"The Normal Order of Things": Propriety, Standardisation and the Making of Tin Pan Alley.

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Abstract

This thesis employs a variegated approach that considers demographics, institutions, business practices, and dominant lyrical themes and imagery, in order to establish the pervasiveness of an ideology of *propriety* within early twentieth-century Tin Pan Alley and its songwriting output. The thesis proposes that this pervasiveness ultimately contributed to the standardisation of song structure within Tin Pan Alley song itself. For the most part, the first generation of Tin Pan Alley, prior to 1920, is considered, in an account of the commercial and aesthetic foundations that led to the 'Golden Age' – the period for which the Alley has been elevated into national myth.

Specifically, it is proposed that in the context of a nation constituted of exilic narratives, and one constantly engaged in a process of identity formation, Tin Pan Alley's institutions, personnel, practices and products engendered a 'structure of feeling' (after Raymond Williams) that amounted to an ideology of propriety, realised through a multivalent aesthetic of Exile/Home. An account of the material and social processes of mass-standardisation for which Tin Pan Alley is well-known is developed, and situated within a broader historical context. The sectional song structure 32-bar AABA is figured as the standardised product of an industrial context, shaped by this ideology of propriety. Furthermore, the dominant themes and lyrical content of the sentimental song are investigated, in order to establish the resonances between these and 32-bar AABA and how they may share ideological import. Finally, an account of the pragmatic, ideological and cognitive affordances of 32-bar AABA is developed, and a statement on how such a study relates to Adorno's views on mass-culture and Tin Pan Alley concludes the work.

In memory of Sam Bennett

Nobody would have been more interested in the ideas presented, and nobody would have distracted me from them with such a quality of revelry.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

> America's present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality….Let us stop to consider that tranquillity at home is more precious than peace abroad, and that both our good fortune and our eminence are dependent on the normal forward stride of all the American people…[1]
>
> Warren G. Harding, U.S. President 1921-23.

> "Did you ever look out of a train window at night? […] And see some little town as you pass through with cottages and gardens, lights in the windows. It seemed so quiet and peaceful… and real. That's what I've always wanted."[2]
>
> Alice Faye's character Katie Blane in the movie *Tin Pan Alley*.

> Sell them their dreams. Sell them what they longed for and hoped for and almost despaired of having. Sell them hats by splashing sunlight across them. Sell them dreams—dreams of country clubs and proms and visions of what might happen if only. After all, people don't buy things to have things. They buy things to work for them. They buy hope—hope of what your merchandise will do for them. Sell them this hope and you won't have to worry about selling them goods.[3]
>
> Helen Landon Cass, a radio announcer at a 1923 sales convention.

The specificity of the research presented here was originally borne out of two huge, expansive, seemingly unrelated questions: "Why does popular culture before the second world war feel strange and distant, when the popular culture that followed it feels connected to our own?", and "How do songs work?". There may be an important connection between these questions and this thesis is an attempt to explore part of that. Across the course of the twentieth-century, dramatic changes occurred in those sectional structures that were most

[1] Warren G. Harding, 'Back to Normal: Address Before Home Market Club,' Boston, Massachusetts, May 14, 1920.
[2] *Tin Pan Alley*, Dir. Walter Lang, 1940, 94 min. (DVD, Twentieth Century Fox) 23 Mins:20 Secs
[3] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 298.

dominant within American popular song production. The fact that sectional song structure became so standardised in Tin Pan Alley song, only to give way to quite different song structures with the emergence of rock 'n' roll begs a more focused question: "Why would a particular sectional song structure be favoured in one age and another in the post-war era". And yet this is still too diffuse a question to be addressed in an adequate way in a single work, especially since there are already messy aspects to its premise. The changes in popular culture that we attribute to the emergence of Rock 'n' Roll only became 'full-blown' in 1955, meaning that if the war was the crucible within which these changes were generated then they took a further decade to manifest. Moreover, there have been several dominant sectional song structures since the emergence of rock 'n' roll, and indeed there was also variation in sectional structure in the early part of the twentieth century.

Out of such ambiguities, it becomes necessary to consider whether there is a more stable object of study that still has relevance to these broad, amorphous ideas. The fact that, for around twenty years, from 1925 onwards, (during the 'Golden Age' of Tin Pan Alley) 32-bar AABA achieved huge primacy as a sectional structure in popular song, appears to offer more stable ground. Therefore, leaving aside the post-war landscape, it is interesting to consider whether there were deep-rooted, socially significant reasons why this structure held prominence for the USA at this time. And in this way, the main thrust of this thesis was alighted upon. In a modest sense, this thesis is interested in whether an ideological preoccupation with *propriety*,[4] which itself manifested via an overarching aesthetic tendency towards representations of *home* and *exile* was conducive to the dominance of 32-bar AABA, which had crystallised into a default song structure by around 1925 and would remain robust for the duration of Tin Pan Alley's 'Golden Age', well into the forties. This means that the majority of the thesis is actually concerned with the popular musical landscape *prior* to the Golden Age, in order to uncover the conditions, and determinants and affordances that led to this crystallisation. Moreover, the thesis considers many elements and aspects of Tin Pan

[4] In many senses of the term, not simply with regard to its oft-used connotations of mannered behaviour, etiquette or decency. Rather, a fuller sense takes in the qualities of being 'right', 'correct', 'suitable' and 'conforming' in more general ways. In fact, part of the aim of this work is to reveal how the narrow 'polite-society' definition of the term confines the ideology of propriety to the perception that it is only relevant to surface, cosmetic domains. Rather, a more critical viewpoint takes into account that propriety informs broader discourses, for example those regarding national identity, immigration, aesthetic form, cultural standardisation and the disciplining of art and culture. The word shares its etymological roots with 'property' and it is instructive that until very recently *propriety* also carried that word's dual meanings of 'ownership' as well as, respectively, the notion of a specific quality, essence or character of a thing. We might conclude that the specific quality of what is right and proper in the social world and beyond is usually that which we call *our own*. See entry for 'Propriety', *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/view/Entry/152846 (Accessed 26/10/2015)

Alley song prior to 1925 other than sectional structure—the business of popular music, the lyrics, the technologies involved, the geography of Manhattan, the demographics of New York, and so on—in order to attempt to build evidence for the central claim that 'propriety' was an important ideological underpinning, and was a key reason why 32-bar AABA would eventually become the standardisation of choice, with notions of 'home' and 'exile' constituting popular aesthetic formations in service to this ideology. Whether such a question can be addressed at all—and especially retrospectively—is contentious, but arguably the challenge does not diminish the importance of attempting it. Susan Sontag encapsulated this tension in 'Notes on Camp' (1964), when she wrote that "the sensibility of an era is not only its most decisive, but also its most perishable aspect."[5] Thus, both the significance and the difficulty of such a task can be acknowledged from the outset.

The well-documented standardisations of early-twentieth-century popular song within Tin Pan Alley contributed to nascent and ongoing American identity formation(s), and indeed contributed to a kind of standardisation of conspicuous, public, American identity itself. The popular song commodity has power. Marx's notion of the 'strangeness' of the human relation to the commodity and its circulation is pertinent from the outset of this enquiry.[6] It is central to the logic of this thesis that commodities are always already imbued with ideology, or do ideological work (even withstanding the fact that the term 'ideology' would, with justice, enjoy far more qualification and explanation than is expressed immediately here). Expression and circulation of ideology through the popular song commodity is a powerful exemplar of such a process. The popular song commodity is an experiential commodity: its aim is to produce affective states in the listener, and the claim of this thesis is that an ideology of propriety shaped this in early twentieth-century USA.

Expressions of propriety (whether social, aesthetic or otherwise) can be understood as functions and consequences of a consumer economy, at the same time that a consumer economy might be understood as a function and a consequence of an ideology of propriety. The circulation of goods necessarily creates and enforces social norms and yet the circulation of goods can also manifest from, and be sustained by, the desire towards expressing propriety, a sense of belonging and the affirming of normative identities. Mass production and

[5] Susan Sontag 'Notes on Camp,' in *A Partisan Century: Political Writings from Partisan Review*, ed. Edith Kurzweil (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 233.

[6] "A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York City, NY: Penguin, 1990), 163.

standardisation of the products circulated have particular consequences for the character of such ideological expression—certainly the *logos* changes from an ideology of propriety that might be mediated by bourgeois notions (and products) pertaining to 'high' art, gentility and fineness, to one that is figured through products and messages of relentless *ubiquity* within mass consumer culture. Mass production and standardisation eventually create a 'realism',[7] and so a sense of reality, by way of endless repetition. This is not to say that individual and subcultural reception of the products of mass culture cannot be subversive, re-appropriating and agentive, but rather that it is important to recognise, in a rather straightforward way, that mass production and standardisation have effects. The circulation of ideological 'matter' via popular song commodities presents a particular opportunity for discussion.

The standardisation of early-twentieth-century popular song—structurally, lyrically, thematically—has been figured as the agent of capital, where an offer of "pseudoindividualisation" accelerates the circulation and consumption of the musical commodity.[8] But as well as the volition and vagaries of capital playing a structuring role in this process, this study pursues other, intersecting foundational logics: technological, bodily, historical and so on. Concerning the latter we can point towards a contemporaneous American preoccupation with delineating normative behaviours,[9] with bourgeois-consumerist propriety and with the construction of a sense of belonging within the 'new' country (the particular character of which is specific to turn-of-the-century USA). In this sense, we will explore whether the standardisation of popular song can be seen as inextricably linked to processes of nation-building and assimilation in fundamental ways. It is my contention here that these processes were often serviced by way of a single aesthetic idea—'Home'—although we will see that the character of that aesthetic could be multivalent, latent and mutable. 'Home' manifests in a diffuse way in the music of the period, for example in the figure of the idealised female, the mother, Ireland, and so on.

The Introduction section of this work is given over largely to methodological questions: the timeframe to be covered; the discursive scope; and some of the broader issues that attend the study of music and sound, popular song and song structure. It will also consider some definitional concerns, as well as giving brief accounts of a few key aspects of popular song

[7] For a discussion of the construction and aesthetics of Capitalism to the extent that it constitutes a 'realism' see Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009)
[8] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On Popular Music,' (1941), in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (Harlow, Essex: Pearson, 2006), 78.
[9] For example within etiquette books, the cult of Home Economics, or even Temperance.

study: the nature of pop markets, the importance of 'feeling', and the significance of microphone development. Chapter One is predominantly a social history: of exilic narratives in the USA; of immigration; of Tin Pan Alley in terms of geography, personnel and business practices; and of the development of new technologies during the period covered. Chapter Two in contrast is concerned with thematic analyses of music, performance and lyrics themselves, and how discourses of propriety manifested through these. It begins by considering how notions of propriety shaped the theatrical performance of the day, as well as attitudes towards Ragtime and Jazz. It then gives an account of propriety in the lyrical content of popular song – from the late-nineteenth century sentimental ballad to high-style Tin Pan Alley. 32-bar AABA, and the notion that it is an expression of ideological propriety across the age is present throughout the thesis. However, Chapter Three is directly concerned with the workings of the structure itself: how the politics of sectional structure has been overlooked in much musicology; the context for AABA in terms of preceding and other contemporaneous sectional structures; the material affordances that AABA would have granted; the ideological consonances that it may have provided and finally an account of some of the cognitive functions that might attend the experience of it.

