates around commercial pop and the social implications of its sound world provide the context for the emergence of the alternative approach to recording which is exemplified by the output of Topic Records. As noted above pop records after around 1950 differed from earlier recordings (and from recordings in genres such as jazz, classical and folk, which were rooted in the rituals of live performance) through their abandonment of mimetic approaches and their use of the medium as a semiotic resource. The sonic aesthetic of pop was associated within the discourse of the revival with commercialism and the death of traditional communitarian values. By contrast, in the work of Topic the affordances of recording technology were exploited in a way that was much more fully connected with social space and with performance tradition. The remainder of this chapter draws on fieldwork interviews with Bill Leader, the label's recording manager, and analysis of

sound recordings to understand how revivalist recording practices developed during the 1950s and 1960s, and how it can be related to the discourses of anti-commercialism, community and authenticity outlined in the first section.

Early history of the Topic label

Topic Records began life as the Topic Record Club, a small sub-section of the Worker's Music Association in 1939 (the WMA was itself founded in 1936). The club released records only sporadically, with print-runs limited to ninety-nine copies to avoid purchase tax (Brocken 2003: 56). Reflecting the WMA's focus on group singing, early releases showed a preference for choral material which reflected the association's progressive and internationalist politics. Their second release included a version of 'The Internationale' backed by 'Soviet Fatherland Song' performed by The Topic Singers and the Unity String Orchestra.[20] Folk song featured to a lesser extent, much of it of American or (most often) Russian origin and usually presented in choral/orchestral arrangements and either licensed from other labels or performed by the in-house vocal group The Topic Singers.[21] Bill Leader, who became Topic's recording manager in 1956, described the organisation as he found it as specialising in 'songs to be sung nightly on the barricades – with piano accompaniment' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). As he put it, the WMA itself represented 'a big barricade made entirely out of pianos […] people defending it with rifles and the barricade's all made of upright pianos with people playing it in tails and dress suits' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

[20] The Unity Theatre a Leftist group associated with the WMA provided a number of singers musicians for Topic releases such as 'Paddy Ryan' (a pseudonym) whose 'The Man That Waters the Workers' Beer' was the label's first release in 1939, and Harry H. Corbett, who contributed to the Lloyd and MacColl sea shanty project *The Singing Sailor* (1956).
[21] At this stage, 'folksong' generally meant 'national music' from various European sources and in classical arrangements, and is not to be confused with the 'traditional music' that later became the label's speciality. Examples include: The Topic Male Singers, *The Refugees/The Peatbog Soldiers* (1941) London: Topic Record Club; The Topic Singers, *Two Soviet Folksongs: the Cruel Sweetheart; Song of the Collectives* (1942) London: Topic Record Club.

Underlying this musical policy, Leader seems to suggest, was a basic ignorance of working class culture and a veiled contempt for the musical capacities of the working classes themselves:

> They had a big brass band policy because they realised that […] your horny-handed sons of toil couldn't really handle a violin or anything like that. They'd obviously never been to an Irish pub in their lives – so pushing down valves was about, you know, all your average bricklayer could do. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Leader's ironic assessment of the WMA as an essentially paternalistic organisation that assumed a mediatory role for educated middle class artists in working class musical life is perhaps not entirely fair: WMA founder Alan Bush and his protégé John Hasted (an influential member of the organisation since 1940) were deeply committed to Left-wing politics (both were members of the Communist party) and to the cause of 'people's music' which included a growing interest in the work of the US folk revival (Gregory 2002a). Hasted in particular was a devoted follower of American folk music, a close friend and collaborator of A.L. Lloyd, an early promoter of skiffle and co-founder of the political folk song magazine *Sing* (Gregory 2002a). In the early 1950s, the WMA had also begun to publish MacColl and Lloyd's collections of industrial folk song *Coaldust Ballads* (1952) and *The Shuttle and the Cage* (1954).[22]

[22] In 1964 Australian academic Edgar Waters (1964: 59) noted that 'increasing numbers of scholars, in a number of countries, are engaged in collecting and studying what they are pleased to call industrial folk song'. Waters identified Lloyd's *Come All Ye Bold Miners* (1952) as a step towards understanding folk song as a part of the social history of labour relations. Edwardian collectors, for whom folk song was inseparable from the rural, unlettered peasantry, might well have considered 'industrial folk song' a contradiction in terms. The concept thus marks a departure from the premise that industrialisation had enacted a final separation between the urbanised working class and earlier folk traditions. A preoccupation with industrial song and culture underpins much work by Lloyd and Ewan MacColl, including the *Radio Ballads* and the *The Iron Muse* (1963) of which Waters remarks that 'the biggest surprise […] may be to discover how much these songs can reveal of the feelings of a particular group of workers about the lives they led in a particular place and at a particular time; about what Raymond Williams calls the "quality of life"' (Waters 1964: 60). However, as Boyes (1993) notes, the concept left the familiar distinction between authentic song traditions and corrupt commercial appropriations intact. Additionally, the focus on male experience within classic industries such as coal, steel and fishing leads Boyes (1993: 240) to remark that 'as subjects for consideration in song, as writers who might draw on their concerns or experience, as club members in a pub-based movement or performers attempting to reproduce its agreed repertoire, women had no obvious role among the "plebs in pitboots arguing politics"'.

That the WMA's folk-related activities in the years immediately following the second world war were largely confined to performances by its various choral groups and a small quantity of printed repertoire was partly to do with the existing state of recording technology and the association's limited funds. Until the mid-1950s, the BBC was the only institution with the resources and expertise necessary to undertake large scale field recording projects. The emergence of Topic as an independent record label depended on the availability of recording equipment of sufficient quality (acquired through personal means or via the BBC) as well as the opening up of a small but growing market for folk music both in the United States and in Britain in the mid-1950s. US influence on the early development of Topic included direct involvement from the musicologist Kenneth Goldstein, whose professional interest in traditional arts combined with an entrepreneurial insight which led him to broker reciprocal agreements between the nascent Topic and the US labels Stinson and Riverside (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Additionally, the increasing involvement of experienced broadcasters and recordists Lloyd and MacColl led to a series of recorded explorations of industrial folk song, and the regional repertoires of the British Isles. Lloyd had been instrumental in steering the WMA toward traditional folk (initially the urban traditions of the US) in his contributions to the WMA's in house publication *Vox Pop* from the mid-1940s onwards (Gregory 2000). Once his experiences recording traditional English singers for the BBC had convinced him of the living status of English folk song and the value of recording traditional performers as an alternative to the classical arrangements of folk music offered by EFDSS, Lloyd took a lasting interest in the Topic label, contributing a number of early releases as a performer and supplying liner notes for many more over the next two decades (Gregory 2000).

By recapturing the traces of an older culture thought to be the authentic artistic expression of the British working class, Topic was a continuation of a movement that had its roots in the interwar activities of cultural activists within and without the WMA.[23] It was also the product of a

[23] Brocken (2003: 58) suggests that the dominance of the label by Lloyd and MacColl in its early days amounted to a 'co-option' by the pair.

particular moment in the technological and social history of Britain and of contemporary debates about the role of technology in society, the place of music in political life, and the status of popular culture. For Leader, Topic replaced the WMA's barricade of pianos with a music that was authentic, rooted in experiences of work, locality and class identity; a complex, highly skilful form of cultural expression in its own right, rather than a simplified version of elite culture. Topic became one of the key institutions of the revival and helped to foster a sense of folk music as the historical cultural expression of working class people, rather than an open resource for musicians and artists of all classes.

The involvement of MacColl (who first recorded for Topic in 1950) and Lloyd as recording artists (and Lloyd as artistic director) meant a greater proportion of British folk song on the label; this caught the attention of Bill Leader who, along with his friend and colleague Alex Eaton, founded a local branch of the WMA and began distributing Topic recordings in their home town of Bradford around 1955 (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Moving to London later the same year Leader began volunteering at the London headquarters in Paddington where his enthusiasm and avowed interest in sound recording led to an appointment as recording manager (ibid.). In 1956, the label announced its decision to focus on British and international traditional song, and in 1958 Gerry Sharp, an accountant working for the WMA, persuaded Alan Bush to let him run Topic as a quasi-independent commercial enterprise in partnership with Leader who began (with guidance from MacColl and Lloyd, as well as ethnomusicologists Kenneth Goldstein and Edgar Waters) to expand the label's catalogue of traditional repertoire (Brocken 2003: 60).[24]

Throughout this transitional period, Topic maintained a strong political ethos: Sharp and Leader's continued sympathy with the international peace movement was reflected in a number of releases by Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson, while links to the TUC and Centre 42 are evidenced by the number of festival participants (including Anne Briggs, Ian Campbell, Louis

[24] Leader reports that for many years after this the label was effectively underwritten by Alan Bush using his own funds. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

Killen and Johnny Handle) that recorded their debut releases for the label between 1962 and 1963. *Songs against the Bomb* (1959), a release timed to coincide with a flurry of CND activity, documented the year's campaign through its songs, with impromptu recording sessions at Ewan MacColl's Ballads and Blues Club and the Partisan Coffee House (Suff 2009: 23). By 1962 the US, Soviet and other foreign imports that had formed the bulk of the label's catalogue had been almost entirely replaced by traditional material performed by revival musicians and source singers from the British Isles. Topic's output began to reflect the general turn towards a regional understanding of British musical traditions that MacColl's Singers' Club had helped to encourage. EPs such as Ray and Archie Fisher's *Far over the Forth* (1961) and Louis Killen and Johnny Handle's *Colliers Rant* (1962) introduced listeners to British regional voices and styles for the first time, and by 1962, the label was firmly established as a central institution of the folk revival with a catalogue dominated by English, Scottish and Irish traditional musicians and revivalist singers.

Recording practice: early sessions

Topic remained a highly specialist, low-budget operation throughout this period. Records were distributed primarily via Colletts' record shop (where Leader also worked during the day) and through the growing network of folk clubs. The label's recording budget was small and recordings were produced without the use of a professional studio. Leader's first recordings were made in 1956, when he assisted MacColl to record the visiting American folk singer Rambling Jack Elliott,[25] and he undertook his first solo recording session on Lloyd's *English Drinking Songs*, produced for Riverside, later the same year.[26] The sessions took place at Lloyd's home at Crooms Hill, Greenwich,

[25] This session was carried out using MacColl's high-speed Ferrograph. Leader believes this machine was a custom order built for the BBC's coverage of the coronation in 1952, with a Wright and Weare deck and a tape speed of up to 15ips, then the professional standard speed in Europe. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).
[26] Topic released six selections from the album in 1961 as the 7" EP *All for me Grog*.

and a large studio flat in South Kensington rented by Hilda Sims of skiffle band the City Ramblers (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).[27]

The tracks were recorded direct to a British-made Vortexion tape recorder using an STC A-type 'ball and biscuit' omnidirectional mic, both hired from the Magnegraph Recording Company in Hanway Place, London (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Leader recalls that Magnegraph had a range of good semi-professional equipment, although what was used for sessions often depended on what was available on the day (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). The STC 'ball and biscuit' was an all-rounder, used in contexts ranging from broadcasting to variety theatre. Leader recalls that 'A-types' had a 'very robust' construction with a 'smooth, open sound' and a 'wide frequency response' and were good at capturing the natural acoustic of a room (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Its omnidirectional pickup pattern meant that performers could arrange themselves around the mic through 360 degrees, making it a suitable choice for multiple source recordings of informal performance contexts. Leader remarks that, in their closeness to 'what the ears hear', single omnidirectional mic recordings present a naturalism very different from the hyper-realism of later multitrack approaches, in which close-miked sources layered in virtual space retain an artificial clarity and warmth (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). When recording group performances with a single omni, the relative volume of sources is set purely by altering their distance from the mic. As sources further away from the mic suffer a loss of definition, single mic omni recordings retain a naturalistic field of focus, which Leader suggests is the closest thing to a neutral representation of a given space (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). In describing his own approach to recording folk song, Leader returns repeatedly to the criterion of 'believability', suggesting that this should be the ultimate aim of producers working in the folk music context (Fieldwork interview, August 2014). This quality, he suggests, is best captured using a single mic approach. In this he echoes the sentiments of

[27] Sims was also a member of Hasted's London Youth Choir and the John Hasted Skiffle and Folksong Group; other members included Shirley Collins and Bert Lloyd. (Gregory 2000).

Folkways founder and recording engineer Moses Asch who remained committed to the one mic technique throughout his career (Bluestein 1987).[28]

English Drinking Songs (released first on the Riverside label in 1956 and then in truncated form as a six track EP *All for me Grog* by Topic in 1961) presented a selection of traditional material associated with the Eel's Foot Inn in Suffolk, a pub which had been the subject of two BBC radio features, the first of which had involved Lloyd as producer and recordist (Gregory 2009: 36).[29] The album is in a sense a return to the atmosphere of these programmes: the liner notes describe the musical context of the Eel's Foot as a 'formal' space in which 'a chairman keeps good order' and '[n]o one sings unless called upon,' but which is nevertheless 'snug and social […] with the wind and the rain outside and the firelight and music within' (Lloyd 1956: n.p.). The songs were arranged for the recording by Lloyd, with additional instrumental accompaniment and backing vocals supplied by members of the City Ramblers.

The recording projects an informal live performance space, with the musicians and singers distributed in a way which corresponds to the real world social context of the pub session. Lloyd's lead vocal occupies a forward position within the slightly resonant space, slightly forward of the accompanying instruments (concertina, banjo and harmonica). The accompanying singers represent a kind of pub audience, participating in and commenting on the performance and as such, belonging to both the recorded performance and the imagined context of the informal pub session. The recording is certainly a step closer to traditional performance style than previous WMA releases. Gregory (2000: 37) notes that 'Lloyd's own singing

[28] Asch told Bluestein (1987) that 'I always believed in the 'one mike [sic] theory - I never accepted the idea of several mikes and mixing. This is the way the mike sounds, and this is the way I hear it. So I only had the one mike on a stand. I even recorded major concerts in Carnegie Hall with one mike. Of, course, it had to be set in the right place. The mikes we used had this beautiful natural quality. And that's still my theory - I hate the stereo recordings, and mixing can never give you the accurate sense of the original sound. That's what I wanted to preserve and document, the actual sound that was there. So I always started to record flat, never with a peak on it, because you were never able then to reconstruct the way it was. Let the equipment have the peaks as you're listening. A hundred years from now it is as natural as the day I recorded it' (Asch quoted in Bluestein 1987: 300).

[29] The first of these, 'Saturday Night at the Eels Foot' (1939), was produced by Jack Dillon and Lloyd. The second 'East Anglia Sings' (1947) was produced by E. J. Moeran and Maurice Brown (Gregory 2000: 36).

style was derived, at least in part, from that of [Harry] Cox', one of the singers featured in the BBC broadcast of 1947 and that Lloyd had already established his credentials as an interpreter of traditional song by taking first place in the category of unaccompanied solo singer at EFDSS Folk Music Festival in 1948.

The recording presents a performance that attempts to replicate elements of authentic traditional style and performance context as well as melody and text. In effect the album is something like an aural song book, to which recording offers the additional dimensions of style and of spatial organisation. Importantly, however, the recording accomplishes something which a printed collection cannot; it reproduces a sense of communal performance and intimate social space, and does so with the immediacy of the sound medium.

Building the WMA's studio

The nomadic practice of recording in the homes of musicians was a policy borne of necessity at this stage in the label's development. However, following the agreement brokered by Kenneth Goldstein between the WMA's General Secretary Will Sahnow and the US label Riverside to produce a series of British folk records for the US market it was decided that the WMA needed to develop its own recording facility (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Leader and a WMA colleague, Dick Sweetenham, began to construct a permanent recording space at the WMA's offices in Paddington soon after they acquired their first tape recorder in 1956. Unable to afford an EMI or BBC tape machine they settled on a semi-professional model produced by disc-cutting specialists Master Sound Systems, the only affordable machine then available capable of matching the professional standard tape speed of 15" per second. Under the guidance of Sweetenham, an EMI trained electrical engineer who went on to design Olympic Studios in Barnes and found the audio firm Helios, the machine was installed in a vacant third floor room, with a larger adjoining space designated as a live room and given the best acoustic treatment the pair could manage, with sandboxes placed in the

windows and carpeting over the wooden floor boards; egg boxes on the walls provided 'a bit of sort of mid to high absorption' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

In accordance with Sweetenham's professional experience at EMI studios, the WMA recording space was modelled on a conventional recording suite, with a larger, acoustically damped live room and a control room for monitoring which also housed the tape recorder and thus doubled as a 'machine room' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Sweetenham donated an EMI ribbon mic and an AKG D19 moving coil, a mid-priced cardioid dynamic mic advertised in the company brochure as a jack-of-all-trades 'for new reports [sic] conferences, lectures, for the many uses of the sound hobbyist' (Recording Hacks 2013: n.p.).[30] Leader used the D19 with its 'peaky mid-lift' primarily as a solo vocal mic, using the ribbon for group recordings (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

The first session undertaken at the WMA studio brought together singer and banjoist Margaret Barry and fiddler Michael Gorman, and was later released (along with additional material previously recorded by Ewan MacColl) as *Street Songs and Fiddle Tunes of Ireland* (1965). The Irish expatriate music scene was growing in London at this time and Barry and Gorman regularly played together at the Bedford Arms, an 'Irish pub' near Leader's flat in Camden Road. Leader was introduced to the pair by the Australian musicologist Edgar Waters and recalls being deeply impressed by what he heard:

> There was this fellow called Michael Gorman who used to sit on one side of the stage […] fantastic fiddle player; completely calm and expressionless. He had a trilby hat which he seldom took off in the course of an evening. And this lady called Margaret Barry, who was from Cork and was a sort of street singer and she had a voice, she had a voice! And she played the banjo, and then other people would be there and join in. Anyway we decided that we'd try and get these Irish

[30] Leader remembers these retailing at around £17 10s in the early 1960s, whereas the more professional quality D12 was around £30 – 'getting on for a month's wages' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

> people round to Paddington and up the stairs and into our studio and play something. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Neither Barry nor Gorman were new to the recording process, having recorded for both Alan Lomax and Ewan MacColl, and were already nationally known, having performed both on BBC television and at the Royal Festival Hall (Arthur 2016). For the session, Barry, Gorman, and three other Bedford Arms regulars arranged themselves 'as they would have wanted to sit to perform' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).[31] Leader and Sweetenham were keen to retain 'natural' performance conditions, encouraging the players to sit 'as convenient for them' and placing the mic so as to obtain a reasonable balance while not losing too much definition on louder sources, such as the piano (which 'tends to be loud but if you move away it starts sounding pretty bloody horrible') moving people 'backwards and forwards' where necessary to achieve a workable balance (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

The session was recorded on a bidirectional EMI ribbon, 'very dead at 90 degrees' with a low output and a muted high-end response (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Leader and Sweetenham monitored from the 'control room' using a single cab equipped with a Stentorian speaker,[32] but the musicians themselves had no monitoring facility (ibid.). The WMA's studio, unlike professional studios at this period where visual contact between live room and desk was maintained via a glass partition, allowed no visual communication between the recordists and musicians during takes (ibid.).[33] However, while Leader acknowledges the desirability of visual contact between performer and recordists in most recording contexts, he does not see it as having been a particular disadvantage in this session (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). They were recording full takes with no edits planned, and so constant reference to visual cues was unnecessary. For

[31] The other players were Paddy Breen (whistle), Tommy Maguire (accordion) and Patsy Goulding (piano).

[32] Stentorian were a range of budget speakers produced by the Whiteley Electrical Radio Company, described in an ad in *Audio* magazine (1959: 54) as 'the leading low-cost speakers in the world today'.

[33] As the WMA had the building on a full repairing lease which was due to expire, Leader suggests that permanent structural alterations would have been discouraged (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

Leader, the important thing was that the musicians were left undisturbed during takes, and that an informal performance playing atmosphere had been established; as Leader puts it, for the musicians, 'it wasn't a studio, it was just another room with another crate of Guinness' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

Leader describes this album as an attempt to bring the atmosphere of the pub into the studio, a recording experience that stayed as close to traditional performance for the players as possible. He admits to having a relatively slight knowledge of Irish music at the time, even claiming that he had difficulty telling one tune from another and describes the record as 'over-produced' as a result (Leader 1987: n.p.): 'I tried', he told Reg Hall in a later interview, 'to impose some preconceived idea of how they should play for the consumption of people who are going to buy records' (ibid.). This involved, for example, the practice of 'soloing' –devising arrangements in which the tune was passed between each musician in turn, something which was not a feature of the Irish tune sessions at the Bedford Arms where unison playing was the norm. Although his attempt to recreate as far as possible the traditional performance context in the studio indicates that Leader was to some extent aware of the specific social character of Irish traditional music and wished to reflect this in his recording practice, the adoption of 'soloing' arrangements suggests that he was also uncertain as to what level of authenticity to traditional performance listeners to the recording would be willing to accept.

At their WMA studio, Leader and Sweetenham took conventional studio practice as the starting point for their recording strategy, but this was clearly inflected by recognition of the primacy of the live performance setting. By organising the recording space to mirror as closely as possible the performance context of the Bedford Arms, they attempted to reproduce an Irish traditional performance as it would have been in its original context. They were, however, constrained by the lack of portable equipment to recording in a studio type setting. The acquisition of a truly portable ReVox tape machine around 1960 resulted in a number of location recordings and Leader was able to move beyond the conventional studio model, developing

strategies which more closely reflected the rituals and conventions of traditional performance (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

Location recording

Although Leader made attempts to record at the Bedford itself, it would be some years before the London Irish session scene was captured by Topic in situ (Leader 1987). Around 1960 the WMA's lease on the building in Paddington expired and Leader was left without a permanent recording space – a situation which persisted for the rest of the decade (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). During this period, the label made use of any available space for recording, a situation made more feasible by the appearance of high-quality portable tape machines at the beginning of the 1960s. Leader acquired a ReVox 736 portable tape machine around 1960 and began to make a series of field and location recordings. This was Leader remarks, 'a natural reaction' to the advance in portable technology: 'This was music that existed in that location and we now had the ability to try and capture it in its natural location' (Leader 1987). The Swiss-made ReVox 736, a unit aimed at the high-end audiophile, the serious hobbyist or the semi-professional recordist. Priced around 124 guineas in 1963, the 736 operated at 3 ¾ or 7 ½" p/s, and could record two signals simultaneously in mono (Reel to Reel 2016a: n.p.). In 1967 ReVox released the A77, a lighter recorder with more advanced specifications including 'calibrated VU-meters, a photo-electric end-of-tape switch, a four-digit tape position indicator and a separate output for stereo headphones with its own volume and balance control […] Facilities for switching off the spooling motors and a special button for tape editing' (Reel to Reel 2016b: n.p.). Leader acquired an A77 around the time they appeared on the market in 1967 (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

That year Leader produced a further attempt to capture the pub culture of London's Irish diaspora, *Paddy in the Smoke* (1968). Made in collaboration with musician and recordist Reg Hall at Irish pub The Favourite, the recording demonstrates how far Leader's recording style had developed over

the previous decade. The recording utilised a stereo pair of cheap Sennheiser mics:[34]

> They were not quite spherical, they were elliptical, flattened spheres, two of them, and they […] fitted into a little rig that made them a stereo pair. And this thing was infinitely adjustable, quite a small thing because most stereo pairs […] were bloody enormous. These were quite discreet. They weren't fancy, they were only moving coil mics, and cheapo ones at that, bit sort of mid-y. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

The pub had a designated area for players and audience around which the recordists had to arrange themselves, 'a tiny, tiny platform that everybody squeezed onto, for the performers. You had to be careful how close you sat to the fiddle player otherwise he'd have your eye out' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). This was not a formal performance space: the pub's non-playing regulars were sometimes attentive to the proceedings and sometimes not, a fact which can be clearly discerned from the recordings: '[T]hey all came out from mass and then started drinking the Guinness. And a lot of them didn't know and didn't care that there was music playing, let alone that there was recording being done. So yes, it was very noisy but that was how it was' (Leader, fieldwork interview August 2014).

The ReVox tape unit was placed to one side of the performers and close to where they were sitting. The mics, arranged as a stereo pair were positioned using a boom, with Leader relying on sight to guide the placement of microphones in the absence of monitoring:

> [A]ll you did really was stick the boom mic as much in the sort of hot spot, as we could see it visually. I'd arrange, orient the pair, use them as a cross pair,[35] then all we had to do was sort of make sure we changed the tape in time to not miss too many interesting things. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

[34] Possibly the MDS-1 Stereo mic, released in 1960.

[35] A crossed pair, also known as the 'X-Y' technique, uses two identical cardioid pattern mics placed as close as possible to one another at an angle of between 90 and 135 degrees, in order to capture a stereo image of a source.