The Period Covered

We can trace an impulse towards propriety, and the delineation of 'normative' American identities within the increasing fixity and standardising practices of the new popular song industry, in social and institutional terms, and in terms of lyrics and song structure. In terms of historical range, this study occasionally considers events as far back as the mid-nineteenth century but in the main will take as its starting point the period that begins with theatrical impresario Tony Pastor's sanitisation of Vaudeville in the 1880s[10] and the distillation of the solely 'popular' song product and market in Tin Pan Alley in the 1890s. We can also recognise the disciplining and sanitisation of ragtime for a white audience in the 1900s—and beyond—as being the consequence of a similar impulse. This was achieved in part by the resurgence and eventual (re-)dominance of thematic tendencies in the sentimental popular ballad, a nineteenth century form reinvigorated by the grafting on of ragtime stylisms. Again, the consequence of many of the tropes, images and narrative devices in sentimental song is the reaffirmation of some sort of normative, Home position—whether the subject is explicitly domestic, nostalgic or something else. Sentimental song is a bell-weather within our period –

[10] Which can be understood as a domesticating and disciplining of public space, entertainment and art. Tony Pastor was not the first to promote his shows in terms of 'propriety' and decency, but he quickly became amongst the most renowned for it.

it is conspicuous in its conservatism. Finally, one further possible expression of ideological propriety within these historical episodes is the standardisation of sectional structure that emerges around 1925: 32-bar AABA, as a distinct development and movement away from ABAC (which had, hitherto, constituted the 'default' song structure).

The distillation of a purely 'popular' song market begins in about 1893, although, where appropriate, earlier music is referenced and drawn upon in this account. Moreover, the social, political and historical forces that are deemed relevant to popular song from 1893 onwards may, necessarily and obviously, take us quite a distance from that particular year. However, there is good reason to settle upon the mid-1890s as being particularly significant within the development of popular song and there are several important yardsticks to consider around that time. Firstly, 'After the Ball',[11] the million-selling song that 'built' Tin Pan Alley had been released in 1892, functioning as a kind of clarion for those entrepreneurs who were to coalesce and become the new 'popular-only' publishing market. Key figures in this process, the Witmark publishing dynasty, moved to West 28th Street in 1893 which—by way of other publishers following suit—initiated and accelerated the new, aggressive business practices from which the Alley would derive its success and dominance. Having replaced Minstrelsy's primacy,[12] by the mid to late 1890s Vaudeville was established as the dominant mode of American entertainment, much of it emanating out of New York.[13] Indeed Russell Sanjek dates "modern Vaudeville" to January 1893 precisely "when F.F. Proctor, owner of a church converted to a theatre, inaugurated continuous vaudeville in New York".[14]

Finally, the 1880s to the 1920s was the period of the largest 'third wave' of European immigration to New York (and by extension the USA) which has become so important in the history of Tin Pan Alley and popular song. Many of the children of immigrants—some coming of age in the mid-1890s—had a huge influence, directly and indirectly, on Alley publishing and songwriting. The emergence of a second generation of Tin Pan Alley songwriters around the mid-1920s (the beginning of what has come to be known as 'Golden Age' Tin Pan Alley) is also a bookend in this account. By about 1925, the closed, resolving and returning song structure, AABA, became established as the conspicuous default for

[11] Charles K Harris, 'After the Ball' (Chas K. Harris & Co., 1892)
[12] Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays* (New York: Norton, 1983), 287.
[13] Scott states that "by 1896, only ten American minstrel companies remained". See Derek Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis - The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 54.
[14] Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - The First Four Hundred Years, Volume II - From 1790 to 1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 338.

commercial songwriting. This song structure has since become emblematic of the Alley and its standardisations but, contrary to common wisdom, only emerged after an earlier standardisation of structure—ABAC—had already been prevalent. At the same time in the mid-1920s, the condenser microphone and electrical recording equipment became widely available, revolutionising both the process of recording and the listener-consumer's relationship with 'the singer' (and indeed the human voice). This constituted a wholly new popular music product that would eventually supplant sheet music as the Alley's main concern. By way of such developments, the central pillars upon which 'Golden Age' Tin Pan Alley would henceforth operate, and the perception thereafter of an absolutely standardised popular song product, were established and would remain in place until World War II. As such, this thesis is concerned with the conditions that brought about the familiar standardisations, conventions and practices of Golden Age Tin Pan Alley.

The Scope of this Work

There are certain aspects of early-twentieth century popular song which—though they may enrich and productively problematise the study—have been deemed to be outside its' scope. Firstly, it is always only going to be possible to provide a partial history of Tin Pan Alley, an institution that was itself a vast, heterogeneous conglomeration of distinct publishing operations with their own cultures, environments and personnel. Moreover, there are a variety of song products that emanated from Tin Pan Alley that are not relevant to the specific concerns of this study, or would only be peripherally relevant.

For example, the genre of 'illustrated song', where a live singer or recording was accompanied by painted slides detailing the action of the song, would be potentially significant to an account of how both narrative and imagery was figured within the domain of popular song performance. However, the addition of visual imagery to the consumer experience puts this phenomenon outside the bounds of a discussion concerned with technical developments within popular song *proper*, in the same way that sheet music artwork, though fascinating and rich in meaning, would also complicate a process geared towards comparing the inner workings, and reception of *song* itself. Operetta, also, is a theatrical genre containing song which will fall outside the scope of this work. This is principally to constrain the focus towards *Vaudeville*, and the Alley's iconic links with it as a distinctly popular form.

Finally, perhaps the most significant absence in terms of the musical products of Tin Pan Alley will be that of instrumental dance music. As a distinct popular culture product, instrumental

music for dance was as popular, if not more popular, than lyrical songs. This music is relevant to a consideration of sexual propriety as dance was a public practice where discourses around this were both performed and challenged. Perhaps most importantly of all, early-twentieth-century American dances constituted the sanctioning and strict disciplining of physical contact – they were the very enactment and delineation of normative behaviour. However, consideration of the ideological depths of the melopoetic mode, of popular song, would not be served by the inclusion of this music. The degree of *presence* that the dancing body would bring to bear transcends a study where the effect of song, in terms of structure, theme or lyric, can be considered in its specifics. Dancing is altogether too powerful and too potent a practice to be covered here at great length, because it has so much social function that is distinct to the social function of song.

In terms of additional historical context that falls outside the scope of this work, there are significant episodes which, arguably, could be proposed as having a relevance to Chapter One, but which I have chosen not to cover. For example, in the 1910s (and beyond the period of the Great War), the atmosphere of anti-immigration feeling, the rise of labour movements to combat immigrant labour, the Sedition Act (1918), the first Red Scare and the deportations of anarchists such as Emma Goldman and others, are all events which provoked debate about the fundamentals of American identity with regard to immigration. In the main, these episodes will not be directly addressed because of their *overt* political character, whilst many events that have a *latent* political or ideological character will be explored. Relatedly, but for different reasons, I will attempt to address events and popular culture outwith the 1914-18 conflict. It is true that Tin Pan Alley was enormously important to the war effort, and the need for overt immigrant patriotism may have informed some Alley output. However, war song is a specific phenomenon, with elements of propaganda and jingoism manifesting in popular culture in a manner that they do not during peacetime. The distinction of the study presented here is that it tends towards a focus on the ordinary, the everyday and the domestic, and seeks to investigate how popular songs created imaginative spaces and nurtured certain ideological discourses within those more prosaic contexts. The Great War, and the character of its popular song, is also a vast subject in its own right, one that easily fills its own academic monograph.[15]

[15] For example, see Kathleen E. R. Smith *God Bless America: Tin Pan Alley Goes to War* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003).

In terms of my partial history of the Alley, a large omission will be of Hollywood, which is an incredibly important influence on later Alley output, since many of the major publishing firms were bought by Hollywood studios during the Depression. This is because of the time period covered within this thesis, which does not really exceed 1925, the point at which AABA, and Tin Pan Alley's Golden Age were established. The purchase of Alley businesses by Hollywood film companies, and their working relationship, lies beyond this timeframe. Thus, the focus here is largely toward the conditions leading up to the Golden Age rather than the Golden Age itself. In addition, the distinct modality of music and song for film—with its own powerful visual, narrative and performance aesthetics—means that again (like the 'illustrated song' writ large) the addition of Hollywood would compromise a study which seeks to focus on the phenomenon of popular song in a more essential form.

Writing about Music

Before the specifics of this account are explored further, there is something to be said about the challenge inherent in writing about music at all, because the disputed approaches to that question have a fundamental bearing on the shape and character of this work. On the one hand, it may be possible (if incurious) to argue that musical practice, objects and experience are straightforward, even trivial phenomena, serving functions of diversion and entertainment and not much else. The lack of imagination in this position is doubled by the assumption that diversion and entertainment are not curious phenomena in themselves, worthy of investigation and demanding, potentially, complex and intricate explanation. More rigorously, but in a limited way, a purely empirical approach might contend that the quantifiable *measurement* and description of the 'thing itself' (for example, a musical practice, object or experience) is the primary focus of enquiry. The possibility of broader, less quantifiable significances that a given musical phenomenon may hold for the society that it manifests within might be deemed less important or at least less fit for investigation. Such discourses may contend that once the phenomena and the mental processes involved in their apperception have been described, the analysis need not really go further – that investigation of musical phenomena should only be concerned with wholly observable, demystifiable matters.

This research is very much conducted and presented via an alternative outlook. In fact, this thesis contends that, in the case of musical practices, objects and experience, a reticence towards broader social and critical enquiry is especially unsatisfactory because the meaning of

such phenomena is *always* relational.[16] If musical meanings are relational they must have something with which they are in conversation or interaction. Historically, it might have been enough to discuss, say, a composer in relation to a canon, or to be satisfied that the meaning of a text could be found in its similarities or dissimilarities to other such texts. However, since the emergence of Popular Music Studies as a discipline, as well as the rise of New Musicology in the 1980s, we have witnessed a transformed approach when exploring what the musical object, practice or experience stands in relation to. The quilting point at which lived experience, the everyday, our institutions, societal norms and so on, act upon and are acted upon by musical material, is contested to say the least. We can now work under the aegis of a tradition of criticism which has established, in Raymond Williams' words, that it would be

> an error to suppose that values or art-works could be adequately studied without reference to the particular society within which they were expressed, but it is equally an error to suppose that the social explanation is determining, or that the values and works are mere by-products.[17]

Kantian aesthetic mainstays of beauty, order, and purpose do not necessarily have to be discarded in their entirety, but they can also be situated as social constructs that serve ideological functions in a given time or place. This work draws on, and in a more diffuse sense is influenced by, intellectual trajectories which consider alternative organising logics and set about constructing Marxian, or Lacanian, or Structuralist readings of, say, how the sections in a pop song may come to function as they do. These are, of course, scholarly approaches and endeavours which are multiplicitous, and indeed quarrelsome with each other, and do not necessarily accord in terms of how they investigate any particular musical phenomenon.

A development that does result from these approaches, and is relevant to this work, is that music and material culture must be situated within the contexts from which they arise. In short, and crudely put: In this thesis, macro- and micro-economics, or institutional histories, or gender politics, or legacies of colonial relations, or the nature of the unconscious are all taken to be fundamental structuring logics that interact with the societies that produce musical phenomena (and thus the musical phenomena themselves) and that meaning is not independent of such concerns. So this study aspires towards an exploration of an interdependent, rhizomatic, network of causality and consequence, where actors, institutions,

[16] In fact, of course such a claim goes far beyond musical phenomena but musical phenomena potentially presents an exemplar for broader, networked, 'relational' investigation

[17] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Pelican, 1961), 45.

ideas and objects produce meaning, both contingent upon each other and independently.

Just as the transmission and reaffirmation of ideology via the circulation of the commodity has already been asserted as being essential to this work, so too is the assertion that interactions between such fundamental structuring logics and musical phenomena are where the gravity and significance of music oftentimes resides. And, indeed, that music has the capacity to provide an optic through which certain fundamental structures of human pleasure, perception and understanding are made perceivable. Thus, analyses of pleasure and/or understanding in otherwise seemingly unrelated systems of economy, or patriarchy, or colonial subjugation benefit from the recognition of this optic. Moreover, any occasional, idle charge of music's triviality is in fact a symptom of the complexity of the actual character of these musical-social interactions. These interactions, in fact, open up their own distinct discursive spaces and agentive discourses (and so, ideology) that are then folded back into the already mysterious relation between the musical and the extra-musical.

A variety of explanatory systems and critical theories employ their own lexicons in an attempt get outside language (whilst remaining within the grasp of experience) and so begin to understand these spaces and registers. There are many terms, historically, that have been employed in an attempt to revisit or uncover that which is beyond signification or surety: the noumenal; the sublime; the Dionysian; the lack; the uncanny; the absurd; the surplus; the erotic; the affective; the liminal; the interstitial; the aporia; the Kristevan sémiotique: these are discursive spaces that would write the un-writable and know the unknowable.

This work on early-twentieth-century American popular song is presented to the reader with full acceptance of these conceptual frameworks, and although they cannot be fully and richly explored here, as a writer I am indebted to them. This is not least because any musical practice at all seems to work, at least in part, with that which is beyond signification, and these concepts are often discursive tools employed in the service of the quixotic goal of making that articulable. And so 'writing about music' presents its own famous paradox, because the pleasure and knowledge that is specific to musical experience begins at the limit of language, the thresholds of the human body and the edge of selfhood. Susan McClary's criticism of an approach that does not include some kind of analysis of the musical – and its broader relationship with the society that produces it – is relevant here:

> To assess music from the outside as though it were but one commodity among many,

> or as though its meanings resided solely within its lyrics, is to fail to locate its pleasures, its means of manipulation and therefore its politics. In short the study of popular music should also include the study of popular music.[18]

Music contains social meanings within its soundings. We are, by way of certain cultural and social practices, absorbed into unisons with things outside ourselves.[19] David Schwartz, for example, posits that experiences such as "sleeping, swimming, having sex, being absorbed by a movie, by a religious experience, by a landscape" share a common feature with listening to music which is that "the boundary separating the body from the external world seems dissolved or crossed in some way.[20]

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The strangeness of our existence is detectable in both the banal and the dazzling. And writing about musical experience—its capacity both for metaphor and for the very enactment of so much lived experience—is a jumping-off point for discussing each of those philosophical concepts above. What writing about music 'should' look like is a disputed practice. How one describes sound, the experience of sound and furthermore the organisation, production and consumption of sound is a frustrating task when the discursive systems on offer always result in their own limitations, and we can feel all the more mystified for attempting the task at all. We resort to the discontented lexicon each discourse has developed for that which lies beyond its own limits. In consequence, Musicology, the nexus-discipline of history, formal musical analysis, sociology, cognitive science and cultural studies, employs a plurality of styles to describe phenomena that push the boundaries of our signification systems and our understanding.

Writing about Song

The broadest possible definition of popular song in the twentieth century (as a structural/formal definition rather than an analysis of its social meanings and usage) is so various and mutable as to immediately appeal to the broadest and most absolute grand narratives of representation and aesthetics. Popular song is mimetic for example; it executes narrative structure, or reflects dialectical tension-resolution binaries. It uncovers the interstices between sense and sound: the melopoetic fusion that words and music produce, as well as the irrevocable distance between these elements. The commonplace distinctions of

[18] Susan McClary 'Same as it Ever Was: Youth Culture and Music,' in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* eds. Tricia Rose and Andrew Ross (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), 38.

[19] i.e. "absorb, v… 2. trans. To include or incorporate (a thing) so that it loses its separate existence" *Oxford English Dictionary* 3rd ed., http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/view/Entry/704#eid4201562 (accessed 22/11/2014)

[20] David Schwartz *Listening Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 7.

‘words’ and ‘music’ brings a further complication. ‘Meanings’ and ‘readings’ seem to become exponential when we look at lyrics and try to fold linguistic expression back in to an overall analysis. Any given signifier, even considered via a cursory analysis, immediately presents the complexity beyond the signifier of the signified, the referent, the phonetics and music of language and the relative position of those sounds within grammatical systems.

However, in addition to close readings of lyrical meaning, in the tradition of literary studies, there is a further discipline still – that of melopoetics – that seeks to speak of music and words as creating a distinct phenomenon. Melopoetics, as the specific study of music and words in combination, expands the discursive plane, not only by the richness of all possible linguistic analysis, but by the possibility of new meanings that are only generated, uncovered and disclosed by music and words in combination.

All these meaning-making elements are contextually determined at the point of reception. They exist within their social and historical context, are contingent upon the hugely variable criteria of performance, and interact with particular cultural encodings and physical interactions that take place in and upon the body. An analysis of song and, in this case, dominant popular song-structures in a specifically early-twentieth-century American market, requires an approach that appreciates the multiplicity of causalities, materialities and receptions to which these phenomena are subject to. So there are phenomenological accounts of the sensory experience of song to be made: of the affective and cognitive registers that song may be experienced across and within. There is further exposition required as to why the market has shaped song into certain dominant structural trends. The pleasure and *sense* that these experiential accounts might attest to in song may be physical, but is also politically and historically produced. Even where all these phenomena and analyses combine, there is still an experiential remainder, *what listening to a song feels like*, that is not entirely traceable or mappable.

The ambiguity of writing about song becomes apparent in the process of it. In lieu of an established vocabulary I employ several analyses, utilising: affect theory, cultural history, accounts of institutional networks, textual analysis, formal musical analysis, with the potential for critical readings of all of these. It seems productive that the way to ‘answer’ the multiplicity of the subject is to address an array of criteria and sense-making elements. However, even all of these methodologies in combination still cannot fully describe the *what*, the *why* and the *how* of Song, and so become a basis for further enquiry.

Writing about Song Structure

As will become clear across the course of the thesis, the particular difficulties of articulating the social meanings present within song structure, are a preoccupation of this study. In Chapter One the thesis will attempt to situate 32-bar AABA within broader historical, economic, and institutional contexts, and in Chapter Two, to situate it within the thematic preoccupations of early-twentieth century American popular song. In these ways, I make a case for an ideology of propriety, via the aesthetics of Home, being conducive to 32-bar AABA's dominance by the time of the Alley's Golden Age from the 1920s until the end of the 1940s.

It is a contention of this work that the sectional structure of popular music can be discussed in extra-musical terms. This means that the assembling, patterning, repetitions and resolutions of, say, verse, chorus, breakdown or bridge sections, may have an impact on, and be informed by, factors wholly outside the musical work. This is to complicate the idea that the aesthetic pleasures of a phenomenon such as 32-bar AABA would be structured or produced by factors other than, simply, classicist mainstays such as 'beauty', 'symmetry' or 'clarity'. These may well have their place, but it is appropriate to consider such mainstays as neither eternal (in the Platonic sense) nor transcendent. Rather, we might bear in mind that they are as likely to be the aesthetic products of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, the ebbs and flows of our physiology,[21] and the ideologies – and anxieties – that attend all of this.

Such anxieties might include: desire for the commodity; alienation from the products of one's own labour; cultural neurosis toward apprehending mortality; the impossibility of fully conceiving subject-object relations; of apprehending the thresholds of either one's own body or one's own consciousness; the 'othering' process that takes place in order to establish a cultural norm; and the desires to order and narrativise resulting from any of these. Any metaphysic or causality that 'critical theory' might venture as explanations for aesthetic experience, and our social (re)production of those experiences, could be used as a jumping-off point for considering why popular song has been ordered and patterned in the way it has. Indeed, the patterns and structures of popular songs are most likely interacting with all of these at the same time. As Williams states,

> We can learn a great deal of the life of other places and times…we learn each element

[21] As might be assessed by both 'Affect' theorists and/or cognitive psychology.

> as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole.[22]

The study of popular song, in all its ubiquity, leads us to a unique site of human expression where the market, the body, identity politics, and language interact with each other and with the elusiveness of 'the sonic'.