The first track on the album, 'Maudabawn Chapel' takes the listener straight into the space of a busy London pub. The fiddle and piano play a reel, occupying a central position in the space framed by the sounds of conversation and the clinking of glasses. A few seconds into the track a customer calling for the landlord can be heard. The recording suggests a certain fluidity between players and audience – that they are all participants within the same social context. Peta Webb (1998), a participant in sessions at The Favourite in the years following the recording of the album, wrote that, for her, the recordings captured the sound of:

> people enjoying making music together […] people enjoying being there to listen, meet, talk, shout encouragement […] the atmosphere as well as the music, giving a warmth and sense of occasion which is quite different from any studio recording. (Webb 1998: n.p.)

'The point [of the sessions]' she adds, 'was not performance to an audience but the shared experience of being Irish, the exhilaration of playing tunes in common as a shared language – which we, the English observers, were privileged to witness' (Webb 1998: n.p.). Although Leader dismisses the idea that the recordings deliberately set out to produce any kind of social document, for Webb, that is precisely what the recording represents; a music that is inseparable from its performance context, and one that exists within a unique social space. The stereo track captures spatial detail lacking in earlier recordings: music and musicians are framed by a rich social context, a genuinely heteroglossic space; the voices of a community are here, not just the musical conversations of the players, but voices from the fringes of the scene, and of those whose lives merely run in parallel to it.

Leader's description of the session indicates that at this stage there was far more of a performer/audience divide at these sessions than the recording itself might suggest. The pub had a dedicated performance area, and performers took turns rather than playing in unison. The sound of the recording, with Leader's use of overhead mics, however, seems to particularly emphasise the communality of the traditional performance space. Where Lloyd's *Drinking Songs* (1956) presented traditional pub culture through the lens of revivalist interpretations, and *Street Songs* (1965) attempted to adapt

the atmosphere of the Bedford to the WMA's makeshift studio, *Paddy in the Smoke* (1968) seems to bring the microphone into the authentic space of traditional performance. While the WMA studio recording places the listener in a neutral position, *Paddy in the Smoke* positions the listener as a privileged bystander to genuine socio-musical interaction. The recording also reflects revivalist assumptions about traditional music and its social role, constructing the music as about social relationships, about belonging, and about process. These recordings show how Leader's practice during this period was gradually adapted to the aim of capturing traditional music in social context, and how new technologies such as stereo and portable tape afforded creative possibilities for the representation of informal music-making outside of the studio context.

Recording the folk club scene

Topic responded to the folk boom of the early 1960s by releasing several recordings of revivalist singers. An early success was the Spinners' *Songs Spun in Liverpool* (1962), an EP recorded on location at the group's club. Those involved in the recording stress the informality of the approach, The Spinners' Tony Davis linking the ease and spontaneity of the session with the subsequent commercial success of the recordings: 'Bill Leader came up to our club with a microphone and a Ferrograph tape recorder, plonked it down and recorded the night […] it was the best-selling EP Topic ever brought out' (Davis cited in Bean 2014: 253). Leader also stresses the spontaneity of the session; 'we didn't have a studio and anyway, you couldn't bring a club into a studio so we had to go there. Location recording was the thing'. Leader:

> It was mono so you had nothing to set up. We did have a speaker, so you just plugged the one mic you'd got into the speaker and drove the tape machine and tried to be fairly clever as to where you put that one mic to hear the balance. An acoustic group you can record on one microphone, no problem at all. (Leader cited in Bean 2014: 252-253)

The recording starts with the invocation 'Let's hear you now!' as the band launch into the song 'Whip Jamboree' with enthusiastic vocal support

from audience members. The ensemble of guitar, mandolin, mouth organ and vocals (of which the vocals and mandolin are the most prominent throughout, reflecting natural loudness ratios) are again closely grouped. Loud applause follows each track and the audience remains audibly present even when comparatively hushed during quiet sections of performances. There is a high degree of audience participation in the form of chorus singing, and on the track 'Hayarden', an Israeli folk-song, audience and performers merge, as the crowd provide an ostinato vocal accompaniment to the female lead vocal. This suggests a setting in which the audience are very much in on proceedings, physically enveloping the group and freely contributing to the songs vocally. The recording includes foot-tapping from performers and audience noise and at several points the vocals overdrive the microphone, producing distortion. On one track ('Hayarden' again) the sound of traffic outside (including the squeal of a bus's airbrake) can be discerned over the relatively quiet performance. These intrusions of reality into the performance space, however, rather than marring the recording's 'fidelity' might be read as tokens of it; the 'extraneous' noises and even the distortion that pepper the recording testify to the recording's status as a document of a spontaneous, non-repeatable event. The recording brings the listener firmly within the space of the performance event, which must be negotiated and understood upon its own terms. Like the recording of the Favourite on *Paddy in the Smoke*, it represents the relationships and rituals of a musical community in process.

Despite the vivid sense of a community at play captured in these recordings, Leader denies any conscious attempt at social documentary. Nevertheless, going into the actual space of performance, though impractical, was an ideal for Leader:

> [T]hings are stronger for being real than being reconstructed, but it wasn't that practical to try and document things that were happening in folk clubs […] But whereas some people would have said we can't possibly do this live we have to bring it into the studio, tidy it all up, we didn't ever take that view. Go where the music is has been our

> main thing, or go where the musicians tend to gather. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Leader's home recording style

Location recordings of this type were in fact a rarity amongst Topic's output and most recordings were still made in the homes of musicians or sympathetic WMA members. Leader continually sought out any 'suitable big room with reasonable sound separation from outside noises where an ad hoc studio could be set up', and recorded several of the label's early successes in his own flat in North Villas, Camden Square, 'a two room, kitchen and bathroom on the first floor of an Edwardian house' whose 'back room was lined with books and tapes […] a great acoustic treatment' (Suff 2009: 29; Bean 2014). Many recordings were made with a single mic or cross-paired AKG D12s going into Leader's twin-channel ReVox.[36] The sessions at Leader's flat were intimate affairs. Singer/guitarist Martin Carthy (who recorded unreleased tracks for Leader before signing to Fontana in 1965) recalled that Leader arranged his flat according to a traditional studio configuration, with performers in the 'live room' (bedroom) and Leader in another room (usually the living room) which was designated as a monitoring space/machine room: 'He had a Revox [sic] set up in one room and you went and stood in the other room, with the microphone, and he'd give you the signal, which was the light going on and off' (Harper 2000: 146). Leader seems to have subsequently moved away from this approach, however, preferring to record and monitor in the same room as the performers:

> [T]he whole idea was you sat in a room […] with a pair of headphones, I'd be on one side, they'd be on the other. We'd get the mics right, I could hear what they could doing […] so I could monitor on the way, and it would be better than just having a pane of glass because if anything went wrong you'd get an odd gesture, and they'd look skywards […] and they'd go back and start the verse again you

[36] Only occasionally did a project use separate stereo channels for sources. Leader mentions the Robin and Barry Dransfield album *Rout of the Blues* (1970) made for his own label Trailer as a rare experiment with stereo tracking (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

> didn't have to put down the talk back and say, 'would you mind going back and …' 'you, what did you say then?' So you could really get things on a roll. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Headphones allowed for monitoring within the performance space itself and the twin AKG D12s, arranged as a stereo pair, allowed a small corridor of dead space in which to work (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). In this intimate, shared working space, Leader remarks, exchanges of subtle visual and non-verbal cues between producer and performer became possible. Leader was also placed in the position of an ideal listener, continually responding to each performance as it unfolded. The recording setting was a recognisable version of a more everyday sort of performance relationship, albeit somewhat heightened; the sounds produced by the singer were monitored closely, stops and starts were allowed, and edits could be made. Leader's co-presence within the space of performance allowed him to respond visually to the performer's smallest gestures and to intervene directly in the performance. As he notes, there was less need for verbal communication, a raised eyebrow or other non-verbal gesture being sufficient to indicate the necessity of a fresh take (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

Representing the recording process

A notable aspect of the construction of sound recording practice in the discourse of the revival is the way in which revivalist approaches are offset against the supposed impersonality of modern commercial studio culture: MacColl, who made his earliest studio recordings in the 1950s recalled the experience in negative terms:

> It was lonely sitting in the centre of that enormous studio at HMV with only the microphone for company […] I didn't know anyone in the place and nobody spoke to me except to tell me where to sit. The technicians, looking like hospital orderlies in their white coats, did nothing to reduce the tension and formality of the occasion. (Harker 2007: 104)

MacColl represents his visit to the technocratic space of the HMV studio as something more akin to a medical procedure than a performance. By contrast, descriptions of Leader's recording style often emphasise its spontaneous, informal and even slightly eccentric aspect. John Renbourn, who recorded in a professional studio for Columbia before working with Leader in 1966 recalled that, 'studio engineers wore laboratory coats and this kind of thing. If you were in a studio it was all very BBC-y and regimented […] but Bill wasn't like that at all' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). As Dave Arthur (2012) remembered it:

> The proceedings were often interrupted by the noise of low-flying aircraft or car horns and the screeching of brakes from nearby Camden Road, the floor was frequently ankle deep in recording-tape as Leader wielded his editor's razor blade, cutting and splicing tracks together, and sometimes mislaying the odd verse on the floor. (Arthur 2012: 257)

In Arthur's description of a far from ideal and improvised work-space there is something suggestive of the hobbyist or crank, haphazardly operating a makeshift studio in the face of technical difficulties and in pursuit of a highly personal goal. Yet Leader defends his approach as:

> a great way to record, sitting in a room and there's a person […] I maintained eye contact, I didn't start wandering off, reading the newspaper or anything. So yes, I was paying attention to them and they could pay attention to me if that was the preferred method of doing it. I think it's a great way of doing it. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Leader constructs his own approach to recording in opposition to that of conventional studios: asked whether first-time recording artists were ever nervous, he responded by comparing the conditions in his flat to those in the 'typical studio', a mythical space which (echoing MacColl) he imbues with overtones of scientistic detachment and even sinister hidden motives:

> I think it's much more nerve-wracking to say 'you go in there sonny Jim and I'll be in here and you're all on your own, and that funny

> noise is me dropping the cyanide capsule, and just breathe deeply and all will be well. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Here Leader evokes the studio of 1950s myth, a space of 'despotic and prohibitive architectures' in which 'low affect technicians who could just as easily invent a new kind of plastic, or cure a disease or make an atom bomb' (Doyle 2013: 905). Leader explicitly refers to representations of the sound studio in the films of the time:

> As you can tell from any film you saw about recording studios, and American broadcast studios and things like that – completely unreal and unrealistic. If you go into a separate room, a live room, and there's a hefty brick wall and several plates of glass between you and the other person, who's also got some other people in, maybe your mates, who are not actually involved in what's happening, just at the moment, then before very long, you're in there, pouring out your little heart into the microphone and they'll be having a chat about what was happening last night with half an ear on what might be going right or wrong. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

The studio is constructed as a cold, artificial space characterised by a separation from the everyday and a lack of empathy, both 'unreal and unrealistic'. By contrast, Leader constructs his own approach as human in scale, a kind of enhanced performance environment, in which the interpersonal dynamic established between performer and producer (acting as a kind of proxy audience) is heightened rather than deliberately disrupted.

Recording, social space and proxemics

I have described the spatial characteristics of the folk recordings discussed so far in order to indicate how they related to ideals of folk performance and the kinds of social relationships this was thought to enact. Where the location recordings discussed above were concerned primarily with the relationships common to specific contexts of traditional performance (and spaces of community interaction) Leader's home recordings were more concerned with the interpersonal relationship between performer and listener, presenting an

ideal of musical inter-subjectivity. It will be useful here to return to the notion of proxemics introduced in the first chapter. Recent work by Moore (2012) and Zagorski-Thomas (2014) has suggested that Hall's (1966) notion of proxemics can provide a useful framework for discussing the way recordings represent the dynamics of interpersonal space both within the performance environment presented in the recording itself and in the relationship of performer to listener as constituted by the act of listening. Hall's (1966: 112) basic insight is that 'informal spatial patterns have distinct bounds, and such deep, if unvoiced, significance that they form an essential part of the culture'. His theory deals with the effects of the organisation of shared social spaces (including the built environment and the layout of interiors) on individual behaviour, as well as the significance of distance in interpersonal interaction (Hall 1966). Hall identifies four 'distances' or zones of interpersonal interaction; 'intimate', 'personal', 'social' and 'public' (Hall 1966: 110-120). Each zone constitutes a range of interactional possibilities; 'the kinaesthetic sense of closeness derives in part from the possibilities present in regard to what each participant can do to the other with his extremities' (Hall 1966: 113). Intimate distance (the space between 6" and 18" from a person's body) is associated with a range of physical contact which includes both sexual intimacy and the enhanced threat of physical violence (Hall 1966: 110-112). Personal distance' (between 1.5'-4') is suggestive of relations between good friends or members of the same family and entails that 'one can hold or grasp the other person' (113). Social distance, (between 4'-12') is the space shared by acquaintances, while public distance (between 12'-25'+) suggests the configuration associated with public speaking. These distances imply different styles of vocalization and verbal registers: while the intimate range involves limited vocal communication, the social range is the site of everyday conversation, and the public range demands slower, more formalised forms of speech and less complex syntax.

Other factors that affect interpretations of the meaning of proxemic range are contextual cues (including verbal, visual and even olfactory data) (Hall 1966: 109). In musical applications the sense of interpersonal distance created by a recording is a function not only of the position of sources relative

to the microphone, or of mix position (in the case of multitracked or overdubbed recordings) but of a combination of these aspects of production with other socio-musical cues. The interpretation of the meaning-potential of proxemic distance is inflected by lyrical, melodic, harmonic, timbral and other relevant musical material, as well as by vocal effort. In order to illustrate this approach, I will look at some examples drawn from *The Iron Muse: A panorama of industrial folksong* (1963) and *New Voices* (1965).

Proxemics in *The Iron Muse* and *New Voices*

The Iron Muse (1963) like the published collection *Come All Ye Bold Miners* (1952) was an illustration of MacColl and Lloyd's notion of industrial folksong. The album featured a selection of ballads and songs from Britain's industrial communities arranged and performed by leading performers on the folk scene including MacColl, Lloyd, Louis Killen[37] and The High Level Ranters.[38] Sessions were conducted in a large basement room in London belonging to a journalist sympathetic to the WMA. *New Voices* (1965) was recorded at Leader's Camden Town flat, and featured performers new to the scene who specialised in English regional repertoire. Lancashire based singer Harry Boardman[39] represented the folk music of the industrial north-west, The Watersons the song tradition of Yorkshire, and Maureen Craik[40] that of Tyneside. While both albums were recorded in non-specialised spaces, these arguably became studios for the duration of the recording session insofar as

[37] Louis (later Louisa) Killen (1934-2013) a singer and concertina player from Gateshead. An influential club performer and recording artist specialising in Tyneside and Northumbrian repertoire, Killen also recording several albums for Topic, worked on the BBC *Radio Ballads* and later was a singing tutor on Newcastle University's folk and traditional music degree programme (Schofield 2013).

[38] The High Level Ranters were a Newcastle-based band associated with the Bridge Hotel at the Newcastle end of the city's high level bridge and specialised in Northumbrian and Tyneside repertoire.

[39] Harry Boardman (1930-1987) was a singer from Failsworth, Greater Manchester, specialising in Lancashire repertoire. In 1954, apparently unaware of the existence of MacColl's Ballads and Blues club, he started a folk song 'circle' at a pub in Manchester, one of the first folk clubs outside of London (Schofield 2015). He features on several Topic albums, including *Deep Lancashire* (1968) and *'Owdham' Edge* (1970).

[40] Newcastle singer Maureen Craik (b.1944), despite being praised by A.L. Lloyd (1965: n.p.) for the 'vigour and candour of her singing', never recorded for Topic again and I have been unable to find any information on her later career.

they were physically re-organised to minimise noise and non-musical elements.

The organisation of sound sources within the recorded environment and the use of different interpersonal proxemic registers to inflect musical-textual meaning are evident on several tracks on *The Iron Muse*. Johnny Handle's 'Doon the Waggonway' is sung to a nylon-strung guitar accompaniment and addresses the listener from a personal distance, an effect achieved by a combination of mic placement (the singer's breathing and sounds of articulation can be clearly heard between phrases) and the relatively dead recording environment. This evocation of a personal distance (bordering on intimate – 'touching distance') highlights the tenderness of the lyric and the loving relationship that is implied between the protagonist and the third person of the song's narrative ('my lad's a canny lad/ the canniest I see'). Ewan MacColl's 'Oh, Dear Me' also adopts a position somewhere between the personal and the intimate but here seems to suggest a protagonist singing (or thinking) to himself, a position also suggested by the thoughtful lyric, which strays from musings on social organisation ('oh dear me/ the world is ill divided, them that work the hardest/ are the least provided') to more personal worries about how 'to feed and clothe my bairnies/ off 'n 10 and 9'.

A different proxemic range is in evidence on Louis Killen's 'The Blackleg Miners' which features male lead vocal with fiddle and banjo accompaniment. The text is a strike song which both warns and threatens actual and potential strike-breakers of potentially fatal retaliation, concluding with the warning:

> So join the union while ye may.
>
> Don't wait till your dyin' day,
>
> For that may not be far away,
>
> You dirty blackleg miner.

In contrast to the intimate, tender interpersonal distance set up in the previous tracks, the song is delivered in a full-voiced style by Killen, as if addressed to a crowd. The recording subtly manages the balance between vocal and accompanying instruments through mic positioning and Killen's voice is situated at a public distance from the listener, suggesting a performance aimed at more than one addressee. Watson (1983: 144) has argued that the staging of this song constitutes 'a clear reflection of the agitational tone of the revival in the 1950s' and that 'the atmospheric effect is less that of a kitchen-singer than of a performer at a demonstration or a rally (ibid.: 145). This reading is a direct result of the production: the staging of the song as an expression of communal protest which hails the listener as a potential comrade (or warns them as potential enemy) is constructed through the proxemic distance instantiated by the recording itself. The recording process implicitly interprets the song inviting a particular range of interpretations.

'The Sandgate Girl's Lament/Elsie Marley' by The High Level Ranters features a closely grouped ensemble (accordion/male vocal, concertina, fiddle and guitar). The balance between the instruments reflects the relative loudness of the instruments in performance; there is no obvious layering/balancing of the sources through microphone placement. As a result, the fiddle and concertina, which would dominate in a live setting are the clearest sources heard on the recording while the guitar is less easily discernible, only becoming present at certain points in the performance (mainly in the spaces between melodic phrases played on the two loudest instruments). The lyric deals with the disappointment of a young girl who has married a 'keel lad' who is boorish and violent:

I was a young maid truly,
And lived in Sandgate Street,
I thought to marry a canny lad,
To be with me at neet,

Some good-like body,
Some canny body
To be with me at noon;
But I have married a keel lad,
And my good days are done.

He's an ugly body, a bubbly body,
An ill-faced hideous loon,
But I have married a keel lad
And my good days are done.

The male lead vocal emerges from within the ensemble and occupies a central role within it, remaining the focal point of the recording, except during instrumental breaks, and in the tune 'Elsie Marley', which follows the song in the second half of the track, when it is replaced as a focal point by the prominent pairing of concertina and fiddle. The performance environment is a dry, interior space with very short reverberation. The vocal is positioned at a social distance from the listener, and addresses 'the room' rather than an individual listener. The lyric features a young female protagonist (the 'Sandgate girl' of the title) and the overlaying of the exuberantly male persona suggested by the recording exploits the gap between the subject of the song and that of the performance to ironise the position implied in the lyric, so that when the song's protagonist complains of her 'bloody disgrace' of a husband (a 'keel lad') the performance opens up the possibility of a secondary (knowingly self-effacing but at least partly celebratory) identification by the singer with the latter. This reading is supported by the sense of male solidarity and comradeship suggested by the close grouping and internal configuration of the ensemble, and by the 'close', interior spatial characteristics of the recording environment which suggests a pub-session type set up, an enclosed, male-dominated social space.

Newcastle singer Maureen Craik's reading of the same song on *New Voices* (1965) takes a different approach. The recording features Craik's voice

unaccompanied and centrally positioned within a noticeably reverberant performance environment. Craik's voice produces long echoes which suggest a large empty space, devoid of any significant obstructions between herself and the listener, and in which she is the only person present. The perceived distance location of her voice, combined with the perceived nature of the recording space (empty and echoing) suggests a public, rather than a social or personal proxemic register, but one lacking a public, as if she is addressing an empty hall. The age (youth) and gender (female) of her voice closely match those of the song's implied subject-position. The refrain of the song ('I have married a keel lad/ and my good days are done') becomes once again a lament for the passage into adulthood experienced as disappointment. However, the reverberant treatment of the vocal separates the recorded 'persona' (Craik, the singer) from the subject of the text, insofar as it reveals it *as* a studio performance – the use of reverb, the public, expository mode of address constructed through the combination of mic placement and vocal effort suggest a recital, seeming to situate the song in the past, and (though in a markedly contrasting way from the High Level Ranters' performance) encourage a different, though still ironic reading of the lyric, implying perhaps that the singer would not make the same mistake as the protagonist. In the listening context of the mid-1960s, Craik's youthful reading of an older text simultaneously restores a sense of unity between protagonist and performer and evokes connotations which contrast with the worldview of the lyric, revealing its basis in the experiential context of a former age.

In these examples, as in the pop recordings considered in the first half of this chapter, the recording process not only captures performances but interprets them. While the perceived space of performance in these recordings continues to reference that of live performance, the recording acts as a further dimension of performance in these examples, with spatial characteristics of the sound sources and microphone proxemics significantly affecting the meaning-potential of the musical material presented. This process is a dialectical one: production features and textual-musical features constantly inflect one another in ways that can reinforce, ironize or undermine particular readings.

Conclusion

Topic's recording style emerged out of the ideological milieu of the folk movement and must be understood in the context of contemporary debates about pop culture and its perceived negative social effects. The evolution of its practice was part of a process of re-discovering and representing the social contexts of traditional music as a corrective to the growth of an inauthentic mass mediated pop culture. Despite revivalist imaginings of recording as a simple, reflective process, however, pop producers and folk recordists alike used recording performatively, interpreting existing texts and performances and contributing material for aesthetic interpretation by listeners. The ways in which the recording medium was exploited reveal different aesthetics and even different politics. Where pop recordings employed the semiotic resources of the studio in order to construct complex spatio-musical environments which were often oriented towards the exploration of individual affect and interiority, folk recordings, on the other hand, used recording to privilege live, face-to-face performance, conveying a sense of realistic space, and constructing interpersonal relationships that referenced values of social intimacy and egalitarianism. The recordings produced by Topic during this period, I suggest, helped to realise an ideology of revival that sought to reclaim performance as authentic interpersonal communication, against mass-mediated forms of cultural interaction.

As recording manager for the label, Leader's technique was not ramshackle or eccentric as some accounts suggest, but considered and innovative, evolving with time and circumstances. Although clearly affected by both technological and economic constraints, his practice was not wholly determined by them. As argued in Chapter 1, accounts of recording which emphasise the primacy of the material while seeking to minimise the agency of producers, are often doing ideological work. They act to reassert the independence of the original performance from the processes of technological and aesthetic mediation involved in recording. Rather than being determined by the nature of the music as a discrete mode of social practice, Topic's recording style as it developed in this early period reflected broader ideological commitments shared by the folk revival and the wider Leftist

cultural discourses out of which it emerged. Rather than a transparent process of capture, recording was one of the processes whereby the meaning of folk music was constructed for contemporary listeners, and in which the values of the revival as a movement were realised.

Chapter 4. Professionalisation and creative autonomy in the studio: the case of Pentangle, 1968–1972

Introduction

As argued in the previous chapter, in the popular discourse of the early 1960s, studio production was more or less synonymous with commercialism. Since the late 1940s the pop industry had increasingly invested in star performers rather than songwriters and pop's creative centre of gravity shifted decisively from the songwriter to the recording studio (Zak 2012: 46). As a result, like the Hollywood sound stage before it, the studio became an object of fascination for the general public, and idealised representations of studio recording became a feature of popular films such as *Young Man with a Horn* (1950), *Jailhouse Rock* (1957) and *It's Trad, Dad!* (1962) (Doyle 2013: 903). In cinema, the studio, now 'the place where both the performance and the performer were manufactured', was represented as a 'magical chamber', 'laboratory' or 'crucible', at once wonderful and potentially sinister (ibid.). In fan literature the studio was exposed as a place of complex, quasi-scientific labour and explosive creativity, simultaneously magical and mundane. Readers of *The Radio Luxembourg Book of Record Stars 1962* were taken behind the scenes of EMI's Abbey Road studios, an 'innocent looking house' which concealed 'the biggest recording star factory in the world' (Shapiro 1962: 16). The piece introduced readers to the 'balance' and 'control engineers' and their strange professional dialect (including such snippets of technical jargon as 'give it a little more top, 'try and get a bit more edge' or 'how about some more echo?') (ibid.: 17). The writer also attempted to demystify the infamous 'echo chamber' which readers were reassured was simply 'a loud-speaker facing one of the walls, placed at an angle so that when a sound is sent through the speaker the waves come out, bounce off the wall and are picked up by two microphones placed at the back of the room' (ibid.).