Popular song, as a unit for study, is a paradoxical and elusive subject. The term encompasses an ambiguous, and vast, centuries-old phenomenon as well as conjuring a specific early-twentieth century, specifically American product. This thesis has to be written from a perspective of acceptance that its object of study can be a sprawling, indefinite phenomenon and yet also has a particular, emblematic expression at a particular time and place that seems to typify it. Even when considering Tin Pan Alley output at the turn of the century, this paradox abides. As Hamm writes in his introduction to *Yesterdays* (1983):

> The first problem in dealing with popular song in a historical way is the sheer quantity of material… it is a sheer impossibility to examine more than a tiny fraction of this music and depending on how a selection is made, quite different pictures of the various eras may emerge.[23]

The study of mass material culture, more generally, is fraught with similar tensions. As Timothy D. Taylor has stated:

> If we have learned one important thing from the Marxian study of culture after Adorno—from Raymond Williams—it is that the world is always in flux, that processes, even the most draconian effects of American capitalism, cannot be captured with snapshots of particular cultural moments, or examinations of a single work or two.[24]

This thesis attempts to propose instances in Tin Pan Alley song where an ideology of propriety seems to be a significant factor, with a view to showing how this ideology may have contributed to the standardising of sectional structure into 32-bar AABA by the onset of the Golden Age. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that other ideological trajectories *could* be asserted instead, especially in light of the amount and variety of material produced during the first decades of the twentieth century. However, an additional claim that is made with this study is that the *perception* of what Tin Pan Alley produced, and therefore stood for, also had

[22] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 47.
[23] Hamm *Yesterdays* (1983) xviii.
[24] Timothy D. Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism - Advertising, Music and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 5.

an ideological function and was ideologically produced. With this is mind, a notion of what is *conspicuously* taken to be the *majority* of the Alley's work is relevant here.

The Conspicuous Majoritarian

As already stated, to write about popular song – or its sectional structures – as a single homogeneous phenomenon would leave oneself open to a charge of over-generalisation. Even instituting certain qualifying parameters (for example, to narrow the object of study down to popular song that is industrially produced, American, Manhattanite, from the 1910s and so on) would require acknowledgment that a history of difference, augmentation and divergence is still present within those parameters and that a vast *variety* of sectional structures in popular music be recognised. As Middleton notes succinctly,

> If the [Tin Pan Alley 32-bar AABA] repertoire is placed in the larger context of popular song in the interwar period, it becomes clear that 'subterranean' influences on structural process from other genres (especially I-IV thinking, pentatonic and 'blue' melodic shaping, and musematic repetition techniques, all from African-American musics) should be regarded as at least qualifying any claim that this should be considered an 'American lied', with all the aesthetic aura that such claims entail[25].

However, it is still cogent to look at periodic tendencies, and also that which has come to be *perceived* as a dominant periodic tendency. Certainly, there are examples of extended periods of time within which markets favoured certain popular music structures as particularly saleable, and where audiences—in a symbiotic process—may have considered a certain structure normative, and therefore expected. Standardisation and mass-production between competing and/or cooperating institutions and individuals in the music industry (from publishers to agents to songwriters) have at times produced uniformity of structure to the extent whereby we can consider that uniformity an object of study. As Toynbee has concurred: "While 'mainstream' is often deployed in an ideological way [by its detractors], behind the myth there is… a concrete social and musical phenomenon."[26] Without entering too deeply into Popular Music Studies' well-trodden debates on the nature of 'the people' or 'the popular'[27] we might settle instead, for the notion that aspects of the industrialised song have been perceived as *conspicuous majoritarian* tendencies in a given time and place.

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[25] Richard Middleton, entry for 'Song Form' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 2* (2003), 515.

[26] Jason Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming: from hegemonic centre to global networks,' In: David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus, eds. *Popular Music Studies* (London, UK: Hodder Arnold, 2002), 149–163.

[27] As addressed in, for example, Richard Middleton's *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

The Term 'Popular Song'

Similarly, the paradox of the general term 'popular song' (outwith its Tin Pan Alley specificity) is that it has conspicuous majoritarian meanings and definitions at the same time that it remains elusive in absolute terms. Large sales numbers, mass-production, vernacular language, theme or, indeed, several other criteria could all be proposed as indicative, and yet a given example does not necessarily need all these criteria to be present in order that it enters into the field of 'popular song'. Conversely, such criteria as those listed above can be prominent aspects of musical works that do not necessarily qualify as 'popular music' in any meaningful, shared definition.

The possibility for divergence of definition, however, should enrich rather than diminish understanding. The ingredients necessary for one consumer's popular song may actually have originated centuries apart from another's, yet both may recognise 'The Irish Rover', 'Mack the Knife' and 'Call Me Maybe' as subsequent examples, of the phenomenon, and if we take a long-term historical view with regards to how certain contemporary criteria emerged, we can see why the term has become so nuanced and inclusive. It is worth considering how musicology has defined the term. But rather than comparing a variety of major musicologists' technical definitions of popular song, there is an alternative. It can be as fruitful to attempt to identify the qualities that lead to a writer's claim that a given example is 'the first popular song' (a surprisingly frequent, and variable, occurrence). This also allows us to take a long-term view of some of the formal properties that go into forming a conspicuous majoritarian view of what constitutes 'popular song'.

Indeed, the trajectory of popular song did progress in uneven phases across several centuries, and certain constituent elements – perhaps particular rhythmic patterns, instrumental principles or vocal techniques – may even stretch back into prehistory. It is problematic to speak of origins or definitive moments of development in a conclusive way.[28] Polymorphous flourishings of form, convention, technique and technology occurred beneath the prerogative of larger historical forces. At various historical junctures we can point to certain broader societal developments: the courtly song democratised for the people; the introduction of private finance and printing; the early manifestations of mass-marketed entertainment for a newly abundant leisure-class. Such historical changes have been each complicit in the creation of the cultural commodity we know today. But

[28] Of course the points at which the historical record begins to include written accounts, recorded notation and, subsequently, audio recording, all enable greater specificity with regard to the development of popular song.

these events do not have to be placed in competition with each other for 'birthplace of the popular song'. Rather, they herald, respectively, several births; each of them crucial developments in the history of the political economy of the pop song. This is a cultural and commercial phenomenon that has seen a 'combined and uneven development'[29] – to employ that Trotskyan metaphor of progress – whereby production, reception, dissemination and aesthetic concerns have progressed variously, disparately and yet in correspondence with each other.

So, as previously stated, there are commentators who have proposed candidate songs for 'the very first'. A surprising number take a stab, and a surprising range of historical periods are conferred the status of originating episode. Comparing the merits of each musicologist's proposal for 'first popular song' – in a kind of musicologist's pub quiz – illuminates the multi-faceted nature of the popular song itself. Each analyst makes their case for a song based on the *emergent criteria* they hold to be crucial. And so rather than embarking on a summary of their technical definitions, in search of a cast-iron amalgamation, we can use these proposals of 'the very first' to construct a definition that allows for the importance of certain historical episodes. After all, the lived history of popular song, as well as its formal elements, inform the conspicuous majoritarian view of what constitutes the term. The following section, therefore, details these musicologist's nominations.

"The earliest English popular song", writes Russell Sanjek at the opening of his encyclopaedic series of monographs on the popular music business, is "'Sumer is icumen in' (c.1280)… believed to be the work of a monk… the manuscript contains erasures and corrections typical of a songwriter". The high-medieval age of this nominee seems too extravagant for a phenomenon that Sanjek traces intact into the twentieth century. However, through this medieval example, Sanjek asserts the important criterion of *vernacular language* as a founding principal for our popular song tradition. He dates the introduction of English, which will endure through folk and pop musics' manifold dialects, as extant from the thirteenth century; a time when, "the first generations of English musicians, considered to be rogues, vagabonds and beggars, sang in the vernacular, to audiences knowing only that

[29] Also referred to as "the law of combined development" by Trotsky in his 1930 *History of the Russian Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2008) with reference to a nation's asymmetrical progress towards socialism. The individual elements of political development – including the spheres of art and technology – can be viewed as mercurial, disparate and yet co-dependent in their progress. Such a model of development seems useful, in fact, for the analysis of many human-made phenomena, be they economic systems or cultural artefacts.

tongue."[30] (This emphasis on 'low' speech has already been foreshadowed in his study when he alleges that the first English music – and by implication 'English Language' music – to be heard in America is a performance by the crew of Drake's *Golden Hind* no less). Moreover, as well as a democratisation of language, this would have constituted an instance of secularisation, since religious song by this time would have been conducted in Latin, in the form of Gregorian chant. Even today, popular song can evoke the religious, and yet it is generally considered to be distinct from worship song, and the spaces in which it takes place are secular places of entertainment. Hence, this example may point towards the fact that popular songs, in comparison to say, hymns (or even carols), are taken to be a part of the secular domain.

There is, admittedly, an Anglocentric bent to Sanjek's claim: without an emphasis on the English tongue he would be simply describing a practice of 'local song', found all over the world (and, purportedly, with characteristics which seem to contain symbolic meaning that could go as far back as the middle-Palaeolithic in some areas. And of course by no means could English be taken as an essential component of popular song in the broadest sense. Traditions such as French *chanson* have enjoyed similar longevities stretching from medieval troubadours to international recording artists such as Serge Gainsbourg.[31] This is not to mention the abundance of other, similar patterns of popular song development across the globe.

However, this thesis' does *not* tend to include such international trajectories, and its restricted focus is not arbitrary. Indeed, it is a proposition such as Sanjek's which highlights the justification for this constraint. The research presented here is concerned with particular aesthetic tendencies in Anglophone American popular song and, specifically, its interactions with the market actors and institutions that drive its creation and consumption. All manner of cultural forms have been exploited and assimilated by these actors, taken from the traditions of external nations, regions and peoples (and this pursuit has only accelerated with the general, historical expansion of communications and trade). And yet centuries apart, these actors have severally sustained a distinct market in English language popular song.

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[30] Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business, The First Four Hundred Years - Volume I: The Beginning to 1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

[31] Peter Hawkins, *The French Singer-Songwriter from Aristide Bruant to the Present Day* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 3. Hawkins specifically describes how "Lyric poets… in Provençal… sang their compositions to traditional melodies, such as Bernard de Ventadour (1125-c. 1200)", a dating which would make Bernard a populist pioneer even before Sanjek's monk.

Incorporation of so many influences which are foreign to the United States—with some notable exceptions—have been translated, performed, and sold, in English. A convention that began when, "The growth and spread of a common language made inevitable the traditional true English ballad".[32]

And so the establishment of a common language for popular song, that has provided insulation for hundreds of years of cohesive marketeering, is a contributory development in its history. Interestingly Donald Clarke affirms 'Summer is icumen in' (via Sanjek) as "the earliest English song extant" but for first *popular* song speculatively nominates 'What Shall I do to Show' from Purcell's semi-opera *Dioclesian* (1690). He describes how,

> Its subject is still the songwriter's favourite: love, preferably unrequited love. It would be surprising if this song had not been sung in many a drawing room to simple accompaniment. It is as good a candidate as any to be called the first popular song."[33]

The key references here are to *love*, and to amateur recital via sheet music in a home, thus by implication, the means of reproduction that came with the invention of the printing press. 'Sumer is icumen in', though in vernacular (middle) English, was probably not written with the realistic hope that a huge number of the *populace* would experience it. The reproduction of a transcription via the printing press is one of the practices that eventually renders song distinct from a purely oral practice and its relatively slow rate of oral transition. For example, Hamm describes a song by Francis Hopkinson that "has been almost universally hailed as the first American song"[34] and yet, because of the lack of music publishers in the U.S. Colonies in the late-eighteenth century, it remained unknown until the twentieth century, which makes it difficult to make the case for its 'popular song' credentials.