Despite such attempts to simultaneously demystify and legitimise the studio as a locus of creative endeavour suspicions about the true purpose of the machinery were difficult to dispel and studio technology in pop music

remained a source of controversy amongst critics and audiences alike. Record production figured in debates as the division point between art and commerce, where authentic cultural expression gave way to commercial appropriation. Where many audiences were able to embrace what Zak (2012) calls the 'no-fi' aesthetic – a production style completely divorced from the mimetic reproduction of reality – for those who continued to uphold the cause of sonic fidelity and traditional musical (and by implication social) values, the studio represented a space where technical wizardry was used primarily to deceive.

This conceptualization of the production process as one of adulteration led to a valorisation of sounds which appeared less mediated and which seemed to escape the distorting effects of the apparatus relatively unscathed. The naturalist aesthetic of revivalist folk recordings in the 1950s exemplifies this: as Chapter 3 argued, the commercial studio was typically represented in the discourse of the folk revival as an alien space demanding careful negotiation. For folk music audiences at the beginning of the 1960s the line dividing genuine folk music from its commercial derivatives was at least partly a question of inauthentic technological practices; the unadorned sound of revivalist recordings signalled a rejection of studio artifice and thus of the pop industry's commercial values, while strategies for recording traditional music on location reasserted the priority of traditional performance contexts over the studio and autonomous musicians over recording stars.

As the revival began to generate commercial interest, however, folk music found itself on the margins of a new expanded mainstream. By the mid-1960s the youth record market was booming, opening up a potential source of huge revenues for record labels, who found themselves forced to speculate, investing unprecedented amounts of time and money in experimental signings. While the majors found themselves temporarily at sea in an unpredictable market, independent labels such as Transatlantic, Chrysalis and Island emerged to take advantage of the knowledge gap, exploiting their subcultural capital to tap into the increased demand for a range of previously specialist musics including Britain's folk and traditional repertoire. For a small number of folk musicians a professional recording career became a possibility for the first time.

How was the culture of the commercial studio experienced by these revival musicians making the transition from club performers to professional recording artists in the 1960s? And how were their studio experiences mediated by the notions of authenticity and creative autonomy attendant upon the ideology of the folk movement? The recording career of the jazz-folk band Pentangle, which spanned the creative and commercial zenith of the progressive rock era, provides evidence about how musicians concerned with taking ownership of their recorded work in a commercial production context reconciled their studio experience with their own notions of authenticity in creative practice. Additionally, it offers an insight into how the roles of producer, engineer and musician changed more generally during the period, as older institutional models gave way to new practices, and the perceived role and status of technology in popular music culture shifted significantly. This chapter draws on interviews with the band's guitarist John Renbourn, singer Jacqui McShee and producers Bill Leader and Shel Talmy to consider how the band sought to redraw the terms of their relationship with the studio, transforming it from a site of constraint to one increasingly perceived in terms of creative possibility.

The folk scene and countercultural ideology

Pentangle, who recorded their first album for Transatlantic in 1968, were among a number of young British musicians who, having made their names individually on the club circuit, found themselves working in a professional studio context with greatly expanded financial and technological resources at their disposal. The band had roots in the folk revival, and drew much of their material from American folk and blues and the ballad tradition of the British Isles. They were also influenced by the discourse of the rock counterculture: much of their music was based around the jazz and blues-influenced improvisational techniques common to progressive rock, emphasising the individual virtuosity of the band's four instrumentalists. Lyrically, the band's original material dealt with esoteric or highly personal themes and as such had more in common with US singer-songwriters of the period than with British

revivalist songwriters who took MacColl and Seeger as their main political and aesthetic point of reference.

Both the folk revival and the rock counterculture espoused strong anti-commercial principles. Although they were amongst the most commercially successful folk acts of the late 1960s, the band's singer Jacqui McShee and guitarist John Renbourn are careful to distance themselves from any notion of careerism or commercial drive. McShee in particular presents herself as a reluctant performer who came to singing through other activities and whose musical career unfolded largely 'in spite of' herself:

> I used to belong – and I still do – to CND […] that's where I started singing, my sister and I. Just on the marches. And they said we had good voices so we had to lead the singing. It didn't matter then you know, but to actually sing in front of an audience was something else. (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

Renbourn too emphasises the casual nature of his entry into the profession:

> Early on it was just people scuffling around […] The idea that […] everyone was out to make a career out of it […] it was not that at all. It just sort of happened to some of us that we got signed to record companies and then things started to happen. Initially we were just a bunch of people that liked that kind of music. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

Policy clubs and the alternative scene

The eclectic ethos of the scene from which Pentangle emerged was far removed from (and even consciously opposed to) that of the 'policy clubs' associated with Ewan MacColl and his followers. Ostensibly a response to the musical free-for-all of skiffle and the popular music industry's growing interest in the folk scene, MacColl's policy of restricting performers at his Ballads and Blues Club to their own 'native' repertoire coalesced around 1958 and was further solidified by the founding of his Singers' Club in 1960 (MacKinnon 1993; Harker 2007). MacColl feared that the eclectic and internationalist approach favoured in many clubs would result in cultural

'grey-out', a form of musical 'Esperanto' (Seeger quoted in Brocken 2003: 36). The policy required that: 'residents, guest singers and those who sang from the floor should limit themselves to songs which were in a language the singer spoke or understood' (MacColl 1990: 287-288). In practice, this appears to have been interpreted far more strictly, with singers expected to confine themselves to repertoire from their own region or even city of origin (Bean 2014: 102).[1] The approach was soon taken up in other clubs around the country and at one point MacColl claimed that there were 1500 such clubs in existence (Brocken 2003: 37). The profound seriousness of MacColl's vision, however, could result in a 'sect-like atmosphere' in which less politically motivated performers might be deliberately made to feel unwelcome (Gammon quoted in Brocken 2003: 34).

In this context, the musical eclecticism of other 'non-traditional' clubs could be seen as a deliberate rejection of the MacCollite orthodoxy (Harker 2007). Les Cousins,[2] the Soho club where Renbourn and fellow Pentangle guitarist Bert Jansch served an apprenticeship alongside singer songwriters such as Jackson C. Frank, Paul Simon and Roy Harper was, Renbourn says, 'an alternative hovel where me and Bert used to sit around and play our ideas' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). The club had 'no music policy at all […] what was good about it in retrospect was that anything could happen, anyone could play anything. It had absolutely no musical policy or traditional bias or anything like that, it was totally open which was great' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014).

[1] If this injunction to stick to one's own 'native tradition' was primarily aimed at protecting Britain's indigenous folk traditions from the forces of Americanisation (and commercialism), it was motivated by something more than aesthetic purism. MacColl aimed to stimulate collecting at the grassroots level by encouraging young singers to search out their own local repertoires and thus enrich the known corpus of British traditional song (Harker 2007: 159). Critics accused MacColl of hypocrisy (as a regular performer of both Scots and American repertoire he seemed to exempt himself from the policy) and of using the policy to exert personal control over the aesthetics of the folk scene (Harker 2007: 162). But while the accounts of his contemporaries offer plenty of evidence of MacColl's domineering attitude, his resistance to criticism and the reverence with which his ideas were often treated by his followers, it is unlikely that MacColl was motivated solely by the desire to assert his dominance over the folk scene; instead, the policy concept should be viewed as a genuine (if misguided and dogmatic) attempt by MacColl to mobilise the revival's growing network in the recovery of Britain's local traditional repertoires.

[2] Always anglicised as 'The Cousins' (Kerr, Fieldwork interview, February 2014).

Although McShee and Renbourn were deeply attracted to the British folk repertoire, both felt to some extent rejected by the more purist element within the folk scene because of their equal interest in American traditions. McShee describes an early visit to one of the more purist clubs with her then musical partner Chris Ayliffe:

> We did a floor spot at the Troubadour in London and I wasn't aware how traditional it was and we sang a couple of American things and this chap came up to me afterwards – Martin [Carthy] was playing there – […] and this guy came up and said 'we don't do American songs here we only do British traditional'. And Martin came up and said 'don't take any notice of him love, you sing whatever you like. Sing what you want to sing'. (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

Although McShee attended MacColl's Singer's Club and enjoyed the repertoire performed there, she found the authoritarian atmosphere of the club unappealing:

> I used to go to the Singer's Club and Ballads and Blues and I loved the songs. But my overriding memory is that there wasn't a bar and that if you went out at the interval to get a drink, if you didn't come back on time Ewan MacColl would sing the longest ballad he could and you weren't allowed in so you'd be outside waiting to get in and he did it every week. I was far too scared [to perform]. But I loved Peggy Seeger, I loved those American songs. (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

The growth of a less traditionally-oriented scene centred on venues like The Cousins and the Bristol Troubadour provided an alternative support network for Renbourn and his contemporaries: 'There were just a few gigs that were coming up that were sort of accepting people like me and Bert [Jansch] because previously the folk people, well they didn't want it at all, right? The Singers' Club type clubs' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). Alternative venues, including The Howff in Edinburgh where Jansch performed, taught and even lived for a while, were key points of

intersection between the folk revival and the counterculture (Harper 2000). At The Howff revivalists and 'proto-hippies' like Robin Williamson (later to form the psychedelic act The Incredible String Band) mingled with traditional traveller singers and musicians:

> It was a mixture, and those characters like Clive and Robin [Williamson] befriended some of the old traditional singers who were playing at the Howff and there was a real, real melting pot of stuff […] They would have met Jimmy MacBeath[3] and the tinker people. Funny blend really. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

Renbourn's account of the period suggests that the countercultural ideology underlying this more eclectic scene had more to do with liberal values of individualism and non-conformity than the class-conscious communitarianism espoused by the MacColl and the 'Singer's Club type clubs'. This, he suggests, was part of a wider sense of generational difference:

> We were on the cusp of some kind of cultural thing where if you had long hair it was heinous and if you wore Brylcream you were a proper man – it was that sort of thing, you know. And then it came the time to get a job and quite honestly none of us wanted to do that so we stuck with the music and went hitchhiking. Everybody seemed to be dossing around and travelling so I met more people on the road just going around and about in those days and they all sort of played a bit of Big Bill Broonzy or Rambling Jack. I don't think it was an emulation of the American beat movement or anything like that but it could have been. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

In the music of Pentangle and many of their peers, traditional music, rather than a vehicle for experiences of collectivity or an expression of class identity, was incorporated into a larger musical language which became a means of individual expression linked to a lifestyle ethos which emphasised freedom, eclecticism and exploration. As in the ideology of progressive rock,

[3] Jimmy McBeath (1894–1972) Scottish traveller singer with a large repertoire of Bothy songs and ballads. He won a large revivalist following after his performance at the Edinburgh 'People's Ceilidh' in 1951 (Munro, 1984).

the liberal value of personal autonomy was given more weight than expressions of collective identity.

Moore (2012) notes that belief in the artist's creative autonomy is of central importance to how popular music audiences have evaluated the authenticity of musical products:

> On the one hand, an expression is valued because its production appears to rest on the integrity of the performer, an integrity that is read as secure, as in some sense comfortable. On the other hand, an expression is denigrated because that integrity appears […] to have been compromised (whether by the unacceptable face of capitalism, or just by too much thinking). (Moore 2012: 262)

Moore (2012: 264) cites Gracyk (1996) for whom the concept of authenticity in rock culture rests on enlightenment theories of the unified subject, and is 'bound up with rock's association with the project of liberalism […] founded as it is on the identification of a pre-existent subjectivity'. According to the countercultural ideology of rock, in which music is understood as the unmediated expression of a powerful and centered subjectivity, performances which successfully convey a sense of authentic expression allow us to perceive this subject as unified, while those which fail to do so appear to present us with a conflicted or fragmented subject. As a result, the relationship between the musician as performing subject and the commercial-technical apparatus has often been represented as an antagonistic binary, pitting the performer against the corporate machine, conceptualising the industry and the technological apparatus together as a system of boundaries or constraints to be overcome.

Emerging from a subculture which valorised personal freedom and creative autonomy, Pentangle, like many of their contemporaries, found they had little control over the sound of their own records at first. As they were to discover over the course of several recording projects, the access to technologies and knowledge which was required for them to take ownership over the sound of their own records had to be negotiated in the context of

institutional structures, established traditions of studio practice, and jealously guarded professional boundaries.

Pentangle and their producers

In the early 1960s the techniques available for sculpting the sound of the recorded work were typically concentrated in the hands of the engineer/producer. Musicians hired by the session would not under ordinary circumstances have entered the control room. Production issues were considered outside the remit of musicians, in part because they were perceived as technical rather than aesthetic in nature. The problem of balancing a stereo mix, for example, initially had as much to do with preventing the record stylus skipping as with any musical concerns, such as, for example, the desire to present a realistic stereo image in line with performance convention (Dockwray and Moore 187-188). There were also cultural barriers that defined roles and separated musicians from involvement in production, one of which was the lack of access to technical knowledge on the part of musicians. Training for sound engineers was often informal, but required considerable dedication and luck to acquire. Bill Leader, Pentangle's producer for their third and fourth studio albums, never received any formal training: 'it wasn't something you studied, it was something you did. You got yourself a job and you made the tea, pushed the buttons, swept up the floor, that's how you became a recording engineer' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

In addition to the guild-like apprenticeship required to establish oneself in a working studio, the low levels of technical standardisation and highly centralised technological field meant that a relatively high level of knowledge and skill in electronics was often necessary for engineers. Although there were no vocational courses for recording engineers in the 1960s, a training in electronics could be acquired through employment at the GPO, the BBC or in the army signal corps during national service. Aside from large companies like EMI there were few training opportunities outside those afforded by the state. During this period there was little standardisation of

studio equipment, and often the first task for engineers setting up a studio, if they could not obtain an ex-BBC or EMI desk, was to design and build one themselves (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). As a result, Leader remarks that the quality and exact specifications of these varied greatly, but that most desks featured pan pots, faders and some level of control over equalisation (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Most professional studios by the mid-1960s also had echo, compression and/or limiting (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015). If working in stereo, the mixing engineer could use pan pots to assign sources to a lateral location, alter the relative gain level of tracks (up to four in 1965, eight by 1968, and 16 by 1970) by adjusting faders, use equalisation or apply compression to tracks, and add post-production effects such as echo/reverb, tape delay or flanger either to individual tracks or to the mix as a whole. All of these resources had potential aesthetic consequences for the recorded performance and were wholly in the hands of the producer/mixing engineer.

Above the engineer and managing the creative side of production was the producer or recording manager. In popular culture the pop producer was often represented as a 'venal, mendacious figure' and a near-relation to the 'hidden persuaders' of Madison Avenue (Doyle 2009: n.p.; 2013: 906). This is most evident in the genre of music biopic, where the perennially be-suited figure of the record producer personified an exploitative system (Doyle 2009). If in theory the producer's job was to negotiate the twists and turns of an unpredictable industry, acting as a mediator between the artists and engineers in the studio and the demands of the ever-changing market, in practice, this was often felt to result in a minimisation of risk and lowest common denominator blandness. In 1962, the satirical review programme *That Was the Week That Was* attacked Norrie Paramor, recording manager for Cliff Richard and Helen Shapiro, for producing instantly recognisable sonic clichés which demanded of audiences only a Pavlovian response and as a force for cultural grey-out: 'Like a bomb disposal expert', insisted presenter David Frost, 'he can take out all the messy unpredictability, the risk, the excitement […] during the last ten years, Norrie Paramor has used all his power and all his

influence and made everything ordinary' (*That Was the Week That Was*, 1962: n.p.).

The recording manager of the 1950s and early 1960s who combined the role of impresario with that of composer, arranger and artist manager was expected to select and develop material, direct recording sessions and shape all aspects of the star's career. At the very least, the pop record producer was expecting to generate hits by anticipating demand and identifying commercial trends. Later, however, when as Frith (1981) has argued, rock musicians and their teenage audiences were felt to constitute a quasi-folk community, the role of the producer as a necessary intermediary between the musicians and the mysterious record-buying public began to be replaced by the role of creative facilitator, standing as transparently as possible between performer and audience. Younger producers such as Leiber and Stoller, Phil Spector, and Brian Wilson, with the subcultural capital to connect with youth audiences, emerged at the beginning of the 1960s (Moorefield 2005). With the rapid commercialization of the counterculture in the later 1960s, the 'company-freak' or 'house hippy' began to be a more common figure at major labels in the US (and to a lesser extent the UK) as a counter-balance to the conventional 'A & R man' of the pre-psychedelic era (Powers 2012).

Pentangle's first producer Shel Talmy exemplified the newer type of producer for whom subcultural capital was as important as technical expertise. Talmy was an American trained at Conway studios in Los Angeles by British engineer Phil Young. His apprenticeship was relatively short:

> At that point in time the equipment was by today's standards primitive so it was not a huge learning curve. We had a console with rotary pots as opposed to sliders. About the third day I was there he said 'you do the session', and I had a ten-piece jazz combo come in and I was sweating just a little bit to say the least. (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

Talmy went to England in 1962 hoping to mirror his mentor's success in the US by establishing himself as an independent producer on the London scene. He 'bullshitted' his way into an arrangement whereby he would work for

Decca as an independent producer, receiving a retainer in addition to royalties, and recording minor hits for Doug Sheldon and The Bachelors before securing hits for The Who and The Kinks at the smaller independent label Pye (Talmy 2010). Talmy also ran a small record label, Planet, and operated as a booking agent for acts including John Renbourn and singer Doris Henderson from a small office on Denmark Street (London's 'tin-pan alley'). Renbourn remembered Talmy as a larger-than-life figure in a gold Cadillac, who had established himself through a combination of chutzpah and genuine engineering ability (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). At this stage Talmy 'hadn't made a great name for himself as a producer', Renbourn recalls, 'but he did, mainly because he had a gold Cadillac and spoke American […] the English were sort of bowled over by the approach' (ibid.). As well as managing to convey what Renbourn called the 'right persona' to convince Decca of his value as a producer Talmy also had bankable expertise in his command of three-track recording and techniques for recording acoustic instruments, developed through his work with artists on the Los Angeles folk scene, which Renbourn believes contributed to Pentangle's signature sound: 'He was pretty good at recording on three track, which is very unusual … in fact some of the very bright Pentangle guitar sounds were something that he really pioneered' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014).

Talmy (2010) remarked that the general equipment situation in the UK, although 'basically the same, was still not up to what I'd worked with here. It was more primitive'. A standard professional studio in 1963 meant 'at least a four track console with sliders and a lot of outboard' and 'a good set of microphones' (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015). 'At that point', he recalls, 'everybody had echo and were using echo chambers' (ibid.). IBC studios and Olympic were in his opinion the 'outstanding' studios in London at the time while EMI's studios, were 'acoustically and equipment-wise not studios I would voluntarily use' (ibid.). Talmy describes recording as a process of 'translating' the live context:

> What I've always gone for, especially with rock bands, is to translate what they do live onto tape. […] I don't like sterile records, which is

> what happens when you basically ignore what the band does onstage. (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

He favours a live sounding room and live tracking over isolation and overdubbing:

> I've never recorded instruments separately, I don't believe in it, I think it loses any feel or emotion that a track has – I know there's a lot of producers that do that, I'm not one of them. (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

Studio acoustics, he states, should preferably be 'just live enough without echoing throughout the joint and you have enough baffles to isolate people'. Recording should also be as 'live' as possible; 'if I could get it live I would get it live' (Talmy fieldwork interview, February 2015).

Talmy (2010) characterises the ideal producer as a combined hit-maker, creative facilitator and 'slavedriver'. '[W]hen I hear a song that I think is a hit record, I can hear it finished in my head, the way it should be done, complete, mixed, with instruments and all kinds of stuff' (ibid.). His insistence on a strong work ethic in the studio is linked to a belief in the value of spontaneity:

> Part of what I'm supposed to do in the studio is provide for, or at least enhance, an environment where everybody can work, accomplish things, and have some fun while we're doing it. In my experience the longer you go on, the worse it sounds. Almost without exception. (Talmy 2010: n.p.)

For a project to run smoothly Talmy suggests there should be an intuitive sympathy between the creative aims of producer and musicians. '[P]roducing a record should be very much a symbiosis, a partnership between the producer and the band. And if it isn't, then it's not worth doing' (Talmy 2010). Ideally, this unspoken accord should extend to engineers too, a relationship based in instinctive communication rather than constant dialogue. Of Glyn Johns, his protégé and engineer at IBC studios in London, he remarks:

> I didn't have to explain to him in any kind of detail what I wanted. By the time we'd worked together for a short time, he knew what I

> wanted and gave it to me. And don't forget I started out as an engineer, so I knew how to get it myself. (Talmy 2010: n.p.)

Talmy became Pentangle's producer in 1968. As a producer of commercial pop acts Talmy was used to coaching musicians, selecting material, and drawing on a pool of studio musicians in order to bolster the sound of recordings (Talmy 2010). 'The bands I worked with before, I always chose the material, including the Who, the Kinks, Manfred Mann and everybody else' (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015). With Pentangle, however, ('probably the best band I ever worked with in terms of competence') this proved to be unnecessary:

> I did not get involved – which is unusual for me – in the picking of material because they already had all the material that they wanted to do and they had a clear idea of the kind of stuff they wanted to do which had a huge range […] but I certainly participated in terms of arrangements. (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

Ultimately, Talmy saw the producer's role as to act as a mediator between the musicians and the market with the ultimate goal of reaching as large an audience as possible: 'It was my job to try and meld that whole thing together and come out with the best recording that I could that would attract an audience which, as it happens, it did' (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015).

Talmy's tenure as producer coincided with the band's most commercially successful period, and it is clear that he ascribes this to his production style, which he compares favourably to the more 'traditional' approach of his successor in the role, Bill Leader:

> There were two distinct methods, one was what Bill Leader did, and one was what I did which was to try to sell records. The other ways, they're fun and they're valuable but they don't reach an audience and as a commercial record producer I have ego enough to want to think that the maximum amount of people are available to hear what I've done otherwise I've wasted my damn time. (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

He is frankly scathing of Leader's skills as a producer, attributing Pentangle's waning commercial success to Leader's production:

> He does stuff that's very traditional but is not really commercial unfortunately. *Cruel Sister* was a commercial disaster.[4] As a consumer, which I also am, I'm not surprised. It was not particularly scintillating. It was The Pentangle, so it was good from their point of view but there are other things that sell a record. (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

Talmy epitomises the notion of the pop producer as intermediary between musician, industry and audience. The essence of his job as he describes it, was commercial vision, the ability to recognise and produce hit records. By contrast, Leader had worked exclusively within a niche market characterised by an anti-commercial ethos. As Renbourn remembers it, after a couple of high profile and commercially successful recording projects with Talmy, with the record company 'muscled into going into more expensive studios' (such as Talmy's favourite IBC) the band felt that Leader should produce the next project. 'Jacqui and myself felt that we really missed old Bill and we rather hoped that he would come back and be in the studio with us' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). Leader had previously recorded Jansch and Renbourn at their shared flat in St. John's Wood and possessed significant subcultural capital due to his earlier recordings for Topic and Transatlantic. Renbourn:

> I was totally in awe of Bill, because some of the records that I'd heard previously that I thought were fantastic, he'd recorded. His name was on *Jack Takes the Floor* [1958 EP released by Topic] […] which was just ground-breaking as far as I was concerned, and also the one with Willie Clancy *The Breeze from Erin*.[5] If you had a wonderful record, you found that Bill had recorded it. So he was a kind of legend to me. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

[4] *Cruel Sister* (1970) the first Leader-produced record by the band.
[5] *The Breeze from Erin – Irish Folk Music on Wind Instruments* (Topic Records 1969) also featured Festy Conlan, Eddie Corcoran, Tim Lyons, Tony McMahon, Seamus Tansey and Reg Hall.

McShee recalled that the decision to recruit Bill Leader as producer was driven by a desire to return to their roots in the Anglo-American folk repertoire: 'John wanted to get back to roots so asked Bill Leader. That was a statement that John was quite forcibly – and I was quite happy to go along with it because I love all the songs' (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015). McShee suggests that the selection of Leader reflected a desire for creative autonomy that outweighed commercial concerns:

> I think everyone was quite happy just trolling along earning enough money to live. As long as everyone could, you know, buy their guitar strings or bass strings. […] When you get someone like Shel Talmy […] he takes that product to the people to sell it and that's why everything changed because suddenly people realised they could make some money out of it. (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

For Renbourn, Leader's value as a producer lay not in his ability to connect the band with the market but in 'the fact that he was a great engineer', whose approach to recording was based in an intuitive technical knowledge and avoided intervening in artistic problems:

> He knew exactly what was going on in the sound frequency range and he didn't interfere with production, which is a huge strength, isn't it? Just to make it easy for the artist and the performers to feel good and play then that's really the biggest knack, I think. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

Leader, with his folk background and his emphasis on the facilitating aspect of the producer's role, presents a sharp contrast with the less self-effacing, commercially-driven Talmy. Although Leader's skills as an engineer were a primary consideration, as Renbourn suggests, Leader was also a calming presence in the studio, a trusted colleague who understood the demands of the material and the personalities involved (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014; McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015).

Changing relationships in the studio

Pentangle's relationship with their producers and with the studio as a creative site changed markedly over the four peak years of their career. For the first two records the band experienced limited involvement in the production processes beyond providing viable takes:

> Initially, none of us had any say. Making the record wasn't our domain, all we had to do was sit down and play and get pissed afterwards. That was basically it. So you had no say in the matter and you didn't expect you would. They were the important people that were in the glass box, and if you'd been working in a kitchen all your life, which I had, then it was their domain. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

McShee had some previous experience of recording, contributing harmonies to the Renbourn solo album *Another Monday* (1966), recorded by Leader in the intimate home studio configuration described in the previous chapter. Talmy's favoured studio at IBC presented a very different working space, however: 'I can see this big room and there was this little room like a vocal booth. And I found it quite scary it just seemed so huge, huge high ceilings' (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015). Talmy was also an intimidating presence at first:

> I was really nervous of everybody […] and the fact that he was blind as well. I was pretty young, you don't know how to treat people. I mean the fact that he was American as well, because Americans have a way of making you feel that they're sort of fantastic, they have this aura […] laid back but forthright. (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

The band members had little technical knowledge of recording processes at this stage. McShee recalled one incident during a recording session with Talmy in which she, Renbourn and Cox (the band's drummer) arranged themselves around a single microphone in order to begin tracking harmony parts, eliciting an incredulous 'you've got to be kidding me!' from the producer, who then re-arranged them accordingly around individual mics

(McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015). Unlike some producers, Talmy would invite the band into the control room to approve takes; 'When I had what I though was going to be a great take I obviously brought the band up to listen to it and if we all agreed, that was a take, if not then we did another one' (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015). Renbourn recalled, however, that the rigid demarcation of musical and technical roles could lead to frustrations and the occasional unpleasant surprise when invited to listen to playbacks of the final mix:

> when we actually did listen to the playback, which was often quite loud, which kind of gives you a false impression, somebody made a comment about how nice it sounded and might it be better if Bert's guitar was in the mix? And it wasn't. So what does that tell you? (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

At this stage in the band's recording career, decisions about the final mix remained firmly in the hands of Talmy as producer. On later projects with Leader, however, the band's awareness of the technical possibilities of multitrack and tape editing led to more ambitious arrangements. Renbourn:

> At that point we discovered we could multitrack and overdub and do bits and pieces, so we were getting into these monstrous confusion pieces with me playing different recorder parts and Christ knows what. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

Although Talmy insists that he had no problem with musicians being present during mixing, perhaps unsurprisingly, many producers and engineers were reluctant to cede any control over the final mix to musicians (Talmy, fieldwork interview, February 2015). Renbourn remembered engineer Nic Kinsey once remarking him to him that 'the worst thing he ever did was invite a guitar player into the control room' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). Leader:

> the involvement of musicians into production I don't think really happened until multitrack really got a grip, when musicians were then invited into the control room and played back a rough mix and slowly realised that things could be changed, they could say 'what's this do

> gov'?' The gov' would say, 'well, it limits the dynamic range.' 'Yeah but what's it sound like?' And suddenly, you got creative use of this stuff for the first time, instead of people trained by the GPO and splendid organisations doing what it was really designed to do, to limit dynamic range, control the dynamic range. It was used to change the sound. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

The increased awareness of the musical affordances of the control room which resulted from their presence at playback sessions encouraged musicians not only to take a more active interest in the musical applications of production techniques, but ultimately to question the value and even the necessity of having a producer at all. As Renbourn remarks, 'the record producer's role is always a bit iffy isn't it? And you get guys that are just top names, you know, and they'll be so, so long as they're the big flavour' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). If the role of the producer was primarily to add commercial prestige to a project, then musicians might very well consider them to be superfluous.

Sound Techniques: 'A different ethos'

The band's first recording sessions with Leader as producer involved a change in venue from Talmy's favoured IBC studios to Chelsea's Sound Techniques, then Transatlantic's first choice for higher budget projects: 'That was considered to be the deluxe place', says Renbourn, 'and if you were very good and the record company was actually going to pay for going into the studio, that was the one people aspired to' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). Though not particularly luxurious by the standards of the period, Sound Techniques was a well-equipped working studio, featuring a four-track desk designed and built by studio manager Geoff Frost, a selection of good industry standard mics and a state of the art EMT140 plate reverb unit (Frost 2008).[6]

[6] A selection of good quality mics were available including Neumann U67s, KM56s, KM 54s, AKG D19s, and an RCA ribbon; later, the studio acquired a Neumann U47, then the industry standard vocal mic (Frost 2008).

Sound Techniques was one of a new generation of independent studios which began to emerge to service the growing record industry in the mid-1960s. The studio had been in operation since the summer of 1965 when it was set up by Frost and fellow engineer John Wood. Frost, an amateur radio and recording enthusiast from an early age, trained in electronics during his national service, designing transistor amplifiers and experimenting with recording army musicians in his spare time, using a second-hand tape machine, mixer and an STC4033a cardioid composite mic (Sound Techniques 2011a). On completing his national service he went to train as a vision mixer for the BBC, before leaving to join Levy's Sound Studio in Bond Street in 1959, a position he held for five years (Sound Techniques 2011a; 2011b). Wood gained his first experience working as a disc-cutting operative for Decca before joining Levy's. This was a three track, 'jobbing' studio which produced records for Maurice Levy's Oriole Records and the Woolworth's budget label Embassy (Sound Techniques 2011c).

Frost and Wood left to found Sound Techniques in 1964 (Frost 2008). After a search for suitable premises they found a converted dairy in Chelsea and arranged a contract which allowed them to alter the interior layout in order to create a central live area, a control room and an office. Part of the first floor was removed in order to raise the level of the ceiling in the live room. The building's sloping floor, a reminder of its original use, was covered in a layer of asphalt and then carpeted to damp resonances. This left an area underneath the office with a lower ceiling which the pair originally planned to use for recording rhythm sections, reserving the higher ceilinged area for recording strings and vocals (Frost 2008).

The design and recording ethos of Sound Techniques were a deliberate departure from the kind of recording facilities common in the UK at this time. While at Levy's Frost had worked with pop producer John Schroeder, and had been made aware of the need for British pop records to achieve greater presence to match their 'louder' US counterparts:

> He said you have to realise that when someone buys a Helen Shapiro record – and the record buying public then were 14 to 19 year old girls – he said they'll have the record player next to their pillow and they

> are listening to that person singing to them. You know, that's their boyfriend or another girlfriend telling them about lost love, or found love or whatever. But they want the sound right in front of them. (Sound Techniques 2011d)

This realisation led Frost to develop a greater awareness of the aesthetic value of space in recording, and he recalls that, at the outset of the Sound Techniques project, he made a visit to Owen Bradley's studio in Nashville in a bid to understand what gave US recordings their characteristic loudness and depth (Sound Techniques 2011e; Frost 2008). Frost was surprised both by the limited amount of equipment at Bradley's 'aircraft hangar'-like studio and the size of the recording spaces within which local musicians were able to 'balance themselves' and 'let the reverb come from […] the surroundings' (Sound Techniques 2011e). From this came an increased awareness of the significance of the natural sound of the room for musical applications (ibid.).

To begin with, the studio's capital was limited and a four-track mixing desk was built by Frost and Wood using a console acquired from the BBC's redundant stores in Chiswick (Frost 2008). Frost and Wood began with little in the way of additional effects; they built an echo chamber to provide artificial reverberation, but later acquired an EMT 140 plate reverb unit and a Fairchild 660 compressor/limiter (ibid.). In 1968 the studio was updated, installing an eight track desk and giving the live room a new acoustic treatment to deal with any remaining unpleasant resonances (ibid.).

Leader had been made aware of Sound Techniques by friend and colleague Joe Boyd, who 'discovered' the studio and used it on a number of successful projects while managing Elektra Records' UK office in 1966 (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). He appreciated the studio's emphasis on substance over style:

> It was a very functioning, working studio, full of people who weren't just interested in making a quick dollar … they didn't have a receptionist with a plunging neckline and a short skirt and all the things the other studios tended to have to show how good they were in terms of recording sound. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Although Leader suggests that the studio's lack of style may have caused Pentangle manager Joe Lustig to reject Sound Techniques in favour of more prestigious facilities, the studio's unpretentious and highly sociable atmosphere appealed to musicians such as Fairport Convention's Dave Pegg: 'It was a lot funkier than places like CBS or Abbey Road, the bigger studios that people had spent a lot of money on. Sound Techniques was like coming home to us' (Frost 2008). As was the case with other smaller independent studios, including Olympic Studios in Barnes (another hip independent popular with both The Beatles and The Rolling Stones), and another Leader discovery, Livingston in Barnet, Sound Techniques became a social centre as well as a workspace for musicians and engineers. Pegg:

> There was obviously a completely different atmosphere and ethos prevailing in the place. It was much more co-operative, you were not just a piece of meat that was brought in to do a task, you were part of a co-operative venture. (Sound Techniques 2012)

As recording budgets increased and bands spent more time in the studio – no longer just a place to record but also a workshop for new material – the relationship between musicians and technical staff became increasingly collaborative: Renbourn and Leader developed close working relationships with engineers John Wood at Sound Techniques and Nic Kinsey at Livingston Studios, another small independent where much of Leader's post-production work for Topic was carried out:

> It was great being with them because they were great guys. Nic used to like drinking a lot of beer and it was always a lot of fun being there and staying there, which often happened – you'd get to the studio and you'd go out on the piss and then you'd stick around for a while. So it was a very nice relaxed atmosphere, there was no tension at all. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

However, where Renbourn remembered the studio drinking culture as one of easy-going camaraderie McShee recalled the 1960s studio as a male dominated, hard-drinking environment within which being a woman could be potentially isolating:

> There was a hell of a lot of drinking, John and Bert as well. I was too scared to drink too much […] I did drink, and I could handle my drink but I didn't… It was difficult being a girl in those sorts of circumstances. There weren't many. There was Sandy Denny, and Maddy came a bit later, but you hardly ever saw them 'cause everybody was always working so you were on your own really, and I had to look after myself. (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

Capturing liveness

The band's work with Leader saw the extended solo sections of early recordings largely replaced by an emphasis on song and a commitment to aural realism that treated the ensemble as they sounded live as the object to be represented. This was a marked contrast with the approach favoured by Talmy in which little attention was paid to the real volume ratios of instruments or to the realistic arrangement of sources within the stereo field, and panning and reverb were manipulated as a way of responding to the unfolding improvisations within extended solo sections.

Asked about his approach to producing Leader remarked, 'I'd heard all that reverb that Shel Talmy put in, I thought, get rid of that' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). As in his recordings of traditional music, Leader's emphasis was firmly on the representation of a believable performance space. The tracks on *Cruel Sister* (1970) were built around complete live takes, with overdubs added later at Olympic Studios. As Leader states, 'it was in the early days of multitrack. Sound Techniques only had four tracks. Eight track we thought was pretty amazing' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). However, the nature of Pentangle's material, much of which was loosely structured with scope for semi-improvisatory interaction between the players, meant that an asynchronous, overdub-based approach, even if the facilities had existed for this, would probably have been counter-productive. Of primary importance was capturing a good sounding take in the

live room, controlling bleed between mics and making the most of the acoustics of the live room.

Retaining a sense of liveness was also an important element of the band's musical aesthetic. As Pentangle's recording projects were often slotted into small gaps in a highly pressurised concert schedule there was little writing in the studio, which marked the band out from many of their contemporaries. Ashley Hutchings of Fairport Convention, a leading folk-rock act who also recorded several albums at Sound Techniques, recalled the almost unlimited time available for experimentation within the studio (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, 24 October 2014). For Fairport as for many others of their generation, the studio functioned as a composing laboratory rather than a space for capturing performances honed endlessly in the live context. For Pentangle, whose sound was built around the improvisational ability of its soloists, liveness was linked to an ideal of spontaneous creativity in the context of a tradition of improvised performance derived from both jazz and folk revivalist values. Decisions about studio arrangements were tempered by a commitment to liveness both as an aesthetic value and as the primary site of performance reflecting the band's roots in both folk and jazz traditions. The successful projection of 'liveness' suggested an unmediated flow of spontaneous composition, genuine musical interaction between players, and a real shared space of performance. 'Danny [Thompson, bassist] was always very enthusiastic about that', Renbourn recalled:

> and he was of the opinion that you shouldn't do too much in the studio if you can't duplicate it on stage. And really the early recordings were exactly that. We just sat down and played and if someone messed up something you just laughed and started another take. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

McShee also expressed a preference for live performance over studio work but spoke of the tedium of having to record multiple takes due to a mistake on the part of one or other band member (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015). Renbourn remembered that 'the number of tracks that fell to pieces because Bert broke a string and fell off his chair was a high percentage' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014).

Command Studios: 'How not to do it'

The obvious benefits of the smaller independent studios with their looser, more experimental take on studio practice were brought home to the band during the making of their second record with Leader as producer. *Reflection* (1971) was recorded at the newly opened Command Studios in Piccadilly, at a point when a punishing cycle of recording and promotion was causing the creative energies of the group to dissipate (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015). By the time the band were recording *Reflection* things had reached a difficult point. McShee:

> There was a lot of drinking and a lot of disagreements about how things would be played. And I think the reason for that was, when Jo Lustig[7] took us on he did actually get us a lot of work and we did get a really good recording contract with Warner Reprise […] but he worked us […] we didn't play any more just to sit around and play. 'Cause we were always on the road and it was like 'right, you're gonna go into the studio to record'. We've got nothing new to record 'cause we haven't had time to work on it 'cause we've been away and that was when the rot started to set in. I think that was like halfway through and it didn't really improve much to be honest. (McShee, fieldwork interview, February 2015)

To these interpersonal and creative difficulties was added their producer's frustration with the facilities available. Planned as a state-of the art modern studio, one of the new breed of luxurious recording facilities to emerge in the early 1970s, Command by all accounts failed to live up to its hype. The complex comprised

> three or four studios and they were all in the same proportion and the control rooms were all equipped with the same equipment so wherever you were it all sounded the same, i.e., awful. You got a choice of two microphones, if you wanted a condenser you could have a 451, you know, sort of nasally AKG mics, or if you didn't wanted to record

[7] The band's manager.

> onto condensers you could have a 222 which is their moving coil mic – and that was it. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

To augment the meagre selection at Command, and avoid the necessity of having to salvage the sessions in the mixing stage, Leader imported 'a whole forest of microphones, because we thought, get the right microphone in the right place on the right thing you don't need to EQ it quite as much as when you're trying to save the day because you've used the wrong mic' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). Each studio featured a 16-track mixing desk, and several new Dolby noise reduction units shared between the different studios.

> They had a modest number of Dolby units in a separate place and they could be plugged in as needed. But you could never have that many at any one time, certainly not if more than one studio was being used. And very often you'd set off using as many as were available because you were the only studio being functioned, and suddenly you'd find, or on replay you would discover, that someone had disconnected your Dolbys and patched them into their own studio 'cause they needed it – that was the sort of place it was. (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014)

Command was used at the insistence of Pentangle's manager Joe Lustig, who Renbourn suggests was keen to prise more recording funds out of Transatlantic boss Nat Joseph, arguing that Sound Techniques, although it was the studio of choice for the label's more high-profile acts, was not a 'real studio' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). Leader supports this, suggesting that Lustig objected to the fact that Sound Techniques was not a purpose built studio; as a converted dairy its interior retained the shallow staircase along which the cows had been transported upstairs to be milked. 'I mean, would you want your group to record in a dairy for God's sake? No he had his standards! So he went to this absolutely appalling studio' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014). For Lustig the expensive and newly furnished Command, a purpose built ex-BBC sound studio was the more prestigious and more professional option. As Leader saw it, however, it was a classic case of style over substance: 'it had the receptionist with the

plunging neckline but it had bugger all else […] a lesson in how not to do it' (Leader, fieldwork interview, August 2014).

When they came to make what was to prove their final studio album *Solomon's Seal* (1971) Pentangle returned once more to Sound Techniques, this time choosing to self-produce in collaboration with engineer John Wood, whom Renbourn describes as a 'stunning engineer' (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014). The importance of a shared aesthetic framework is emphasised strongly by Renbourn:

> I'm very happy just working with an engineer without having a producer but the actual sound is entirely in the ears of the engineer. And if I find an engineer that does it right without me having to say anything there's nothing more to say really. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

Without this tacit understanding, he suggests, a project is doomed from the outset:

> If it's not right you have to be enormously diplomatic and back-pedal and describe it best you can in the hope that you can fix it. But if it's not in the ears of the engineer then it's an uphill struggle to say the least. (Renbourn, fieldwork interview, November 2014)

Conclusion

Over a four year period, Pentangle moved from a situation in which they exercised little or no control over the recorded product to one where the establishment of lasting professional relationships with producer/engineers such as Leader, Wood and Kinsey meant that there was a greater degree of sympathy between their own creative goals and those of technical staff. Ultimately, the establishment of sympathetic working relationships between musicians and engineers like John Wood meant that the role of producer was deemed largely unnecessary to the process. Where, the sleeve of Pentangle's first recording announced it as 'a Shel Talmy production', *Solomon's Seal* (1972) four years later is described as 'produced by the band and John Wood'. These two descriptors suggest that over this relatively short period the status

of the band in relation to the recording had shifted; they have become their own producers rather than simply providers of musical raw material.

In the band's own testimony, Renbourn's description of the producer and engineer as 'the important people in the glass box' gradually gives way to far more positive image of the studio as a place of work, which indicates a shifting of roles over time. In the new independent studios such as Sound Techniques, the studio was remade as a collaborative space in which the musicians and the engineer/producer became partners. Musicians took a greater level of control over the production process by forming working relationships with engineers, something which involved the development of a new culture through socialising and a sharing of territories, expertise and roles.

How does the experience of Pentangle relate to broader changes in studio culture during the period? Their accounts suggest a progressive shift in the way creative roles were distributed in the studio and in how the relationship between authenticity and technology in popular music was perceived. At the beginning of the 1960s popular musicians had low status and production was largely synonymous with commercial mediation. At this stage, the boundary between more serious styles of music (folk, jazz, classical) and popular (i.e., commercial) music was relatively easy to trace, and could be articulated in terms of distinguishable production values. In folk music, the development of a recording aesthetic that deliberately avoided the use of what by now were production clichés (such as the use of echo chambers or Hollywood style string arrangements) allowed a greater level of agency to be ascribed to the performer. Folk music was presented as authentic in opposition to popular styles in part by eschewing the technological trappings of pop, and its stripped down production acted as a guarantee of personal authenticity on the part of performers. By extension this applied also to producers and labels, whose own agency was played down. They were being authentic to the tradition by allowing it to pass unaltered through the production process.

The emergence of seemingly autonomous musicians working within the popular field in the new genre of rock led to the development of a concept

of authenticity in which musicians were seen to have ultimate creative responsibility for the finished work. Therefore, using the tools at their disposal to the full became an acceptable expression of authenticity. Personal authenticity (truth to one's own artistic vision) no longer precluded the use of studio technology. At the same time, these technologies were used in ever more sophisticated and imaginative ways, and were much more frequently under the control of musicians.

By the late 1960s popular musicians were no longer considered devoid of agency, and production was no longer simply a commercial treatment that prepared their product for the market, a process from which they can only hope to escape relatively unscathed. It was slowly becoming part of the creative medium for popular musicians. As the experience of Pentangle indicates, however, access to the creative resources of the studio was distributed unevenly over the field of production, and had to be negotiated between musicians, engineers, and management.

The pop producer as visionary, a mediator between artist, technical staff and commercial audiences exemplified by the charismatic figure of Shel Talmy lost ground during this period, as musicians' sense of the nature and scope of their work shifted and they came increasingly to consider the process of making records as within their professional remit. At the same time, collaborative relationships between musicians and individual engineers became more important, with the latter taking on the role of facilitators for the creative projects of musicians, a shift made possible by the acquisition of status and technical knowledge by musicians and a closer relationship to aesthetic concerns on the part of engineers.

This diffusion of roles took place in the context of an ongoing erosion of the barrier between popular and serious music, and the gradual rehabilitation of studio technologies as legitimate artistic resources for musicians. While at earlier periods in pop history, studio effects were considered inseparable from commercial interests, as rock attained to higher artistic status and was increasingly seen as a potentially progressive art form, the technological resources of the studio were opened up to artists for experimentation. Rock as a serious art-form distanced itself from pop through

musicians' ownership of the sounds produced in the studio. This became a guarantee of authenticity – to the self, to the aesthetic community and to progressive musical values which mirrored progressive political and social values. As musicians gradually took control over the technologies of capture, recordings began to be seen to reflect more closely their own performance ideologies and values. It is this relationship between studio produced sounds and the expression of cultural values that I consider in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Song, sonic metaphor and countercultural discourse in British folk-rock recordings

Introduction

The changes in studio culture detailed in the previous chapter meant that popular musicians at the turn of the 1970s often exercised greater control over the recording process than had their predecessors a decade earlier. Additionally, the rapid technological advances in studio production of the 1960s had expanded the palette of sound-shaping techniques available to musicians and producers. These factors, combined with an increasingly diverse popular music market, provided opportunities for experimentation with the recorded presentation of traditional music. Although the revival movement remained associated with anti-commercial values, as rock achieved the status of a popular art form, record production, previously seen as a purely commercial activity, became associated with high-art practices and countercultural values (Moorefield 2005; Whiteley 1990). In the folk-rock movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s musicians consciously attempted to expand the sonic repertoire open to them, adopting stylistic features, instrumentation and recording techniques from rock into their interpretations of traditional song.

This chapter considers the effect these changes had on the production of textual and social meaning in recorded folk song. What happened when the production techniques of rock were used in the interpretation of traditional repertoire? What techniques were used and how did they affect the construction of textual meanings? And how was the approach constructed by musicians and critics? As many of these musicians aligned themselves with the aesthetics and values of the counterculture, a further set of questions deal with how recording practice situated folk-rock within the counterculture's ideological discourse. These go beyond general aspects of practice to ask: what do individual recordings 'say' as cultural texts? And how do specific uses of recording contribute to their expression of extra-musical values? In answering these questions, I shall return to the notion of recording as

discourse and the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 1, including the concepts of modality and multimodal metaphor.

Way (2015: 184) argues that discourses 'project certain values and ideas which contribute to the (re)production of social life' and that music as a specific mode of discourse 'can be shown to communicate ideas, attitudes and identities, through cultural references and through specific meaning potentials'. In the recordings of folk-rock musicians, I argue, sound recording constituted 'a set of socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning' (MODE 2012). Studio techniques intervened in the semiotic potential of traditional song texts by shaping the material properties of sounds and through the setting up of multimodal metaphors (Van Leeuwen 1999; Machin 2010; Forceville 2012). Building on work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999), Zbikowski (2002; 2009), Zagorski-Thomas (2014) and Moore (2012) I shall apply aspects of conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory to explore the link between sound production and extra-musical values in recorded folk-rock songs, texts situated at the intersection of revivalist and countercultural discourse.

The stereo, multitrack recordings discussed in this chapter are considerably more complex than the field recordings and earlier studio recordings considered elsewhere, raising the question of how to represent the findings of an auditory analysis. While traditional notation is notoriously unsuited for the representation of musical performances as sound, attempts have been made to notate features such as timbre and texture in terms of their effect on musical meaning; van Leeuwen (1999), for example, identifies several basic parameters for analysing sound texts, including lateral and vertical placement of sources, timbre, voice quality and articulation, and makes frequent use of tables to present his analyses. Attempts have also been made to represent the virtual space of the mix visually; both Gibson (1997) and Dockwray and Moore (2010) adopt a three-dimensional 'sound box' diagram to represent the stereo field and the relative positions of sources within it. The intentions behind these attempts at visual representation of audio space are important to bear in mind: Gibson uses visualisation as a pedagogical tool, Dockwray and Moore to trace the evolution of a standard

mix configuration based on an analysis of a large corpus of recordings covering a period of several years.

In this chapter, I am concerned not with identifying mixing strategies characteristic of folk-rock as genre but with how the sonic characteristics of individual recordings contribute to the range of meanings they afford. Aside from the difficulty of quantifying and rendering properties such as sound texture visually, in this context, visual depictions of the sound quality or spatial characteristics of the recordings here could be misleading. This is because when I discuss perceived qualities of sounds such as 'roughness' or 'reverberation', or spatial relationships between sources, I am referring to properties whose meaning is inseparable from the context of the recorded song. To present my findings as a series of objective readings could suggest too strong a causal relationship between 'intrinsic' properties of sounds and the range of possible interpretations they afford. The sounds on recordings do not generate meanings; these, as I will argue later, emerge in the context of the interpretive relationship between the listener and the text.