The printing press renders the song an artefact – commodifiable and circulatable. Indeed the link between vernacular, populist song and its circulation as commodity is key for Clarke. He describes how

> [u]ntil owners of sixteenth-century printing presses discovered a market for the English street ballad, popular songs rarely existed in written form, but went through the process that made them folk music. The scribes working for a selective market – colleges, the church, wealthy collectors of the classics – found little demand for manuscript ballads. Pre-Gutenberg stationers made small profit marketing such

[32] Sanjek, *American Popular Music - Volume I*, 3.
[33] Donald Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of Popular Music* (London: Viking, 1995), 7.
[34] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 90-91.

ephemera.[35]

Moreover, it is with the development of printing that return-oriented financial investment becomes tied to the song commodity. The early printers of these song sheets are the first, key, non-music making market-actors who begin reshaping the landscape of local song to suit purely commercial gain. Bottom line, demand-side sales information would begin to be part of the distribution process, even at this early juncture.

The implication that market forces represent human desire—the popular—in monetised, commercialised form is the qualitative difference implied in Clarke's nomination here. Mass-production is the criterion on which he differentiates the term 'popular song' from 'English song'. In terms of his nomination of this particular Purcell extract, it is difficult to make a rock-solid claim for any single sheet of paper from the sixteenth or seventeenth century to have been more widely distributed than others that enjoyed wide circulation. Bernard Capp suggests that the 1660s are close to the peak of broadside popularity, which marginally predates the *Dioclesian* extract.[36] Moreover, the penny-ballad, or its equivalent, makes popular song culture affordable to (virtually) all.

The introduction of market dynamics is relevant to both the primacy of English as a common language, and also has a bearing on how popular song became situated in terms of class. We can make a case that the English-language musical market was pioneering – and enjoyed a dominance in both innovation and influence thereafter – because of Britain's early industrialisation. As Donald Clarke outlines, "[i]t was no doubt England's already highly developed class-consciousness that led to a greater gulf between serious and popular music."[37] A new working-class demographic was targeted earlier in Britain than on the continent, and a desire for *self*-representation was engendered and sustained in a pact between audience and printer. In contrast he details how

> [o]ther nations stayed closer in many ways to their musical traditions: in Italy the best tunes from the operas were whistled by barrow boys in the street, while German composers never hesitated to use folk tunes in their compositions, or wrote tunes which sounded as though they had always existed. The great nineteenth-century Lieder of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Mahler, Wolf and others carried a broader cultural value than art song in English-speaking countries; they were much more

[35] Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of Popular Music*, 7.
[36] Bernard Capp, 'Popular literature', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* ed. Barry Reay (Worcester: Routledge, 1985), 199.
[37] Donald Clarke (1995), 6.

> accessible and more widely popular.[38]

However, within the *American* experience of mass immigration, it may have been the mixing of both English vernacular and continental traditions that can be considered as providing characteristics for what we would eventually consider popular song or, perhaps as significantly, the emergence of the *idea* of the popular song. Hamm makes the claim that

> [i]n a very real sense, the *concept* of popular song may be said to have begun with Henry Russell—an English-born Jew who studied in Italy, first came to Canada, and then furnished Americans with songs in an Italian musical style, mostly to texts reflecting an Irish type of nostalgia. Of such ethnic mixtures was popular song in America born. [My emphasis][39]

Jumping further forward, Michael Rogin has proposed the nation-wide ubiquity of American Minstrelsy as the "first and most popular form of mass culture in the nineteenth-century United States."[40] Of course, by extrapolation this would also mean that minstrel song was the first mass-culture *music* in the U.S. – given that song was a constant feature of the travelling minstrel show. This would imply that writers such as James Bland and also Stephen Foster were examples of the first popular songwriters, in a national, proto-mass-cultural, arena. Indeed, Hamm describes one aspect of Foster's success which foreshadows the Alley's professionalisation of popular song: that he was "the first American songwriter to support himself with his composition".[41] The notion of popular song in the twentieth century would become inextricably bound up with the assumption that it was written by 'professionals', at least until the 1960s.

In terms of popular song in the Tin Pan Alley tradition, Charles K. Harris is cited throughout the literature as a key figure of its genesis, in terms of business practices if not aesthetics. The story of his 1885 'Songs written to order' shop-front sign in Milwaukee became Tin Pan Alley legend - a tangible instance of song as a marketable, customisable offer.[42] Of course, songs were written to market-induced brief for centuries prior, but nonetheless Harris' famous sign has become a signpost in the history of commercial song. Mark W. Booth emphasises the huge increase of sales at the end of the nineteenth century as being the transformative factor which renders Harris' 'After the Ball' "the first… popular hit in the modern sense of

[38] Donald Clarke (1995), 6.
[39] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 184.
[40] Michael Rogin *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996) 12.
[41] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 227.
[42] Ian Whitcomb, *After the Ball: Pop Music from Rag to Rock* (New York City, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 4.

the word" (it sold two million copies in 1892; Stephen Foster's had sold only a hundredth of this quantity.[43]

Such a quantitative distinction is, of course, only indicative of a scaling-up of an existing process (the sale and distribution of sheet music) rather than a change of a qualitative nature. One could point to 'Home, Sweet Home'[44] as being comparable for its own era: an awful lot of people bought it (it may have sold as many as 100,000 copies),[45] and many more would have heard it and sung it in communal settings. Perhaps the distinction that Booth illuminates with 'After the Ball', is the emerging capacity for a popular song to become an economic and cultural force in its own right – folding its own influence back into the mechanics of its own industry, especially in terms of formal or thematic imitation. There are certain popular songs that are so influential they become a kind of market actor themselves, determining future production for generations, and over time these become key points in a kind of constellation of influence that succeeding generations of songwriter encounter. In contrast, Hamm cites 'Wait Till the Clouds Roll By' of 1881

> since the ensuing commercial success of the Harms company eventually revolutionised the music publishing business and changed the character of American song.[46]

This example is earlier than 'After the Ball' and is included by Hamm in his account only because it is "the first 'Tin Pan Alley' song"[47]. Perhaps these are the first examples of Popular Songs as market forces in their own right.

From these proposals for popular song's genesis, we can ascribe to it certain characteristics that the term 'popular song' seems to be imbued with, in much of its common usage. Firstly, we can contend that it has usually been written in a common language of vernacular English, and it is deemed to be part of the secular, public domain of entertainment rather than religious or courtly ones. It is also distinct from Art-song, and it is likely that its most frequent subject is love. It is an affordable, mass-produced commodity, probably written by professionals, and possibly made-to-order, and non-musical market actors influence its propagation. In terms of American popular song (and arguably many other markets) a defining characteristic is that it

[43] Mark W. Booth, *The Experience of Songs* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1981), 161.
[44] Henry Bishop and J. Howard Payne 'Home, Sweet Home' (George Bacon, 1824).
[45] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 167.
[46] Ibid., 285.
[47] Ibid.

is a hybrid form, and contains within it aspects of many local musics, which have been assimilated when artistically or commercially beneficial. Finally, as with the case of 'After the Ball and 'Wait Till the Clouds Roll By', it is a phenomenon that is self-referential and emulative—both aesthetically for its creators and commercially for those who would fund it. Through the effect that one song might have over another, an interdependent, ecology of influence becomes a defining dynamic for the phenomenon of popular song. It is to that 'ecology' that we now briefly turn our attention.

Arch-Darwinism

We can chart the introduction of a high-turnover, object-oriented musical marketplace back to the broadside ballad. High inventory turnover increased through the 19th century enterprises of parlour song publishing and Vaudeville and then, with Tin Pan Alley, increased greatly. The emergence of bodies such as The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), network radio and then major record labels meant that the circulation of popular song only increased exponentially across the twentieth century. Commercial institutions from the broadside publishers to Sony Corporation have constantly reinvented and renewed commercial production of the 'units' – the sheet music, analogue recording artefacts and now digital data – but also of the intellectual property, that is, the songs. We can generalize about musical production processes over a few hundred years even if simply to point out the relation between product refinement and financial returns.

The abundance of popular songs written, the rate of their output and the short timespan required for popular song reception—in comparison to other dominant cultural commodities like novels and feature films—has ensured that market response has come to form a kind of arch-Darwinism or in Mark Booth's words: "A theater of delirious change".[48] Perhaps only the newspaper is more efficient in its mutability. Mutations in form and technology happen at speed in 19th and 20th century popular song production, but all along there are trends and conventions which remain. The particularly brief length of popular song and its capacity for multifarious, parallel articulation (the multiplicity of simultaneous stimuli in the listening experience at any one instant) ensures that this is a form which develops at pace. Musicologist Joe Bennett has described this process with reference to the post-World War II musical mainstream (although much of what he describes applies to the first half of the

[48] Booth, *The Experience of Songs*, 193.

twentieth-century also) thus:

> Popular songs have, through audience-driven 'natural selection', evolved many characteristics in common with each other that, I suggest, define the form, or at least the popular mainstream of which less (literally) popular niche genre-songwriting activities form tributaries…This is not to say that all songs will exhibit these characteristics; rather, a majority of them will appear in almost all successful songs, and some mainstream classics will have most or all of them…[49]

Bennett goes on to list a set of formal features that have been 'selected' through this process, or ecology, of 'natural' selection. Through such approaches we cannot always account for the popularity of a group like The KLF or even The Velvet Underground—there will always be a host of musicians and market-actors who achieve success in a manner that appears to be without precedent. But we can note that very often, popular song exists within phases of influence where fashion and convention are mutually agreed upon, for a while, until a development (or mutation) becomes necessary—what Isaac Goldberg, a journalist who chronicled Tin Pan Alley called, "…the undying—if not the immortal—commonplace".[50]

It is said that between about 1900 and 1950, somewhere in the region of 300,000 songs were copyrighted nationwide,[51] with certain professional songwriters claiming to write up to ten in a single day, or thousands in total across the most prolific individual careers. This date range, as well as the geographical area, is larger than this thesis deals with in the main but it does help us to understand the magnitude of output. The success of these songs (or not) was in relation to each other and interdependent. They constitute a shared treasury of technique, innovation and convention, available for the next composition. And this ever-increasing resource is sustained by the networked, entrepreneurial activities of individuals and companies who, in their quest for profit and cultural influence, deposit a record (in both senses of the word) of activity and achievement within that treasury.