Folk into folk-rock: sound and ideology

As argued in chapters 1 and 3, revivalist recordings of the early 1960s typically downplayed evidence of technological mediation, valorising small-scale, face-to-face performance and acoustic instrumentation. In the anti-technology, anti-commercial discourse of the revival, the popular music industry constituted an inauthentic other against which revivalist practice was negatively defined. Folk recordists remained committed to capturing believable, intimate performances, while folk musicians performed for the recording medium rather than through it, and often as if it were not there at all. By endeavouring to keep the art of performance separate from the supplementary craft of recording, revivalist producers asserted a vision of authenticity and creative autonomy which stood in opposition to a posited industrial mass culture.

The folk-rock bands which began to emerge on independent labels such as Transatlantic, Island and Chrysalis at the end of the 1960s adopted a

different aesthetic, incorporating electric instrumentation and contemporary studio techniques into their practice. Rock had by this time attained a countercultural status which was increasingly associated with innovative approaches to studio sound production (Whiteley 1990). This was due in part to an influential critical discourse originating in the US magazine *Rolling Stone* and echoed by writers in the British music weeklies *Melody Maker* and the *NME* as well as a growing underground press that included publications such as *Oz* and the *International Times*.

In contrast with the folk revival that preceded it, the politics of the counterculture were often implied rather than stated, and music was tacitly agreed to be a medium for political expression: Whiteley (1990: 37) argues that within this countercultural discourse, music was seen as 'a symbolic act of self-liberation and self-realisation in which reality and musical experience were fused'. As Simonelli (2013) notes, rock musicians were routinely treated as generational spokespersons in the media, despite the comparative lack of political content in their lyrics. Instead, the oppositional status of musical texts was located in sounds themselves, from Hendrix's fuzz-laden guitar to the echoic spatiality of Pink Floyd; '[s]uch was the power of rock music', observes Bennett (2014: 18), 'that it came to bespeak notions of an alternative community that hippies believed could be experienced and realized through the music itself'. Rock records were thought to bear witness to and even to manifest an alternative community in sound, indicating a shift in the perceived significance of music and sound in everyday political practice. As Frith (1981) has argued, rock began to be constructed as a modern folk music thought to constitute the authentic expression of a global alternative youth culture. This notion of sound as a political medium allowed commercially developed techniques of sound manipulation to be incorporated into musicians' practice without compromising the authenticity of the product or the autonomy of the artist.

Origins of the term

The term folk-rock first emerged in the US in the mid-1960s and was used to denote a hybrid genre which combined the introspection and commitment to personal authenticity associated with the work of singer-songwriters such as Bob Dylan with rock instrumentation and performance values (Sweers 2005). The origins of the style may be traced to Dylan himself and his sudden, dramatic and controversial adoption of electric blues-rock instrumentation at the Newport Folk Festival of 1965 (Burns 2012).[1] In the UK, the term folk-rock referred to a somewhat different entity, albeit one similarly rooted in the US and UK folk revivals of the 1950s and 1960s. Although early British folk-rock acts such as Fairport Convention were clearly influenced by the American and Canadian acts (primarily singer-songwriters) described as folk-rock by the American music press, folk-rock in Britain took on a local flavour, incorporating songs and tunes from Anglo-American traditions into a blend that, while it was transatlantic in its sound and outlook, consciously explored local repertoires and retained links to the mainstream revival in terms of material and personnel, with many of the movement's leading figures continuing to perform acoustic folk music in revivalist clubs.

The incorporation of electric instruments into an acoustic 'folk' aesthetic is often taken as a defining characteristic of the genre in both the US and UK contexts; however, the question of just what 'going electric' meant for musicians in this period is open to interpretation. The consciously innovative approach of many folk-rock acts suggests that the term folk-rock or 'electric folk' (an alternative designation for the genre), should be read as having a significance beyond the merely descriptive, implying connotations of creative autonomy (from the revival with its strictly codified performance practices) and a simultaneous aspiration towards the creative licence granted to rock artists to explore the sonic potential of new technologies of which the electric guitar, however emblematic of musical modernity, was only one. As I have argued in previous chapters, recording's semantic resources were

[1] The folk-rock term was also applied by US writers to the debut single by Los Angeles band The Byrds (a Beatles-inspired version of Dylan's 'Mr. Tambourine Man') and was later used to denote the music of California-based singer-songwriters, including Joni Mitchell, Crosby Stills and Nash, and Jefferson Airplane (Sweers 2005).

increasingly exploited by pop producers during this period. Gracyk (1996) argues that with the development of the rock aesthetic, recording was essentially transformed from a mode of transcription into the musician's primary creative medium. For revivalist musicians embracing a rock aesthetic, then, electrification was more than a matter of instrumentation; it was symbolic of a more profound aesthetic shift which entailed not only new styles of arrangement and performance but a fundamentally altered relationship with recording. Central to the folk-rock project, I argue, was the use of new techniques and technologies in the creative re-interpretation of traditional texts. In this chapter I show how folk-rock artists embraced the creative resources afforded by the recording medium in a way that set them apart from and in conflict with the more traditional elements within the revival. The case studies have been selected in order to illustrate the range of approaches within the movement and to emphasise specifically the importance of a rock-influenced recording aesthetic to the work of folk-rock musicians during this period.

Folk-rock in Britain

Folk-rock was a product of the same underground music scene that produced the progressive rock movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ashley Hutchings,[2] bassist and founder member of Fairport Convention, recalled the band's emergence in 1967 within the context of an extremely eclectic London music scene:

> There was so much happening […] musically speaking it was phenomenal because you would go to a gig and you would see anything – together – there might be a poet on and then a blues band, then a solo acoustic guitarist might come up and then there was a freaky rock band playing, you know. Everyone was open eared and open eyed, and everything was accepted and you could be a success playing anything as long as it was good and interesting and it was

[2] Hutchings is a key figure in the folk-rock movement and the revival more broadly considered and was also a founder member of leading folk-rock bands Steeleye Span and the Albion Country Band (later the Albion Band).

> great to be a part of that. (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014)

Fairport, Hutchings says, were 'on the edge of the psychedelic scene but also very much a part of it, we played all the famous clubs, the UFO club [….] and of course the Roundhouse' (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014).[3] The band differed from many of their contemporaries on the London rock scene in their emphasis on creative arrangement rather than virtuosic improvisation, substantially re-working material by contemporary singer-songwriters including Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell. Hutchings is keen to emphasise that they were not a covers band in the traditional sense:

> We would completely reinvent the songs. We'd take a song like Leonard Cohen's 'Suzanne', for example, and make it sound unlike anything that Cohen would have imagined. And we were the first group over here that ever covered anything by Joni Mitchell. And again it was more of a rock band playing the songs, rather than a light acoustic. So right from the very early days we were into arranging in inventive ways. (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014)

In this eclectic climate, the band members developed competence in a variety of styles:

> We had a good grounding in our teenage years, living in London going to many, many different venues, taking in all kinds of music […] you'd go to a blues club one night and the you'd go to Ronnie Scott's jazz club then a psychedelic club, an early psychedelic club […] and you know classical music – we took in absolutely anything. So we'd also gone to folk clubs in '65, '66. […] And it's just that when Sandy Denny[4] joined the band in '68 we thought 'oh yeah folk

[3] The UFO (pronounced 'yoo-fo') club was a well-known psychedelic venue in London. The Roundhouse, an arts centre and music venue in Camden Town, London, was initially purchased by Centre 42 as the permanent home of the project but had a second life as a countercultural hub, playing host to a very different sort of multimedia performance from that envisaged by Charles Parker in 1961.

[4] Denny was a popular folk club performer and singer-songwriter who had recorded with The Strawbs before being asked to join Fairport replacing the band's original female vocalist Judy Dyble.

songs, why don't we have a go at those as well?' (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014)

Fairport recorded their first album for Polydor in 1967 and made their first recorded attempt at a folk-rock approach on *Unhalfbricking* (1969): 'Up to the summer of 1969 we'd just been dominated by American culture in the music that we did and then it all changed […] we were suddenly singing folk ballads but with rock guitar solos' (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014). Hutchings states that the conscious decision by the band to pursue a new direction based on indigenous British traditions was cemented as a result of listening to the eponymous second album by Canadian group The Band (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014).[5] The main impetus seems to have been the search for a unique and innovative direction for the group; the fact that 'no one had done it before' rather than a commitment to any revivalist sense of the material's inherent worth or of its original social function appears to have been the determining factor.

Sweers (2005: 173) notes that in Fairport's arrangements of traditional material the electric guitar opened up new timbral possibilities offering 'an affective quality that could not be expressed by the voice alone'. In 'A Sailor's Life' (1969), for example, an expanded repertoire of sounds resulting from amplification was used to achieve word-painting effects which support the images in the text (Sweers 2005: 173). The band's use of electric instrumentation, however, put them at odds with many within the folk revival: 'On an ideological level, the use of the electric guitar was subsequently interpreted by some as a betrayal of their ideals, the instrument itself being seen as a symbol of commercial music' (Sweers 2005: 22). As a result, folk-rock acts such as Fairport, Pentangle and Steeleye Span were subject to accusations of cultural exploitation by some revivalists: in particular, their work seen as a de-politicisation of folk music in pursuit of commercial success. Watson (1983: 144-146) for example, denounced the work of Steeleye Span as the 'plundering' of an essentially working class culture by middle class musicians playing for a predominantly middle class audience,

[5] The Band (1969), *The Band*, Los Angeles: Capitol Records.

arguing that the band's approach removed the material from its 'original social aesthetic function' making it a 'vehicle for a sound and a rhythm'. Political song, Watson (1983: 146) argued, 'should be portable, imitable, participatory and accessible – that is it must allow of no barrier between singer and audience'. By implying that folk music's political value is ultimately a function of how performance enacts the social relationship of performer and audience, Watson constructed folk-rock as a politically reactionary step which re-inscribed the barrier between performers and audience which he saw as typical of commercial forms.

Brocken (2003: 93) argues that contemporary criticisms of the movement were based in the revivalist assumption that 'folk music signifies the participant within the collective' and rock the 'individual and exploitative'. Indeed, Watson's (1983: 146) critique implicitly presents pop culture as essentially alienated, individualist, and apolitical (his use of the term 'headphone listening' to describe Steeleye Span's music neatly evokes this notion of solipsistic passivity). As Frith (1981) has noted, however, far from rejecting the experience of community, the rock ideology that developed in the 1960s drew heavily on group sentiment, and the discourse of rock offered an experience of belonging to an increasingly global counterculture movement. As Bennett (2014) and Whiteley (1990) suggest, the sound of recordings, rather than representing a barrier between listeners and performers, was decisive in enacting this imagined community of shared experiences and values. Rather than straight commercial appropriation, I argue, folk-rock represented a synthesis of traditional repertoire and a countercultural aesthetics of sound. Its incorporation of rock techniques and instrumentation was an indicator not so much of naked commercial intent but of musicians' desire to incorporate a new sonic palette into the interpretation of traditional material. This, however, entailed what might be called a textual approach which privileged the individual artistic interpretation of traditional songs over performance as a celebration of communitarian values. In this sense, folk-rock marked a departure from the ideology of the revival and towards notions of personal authenticity and creative autonomy more closely associated with the emerging rock counterculture.

Recording technology and textual meaning

Sweers (2005) notes that studio techniques such as overdubbing were used sparingly in the work of Fairport. In Hutchings's later project, Steeleye Span, however, she notes that recording's affordances, including 'spatial effects, sound distortions, fade-ins, fade-outs and the technical effects of the electric guitar and bass [played] a much more pivotal role' (Sweers 2005: 180). In order to understand how these types of effects were used to open up potential meanings in recordings of traditional song it is necessary to know first what interpretive resources recording made available to musicians and producers during the period and how these were exploited in popular music recordings.

The techniques of stereo mixing and tape editing which had developed by the late 1960s allowed for both the layering of parts recorded separately and for the manipulation of the sound using various forms of signal processing. The application of artificial reverberation (through the use of echo chambers or 'plate' reverb units) was one of the most important and versatile techniques used by producers in the 1960s, affecting the production of space in recordings and the creative staging of the human voice (Lacasse 2000).[6] As Doyle (2005: 32) notes, in everyday experience 'reverberation does much to define what we perceive as timbre, volume and sound colouration, and largely determines our perceptions of directionality and nearness'. The absorption rate (the ratio of direct to reflected sound) also affects the level of articulatory detail we perceive. In the case of the human voice, as the ratio shifts in favour of reflected sound, the sense of distance increases, and details which specify the body of the singer become blurred. At the furthest extreme, reverberation can mask the human origin of the voice altogether, transforming a voice into

[6] The echo chamber should be distinguished from tape echo, the sound associated with Sam Phillips' Sun label in the mid-1950s and particularly the early recordings of Elvis Presley. This 'slapback' effect created a ricocheting single repetition of the original signal by manipulating the recording and playback heads on the tape machine. The echo chamber was developed as a way of adding virtual spatial detail to studio recordings from the 1930s on, and although its naturalistic use was retained in traditional, live-performance dominated musical genres (such as jazz and classical recordings) its potential as a novelty effect, and for producing more abstract representations was soon seized upon by pop producers around the late 1940s. The reverberant quality that producers and audiences knew as 'echo' was produced by feeding an audio signal through a monitor placed within a reflective chamber (often the studio toilet) and re-routing this via a microphone placed within the chamber back to the desk. The reverberant signal from the microphone could then be blended with the direct signal to add an extra spatial dimension to the recorded track.

pure sound with uncanny effect. As well as allowing for the construction of virtual space, therefore, echo and reverb allowed producers to push the characteristics of recordings beyond realistic representations and toward the abstract, suggesting new possibilities for the staging of song narratives.

The use of echo or reverb to shape the level of articulatory detail in a recording can play an important role in determining the interpretive possibilities open to listeners. In Chapter 1, I invoked van Leeuwen's (1999) concept of modality to talk about how the level of articulatory detail in visual images can affect the interpretive possibilities available to viewers. In linguistics modality refers to the techniques used in language to indicate the degree of truth which should be ascribed to a representation (van Leeuwen 1999). As van Leeuwen shows, however, the term can also be used to refer to the ways in which sound recordings construct the relationship between representations and everyday reality and thus affect the interpretive stances open to listeners. Recordings which provide a high level of naturalistic detail encourage a realist interpretation; field recordings, for example, which specify a real event, encourage listeners to treat them as faithful records of reality. Recordings which provide less naturalistic detail implicitly discourage naturalistic interpretations, and by exaggerating certain salient aspects of everyday sounds, speak to the listeners' subjective experience. Van Leeuwen (1999: 177) notes that representations move towards a more abstract modality when 'articulation […] is reduced' with the result that the criterion of truth shifts to 'the degree to which the representation can capture the underlying essence of what it depicts'. As the modality of an aural representation becomes more abstract, the criterion of truth becomes primarily affective rather than mimetic.[7]

The technologies that became prevalent in studio recording after 1945 (such as echo and overdubbing) allowed producers to shift the modality of recordings towards more abstract forms of representation. John Leyton's *Johnny Remember Me* (1961) might be considered an example of the use of an abstract modality in post-war British pop recording. The song combines a

[7] This may paradoxically be reached by way of a hyper-realism, that is, in an attention to the sonic detail that goes beyond the limits of the representational.

lyrical evocation of the supernatural with an audible representation of the singer's inner turmoil: as Leyton sings of how he is haunted by the voice of the girl he 'loved and lost a year ago' we hear the voice itself, echoing from far down deep in the mix:

> Well it's hard to believe I know, but I hear her
>
> Sighing in the voice of the wind
>
> Blowing in the treetops,
>
> (Female vocal: oo-ooh..!)
>
> Way above me

In these types of recordings, rather than a realist representation of a live performance, we seem to be given access to the singer's inner experience. Their appeal is partly constituted by the sense that emotions which are ordinarily inside and hidden are made real and present; echo is used not to represent real space but inner space made audible. Echo and reverb also carry an accumulated weight of cultural associations, many of which relate to the interior or the supernatural. Doyle (2005) notes that reverberant spaces figured in pre-phonographic and pre-cinematic literature as spaces of supernatural experience or psychic insight. The appearance of echo in film also signalled transformations in characters' conscious states and their relationship with their environment, evoking the sinister atmosphere of 'deserted streets at night, or gloomy subterranean environments wherein lurks a mortal threat' (ibid.: 170). Once the echo chamber became available to pop studio engineers it was frequently used to evoke the uncanny; Doyle notes that 'performers as unalike as pop singer Vaughn Monroe and blues singer John Lee Hooker were using echo and reverb, albeit in different ways, to signify uncanny presences' (ibid.: 8).

The use of echo in folk and folk-rock

These possibilities and the ways in which they were taken up by folk-rock musicians can be illustrated by comparing two recorded versions of the 'Lyke Wake Dirge' the first by revivalist group The Young Tradition and the second by folk-rock band Pentangle.[8] The song is a traditional text (first published in John Aubrey's *The Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* in 1686) which recounts the soul's journey through the afterlife. The song was believed by Aubrey to have been used in Roman Catholic funeral rites in North Yorkshire until the early seventeenth century and there is anecdotal evidence that the song was indeed used in this context as late as 1800 (Blakeborough 1898: 123). The song appeared in a new setting by Boulton in *Songs of the North* (1895) and it is this version of the tune that was revived by the Young Tradition whose arrangement also provides the melody used in Pentangle's recording. The full text of the Young Tradition's version is given below:

This ae night, this ae night
Any night and all,
Fire and fleet and candle light,
And Christ receive thy soul.

If thou from here away dost pass,
Any night and all,
To whinny moor thou comest at last
And Christ receive thy soul.

If thou gavest ever hosen or shoon,
Any night and all,

[8] The Young Tradition were a three-part *a capella* group comprising Peter Bellamy, Royston Wood and Heather Wood (no relation).

Then sit thee down and put them on.

And Christ receive thy soul.

But if hosen and shoon thou ne'er gavest nane,

Any night and all,

The whinny will prick thee to thy bare bane,

And Christ receive thy soul.

If thou from there away dost pass

Any night and all,

To purgatory fire thou comest at last.

And Christ receive thy soul.

If thou gavest ever meat or drink

Any night and all,

The fire will never make thee shrink.

And Christ receive thy soul.

But if meat or drink thou gavest nane,

Any night and all,

The fire will burn thee to thy bare bane,

And Christ receive thy soul.

The Young Tradition's 'Lyke Wake Dirge' (1965) is fairly typical of recordings of revival singers during the period, presenting a closely grouped ensemble whose perceived directionality and relative volumes reflect natural positions and ratios in live performance. Reverb is used to suggest a slightly

reflective performance space such as a concert hall (or a chapel) but a low absorption rate means that a high degree of articulatory detail can still be discerned. This combined with relatively close mic placement produces a naturalistic density of detail; the performers sound close to the listener and the qualities of their individual voices are easily discernible. The style of performance and the spatial character of the recording reflect the song's performance history by situating it within a formalised or ritual performance context and the recorded image could almost be a live snapshot of one of the group's folk club performances. The recording, however, by minimising background noise establishes a neutral field within which the singers are situated: there is none of the extraneous sound we might expect to hear if we were present at an actual performance. The sound is sufficiently realistic to suggest an actual performance, but the recording's clarity and resonance shift it slightly towards a more abstract modality. The mic positioning suggests an ideal listening position; EQ and reverb have been used to shape and blend the vocals, but not so far as to blur them into one another, and we are still aware of three distinct singers arranged in a recognisable performance configuration.

In Pentangle's 'Lyke Wake Dirge' (1968) a large degree of artificial echo is progressively applied to the band's vocals making it difficult to separate the voices and they blend together to create a single, blurred sound image. Additionally, the directionality of the voices is difficult to pinpoint; the combined sound image is increased in size and the voices seem to fully occupy the space of the recording. The voices seem unnaturally loud, despite the relatively soft and breathy articulation which in the context of an everyday social interaction might suggest a relatively intimate proxemic range. However, the volume of the voices relative to the other instruments suggests a public distance, and because of the frequency profile constructed through the use of EQ, they have a richness and depth that is more than real. There is thus a dissonance between the public reach of the voices and the intimate distance implied by the style of voice production.

Some of the detail that would help supply socio-cultural information about the individual singers is obscured by the echo and as a result the voices lose a degree of individuality. This makes the track stand out from other songs

on the same album, in which close mic positioning and sparing use of echo allows the vocal detail and thus the distinct personalities of the three vocalists to come through clearly.[9] In another song the meaning of this smoothing effect of echo would be differently perceived: in the Beach Boys' 'Surfer Girl' (1963), for example, a vocal harmony arrangement has echo applied to it, again with the effect that details of articulation that would reveal the singers' individuality are smoothed out. Here though, the echo helps produce a tight harmony sound that suggests a unified subject. At the same time, it lends a daydream-like quality to the vocals that reflects the lyric's fantasy speculation about the romantic intentions of a possible lover and their possible future life together.

By underscoring the tightness of the harmonies and accentuating timbral smoothness, a musical sense of togetherness is created which connotes romantic closeness, a reading that is also supported by musical features such as the parallel motion of the harmonies, the vocal effort pattern of the singers and a harmonic progression based on the I-vi-IV-V 'doo-wop' changes which provided a basis for romantic balladry from the 1940s onwards (Moore 2014: 77). In the context of the 'The Lyke Wake Dirge', a religious text, the removal of vocal grit, the marks of the singers' individuality, has the effect of dehumanising them, amplifying the supernatural quality inherent in the textual images.

Techniques of signal processing such as echo can alter the meaning potential of recorded song texts through the management of modality, their perceived level of truth to reality. Once the modality of a recording has been established, listeners are able to apply an appropriate interpretive strategy to the sounds presented: are the sounds intended to be heard as a realistic depiction of a performance event? Or are they constructions unrelated to a prior sonic event and therefore to be interpreted according to a more abstract framework? The move away from mimetic realism towards a more abstract modality, I suggest, allows recorded sounds to be interpreted as expressive or

[9] Four members of the band (Jansch, McShee, Renbourn and Cox) regularly provided lyrical material for the band and sang their own contributions. This suggests an apparent link here between both singing and song-writing as acts of self-expression, and the association of the singer's unique personality with the 'grain' of their distinctive singing voice.

supportive of textual meanings, rather than as purely contingent effects of the performance.

Sound recording, metaphor and textual meaning

One other way in which record production can help to construct textual meanings is through sonic metaphor. Folk-rock musicians were aware of the narrative possibilities presented by electronically mediated sound: as fiddler Dave Swarbrick of Fairport Convention put it:

> You know, if you're singing about a bloke having his head chopped off, a girl fucking her brother and having a baby and the brother getting pissed off and cutting her guts open and stamping on the baby and killing his sister [...] having to work with a storyline like that with acoustic instruments wouldn't be half as powerful or potent, dramatically, as saying the same things electrically. Because when you deal with violence [...] someone slashing with a sword, say, there are sounds that exist electrically – with electric bass, say – that can very explicitly suggest what the words are saying. (Denselow 1975: 140)

Swarbrick's vivid evocation of the capacity of electronic sound to convey the actions, events and images in traditional texts hints at the potential of metaphor theory for explaining how recording as sonic mediation can contribute to the construction of song narratives. In the sonic analogies that he describes metaphors such as 'VOLUME IS PHYSICAL FORCE' are used to structure interpretations of musical sounds and extend the power of textual images.

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980; 1999) conceptual metaphor theory argues that abstract domains of experience (such as music) rely on processes of cross-domain mapping, in which structure from a basic-level source domain is mapped across onto a more abstract target domain. One example is the use of spatial concepts to understand musical pitch, where an 'up/down' schema drawn from the spatial domain is used to think and talk about musical notes as if they had a position in physical space (Zbikowski 2002: 65).

Cognitive metaphors thus allow us to understand relatively abstract experiences in terms of more basic ones. As Johnson and Larson (2003) argue, the basic cognitive metaphors that allow us to understand music have embodied experience at their core. A metaphor based approach also suggests connections between the metaphorical relationships in cultural texts and underlying systems of values. Recent work on musical metaphor suggests that musical sounds not only enter into homologous relationships with other modes, but do so in principled and culturally mediated ways. Conceptual metaphor theory is concerned with the kind of stable, entrenched metaphorical relationships that support more abstract cognition; how time is cognised in spatial terms, for example, is a very basic mapping which supports a huge number of conceptual and linguistic activities, as indicated by expressions such as 'facing the future' or 'Christmas is coming up fast'. Although these are based in universal cognitive processes, the content of conventional mappings is culturally specific. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note, in English it is conventional to use the domain of war to talk about academic arguments, e.g., 'There's a breach in your argument' or 'his position was attacked and undermined' (Figure 5.1).