This ecology of stability, reinvention and an audience-driven 'natural selection' was industrialised with the emergence of Tin Pan Alley and there remain companies, established

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[49] Joe Bennett, 'Collaborative Songwriting - The Ontology of Negotiated Creativity in Popular Music Studio Practice.' Journal of the Art of Record Production 5 (2010) http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/864/1/Bennett%20-%20Collaborative%20Songwriting.pdf. (Accessed 20th November, 2015.)

[50] Isaac Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2010. Originally printed New York, NY: The John Day Company, 1930) 88.

[51] James T. Maher, introduction to Alec Wilder *American Popular Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) xxxviii

at that time, which have a great effect on the contemporary cultural landscape. It was clear, even for a sociologist writing in the 1970s, that the commercial apparatus which sustained Tin Pan Alley before the war, had continued into the 1950s. The sociologist George H Lewis could, twenty years hence, still identify a "Tin Pan Alley Complex" where "Publishing companies were closely tied to record companies, who were, in return, linked economically with theatres, movie studios and broadcast networks".[52] These conspicuous majoritarian operations – the consumer-perceived mainstreams – have reproduced certain compositional structures, conventions and tropes amongst themselves for decades at a time. As already stated, this research concerns itself with the reliance on 32-bar AABA during Golden Age Tin Pan Alley, and the factors which contributed to this.

Consumer Pleasure

Of course those musicians, marketeers and market-actors who dictate investment decisions in a commercial music enterprise are only the first listeners amongst equals. The consumer, and the specific character of the pleasure they are prepared to pay for, provides straightforward and substantive financial evidence to the market-actor as to how they should re-invest or modify their product. Putting the consumer, and sales information, at the heart of musical and compositional enterprise, is a dynamic that had been gaining ground for centuries, since the broadside ballad at least. A defining characteristic of Tin Pan Alley was that it represented a full and conspicuous realisation of this dynamic. Tin Pan Alley publishers could be entirely independent from the vestiges of patronage which had remained into the nineteenth century.[53] Eventually, of course, their aggressive market control—and the sums of investment involved in promoting a song—would see the upstart publishers assume the role of a kind of patron themselves, albeit with the important distinction of being motivated by the bottom line and the recouping of their investment.

Both the producer (i.e. the songwriter or publisher) and the consumer are important figures to consider in a discussion of ideology's embeddedness within the cultural commodity. It is the consumer who makes the purchase that is the sustaining force of the commercial enterprise—in this case a choice between a variety of different musical commodities, each containing distinct messages, atmospheres and experiences. And thus the sales figures for 'leisure'

[52] George H. Lewis, 'Taste Cultures and Culture Classes in Mass Society: Shifting Patterns in American Popular Music' in *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8/1 (1977): 42.

[53] Timothy E. Scheurer, 'The Nineteenth Century - Introduction' in *American Popular Music: Readings from the Popular Press, Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century and Tin Pan Alley* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 44.

consumption across a society provides a crude monetary index as to the shape and signifiers of pleasure a given community seems willing to pay for. The classical liberal economist can extrapolate from such sales figures how the invisible hand of market forces eventually grants both the consumer and producer the closest manifestation of their own satisfaction possible. Such a measure does not necessarily explain how certain markets may have been shaped by political or corporate institutions, and indeed it does not take account of the fact that consumers do not necessarily act *rationally* with regard to their own pleasure or self-interest, especially in light of the manufacture of desires via advertising and marketing.[54] Moreover, a flat sales figure does not necessarily provide any recognition of the fact that the 'general' public is always a multiplicity of publics, each with a complex and distinctive identity for belonging. As Tawa has noted:

> The post-Civil War audience for popular song was really an aggregate of several overlapping publics, each large in number, and was characterized by heterogeneity. From the countless offerings of composers and publishers, the songs that became the most popular were those that were highly entertaining and communicative to one or more of these audiences.[55]

As we shall see, the use of a simple, intelligible sectional structure such as 32-bar AABA would resonate in this multi-audience arena.

At the least, a measure of sales as an index of culture has a symbolic value in that it affirms the American orthodoxy of the free market as logos. The veracity of the notion that posits the market as the index of human desires is complicated by the *perceived* veracity of such a claim. In this case, the free market itself is a cultural and ideological signifier in the USA and so a discursive feedback loop forms where the perception of the market as logos informs the actual efficacy of the free market. As composer and musicologist William Brooks has noted with regard to the perceived value of popular music:

> In American Ideology, free markets mediate economically between Pioneer and Citizen: the value of each Pioneer creation is established by the price assigned it by Citizen purchasers... its monovalent measure of success.[56]

Questions of taste or value, even in the Adornian sense that a lack of 'authentic' value is

[54] With thanks to Dr Jennifer Hodgson for helping me to articulate this notion.
[55] Nicholas E. Tawa. *The Way to Tin Pan Alley - American Popular Song, 1866-1910* (New York, NY: Schirmer Books / Macmillan, 1990), 4.
[56] William Brooks, 'Music in America: An Overview (Part 2) - Popular Music' in *The Cambridge History of American Music* ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 262.

attributed to products that assist in Capitalist degradation/exploitation, are less important to this study than what we might loosely call the significance of ubiquity—a ubiquity which, if nothing else can be attested to by virtue of units sold. In any case, the interrogation of false consciousness in the Marxian sense has become a more nuanced endeavour since Stuart Hall and others have been able to articulate how agency and creativity subsist within the act of consumption itself.[57] As Timothy D Taylor puts it (boldly):

> Capitalism isn't as monolithic as it comes across in many of his [Adorno's] writings, people aren't always duped by the cultural industries, music isn't always a commodity, and, if it is, isn't always a commodity in the same way."[58]

If consumers can be co-authors of popular music's meanings then we might contend that the deathly commodity that sustains a Marxian understood false consciousness is, at least partly, under pressure from the reconfiguration and reappropriation by those in its thrall. Isaac Goldberg, a contemporary journalist of the Alley writing in 1930 (whose account features throughout this thesis) asked with characteristic economy: "Can it really be a lie if it sells a million copies?"[59]

And yet there are times when the capacity to shape meaning in popular music can be attributed to a top-down institution or process, and it becomes necessary to investigate this. Even where "demonization" analyses of the culture industry (to use David Sanjek's term) emphasise the agency and power of corporations to the disadvantage of consumers, they often "fail to address the question of the music industry's role in the creation of *meaning* in popular music"[My emphasis].[60] Citing Reebee Garofalo, David Sanjek reminds us that

> we must assess both consumption and production with equal vigour and realise that individuals can only reappropriate and recontextualize that which the music industry sees fit to sell to them.[61]

Again, this points to the perennial debate as to the agency of cultural consumers and their complicity and influence toward the cultural artefacts which are presented to them. Although the sales record can impart to us the popularity of certain themes, imagery and even sonic environments, it cannot explain by itself, either the providence or the rationale for those

[57] For an introduction to such ideas see Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall et al, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage Publications, 1997)
[58] Timothy D. Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism - Advertising, Music and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 5.
[59] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 2.
[60] David Sanjek, 'Funkentelechy vs. the Stockholm syndrome: The place of industrial analysis in popular music studies' *Popular Music and Society* 21/1 (1997): 84.
[61] Ibid., 88-89.

popularities. The consumer-producer relationship, especially when we are dealing with 'culture', is of course one of symbiosis. As Goldberg wrote at the time: "These ballads and snatches are made of its [the public's] own vernacular and, at the same time, make it over in turn… It is a living circuit."[62]

So the songwriter and publisher in their role as product-producer are inextricable from the particular urban, national, and class culture of which they themselves are members. We cannot simplistically look to the industry as the logos from which cultural expression pours forth, and which the consumer either votes for or against. Rather, we might consider what conceptions of social propriety, subversion—and the pleasures of each—have been internalised by both producer and consumer, and how these circulate and are reproduced independently of the actors themselves. For example, Nicholas Tawa's study emphasises notions of 'common values' interacting with publishers' cynicism when

> lyrics and music reflected some commonly held set of principles of taste and worth… the American people of this [turn of the twentieth century] period were not mindless acceptors of everything presented to them… Late-nineteenth-century publishers continuously faced the problem of issuing songs inexpensive enough for ordinary people to purchase and inclusive of enough common values to attract as many people as possible.[63]

'Common values', as an explanatory basis for the circulation and significance of cultural artefacts, ideas and tropes, would imply a greater emphasis on agency and *conscious* decision-making than this thesis claims. However, where this thesis does emphasise notions such as unconscious desire and internalised ideology, these are in some senses analogous theories to an idea of 'common values', at least in the sense that they address how human cultures reproduce themselves. However, such ideas are put forward with an important, distinct emphasis placed upon the hidden, the implicit and the unbeknown, as opposed to such an explicit, public notion as 'shared values'. Chapters Two and Three offer explanations for how popular song's thematic preoccupations and structural mainstays may have been expressions of profoundly deep-seated systems of meaning and organisation, whether these might be aspects of the Lacanian symbolic order or Althusserian ideology.

However, notions such as 'values', or ideology, or unconscious desire or an underlying symbolic order, do not necessarily address the *character* and *quality* of how such phenomena

[62] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 7.
[63] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 4.

might manifest for (or within) an individual. Massumi writes of how cultural theorists in the 1980s and 1990s became increasingly biased towards determinist, dialectical explanations. He states that for some top-down theorists, "The everyday was the place where nothing happened."[64] Politics was to be found in the explicit, articulated relations between individuals and institutions. And oftentimes that would constitute the extent of analysis. As Roy Shuker notes in a definition of political economy: "Classical Marxist political economy tended to devalue the significance of culture, seeing it primarily as a reflection of the economic base."[65] Culture, however, and the effects of cultural artefacts, legitimate an economic system, and provide it with a 'license to operate', and so we might more accurately describe the economic base and the culture it gives rise to as interdependent.

The content of a song, say, in the form of sheet music or recording, is experienced physically and this physical experience is complex. We must also pay some attention, therefore, to the fact that the fundamental unit of social relations (indeed, of all the institutional networks of production and consumption described above) and the fundamental site for the making of meaning (political, ideological, unconscious, whichever) is the human body. At bottom, Tin Pan Alley songwriters and publishers were conscious that they were concocting for sale a product that elicited affective response – tugged the heartstrings, put a spring in the step, and so on. This was not lost on Goldberg, the contemporary chronicler of the Alley. He explained songwriters' aesthetic aspirations as comparable to that of a salacious tabloid where the popular song "obeys every little rule laid down by editors in search of speed, pep and punch".[66] With this in mind, we can turn our attention, briefly, to how theorists have attempted to situate *feeling*, affective response and embodied cognition, within the social networks of production and consumption.