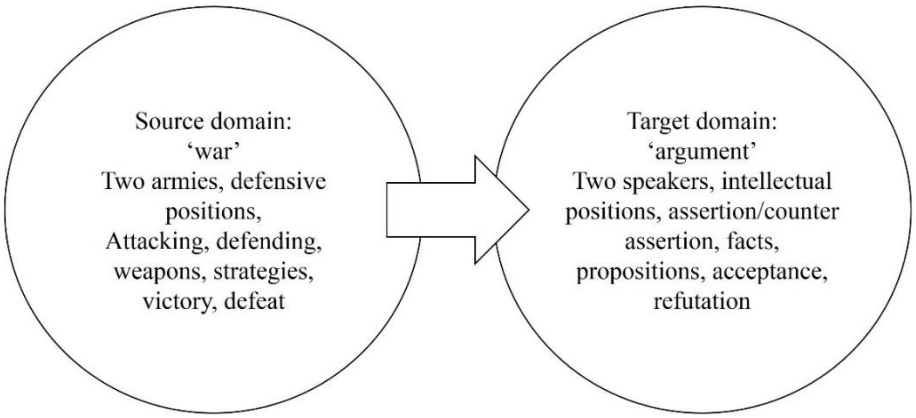

Figure 5.1: Cross domain mapping for 'ARGUMENT IS WAR' (Lakoff and Johnson 1980)

Zbikowski (2002: 67-68) notes that understanding musical pitch in terms of verticality is a predominantly European phenomenon and that other cultures

use metaphors of size, age, or the physical structure of natural phenomena (such as waterfalls) to conceptualise tonal relationships in spatial terms. Although these all share a basic underlying metaphorical structure ('NOTES ARE POINTS ALONG A CONTINUUM') their articulation is informed by the shared cultural experiences and values of the group. Identifying the cognitive metaphors that underlie discursive practice not only reveal the values and assumptions of their producers, but also how producers use metaphor to shape others' perceptions of social reality. Hart (2010: 153), for example, shows how descriptions of immigrants using 'flood' metaphors can be used to manipulate political discourse in the interests of powerful groups.

Moving beyond verbal discourse Zbikowski (2009) has suggested that music can supply the source domain for multimodal metaphors, while Forceville (2009) has shown how sound can be used to construct multimodal metaphors in advertising discourse. This raises new possibilities for understanding how recorded songs communicate social meanings; if underlying cognitive metaphors can be identified in musical compositions, then perhaps record production can also be used to construct meanings in a cohesive and observable way, reflecting producers' values and shaping listener perceptions of social reality.

Blending theory

Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending theory builds on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980; 1999) notion of conceptual metaphor to allow analysis of metaphorical constructions at a more local and specific level (Grady *et al.* 1999). While it acknowledges the existence of Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual domains, blending theory is more concerned with the temporary and novel conceptualisations that occur in ongoing processes of representation and interpretation (ibid.: 101). Blending theory posits the existence of 'mental spaces', 'partial and temporary representational structures which speakers construct when thinking or talking about a perceived, imagined, past, present, or future situation' (ibid.: 102). These temporary spaces build upon the basic cognitive metaphors identified by

Lakoff and Johnson, but map only selected structure across in the course of an ongoing, pragmatic process of active interpretation.

This can be illustrated by an example from music. Zbikowski (2002) shows how conceptual blending underpins the compositional technique of word-painting. In his example from a mass by Palestrina, the text 'descendit de caelis' is illustrated by a descending scalar passage in the music, creating the blended entity of a physical descent that has the qualities of stately, stepwise motion mapped across from the musical articulation (ibid.: 63). The entrenched metaphor 'pitch is position in space' supports a temporary meaning which emerges in the blend of text, music and articulation. The key aspect of conceptual blends is that they produce new emergent meanings within a third 'blended space'; they are more than the sum of their parts. A melodic descent can be conceived as motion in space because of the shared structure of the two 'input spaces' (the content of the 'generic space') but its meaning in the local interpretive context is the product of a blend which incorporates the textual, musical inputs and the spatial, textural or timbral qualities of the performance, generating a new meaning that exceeds that already present in the original input spaces (Figure 5.2).

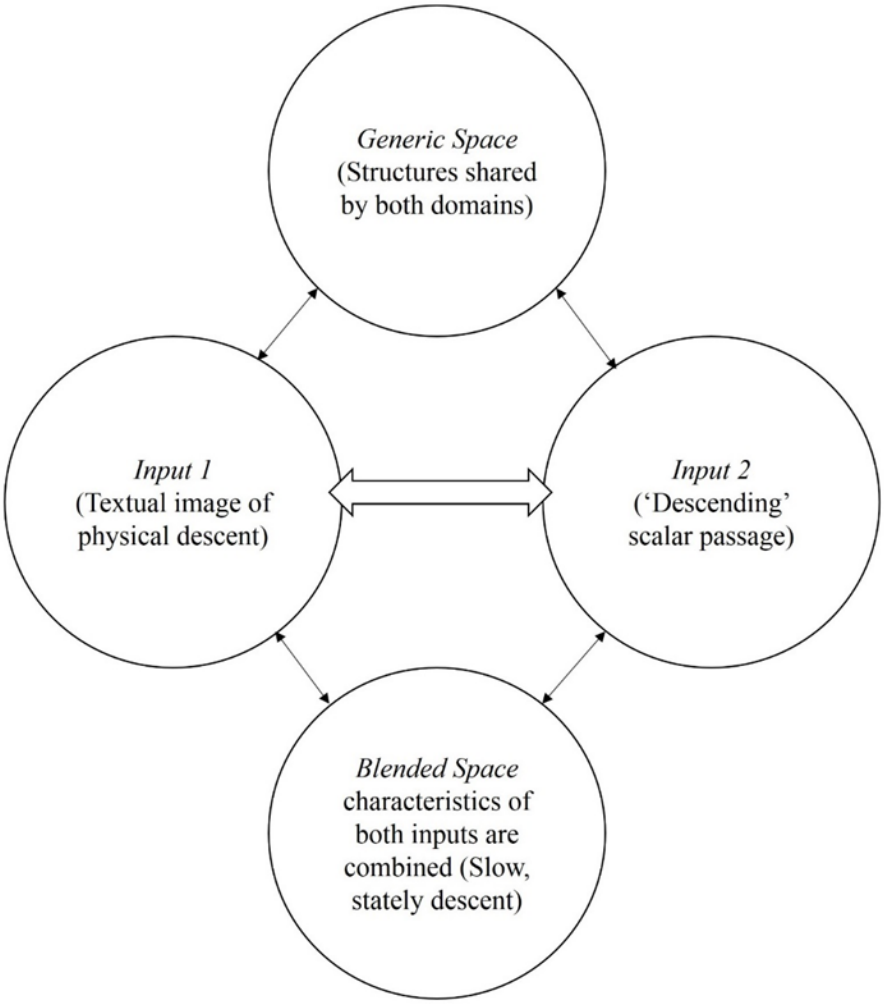

Figure 5.2: Conceptual integration network for Zbikowski (2002) example 'descendit de caelis'

Where conceptual metaphor theory deals with a relatively stable system of underlying cultural metaphors, conceptual blending describes an ongoing cognitive process in which concepts are articulated into 'short-term [constructs] informed by the more general and more stable knowledge structures associated with a particular domain (Grady *et al*. 1999: 102). It thus allows for more detailed discussion of the live processes of sense-making that we engage in when composing, playing or listening to music.

Applying conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory to recorded song

The new resources developed by recording engineers after 1945 opened up further possibilities for the construction of blended meanings in recorded song. Patti Page's *Confess* (1947) was one of the first pop recordings to use the new technique of overdubbing, and has become a classic example of how recording began to transform popular song after 1945 (Lacasse 2000: 127; Moore 2012: 130; Doyle, 2005: 30, 144). The song had already been recorded as an upbeat duet by Buddy Clark and Doris Day earlier the same year. As the recording budget could not stretch to a second vocalist, however, Page took both parts of the duet herself (Lacasse 2000: 128). In her slow, introspective reading the languid vocal is framed by a sparse piano, guitar and bass accompaniment, as she plaintively urges her lover to admit his true feelings:

> Confess,
>
> (Confess, confess)
>
> Why don't you confess?
>
> (Say yes, say yes)
>
> I wish you'd reveal to me
>
> (Reveal to me)
>
> The way that you feel,
>
> (I wish you'd tell me the way that you feel)

In Page's version, aspects of the recording process contribute greatly to the meaning potential of the recorded performance. The main vocal is recorded dry and frontally positioned, while the second is positioned back in the mix as if it were an echo of the lead part and noticeably reverberant. The lines given to this second reverberant voice (shown in brackets) are shorter and more urgent ('say yes, say yes') compared to those in the lead voice (which might be interpreted as representing Page's outward social persona) which is more

wistful, less direct ('I wish you'd reveal to me/ the way that you feel'). This, combined with the fact that the second voice is clearly Page herself, and the lyrical concern with feelings that remain unvoiced supports the interpretation that the second part is Page's inner voice, rising to the surface with 'an aching need to be heard' (Doyle 2005: 145).

Where Clark and Day's realist recording evoked an image of two lovers poised together on the brink of a deeper intimacy, Page's version uses echo and overdubbing to suggest a lonelier and more introspective experience. We are less sure of the reality of the feelings that Page demands that the other confess – is she imagining them? The recording affords the listener an emotional intimacy with the singer that is lacking from other versions – we seem to hear her innermost thoughts – while it denies her the kind of interpersonal intimacy that Clark and Day's duet version vividly portrays. In Page's *Confess*, the production provides crucial material for aesthetic interpretation; the potential interpretation of Page struggling with her own unexpressed feelings emerges multimodally in the imaginative space conjured between the recording and the listener by the combination of text, music and studio sound (Figure 5.3).

Blending theory can help to describe this as an emergent meaning resulting from a blend of two input spaces. When we listen to Page's *Confess* and hear her overdubbed second vocal, we can make sense of the experience because of our capacity to construct imaginative blends of structure from two or more spaces. Our interpretations can also draw on the existing cultural tropes discussed above (such as the notion of an interior monologue, common in cinema) to construct a blended mental space in which the second voice we hear on the recording is Page's inner voice, her conscience or soul.[10] This

[10] *Confess* (1947) drew on the pre-existing cultural link between the echoic space of recordings and the mind already discussed (above and in chapter 3). Aural explorations of altered inner states became more developed and acquired a countercultural significance with the arrival of psychedelia. The Beatles' 'Strawberry Fields Forever' (1967) with its backwards tracks, slowed-down vocals and use of tape collage exemplifies the link between sonic experimentation, psychic exploration and counter-cultural politics. The lyric explicitly questioned the notion of a reality beyond the sign ('nothing is real') and was released accompanied by a film in which coloured filters, backwards sequences and spatial distortions amplified the song's surreal sonic textures. Where *Confess* used overdubbing and echo to suggest the voice of unconscious desire, the countercultural preoccupation with consciousness led to the use of studio techniques to sonically reference represent the

emergent meaning feeds into how we interpret the song as a whole: Page's reading becomes a study of anxiety, introspection, and possibly unrequited love, rather than a celebration of shared intimacy.

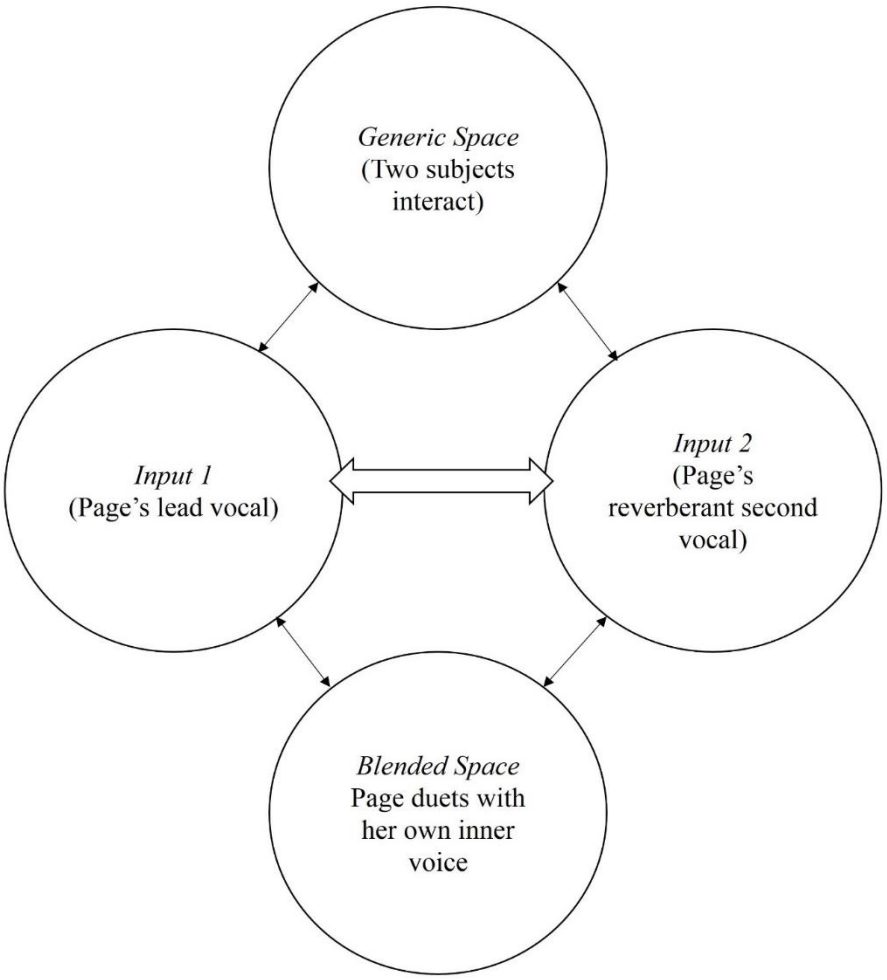

Figure 5.3: Conceptual integration network for Patti Page's Confess

Returning to Pentangle' Lyke Wake Dirge', how can these concepts be applied in understanding how recording shapes the song's meaning potential? Using conceptual metaphor theory the text itself can be understood as based on a cross-domain mapping in which a less familiar or more abstract domain

experiential quality of altered states (whether the result of psychedelic drug use or of spiritual awakening). As Whiteley (1990: 38) notes, these techniques quickly became indexical of countercultural identity through what she calls 'psychedelic coding'; in adopting sound as a means for exploring the psychology of song characters, folk-rock musicians tacitly aligned themselves with countercultural aesthetics and values.

of experience is made knowable by mapping structure from a more concrete domain grounded in embodied experience. In this case, the process of dying (the ultimate unknown domain) is made comprehensible by recruiting structure from the more familiar domain of travel. The conceptual metaphor is one with a wide cultural distribution, exemplifying a popular Christian (and pre-Christian) trope 'the soul's journey' which underpins religious representations of death in terms of a physical journey from medieval liturgical art to modern tabloid stories of 'near death' experiences.

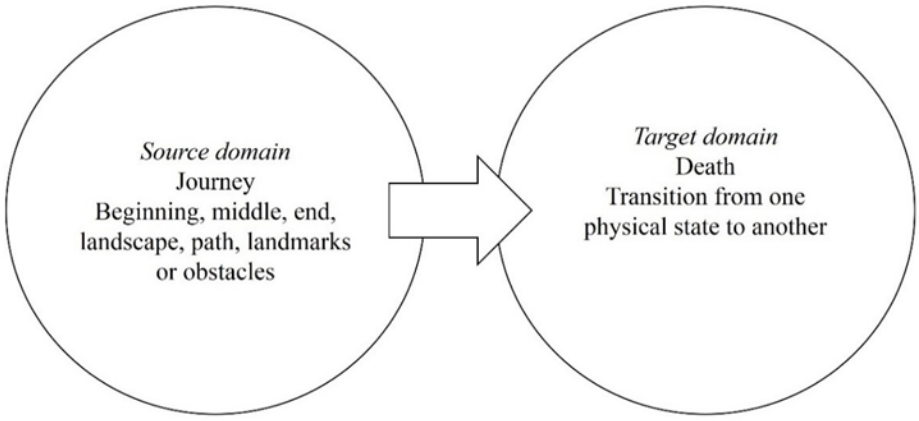

Figure 5.4: Cross domain mapping for 'DEATH IS A JOURNEY'

In this particular instance, however, the basic conceptual metaphor ('DEATH IS A JOURNEY') is highly elaborated, producing a text in which the afterlife is represented as a physical landscape of moors and bridges leading to the fires of purgatory (and ultimately to heaven) (Figure 5.4). Local details are constructed through elaboration: the soul leaves the house and its comforts to set out on a journey, encountering a series of progressively more daunting challenges; the 'whinny moor', the 'brig o' dread' and 'purgatory fire'. The narrative reflects the Roman Catholic belief that good deeds done in life help to ease the passage of the soul through purgatory and into heaven. Thus, in the song, shoes given to the needy in life are magically restored to the giver, to protect their feet from the pricking of the gorse while crossing the 'whinny moor'.

A conceptual integration network can be produced for the text as a conceptual blend (Figure 5.5). Although the basic mapping is founded in a cultural convention, the specific blend of the two input spaces, 'death' (a transition between states) and 'travel', is unique to the song and creates new structure that does not exist in the original spaces. The process of dying as represented in Christian mythology does not have necessary structural aspects that correlate with the moors, bridge, and fire of the journey. It is only in the blended space of the song text that these aspects of the travel domain are mapped onto the notion of death as a transition into the afterlife to produce new structure in the form of the succession of 'trials' which form the basis of the song's narrative.

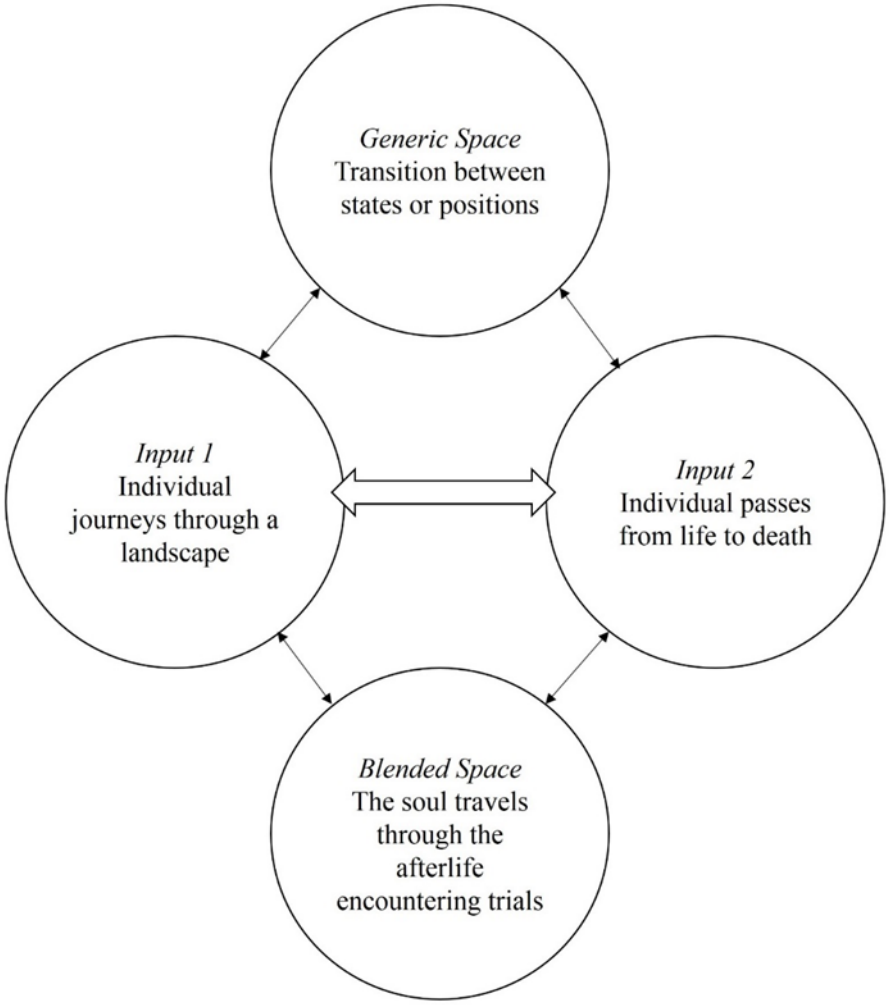

Figure 5.5: Conceptual integration network for 'Lyke Wake Dirge'

The blended space also projects structure back on the input spaces, allowing death to be seen as a journey for which one can prepare, and framing acts of giving in the form of charity during the individual's lifetime as part of this preparation. The landscape of the text is a transfigured everyday setting, in which everyday objects and occurrences take on an extra burden of spiritual meaning.

Zbikowski (2002: 74) points out that in cross-domain mapping, structure is not mapped across wholesale: in this case, where structure from the domain of the everyday is imposed upon death as a spiritual transformation, only the salient aspects of the everyday objects, those relevant to the subject's experience are recruited into the blend. Thus the thorns exist only to prick, the bridge to inspire dread, the fire to shrink, etc. The relationship between the objects as they exist within the blended space of the text and as they exist in the realm of the everyday from which they are recruited is one of abstraction. It is in terms of this relationship that they can carry their supernatural significance; they exist only *for the subject*. This mapping, the thinking of one domain in terms of another relates to the hermeneutic modality the text sets up: in realism, the world exists objectively, and objects for-themselves; in a more abstract modality (as here) the phenomenal world becomes more symbolic in character and objects exist only for the perceiver.

In Pentangle's version of the 'Lyke Wake Dirge' the abstract modality set up in the text and the modality of the recording merge. This aspect marks it out as different in approach from the version by the Young Tradition in which the performance seems to produce its meaning unaided by the recording medium. If the Young Tradition's version is analogous to a film of a stage play shot with a single camera, Pentangle's version is closer to a studio-shot film, incorporating aspects of the recording into the performance itself, allowing new meanings to emerge in the blend of musical-textual and sonic properties constituted by the recording itself.

Narrative uses of production techniques in folk-rock

When the folk singer and guitarist Martin Carthy joined Ashley Hutchings' post-Fairport folk-rock outfit Steeleye Span in 1971, he had already recorded a string of albums featuring his solo voice and acoustic guitar. Carthy's guitar accompaniments had always made use of a range of harmonic techniques (such as drones and unison notes) achievable by the use of altered tunings, and the percussive effects (such as damping and snapping the strings) made possible by an innovative fingerstyle guitar technique. In this new context, he was able to draw upon the semiotic resources of a rock band line up and the contemporary studio. Whilst recording the song 'Boys of Bedlam' (1970), he and joint lead-vocalist Maddy Prior experimented with an unusual approach to recording their vocals:

> [T]he idea was to make the voices sound odd. Well, nowadays you'd just put a lot of nonsense and that bought stuff, but then we hadn't that kind of thing you see. So we sang in the back of a banjo. That's why it's got this strange vocal sound. Martin said, 'oh yes, this sounds great! Sounds like crazy lunatics'. (Prior quoted in Sweers 2005: 180)

In the song's eighteenth century text, a sequence of absurd yet faintly ominous images conveys a sense of lunacy and vague threat.[11] The lyric is set to a recently composed tune in a seventeenth century style by revivalist band the Halliard which strongly suggests an unspecified and exoticised past. The unorthodox mic positioning also lends the vocals a highly unusual timbre, as if the singers' voices were distorted by an impure or obstructed signal. In the context of the song, this technique, by changing the frequency profile of the singers' voices and altering and obscuring their natural tone with a rough sonic patina, is able to stand for the altered mental state of the song's protagonists; it is, as Prior's remarks suggest, an audible representation of lunacy.

Van Leeuwen (1999: 205) argues that the semiotic affordances of timbre are rooted in what he calls *experiential meaning potential*, which arises

[11] The song also known as 'Mad Maudlin' (Roud No. V16366) certainly predates its earliest printed appearance in Thomas D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1728).

from ‘our experience of what we physically have to do to produce a particular sound’. Thus perceived articulatory qualities of smoothness, roughness, laxness or tension invoke interpretations based in our own experiences of our physical state when producing these sounds: ‘The sound that results from tensing’ he suggests, ‘not only *is* tense, it also *means* tense – and makes tense’; and these meaning potentials can be extended to other sources, machines, instruments, etc., which share the same timbral properties (ibid.: 131, emphasis in original).

Sound recordings can evoke experiential meaning by manipulating the perceived articulatory characteristics of sounds. The treatment given to the vocals in this track accentuates qualities of nasality and roughness, creating a sense of tension and rigidity which is further emphasised by the relatively small space assigned to the two vocals within the stereo array. In the musical-textual space of the song, these generalised embodied meanings of tension, rigidity, and roughness are inflected by the lyrical references to madness to construct a sense of otherness and threat.