Popular Song and Popular Feeling

The monetisation of Affect—or the industrialisation of elicitation of affective states—is a ubiquitous and characteristic feature of our modernity. The elicitation of bodily affect conscripts us into a simulation of reality – one that is not only communicated and cognized but also felt. Gambling, green-rooms, fairgrounds, fireworks, jewellery, car-interiors, pocket-fans, garden lawns, beach-front property, make-up, gym culture, remote controls, strobe lights and sushi conveyor belts create 'synthetic' affective states for the consumer. An abundance

[64] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1.
[65] Roy Shuker, entry for 'Political Economy' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 1, Media, Industry and Society* (London: Continuum, 2012), 97.
[66] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 100.

of similar products and services simulate the nexus between a given socio-historical signifier and its attendant physiology. (And all this is not to mention adverts, video games and the internet's distillations of affective experience through meme, GIF and no doubt a host of yet unimagined seductions).[67] The majority of our leisure-time is a carousel of prescribed consumption: tactile pleasures; simulated rusticity; staged jeopardy; historical re-enactment; communal peacockery; and the fetishisations of mastery and convenience. Such manipulations of appetite and satiety have always been the conditions of exchange since perdurable metal specie (that is, coined money) embodied value itself as shiny and rare stimulus. The consumer market is sometimes conceived of as the domain where images are manipulated, distributed and (hopefully, for the advertiser) interpreted for profit. It would be richer still to acknowledge that, as well as a dependence on the interpretation of images, it is the domain where the manipulation and distribution of *affective states* takes place, states that are increasingly made to measure and immersive.

The exploitation of 'popular feeling' ('exploitation' in its economic use as a dispassionate utilisation towards one's advantage, as opposed to merely the implication of an unjust power relation) has been a concern within cultural studies at least since the Birmingham School.[68] The relationship between such an enquiry and the function of popular music (as a constituent player in the process) was being explored from that research centre's inception, in the work of Richard Hoggart and subsequently Lawrence Grossberg. Grossberg's work in particular pointed towards the notion that the record industry had come to package – along with the documented musical practice and its 'message' – a simulated and transferrable affective state in itself. This is a position that he traces back to early articulations of a proto-affect theory at Birmingham. He recalls in an interview:

> I kept wanting to argue that somehow the notion – what Hoggart called "what it feels like [to be alive]" and Williams called "the structure of feeling" – was more than what the Althusserian notion of ideology and the extant theories of experience captured.
> …
> And that, in a way, popular music gave access to that perhaps more obviously than other forms of mediated culture.[69]

Throughout his writings, Raymond Williams attempted to formulate a notion of a "structure

[67] For an exposition of the affective power of GIF files, and the extraordinary pursuit of 'moments of being' that its producers seek to capture with this seemingly trivial format, see the short *Offbook* documentary on PBS 'GIFS – Birth of a Medium' at http://video.pbs.org/video/2207348428

[68] The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) established at the University of Birmingham in 1964.

[69] Lawrence Grossberg, 'Rediscovering the Virtual in the Actual – Interview,' in Gregg and Seigworth (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 310.

of feeling" that is unique to a given time and place: a "community of experience hardly needing expression". In *The Long Revolution* he states that

> It is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity… I think it is a very deep and wide possession… One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere.[70]

How it *feels* to live in a given time and place is captured, in an approximate way at least, in its works of art and cultural commodities. There are limits to this 'capture'. He reminds us that within the work of art

> if anywhere, this characteristic [structure of feeling] is likely to be expressed… the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon.[71]

However, the structure of feeling should also be considered as a concept of emergence rather than a settled and definitive 'spirit of the age'. Williams described it as such in *Marxism and Literature*.[72] It is a shifting and contested concept but it is useful for this research as it emphasises that living in a given time and place with its particular constellation of institutions, conventions, cultural inheritance and cultural forms, a unique shared community of feeling will abide.

An understanding of mass-experience, and the significance of the mass-witnessing of mass-experience, can be approached through the study of popular song. In light of its capacity for circulation and quick consumption it is potentially an exemplary artefact in such a process. In fact, in the documentative sense (rather than the musical), it is a public, and publicised record of such a process. Popular song can potentially be experienced by an individual as a reflection of the culture they inhabit because of the knowledge, during the listening experience, that so many others are also being exposed to the same material. The Alley journalist Goldberg (who was himself grasping for a lexicon around these issues) intimated in the midst of the Alley's Golden Age that "[i]t is impossible to have several millions of people simultaneously listening to or singing a song—however good or bad—without that song doing something to them, and for them."[73] There is potency in the knowledge that one is

[70] Ibid., 64-65.
[71] Ibid., 48.
[72] Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), 134.
[73] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 100.

taking part in mass-spectacle.

Cultural studies, and latterly Affect scholarship has attempted to begin to create a vocabulary to describe the experience of being 'within' a popular culture at a given time. Of course, as Susan Sontag hints in the early part of this introduction, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the feeling of a place in time. Williams concurs in *The Long Revolution*:

> The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living.[74]

In limited ways, musical objects and their circulation (especially, but by no means only, recordings) can be a useful instrument in that pursuit, as Grossberg intimates above. Where there is evidence that a musical object had significance for a community we can, at least, approximate and observe, a physical experience (although the ability to empathise with past listenings, performances and their contexts may be ultimately unknowable). Such a process can be one that affords individuals a way of beginning to locate themselves in time and geography, by way of shared affective experience. In a sense, the circulation of records can be seen as akin to the circulation of little packets of affective, or liminal experience, possessing the capacity to locate the listener within an intersubjective register, even across time and geography.

Of course, an account of individual, or collective, affective states and reception does not necessarily free us from the political. Indeed, such an account may simply lead us to the ideological potentials of Affect: that it can be harnessed to put *something in the water*, to use a proverbial term. Entire subsections of the mass media are focused on structuring our feelings and the messages that provoke them, and this does not only apply to advertisers and marketeers. Likewise, popular music makers are engaged in the mass mobilisation of shared affective states. For Adorno, of course, even the promise of intersubjectivity could be illusory, constituting the dulling of authentic life, and the throwing of a sop of emotion to the alienated subject. As he noted in his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*:

> To people harnessed between their jobs and the reproduction of their working energies, the hits are purveyors of an ersatz for feelings which their contemporaneously revised ego ideal tells them they should have. Socially the hits

[74] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 47.

> either channel emotions—thus recognising them—or *vicariously* fulfil the longing for emotions…What makes a hit a hit, aside from the manipulative energy of the moment, is its power either to absorb or to feign widespread stirrings.[75]

But post-Marxian accounts of culture proffered by Nigel Thrift, Massumi and Grossberg share the ramifications of Hoggart's and Williams' embryonic notions that much *political* and *actualising* work occurs at the level of unarticulated bodily feeling – outside of propositional thought, and so the shared experience of physical material must be politically significant in itself.

However, evidencing how popular music might do this has always proved particularly difficult. So much of the life-world can be articulated, expressed, represented and evoked at the nexus of the industrially-produced song. Furthermore, and crucially, so much of that life-world experience in song is non-linguistic, virtualised and felt, and any documentable effect is fleeting, despite the experience itself, and its consequences, outlasting that 'real-time' reception. This is also true of the affective moment which – like a tune in the head – has a tail, a shelf life, and a fall-out beyond its manifestation. Whatever an affective instant might be it cannot be plotted temporally – that is in 'real-time' – against the stimulus or the trigger. As Thrift points out, "an affect such as anger may last for a few seconds but equally may motivate revenge that spans decades."[76] So the body and the individual subject can react to a stimulus in real-time or in a distended/compacted psychological temporality. Likewise, the consequences of song – and the political power of its specific pleasures – outlive the sound wave that carries it.

This study is concerned with certain formal abstractions (structural, linguistic, semiotic) that songs perform, and how broader social and ideological preoccupations were channelled into these abstractions via the particular social world of Tin Pan Alley.[77] Moreover, in the spirit of those enquiries that posit the political importance of affective states (as described above), it would be remiss to give an account of popular song at the beginning of the twentieth century

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[75] Theodor Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1989 - First published in the original 1962), 27. [My emphasis]

[76] Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 177.

[77] In so much as this process is presented on the page in rather sober terms such as '32-bar AABA' or 'discourses around nostalgia' or other such reductions, the reader is asked to view such plain terminology as an attempt to name (or give a shorthand for) phenomena that are actually attended by complex affective experiences. As Massumi describes in *Parables…*: "[t]he escape of affect…is also continuous, like a background perception that accompanies every event, however quotidian… For it is nothing less than the *perception of one's own vitality*, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as 'freedom')…It is the perception of this *self-perception*, its naming and making conscious, that allows affect to be effectively analysed…"[Author's emphasis]. See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 35-36.

that did not acknowledge the affective experience of hearing the human voice. Indeed, one of the key foundations for the Golden Age Alley's dominance was a remarkable technological enhancement of that experience, namely, the spectacularisation of the human voice that began with acoustic recording and was virtually perfected with the emergence of electrical recording. These developments, of course, also enhanced live performance similarly. Thus, the aforementioned formal abstractions within song (and, thus, the ideologies that informed them) were experienced and enhanced by new affective technologies. It is to this, the affective experience of song, via these new technological enhancements, that we briefly turn our attention, and in the first instance this is via a proposal that situates the popular song, the voice and the microphone as being, fundamentally, technologies of *longing*.

A New Technology of Longing

Irving Caesar, in episode seven of Tony Palmer's extensive television history of Popular Music proposes, in ebullient fashion, that "the best popular song ever written" is Howard, Hough and Adams' 'I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now'.[78] His emphasis is on the fact that a comprehensive story-world is already present by the completion of singing the first line. And there is a significant insight here, amidst his characteristic Alley hyperbole, which is that some of the most fundamental qualities and potentials of song are present in that very line. It is a line that reminds us of these qualities: that song is devotional; that it is able to collapse - in an imaginative sense - the physical bounds of time and space; that it is an act of virtualisation; and moreover that it is able to portray the phenomenological experience of an instant. As Negus proposes, "It is the present of the present that many love songs wish to convey; the here and now— a celebration of the moment of love, to hold onto and to repeat the fleeting moment."[79] Perhaps as a result of all these qualities it can be understood that song is intrinsically concerned with *longing*, and that, through a certain lens, a multitude of popular songs enact such a state.

The market—and even folk and vernacular music prior to broadsides—has engaged in the commonplace creation of songs that are deliberately written to evoke and describe longing – longing for a person, a time, a place, a culture, whichever. Across early-twentieth-century American popular song, longing is implicit or explicit. Even the novelty song that expresses a short-term desire for a new fad can be placed within such a category, but there is something

[78] 'Always Chasing Rainbows - Tin Pan Alley' Episode 7 of *All You Need is Love*, Directed by Tony Palmer (UK June 16, 2009 DVD, Originally shown 1977). For the song itself see Will M. Hough, Frank R. Adams , Joseph E. Howard 'I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now' (Edward B. Marks Music Corp. 1909).