Applying a metaphor theory approach can add a further layer to this analysis by revealing the underlying conceptual metaphors which might structure such uses of the medium. The implied proposition made in the song’s production could be expressed verbally as ‘MADNESS IS OBSTRUCTED SIGNAL’, framing the concept of ‘understanding’ or ‘mental clarity’ (a concept which is itself a visual metaphor) in terms of communication. The basic conceptual metaphor at work here – ‘UNDERSTANDING IS HEARING’ – underlies linguistic constructions such as ‘you’re not hearing me’ or ‘I hear you loud and clear’. As conceptual metaphor theory requires that we identify a source domain and a target domain, it could be argued that the domain of communication, as cued by the unusual sound of the vocals, which evoke the common cultural experience of a poor signal hampering understanding (on the telephone or radio, perhaps) is used to construct madness in terms of this metaphor of an obstructed or altered signal. This would constitute a multimodal metaphor whose source domain is primarily cued by the sonic medium, and whose target domain is located in the textual mode (Figure 5.6).

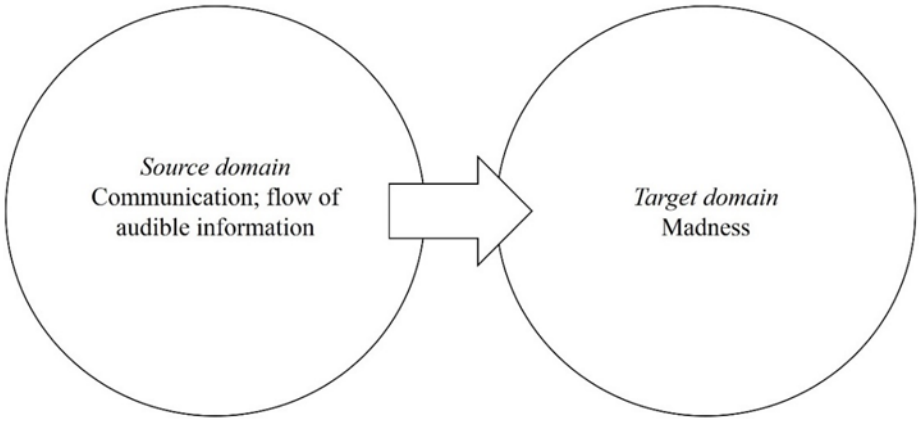

Figure 5.6: Cross domain mapping for 'MADNESS IS DISTORTED SIGNAL'

Applying blending theory, we could argue that the mental spaces set up by the text, and those of the production, are combined in a blended space in which emergent meanings are produced. A conceptual integration network has at least four spaces compared to conceptual metaphor theory's two: the two inputs feed into the blend, but there is also a fourth 'generic' space. This contains the shared invariant structure recruited from the input spaces, in this case, a sender and receiver and a signal passing between them. The salient aspects of each input space (the sound of the vocals, the image of madness in the text) create a temporary blend in which madness has an audible (vocal) aspect (Figure 5.7).

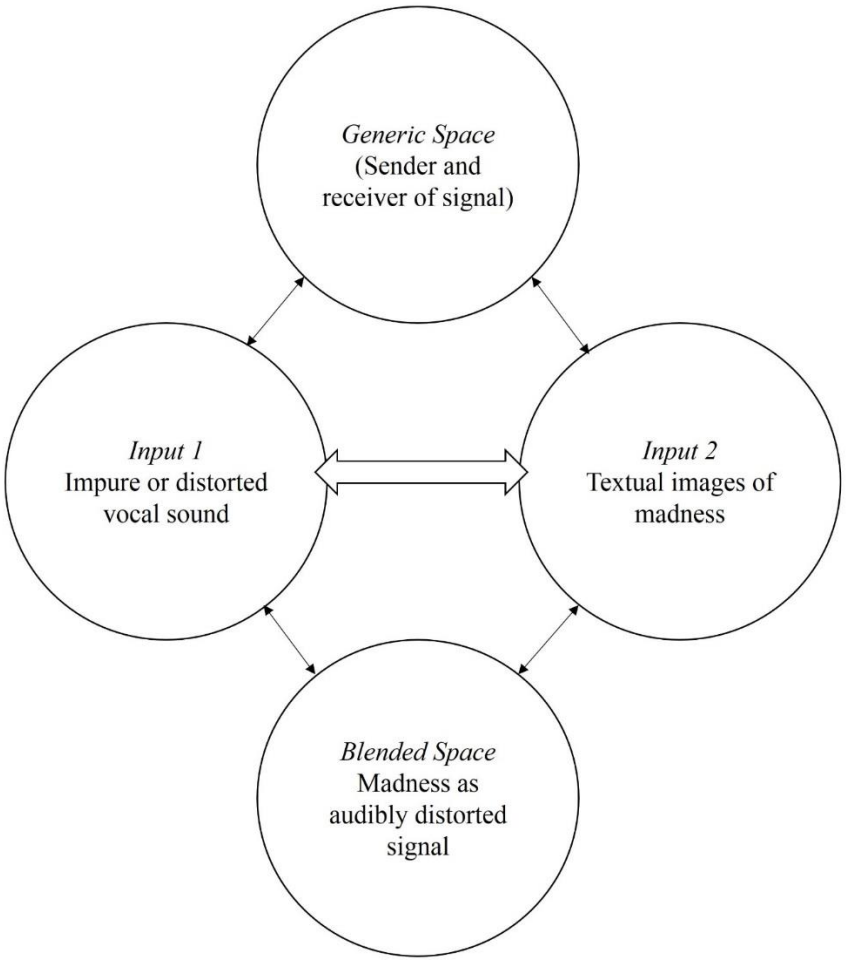

Figure 5.7: Conceptual integration network for 'Boys of Bedlam'

Conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory both hold that identifying underlying metaphors in representations can reveal tacit values. What then can this example tell us about the song's underlying values or cultural assumptions? The effect of this treatment of the vocal has implications for how the relationship between the song's persona and the listener is constructed: the effect of the vocal sound in the introduction is 'othering', distancing us from the singers by virtue of their vocal strangeness and the notion that this reflects an altered mental state. We do not identify directly with the singers, but are threatened by their essential difference from us. In the lyrical context suggested by the title's reference to Bedlam, we are placed in a voyeuristic relationship to the song's mad protagonists. The song's

production helps establish a subject-position in which we see the Bedlamites as 'other' in terms of social distance.

One noticeable effect of the positioning of the vocals in the stereo mix is that they sound small and cramped; we hear them as occupying a small delimited space within the total aural space of the recording. Given the text's reference to Bedlam, a place of confinement, we might hear this feature of the mix as analogous to the physical constraints imposed upon the song's subjects – kind of sonic cell or straight-jacket. This helps to construct an identification of Carthy and Prior with 'the mad' of the text and to suggest that we are viewing them from a particular perspective. The imposition of a notion of 'confinement' onto the sonic qualities of the mix, though afforded by the song's text, is not a straightforward translation from one mode to another but is in fact something new. There is nothing in the song's text alone to suggest that the subject is, at the beginning of the song's narrative, physically incarcerated, nor is there anything in the sound of the vocals alone that determines such a reading. The possibility for such an interpretation emerges out of the recording as a multi-modal text. The combination of the sonic qualities of the recording, the notion of madness and the image of bedlam allows for the ascription of this meaning based on a complex of cross-modal blends which combine to suggest a narrative in which the singers, 'lunatics' incarcerated in Bedlam, are singing within a cramped physical space. If the listener is aware of the eighteenth century practice of charging voyeurs admission to the hospital to view the lunatics, a situation is constructed in which the singers may be identified with 'the mad' and the listener with the voyeur.

Later in the song, the mix changes, and the vocal sound becomes much clearer, with Prior dropping out and Carthy taking the lead vocal. The vocal sound image is larger and more prominent in the mix, and articulated more clearly. It is a mix that, aside from the slightly unusual instrumentation, is much closer to a conventional rock configuration, with a centrally positioned vocal and other instruments balanced across the stereo array, the arrangement that Moore (2012: 32) has called the 'diagonal mix'. Van Leeuwen (1999: 23) argues that if a sound 'is positioned as Figure, it is

thereby treated as the most important sound, the sound which the listener must identify with, and /or react to and/or act upon'. The central positioning of Carthy's vocal in the second mix enacts a more intimate social distance, suggesting that we identify with the song persona more closely, that we are less estranged from it. The song's production thus constructs two distinct social distances, suggesting that 'madness' whether experienced as sense or nonsense is a function of perspective. Structural aspects of the mix create the outline of a narrative, an audible shift in perspective that feeds into the text and allows new potential meanings to emerge.

A final example that may be drawn out of this short section relates aspects of sound production to the song's rhythmic structure. The first verse, sung in alternate bars of 4/4 and 5/4 is accompanied by a tapped drum figure played in 3/4 setting up a cross-rhythm in which the drum hits fall repeatedly on weak beats in the vocal part, highlighting unexpected words and syllables in the text:

For to **see** mad **Tom of** B**edlam**

Ten thou**sand miles** I'll **travel**,

Mad Maudlin **goes on** di**rty to**es,

For to save **her shoes** from **gravel**

Still I **sing 'bon**ny **boys, bon**ny mad **boys,**

Bed**lam boys** are **bonny**,

For they **all** go **bare and** they live **by** the **air**,

And they want **no drink** nor **money**

The two contrasting rhythms add to the sense of strangeness and disconnection evoked by the sound quality of the vocals and their emphasis on unexpected syllables also set up an equivalence between a lack of sense and rhythmic dissonance, a metaphor of madness as being 'out of sync' and therefore unpredictable and threatening. The two rhythm patterns achieve a

momentary convergence when the bass enters at around 0.30s causing the low, muffled bass note to fall on the word 'down':

I went **down** to Satan's kitchen,

For to get me food one morning

And there I got souls piping hot,

All on the spits a-turning

The concurrence of the bass note with this word in the text is unexpected due to the setting up of the two conflicting rhythms which make it unclear as to where we should locate the rhythmic pulse. This quality of unexpectedness greatly adds to the impact of the bass's entrance and adds to the sense of madness as a kind of rhythmic disconnection a further dimension of implied threat.

This cross-modal focussing on the word 'down' builds on the metaphor 'pitch relationships are relationships in vertical space' which Zbikowski (2002) identifies as a fundamental metaphor in western conceptions of musical pitch. But as well as allowing us to place the note on a metaphorical continuum of 'low to high' in the immediate context of the song, the musical metaphor also fulfils a narrative function, illustrating the descent alluded to in the text by drawing upon a conventional musical metaphor to reflect the cultural convention that 'hell is below'. Again, however, the sonic quality of the bass itself contributes something that is not found in the text alone, its muffled but reverberant quality suggests a descent into a subterranean space which is simultaneously large, mysterious and terrible.

Here, as in previous examples, production is used to tell us about the inner state of the song's persona and how we should respond to them, managing the perceived social distance between protagonist and listener.[12]

[12] Dibben (1999) and Clarke (1999) provide detailed discussions of the concept of 'subject-position' in recorded popular song.

The production choices not only reflect entrenched cultural metaphors that organise a range of verbal, textual and sonic practices, but speak to cultural values, desires and assumptions; in *Confess*, these had to do not only with conventional ways of mapping the mind and the internal structures of thought, but with the social implications of the relationship between inner desire and outward behaviour; in 'Bedlam Boys', they relate to ideas about the nature of madness as a cultural construct. In both cases a meaning not present in the lyric alone is constructed multimodally, using production techniques to elaborate on the textual images.

Recorded space as psychic space in 'Pentangling'

Other examples can be found of aspects of recording technique helping fill out a subject's inner life. In Pentangle's track 'Pentangling' (1968) a widening of the stereo field using panning and echo suggests a corresponding broadening of the subject's mental horizons. At the beginning of the track, the stereo space of the recording is comparatively narrow, dry and depthless, an effect achieved by close mic positioning, a centrally clustered mix and avoidance of echo. At the point of transition to the next section of the piece, however, the stereo field suddenly becomes wider and deeper, creating an aural effect which is the equivalent of an adjustment of a camera lens's aperture. This is produced by using panning to increase the width of the stereo image while a simultaneous increase in the level of echo applied to the track creates a sense of enhanced depth. As a result, the three-dimensional space of the recording suddenly seems to open up.

Applying a conceptual metaphor/blending approach, I suggest that production techniques are used here to construct a multimodal metaphor in which space (specifically, the stereo field) acts as source domain for understanding the evolving mental state of the song's subject. There are three main elements in the construction of this metaphor. Firstly, and most importantly, panning and echo allow the space of the recording to supply the source domain for the metaphor. Secondly, the text establishes an introspective orientation and specifies the subject of the song through a series

of impressionistic images. Thirdly, stylistic changes in the musical domain further elaborate the nature of the transition in the subjective state of the song's protagonist (specifically, a transition from introspection and stiffness to a more relaxed outward orientation); this is accomplished through a stylistic shift from a relatively tensely articulated folk/renaissance style to a lighter, looser, jazz inflected feel in the song's second section.

In the first section of the lyric, passive verb processes suggest a trance-like state, with verbs like 'slip' and 'float' evoking smooth, gentle movement, and the casting off of a familiar viewpoint for a transformed perceptual orientation:

> The swimmer slips below the surface,
>
> Floating slowly in clear water,
>
> Drinking sunlight through the fisheye,
>
> See the moon broken.

In this passage, a subject for the song ('the swimmer') is identified, described in the third person before the final line of the verse shifts the tense from third person to second person imperative, with the phrase 'see the moon broken'. This line immediately precedes the transition to the song's second section and the shift from a flat, anechoic mix to a more spacious mix configuration. This section's lyric invokes a more complex field of interaction for the song's subject, one far richer in interactional possibility:

> Moonflowers bright with people walking,
>
> Drinking wine and eating fruit and laughing
>
> Heart and soul life passes one to another
>
> Death alone walks with no one to converse with.

The grammatical features of the lyric and the stylistic contrast between the first and second sections of the song outline a narrative of perceptual change; the change in orientation of the lyric and the change in the music produce a narrative in their own right. But production plays a crucial role: it is only through the use of panning as a production technique that the spatial metaphor of 'EXPANDED STEREO IMAGE = EXPANDED CONSCIOUSNESS' comes to frame the meaning, elaborating on and clarifying the shift from stiffness and constraint to relaxation as one that results from a change in mental orientation on the part of the subject (Figure 5.8).

Image Schemata

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999) the condition of possibility for cognitive structures such as the 'STEREO SPACE = MIND' metaphor is the shared structure that underlies conventional thinking about both stereo recordings and the mind as physical containers. Lakoff and Johnson's 'image schemata' are pre-conceptual structures based in 'recurrent patterns of bodily experience' (Johnson and Rohrer 2007 cited in Zagorski-Thomas 2014: 9). These basic cognitive templates are what 'link sensorimotor experience to conceptualization and language' (ibid.). The 'container' schema allows us to cognise relationships such as 'inside/outside' and to make inferences such as 'If 'A is in B, and X is in A, then X is in B' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 31). The minimal structure of the container schema includes 'an inside, an outside

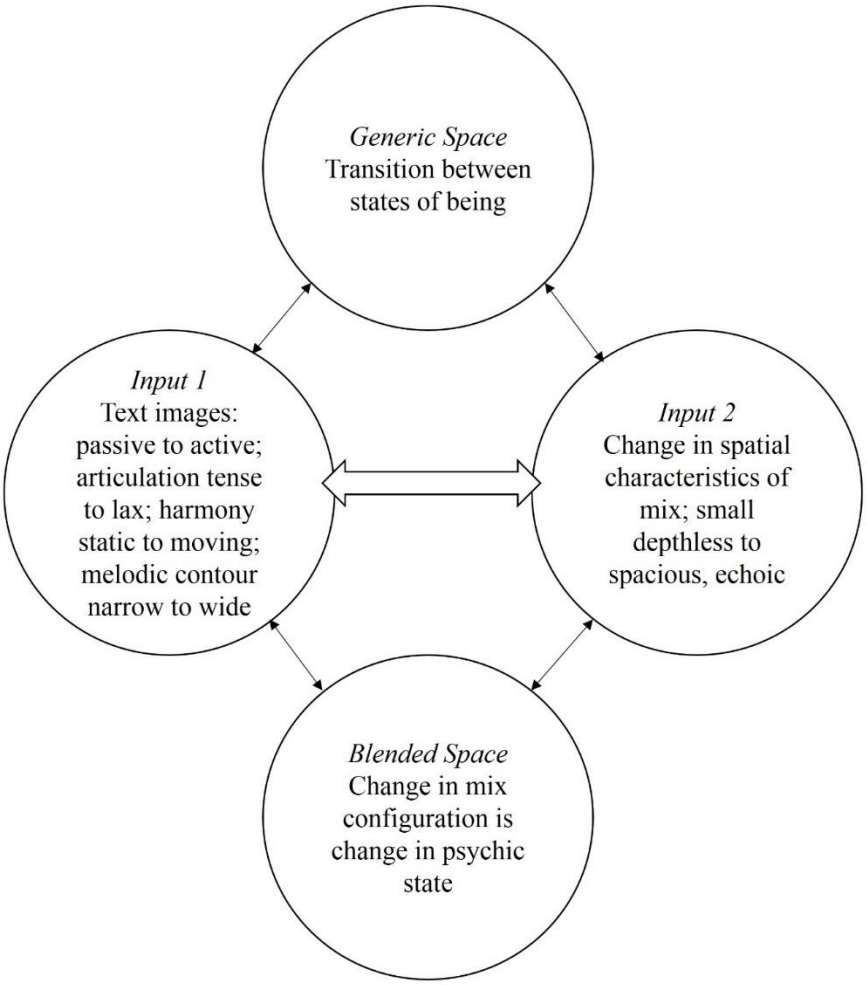

Figure 5.8: Conceptual integration network for 'Pentangling'

and a boundary' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 32). Image schemata are cross-modal: they can be imposed upon a visual or an auditory scene (marking out a sub-field within it), 'as when we conceptually separate out one part of a piece of music from another' (ibid.: 32). In recorded song, a common use of the container schema is observable in the way the stereo field is usually conceived as a four-dimensional space with lateral, vertical, temporal and axial dimensions and an audible boundary (the space between the speakers) (Dockwray and Moore 2010).[13] This space can then be mentally divided into

[13] Dockwray and Moore's (2010) 'sound-box' uses this notion of the recording space as a container capable of being subdivided into smaller spaces as a hermeneutic device.

smaller sub-fields, with sound sources distributed across it. The shared structure of a container schema is also what allows for this mapping of the song's stereo space onto psychic space, suggesting a broadening of the perceptual field of the song's subject. The notion of the mind as a container for thoughts, concepts, impressions and experiences is one which underlies many linguistic expressions relating to thought, and I argue that it is the conceptual metaphor of 'consciousness expansion' that is being invoked here.

This use of panning reflects popular ways of talking about mental states as qualities of spaces or objects within spaces in phrases like 'keeping an open mind' or a 'head full of ideas', because both stereo sound and the mind are conceptualised in terms of a container schema. This underlying conceptual framework makes it possible for the recording to suggest that in the transition between musical sections, we should hear a psychic progression in the subject. This track can thus be related to contemporary countercultural texts such as *Itchycoo Park* (1967) and 'Strawberry Fields Forever' (1967) which use textural changes in the spatial or timbral characteristics of the recorded space to signal altered perception. Moreover, through the textual imagery and the stylistic shift in the music, in this track, psychic exploration and consciousness expansion are represented as desirable. Again, metaphor theory suggests ways of grounding the uses of production in shared, cross-modal conceptual structures, linking the aesthetics of production to group ideologies.

In his study of 'visionary' British music Young (2010: 217-218) interprets the world evoked by 'Pentangling' as a sonic Utopia, 'a gracious paradise' where 'a carefree, effortless existence is nourished with an abundance of good things to eat and drink […] a "land of doesn't have to be"'. The song evokes an idyllic existence in which personal exploration and self-realization are unconstrained by everyday concerns. The notion of a perceptual shift from tension to a more relaxed disposition is supported and elaborated on by changes in the music: at the beginning of this second section, the song's harmonic basis shifts to a jazz/blues mixolydian feel. This stylistic transition is marked by the entrance of double bass and brushed drum kit playing a slow ('strolling pace') 4/4 beat that slightly emphasises beats 1 and

3. The sense of tension and pent-up energy of the first section is replaced by a sense of relaxation and smoothness, underlining the transition between contrasting affective states.

As well as using rhythmic and harmonic features to suggest a transition from stasis to smooth, forward motion, the arrangement relates notions of bodily disposition to culturally mediated notions of musical style. The fuller instrumentation, combined with a more contrapuntal approach (contrasting an interweaving relationship of parts with the uniformity of direction in section one) suggests a transition from the solipsism of the first section into a world populated by multiple others. The tense, jerky, stepwise movement of the first section's melody, the more 'blocky' harmony and the more 'classical' technique, gives way to a smooth, sliding melodic contour with a wider compass and smoother transitions between chords suggesting greater freedom and ease of movement. As in the band's version of 'Lyke Wake Dirge', echo on the voice and instruments smooths out the details of articulation that were so evident in the first section, suggesting less effort in production, and conveying an impression of spaciousness and depth. Here, however, the frictionless effect suggests bodily ease rather than a bodiless supernatural context. In 'Pentangling', the use of echo again lends a sense of smoothness to the overall mix, but this time it blends with the easy-going state of the text-subject, the languid, jazz-inflected music and the relaxed articulation of the performance to construct a different subject-position; one which presents the song's soundscape as pleasurable, relaxed, and free from constraint. The recording contributes to the construction of a subject-position which, as Young's (2010) interpretation suggests, seems to look favourably on counter-cultural notions of non-alienated labour, self-expression and personal exploration.

Metaphor and narrative in 'The Murder of Maria Marten'

The Albion Country Band's 'The Murder of Maria Marten' (1971) also uses multimodal metaphor to elaborate upon the inner experience of the song's persona. In order to construct its narrative, the track makes use of tape editing

to splice together two very different mix configurations and atmospheres. This technique is used to set up the metaphor 'different mixes are points in narrative time'. Hutchings had seen himself as the 'academic' of Fairport and Steeleye Span, and was the driving force behind the 'conscious project' of reinterpreting traditional song that was played out in the work of those bands (Sweers 2005: 91). The filmic quality of the piece with its audible 'scene changes' reflected a conscious strategy on the part of Hutchings:

> It was my idea to cut it up, to cut up the song so that it doesn't start at the beginning and end with him being hung, it takes the action from the middle – it's like a movie. That song at the time was unique because it treated the song like a film with flashbacks. (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014)

The track is based on a nineteenth century broadside in the form of a 'true confession' by the murderer William Corder who was executed for the crime in 1828.[14] Hutchings re-ordered the ballad's original verse sequence for the recording, beginning the song at the moment when Corder arranges to meet Marten at the Red Barn, the scene of the killing; at this point, the protagonist is speaking to his prospective victim in the future conditional tense; the murder of the title has yet to take place:

> If you meet me at the Red Barn,
>
> As sure as I have life,
>
> I will take you to Ipswich town,
>
> And there make you my wife.

In order to convey this sense of our entering the story at a crucial moment in the narrative, the mix 'fades in' to reveal a temporal sequence already in motion; the track, effectively, has no beginning. This first section recounts

[14] The broadside sold over a million copies, becoming the inspiration for a series of dramatic retellings, a feature film of 1935 and the song 'Murder in the Red Barn' (1992) by Tom Waits.

Corder's preparation for the murder itself before a cross-fade into the second mix takes us straight to the execution scene and the killer's warning from the gallows. With this dramatic change in the instrumentation and the vocal quality, which becomes highly echoic, the recording produces a quasi-cinematic scene change allowing us to shift between two 'presents'. After two verses, we are returned to the unfolding present of the ballad and Corder's first person narrative:

> I went unto her father's house,
> The 18th day of May,
> And said 'my dear Maria
> We will fix our wedding day'.

The narrative continues for several verses, recounting the murder itself and the appearance of Maria's ghost to her mother in a dream, the discovery of the girl's body by her father and his confrontation of Corder with the corpse at the trial. The song then ends up once more at the gallows, and Corder's appeal to the witnesses:

> So all young men that do pass by,
> With pity look on me,
> For murdering of that young girl
> I was hung upon a tree.

The recording then concludes with the sound of a horse drawn wagon (intended, Hutchings says, to represent the executioner's cart) crossing the stereo field from left to right, before a final fade (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014).

The narrative sequence of the ballad is organised using different instrumentations and mix characteristics to locate the action at different points in time. The unfolding present of the main action of the ballad is denoted by full rock band instrumentation (two vocals, two electric guitars, electric bass, kit) with the addition of fiddle, and an overall mix which is comparatively dry and present and which uses a conventional 'diagonal' configuration (Dockwray and Moore 2010).[15] The second point in narrative time is represented by a mix in which a highly echoic female vocal is accompanied by a droning hurdy-gurdy, also treated with reverb. This section is harmonically and rhythmically static and characterised by a sense of stasis and entropy, contrasting with the 'staggering' irregular metre of the previous section.

In the context of the narrative, this sparse, echoic mix accompanies the verses in which the song's main character stands awaiting execution and issuing a warning from the gallows to the gathered spectators. Machin (2010: 125) refers to the cultural-historical connotations of reverb, linking it to spaces of authority, even the 'voice of God'. In this case the use of reverb accomplishes a number of discursive effects: firstly, it evokes cultural references signalling a sense of loneliness and exposure, encouraging us to identify with the emotional trajectory of the song's anti-hero; secondly, it augments the song's narrative rhythm by its difference from the song's other mix configuration; and thirdly, it smooths the vocal timbre, contributing to its lax and breathy quality, and the low-affect, entropic mood of the vocal performance.

The music/sound discourse in the Albion Country Band's reading of 'Maria Marten' both amplifies and exceeds aspects of the textual structure. The characteristic switching between tenses, times, and from first to third person in the ballad text itself provides a framework for interpreting certain musical and textural features of the recording, and the two contrasting mixes allow us to move between two different times within the narrative. But the

[15] Dockwray and Moore's (2010) 'diagonal mix' refers to the now standard configuration in stereo rock band recordings which places guitars left and right, vocals forward and rhythm section instruments (bass and drums) at the back of the mix.

blend of textual and musical/textural spaces allows for significant elaboration on the text images, and again, meanings are produced multimodally that cannot be reduced to meanings located in any of the modes taken individually. Conceptual blending can again help to explain how these meanings emerge through the interaction of music, text and sound. A blend between aspects of the textual structure – its switching between different tenses, viewpoints and times – and the musical structure, constructs a sense of the music's representing different times and places (Figure 5.9).

The music exemplifies a meaning that seems to reside in the text itself, but there is also a remainder that allows further elaborated meanings to emerge in the song's blended space. The repetitive rhythmic character of the arrangement in mix 1 could be heard as mechanistic; one verse follows the next in quick succession, the vocal seeming to be pushed forward by the ensemble, which could suggest a determinist reading of the song's narrative. Coupled with singer Shirley Collins's delivery (breathy, low-affect), a sense of passivity or even automatism could be read into the song at this point, a sense that Corder, rather than an autonomous actor, is caught up in events that are unfolding outside of his control. In mix 2, which accompanies the song's 'gallows scene', the slower tempo (combined with a more rubato feel), the static harmony, the smoothing out of articulation with echo, and the low-energy of Collins's vocal, combine to create a sense of entropy, as if the narrator has reached a point of termination, no longer driven along by the force of events and lacking the energy to continue.

Hutchings points out that in its broadside form 'The Murder of Maria Marten' was sensationalist tabloid fodder, 'the equivalent of a whole month of front page stories in The Sun' (Hutchings, fieldwork interview, October 2014). Where previous readings of the tale (such as Tod Slaughter's portrayal of Corder in the film version of 1935) revel in its lurid aspects, the Albion Country Band's recording, while retaining the language of the original ballad text, adds a layer of interpretation that moves the piece beyond pure melodrama and affords a more nuanced perspective, one which identifies emotionally (if not sympathetically) with the killer as the song's tragic protagonist.

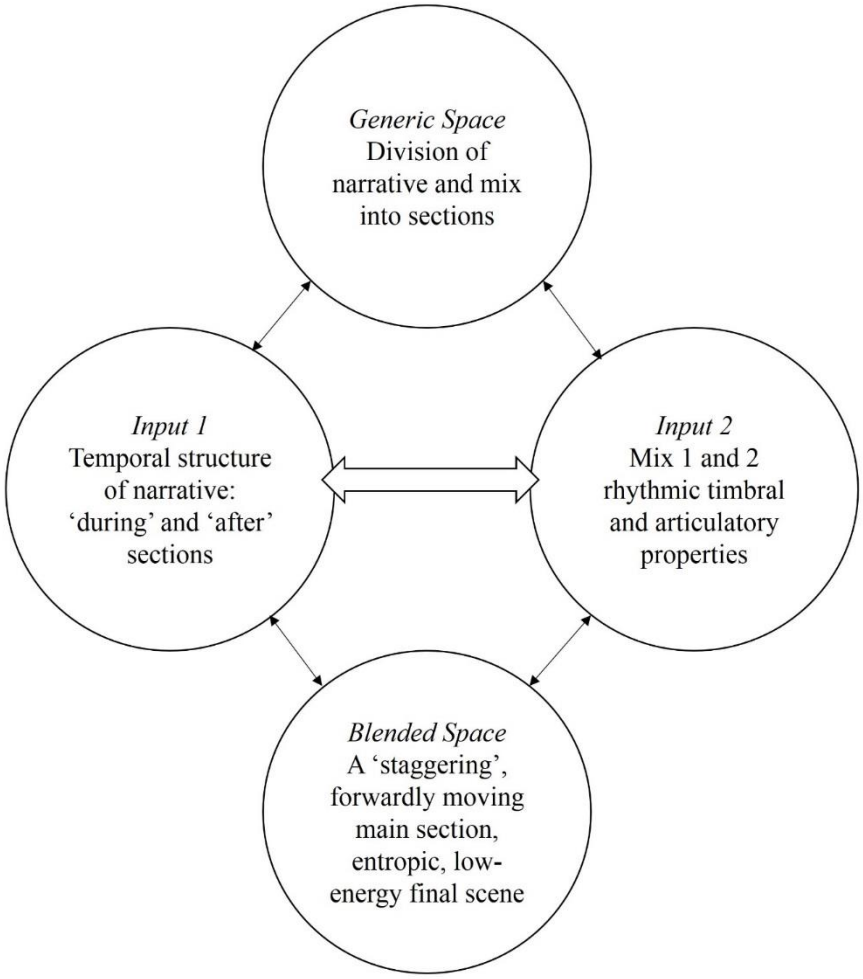

Figure 5.9: Conceptual integration network for 'The Murder of Maria Marten'

Conclusion

The recordings considered in this chapter illustrate some of the ways in which studio techniques such as echo, reverb and multitracking were used by folk-rock bands in the late 1960s and early 1970s to re-interpret traditional ballad texts and to construct countercultural values and identities. Folk-rock marked a point of divergence from the mainstream revival both in terms of its practice and its cultural values. It was created within a commercial context by professional musicians for whom the studio was an increasingly familiar workspace. There are resonances, however, with earlier work such as the *Radio Ballads*, in which the narrative possibilities of tape editing, montage

and echo were consciously exploited. Studio production in the countercultural context was imbued with connotations of avant-gardism and musicians such as Swarbrick, Prior and Hutchings, as their own testimony suggests, were clearly conscious of the semantic possibilities opened to them by studio technology. As noted in chapter 2, Pegg (1999) has argued that the *Radio Ballads*, like the Edwardian composers of the English Renaissance, appropriated isolated elements of traditional culture in the service of an elite cultural discourse. Folk-rock bands too tended to adopt a textual approach, dramatising and recontextualising selected folk song texts rather than seeking to reconstruct authentic performance style or complete repertoires. In this sense they too have something in common with Vaughan Williams, Britten or Grainger. The main difference in approach between earlier revivalists and that of folk-rock bands lies in the latter's adoption of previously commercial studio techniques and the relationship between recording and performance this implies. Where previous revivalist recordings had emphasised the primacy of live performance as a collective and participatory activity, what Watson (1983: 143) called 'the "your-turn-next" of the old participatory folk audience', folk-rock recordings were artistic productions which rarely used the spatial characteristics of recordings to convey a sense of communality.

In folk-rock, studio recording was exploited as a semiotic mode, generating interpretive affordances that expanded the meaning potential of traditional song texts. The work of multimodal discourse analysts such as van Leeuwen (1999; 2004) Machin (2010; 2013), and Forceville (2009) provides a theoretical toolkit which can be usefully augmented by theories of conceptual metaphor and cross-domain mapping as advanced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999) and conceptual blending theory (Zbikowski 2002; 2009; Grady *et al*. 1999). By grounding the meaning potential of the sonic aspects of production in embodied and cultural experience, metaphor theory helps to clarify how recorded songs generate potential meanings; but it also hints at how recordings establish countercultural subject-positions and afford experiences of group identity and shared values. The application of metaphor theory suggests that certain uses of production can be understood as non-verbal articulations (spatial or timbral) of the same underlying conceptual

structures that underlie verbal and visual metaphors. This supports the basic principle outlined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that the production of metaphors is used in order to move from abstract concepts to concrete and observable ones. Blending theory suggests, against more traditional semiotic approaches, that although cultural connotations play a crucial role in the construction of meaning in recorded song, these meanings are not dependent on a pre-established language of socially convened relationships between particular musical, textual elements. What it suggests instead is that culturally mediated conceptual metaphors based in pre-conceptual image schemata provide the structures that we use to both understand and express abstract ideas through musical and recorded sounds. From a cultural-historical perspective, therefore, analysing the way recordings were made to sound as well as their musical and textual elements can perhaps offer an insight into historical values and attitudes, as well as the felt resonances between sound and political meaning in contemporary musical practice.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to explore the contribution of sound recording to the production of meaning in the post-war folk revival. I have focussed on three related sets of questions: the first of these dealt with how sound recording as a historical practice connected with wider cultural-political questions as they were filtered through the ideology of the movement. This ideology involved beliefs about aspects of culture and society, such as the intersection of technology with politics and social life, and the role of music in society, and fed into a range of discourses relating to musical aesthetics and performance practice which in turn shaped the development of the movement itself. A second set of questions dealt with the role of recording in the production of more local textual meanings. I looked at how the semiotic potential of recording was exploited by revivalists in the re-interpretation of folk song texts and how social, technological and ideological factors shaped the evolution of musicians' approaches to recording over the period. Finally, I considered the various representations of recording in surrounding discourses and what they reveal about contemporary attitudes and values both within the revival movement and in popular music culture more broadly.

In selecting as case studies the *Radio Ballads*, the commercially released recordings made by Topic Records, and recordings made and released by larger counter-culturally affiliated independents, my intention has been to compare disparate approaches and creative contexts within the revival, to trace how they emerged, how they were linked to one another, and how they were affected by changes in the popular music industry, and by shifting notions of folk music's broader social meaning. Although each case study has been quite narrowly focussed, the types of recording considered here (field recordings, studio recordings, home, live and location recordings) constitute a representative sample of the kinds of recordings produced during this period. I also considered a range of recording techniques and the ways each of these contributed to the production of textual and social meaning. Among these were microphone placement, tape editing, echo and stereo multitracking as well as some more subtle and localised techniques for manipulating the sounds of vocals and instruments. By considering these

techniques in the context of specific texts, I have tried to indicate how the meaning potential of each emerged in the context of particular creative and technical problems, such as how best to record a performance in a folk club, how to convey the social character of a London Irish session in the late 1960s, or how to illustrate an image in a song text. I have thus tried to convey both the range of recording practices that emerged within the revival and their local and specific character.

My research suggests that the revival's recording practice displayed a continual dialogue between tradition and innovation. Established models such as the conventional studio often provided a starting point for revivalist practice, but as in the case of Leader's home recording approach, were often adapted or transcended, even to the extent of becoming a negative image against which authentic practice was defined. Occasionally these models had to be actively fought against, as in the case of Charles Parker's work on the *Radio Ballads*, where the project's development demanded that a rigorous institutional distinction between producers and engineers be overcome. In their blending of the roles of writer and tape editor, the programmes inadvertently ran counter to an implicitly classed aspect of BBC organisation that had previously been invisible. Later, as discussed in Chapter 4, a similar blending of roles had to occur in the studio as, under pressure from newer notions of creative autonomy in folk and rock discourse, the roles and status of musicians, engineers and producers were called into question and musicians found their way into the control room, forming new strategic alliances which blurred the boundaries between creative and technical roles.

Revivalist recording was a very small sub-field of cultural practice within the larger music industry, and was often represented by its proponents as oppositional to the commercial mainstream. Despite this perceived oppositional status, however, changes in the wider industry were inevitably reflected in the sub-field of folk. The professionalisation of the folk revival which accompanied the wider boom in recorded music in the 1960s gave more folk musicians access to recording as well as a share of control over its creative resources. At the same time, with the emergence of rock as a popular art form, the studio became a legitimate creative environment for popular

musicians. For folk performers at the beginning of the period, recording was a route to the market but rarely open to them as a creative medium. Over the course of this period, however, the definition of folk musicianship was gradually extended to include decisions about recording which affected the meaning of recorded texts. This reflected the growing commercial success of the folk revival and its close relationship with the wider popular music industry against which it had initially defined itself.

Innovation in recording technology (much of it originating within the commercial sphere) affected the sound and practice of recording within the folk revival. But the relationship between technological change and practice was a reciprocal one. Rather than technologies emerging and impacting upon musical practice, musical ideologies and discourses also framed the creative possibilities offered by recording technologies. The emergence of folk-rock, for example, was not just the result of advances in (and access to) technology but was made ideologically possible by the transformation of pop's cultural status over the course of the 1960s. The independent studio as a collaborative space would not have developed the way it did without both financial investment by majors and large independent labels in experimental work (related to their own attempts to function in an unpredictable and rapidly expanding market) and the notions of popular music as an art practice that were developed within the critical discourse of the period.

Revivalist recording practices, I have argued, were closely related to ideologies of performance and ideas about social organisation. Revivalist performance sought to reassert collective modes of musical activity, and recording helped construct traditional practice as a collective and participatory mode of musical experience. Rather than practice simply reflecting ideology, however, a clear notion of the essence of traditional practice emerged as a *result* of these technical/aesthetic negotiations. It was in part through an engagement with recording technologies, I suggest, that the meaning of traditional music in the revival was worked out.

As outlined in the final two chapters, changes in technologies and working practices affected the presentation of traditional texts. The general narrative suggested by the case studies presented here is one of an increase in

the complexity of recorded song texts which reflects social factors including professionalisation, advances in technology and the merging of the discourse of the revival with that of the later counterculture. Ideology also played a role in shaping approaches to the presentation of texts. Where earlier recordings emphasised the relationships of performance, spontaneity and an unadorned aesthetic, folk-rock recordings often sought to dramatize and illustrate song narratives, and recording was used as a tool for structuring material, for mediating sounds in meaningful ways, for constructing dramatic spaces and suggesting relationships between textual images and sounds. These two basic approaches could be described as either social/collectivist, or textual/individualist but should not be rigidly separated. In recordings that might be said to fall primarily into the first category the framing of the music as social practice also inflected the meaning of songs as texts; similarly, the text-oriented approach of folk-rock recordings itself had a socialising aspect, insofar as the style of production they adopted connected them to an alternative form of collective identity, in terms of the globalist, individualist discourse of the counterculture. In the first set of recordings, live traditional performance was constructed as the primary locus of collective experience; in the latter, recordings themselves enacted a global, mediated countercultural collectivity that bound the listening audience in a community of shared aesthetic (and implied political) values.

A fundamental point to emphasise is that, despite the basic causal relationship between real-world sounds and the sounds that exist on recordings, performance and recording should not be understood in terms of a relationship of 'original' and 'copy', even in cases where recording is undertaken in a documentary spirit. A recording may take a live performance as its object, or as an ideal relationship to be captured; but even in cases where the most minimal and rudimentary technology is being employed, recording remains a separate mode of practice from performance – it never simply reflects performances, but always, often subtly, re-interprets them. This re-interpretation is accomplished through material and discursive processes – the configuration of interpersonal space, the selection and placement of microphones, processes of editing and post-production – all of

which reflect back on the users and shape their ideas of what is possible. It is also achieved through discursive representations of performance and recording as practices. The discourses that surround recording shape how we make and hear recordings, and there are few aspects of recording practice that can be considered to be without any aesthetic or ideological significance.

An unexpected aspect of the research has been to draw attention to the technological utopianism of certain areas of the revival, in particular MacColl and Parker's estimation of what sound recording (on its own and in collaboration with other 'new media') could do. Their work, which was characterised by a fascination with the social potential of the media and with multimodal approaches (such as the Radio Ballad itself) reflected the concerns of a previous generation in modernist drama and film and also pointed forward to the narrative uses of record production in folk-rock as detailed in Chapter 5, in which a similar fascination with the semiotic resources of sound was explored. It is interesting that in between these two cultural moments, the mainstream of the revival eschewed the creative manipulation of sound in favour of a re-asserted documentary realism. This was, as I argued in Chapter 3, largely to do with the heavily weighted association of sonic manipulation in music with questionable commercial practices. The pop culture revolution of the 1960s and the attendant reclamation of recording as an art practice had to intervene before folk musicians could make use of technology in this way. Even now, the use of recording in traditional performance can be controversial, and in many traditional recordings, the priority of performance is asserted through the production of a highly mediatised aesthetics of authenticity and directness (Zagorski-Thomas 2014).

A secondary concern of this study has been to highlight the creative and intellectual contribution of engineers and producers to the revival as a cultural movement. Through interviews, this study has begun to recapture contributions of influential producers some of whom have never before been interviewed about these aspects of their work. Talking to them has helped both to reveal the varied nature of their practice and re-situate it within its contemporary context. Interview material proves fertile ground for gaining an

understanding of the strategies used by producers to construct their own practice against that of others; Leader's characterisation of his home-recording approach as preferable to the professional studio, for example, shows how the representational strategies of individuals connect with wider technological-dystopian narratives in accounts which combine local and personal interests with global narratives about technology, culture and society.

Technologies and their perceived capacities must be understood within their contemporary cultural-historical context and I have therefore used ethnographic and historical research to build a picture of the popular discourse surrounding recording practice during this period. It is interesting to note that the popular music press, at a time when pop audiences were often dismissed as a homogenous, undiscerning and non-reflexive mass, seems to indicate controversies around the uses of technology that had much to do with defining what it meant to be an authentic musician or an authentic listener for contemporary audiences. Technology was represented in utopian ways (promising to connect musicians with their audiences) and in dystopian ways (threatening to deskill and dehumanise the music industry). The recovery of these contemporary debates is interesting in its own right, but also provides valuable context for understanding the folk revival in terms of the wider discourses on music, technology and musicianship within which it emerged.

A significant aspect of my approach has been to suggest the explanatory potential of concepts from discourse analysis to describe how recordings themselves produce accounts of musical practice that have a discursive function; the ways in which recordings represent interpersonal space and how this function can be appropriated into discourses that have wider cultural significance is, I argue, a potentially revelatory finding for the study of recorded music in cultural-political discourse. This project has also argued for the suitability of a multimodal approach to understanding recording's contribution to meaning. As work in both musicology (Kramer 2002) and multimodal discourse analysis (van Leeuwen 1999; 2004; Machin 2010) suggests, processes of collocation are crucial to the meaning potential of recording (as they are for music more generally), and it cannot, nor should

not be studied in isolation. In combination with musical, textual and visual modes, however, recording presents a powerful resource for constructing and shaping meaning. The multimodal character of sound recording makes the study of record production and its contribution to musical and social meaning a necessarily interdisciplinary locus of research. The notion of metaphor and theories of embodiment explored in Chapter 5 suggest a potential line of development for this kind of work and input from cognitive science as well as sociology and psychology could usefully compliment such an approach.

Much more research would be needed to fully recapture the complexity of the era's practice. A wider scope in terms of the corpus looked at (for example, recordings on major labels and, perhaps more importantly, the wealth of amateur recordings made during the period) would be beneficial as would more research on reception, including a detailed ethnography of listening. The contemporary reception of these recordings is something we know little about and cannot be assumed on the basis of structural analysis alone. The everyday aesthetic discourses of audiences that surrounded these recordings, and their meanings are now essentially lost, although album reviews and interviews with the musicians for whom they constituted a first introduction to the genre tell us something about how particular recordings may have been received. Although my interviewees all recalled recordings playing a significant role in their early development and indicate the stature of recordists such as Leader within the revival, such evidence is at best fragmentary and only hints at the listening culture of the period.

The time frame of this study has necessarily been limited, in part for pragmatic reasons, but also because the period was one of emergence and rapid change. Extending the period would entail considering further changes in the nature of recording technology and recording aesthetics, including the incorporation of synthesisers in the music of bands such as Runrig, Clannad and Pyewackett and the effect of later trends in studio practice such as the move from live room aesthetics to separation in British studios that Zagorski-Thomas (2012) identifies. Bringing this study up to the present time would also involve engaging with forty years of continued institutionalisation and professionalisation in folk and traditional music. This period has seen the

setting up of new global performance networks (festivals and art centres), the acceptance of folk music as a performance subject into the academy and the advent of high-quality home recording making record labels arguably less important as cultural and commercial mediators, and diminishing the status of recordings as artistic statements.

Another aspect is the political decentralisation of the folk movement itself. As I observed in the introduction, the folk scene in the UK has drifted somewhat from its radical roots and is now unarguably a sub-field of the popular music industry as a whole. 'It is now problematic', Keegan-Phipps (2008) argues:

> to represent folk music in England as a culturally self-conscious alternative to globalized Western pop music. Whilst discursive emphasis is placed on historicism and human immediacy – in contradistinction to the modern artifice of Anglo-American pop – folk music is taking on the forms, structures and economic motivations (…) and the musical structures (…) of the pop music industry. (Keegan-Phipps 2008: 350)

This study suggests that there has never been an unproblematic opposition between the two categories of folk and pop which have always existed in some relationship of (often productive) tension. While recording in folk music is no longer to be considered a particularly radical practice, it still fulfils a role in negotiating the perceived relationship between traditional musics and often implicit notions of authenticity and of a collective cultural past. Increasingly, this takes forms other than the symbolic rejection of aspects of modern techno-culture in favour of more nuanced approaches to technology, and constructions of music's social dimension that are more closely related to aesthetics from other musical traditions, such as pop and jazz.

I hope that this study will prove useful to students of recording within similar movements in other European countries (such as Italy) which also experienced a folk revival during the period, and where the cultural dynamic of pop and folk played out somewhat differently (Fabbri 2015). The wider context of the practices described here is 'the sixties' – and this cultural

phenomenon meant different things in different places, and as Marwick (1998) notes, even at different times. An aspect worth considering further is how the revival's discourse was gendered and the ways in which this may have affected the aesthetics and practice of recording as well as the experiences of female musicians and recordists. In the *Radio Ballads*, for example, the centrality of notions of masculinity to perceptions of working class culture are obvious and indeed central to the programmes' message, and the celebration of industrial work as a fundamental pillar of working class life and culture is a major constituent of the revivalist ideology articulated; how this may have been rendered sonically in other contexts, and how it may have affected the kinds of material selected by recordists, or the working relationships of male and female musicians in their recording practice is certainly worthy of further consideration. Detailed study of the uses of recording in the context of particular artists' careers over an extended period of time would also be enlightening, particularly in the case of performers like Martin Carthy or Shirley Collins whose careers span almost the entire period of the post-war revival, and whose recording practice has, as a result, been enormously varied.

This thesis has been a first step towards answering a previously unexplored set of questions in an area that has already received a great deal of attention. Of the many histories of the post-war revival, none have so far thought to approach traditional music recording practices historically or consider how meaning in folk and traditional music has been shaped by those practices. Recording has been bracketed off, viewed as a simple process of capturing performance. I hope that in future studies of traditional recording practice recording will no longer be considered a generic process but a discursive, participatory activity which is different every time and which involves answering questions which are specific to each individual creative context. As well as making a contribution to the well-established field of folk music and revival scholarship, this study has sought to connect with a number of emerging strands including multimodal discourse studies and the study of record production. I have explored the hypothesis that recording should be regarded as a crucial component of music's discursive resources and offered

examples of how recording techniques contributed to the production of discursive meaning within the specific context of the post-war revival. Producers, I argue, do not just produce records but contribute to understandings of social reality. In the study of music, but also in the study of culture, politics and society more generally, sound remains to some extent a hidden dimension. Musicology has insights to offer not just the wider scholarly community but society as whole, into the ways in which sound practices and particularly technologies of sound affect our perceptions of the social field, our sense of the past, our relationships with one another and how we collectively imagine the ideal society.

Appendix I: List of respondents

Name of respondent	Type of interview	Location	Date
Engle, Tony	Recorded face-to-face interview	London	February 2013
Engle, Tony	Recorded face-to-face interview	London	October 2013
Hall, Reg	Recorded face-to-face interview	Croydon	October 2013
Hutchings, Ashley	Recorded telephone interview	Newcastle upon Tyne	July 2014
Kerr, Sandra	Recorded face-to-face interview	Newcastle upon Tyne	February 2014
Leader, Bill	Recorded face-to-face interview	Manchester	August 2014
Leader, Bill	Recorded Telephone interview	Newcastle upon Tyne	October 2014
McShee, Jacqui	Recorded face-to-face interview	Redhill	February 2015
Renbourn, John	Recorded face-to-face interview	Newcastle upon Tyne	November 2015
Stradling, Rod	Recorded face-to-face interview	Stroud	September 2014
Talmy, Shel	Recorded Telephone interview	Newcastle upon Tyne	February 2015

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