[79] Keith Negus, 'Narrative Time and the Popular Song' *Popular Music and Society* 35/4 (2012): 487.

specific and distinct about the affective qualities of songs concerned with lost love, unrequited love and—a particular favourite of the Alley—nostalgia. Adorno was absolutely blunt about nostalgia as a sales tool, targeted to the alienated modern subject where "[the songwriters] fake a longing for past irrevocably lost experiences, dedicated to all those consumers who fancy that in memories of a fictitious past they will gain the life denied them."[80] Indeed there is explicit testimony detailing such commercial manoeuvers. Sanjek recounts the instance where, the publisher, Leo Feist asked Abe Holzman to write a cakewalk, and the latter named it *Echoes of the South* because "echoes of anything sells.[81] This particular statement is a neat and emblematic summation of the commercial attitude toward nostalgia – an example where music professionals have internalised a commercial imperative in service of their aesthetic choices. They are quick to employ the mythic geography of home (the South) and combine it with the sonic phenomenon which embodies the decay and entropy of sound (the echo), and the loss and longing which that combination adds up to.

In fact, the longing that that the singing voice can evoke and, indeed, promise to transcend has always been a key offering for commercial music and was fetishised as such from early on. We might detect this, for example, in the commonplace marketing technique in Vaudeville theatres of planting 'the singer in the gallery'. A young boy in the upper circle would spontaneously stand up to join in the female lead's solo, "as if carried away by the song's beauty" and they would proceed to sing and harmonise together.[82] By seemingly breaking the fourth wall of theatrical performance, the well-rehearsed performers would attempt to enthral the audience with the possibility of bridging the longing between two discrete human bodies.

It is no surprise that songs *about* longing should so often hold a rarefied position in the popular canon. As a reification of language itself, song is always an idealisation, always a devotion, to use religious metaphor. The specialisation and stylising of utterance in song renders the signified idealised, and an ideal state of longing is therefore, arguably, always implicit. The site of the voice, also, as the *imagined* interiority of another, and as the chain of rarefied language and non-signifying vibration which reaches from the larynx of the singer to within the anatomical boundaries of the listener, constitutes a kind of absorption between subjects (as Schwartz has similarly described earlier in this chapter).[83] But the ephemeral,

[80] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 36.
[81] Sanjek *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 406.
[82] Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Greatest Lyricists* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), 21.
[83] In Mladen Dolar's words "The voice appears as the link which ties the signifier to the body" in Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 59.

and ultimately unknowable, materiality of this shared sound, renders also only the promise of that absorption where "the mere oscillation of air… keeps vanishing the moment it is produced, materiality at its most intangible."[84] The practice of singing, at all, could be said to hold within it a yearning for the potential which singing itself can never fully disclose. Dolar has proposed that

> [t]he voice as the bearer of a deeper sense, of some profound message, is a structural illusion, the core of a fantasy that the singing voice might cure the wound inflicted by culture, restore the loss that we suffered by the assumption of the symbolic order. This deceptive promise disavows the fact that the voice owes its fascination to this wound, and that its allegedly miraculous force stems from its being situated in this gap.[85]

Such notions of inherent illusion and loss in the experience of hearing the voice makes the pursuit of *recording* seem even more significant. The process is even, in the contemporary media-professional's jargon, described as the *capturing* of the voice – indicative of a desire to fix it within discrete boundaries, prevent its elusion and ultimately, to monetise it. In the early-twentieth-century, technological advancement promoted and created a new fantasy of intimacy with the singer. The invention of the microphone enabled the singer to stand at the head of the largest and most dynamic sonic palette then available, that of the concert orchestra. From this point on, in a dance-hall or on recordings, they could combine with the orchestra to create heroic or tragic experiences that exceeded any previous human-instrument interaction. The unprecedented knowledge and intimacy of a single speaking subject-body, that the great mass public could now share, constituted a fundamental epistemological shift – we were a wiser civilisation (or at least, differently informed) by the microphoned body. [86]

Nothing less than a new technological heroism would be accessed via the microphone and this was due to the *mediation* between listener and singer being adjusted along fundamental axes. Precious few individuals across the globe had their unique laryngeal characteristics rendered through electro-magnetic resolution. The spectacle of this rare privilege was itself aggrandising – deifying even. In the rarefication process that stadium theatrics, mass broadcast and video-editing would later inherit, the positioning of an agent at the apex of a mass-spectacle technology renders their very being spectacular, regardless of how they might

[84] Dolar, Mladen (2006) 59.
[85] Ibid. 31.
[86] Such *mass* listenings of the microphonic voice were, of course, made possible by radio broadcast but also, as a recorded and documented event, once shellac 78s had replaced the singularity of cylinder where, because of its capacity for re-recording, "every recording was an original". Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes – A Short History of Recording and its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1995), 5.

conduct themselves whilst so-positioned. Indeed, it is possible that, in epistemological terms, recorded media actually extends a sense of separation, idealisation and longing. The potential of sharing another's embodied experience is at once present, but even more absent, by virtue of the absence of the individual themselves. The recorded, mass-reproduced, spectacularised voice furnishes 'the lack' that atomised, urbanised living exacerbates. Chanan describes the same process whereby "reproduction – mechanical, electrical or electronic – creates a distance, both physical and psychic, between performer and audience that simply never existed before."[87] The covetous senses of the consumer – vision, hearing and so on – are filled and occupied beyond their rationalising capacity. The electro-magnetised voice, in short, was dazzling for the mass public it now enveloped.

And, as already stated, the spectacle of the technology itself produces social and ideological effects. Singing was by no means the only function that microphones were used for – it was, rather, one of a variety. But what Chanan calls its "symbolic fitness" for the era, was especially imprinted on, and also epitomised by, its interaction with the singing star.[88] Analogous to the eighteenth-century piano, the microphone had a "hunger for music of every scale and genre" (as well as its suitability for politicians, educators and actors) and, through its particular physical workings, exemplified the electrical age.[89] The strange charisma of the invention itself was reinvested in the crooners and singers of the age, for they epitomised its use. More so than for a politician, educator or actor, for whom the technology is primarily an enabling, and functional one (the exception perhaps being Roosevelt's 'Fireside Chats'), the new, intimate singers were perceived as *wielding* an instrument. By virtue of the complexity and diversity of the singing voice, they used more of its capabilities, and in so doing, symbiotically acquired more of its glamour.

Furthermore, the tendency towards songs expressing, thematically and lyrically, desire for the idealised (unobtainable) love-object—so conspicuous in our period—also instantiates a proxy relationship of desire and devotion between the singer and listener. As Toynbee has pointed out:

> Many songs used the first and second person form giving a strong sense of the singer as subject (the 'I'), and audience member [or listener] as the one being sung to (the adored 'you' of the song). In this way an ideal relationship was set up between the

[87] Ibid., 8.
[88] Ibid., 70.
[89] Ibid., 8.

persona of the singer and the listener.[90]

The vicarious, voyeurising technology of the microphone was able to construct an emblematic identity for the singer as *Primus inter pares* – the articulator of our own interiority where "there was a tendency to treat the microphone as a confidant or an accomplice."[91] Lars Nyre relates an advertisement on a 1931 Victor record sleeve which claims to offer not only "the voice or instrument of the musician but his very self".[92] Such a notion of exchange helped to render the popular singer as personal, coveted possession. And the primary element in how a popular singer is experienced is the song sung, which likewise, became the emotional property of the lifestyle consumer.

In summation, it is essential to acknowledge that amongst all the economic and cultural development of the twentieth century, an enormously far-reaching root and branch impact on popular music came from mic-ing up the singer. From changes provoked in the physical architectures of public space, to a transformation in the very metaphysics of musical 'intersubjectivity', the microphone changed our knowledge and experience of other people, as movable-type had done five hundred years previously. Amongst other techno-discursive exchanges, the microphoned singing-star was a symbiotic apparatus for a century of Freudian introspection, aspirational and atomised consumerism, emergent youth culture and finally—in combination with compression and reverb—a hyper-real fantasy existence to replace the poverty of the everyday.

For the remainder of this thesis, I would ask the reader to bear in mind that many of the phenomena that will be discussed (sectional structure, thematics, and so on) were (literally and figuratively) amplified and spectacularised by these developments. For the remaining chapters, however, the specificities of the microphonic voice will not be covered. Rather, in what follows, I will try to give an account of those aspects of the popular song that the power and potency of the singing voice may in fact serve to obscure.
This introduction has attempted to outline the musical material that will be covered in the rest of this thesis, as well as drawing attention to certain methodological and theoretical concerns that present themselves with the study of such material. The following chapter will attempt to provide the historical context for the study.

[90] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,' 152.
[91] Lars Nyre, *Sound Media: From Live Journalism to Music Recording* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 152.
[92] Ibid.

Chapter 1. Ruling in Exile: The Tin Pan Alley Context

In this chapter I will situate Tin Pan Alley, as the primary institution of early-twentieth-century American popular song, in historical context. This will range from a broad, overarching analysis of the notion of American experience being predicated on a condition of exile, through a more localised cultural history of turn-of-the-century Manhattan, down to an account of the specific networks and personnel that populated the songwriting and publishing companies, and the products that they made. So, to begin with we will consider the country from a distance.

America as Exilic Identity and Exilic Myth

The notion of home connotes its opposite. The idea of the USA itself, and that of American identity, can be described as being shot through with a prevailing sense of its originary state of Exile. It is a particular nationhood that, in its very conception, enacts a break from a past as it had been defined, by blood, religious orthodoxy and the tyranny of a monarchical organisation of land. From its foundation, the new republic pursued a nation-building project that defined itself by way of its self-imposed exile from the histories of nations prior, and from the concept of the nation-state as it had been previously understood. Famously, it was and is a country that has striven—or at least claimed to strive—to be a polity based on hitherto unprecedented *ideas* rather than the stultifying accidents of history.[1]

Clearly, the USA is a heterogeneous entity that cannot be easily simplified, reduced or generalised about, and it is problematic to talk about it as any one, single place. However, the very particular genesis of the country, in combination with its size and variability means that certain broad, overarching analyses are not without their place, especially if they are, in fact, not statements of simplification but rather broad recognition of the complexity of the place. For the purposes of this thesis, such a Tocquevillian[2] scope forms an assumption that drives this research, which is this: American society is always embroiled in a process of identity formation and this process always involves, at least in part, the working through of a multitude of *exilic* states and experiences. Whether or not individual members of American

[1] The discussion here is concerning the establishment of the political entity we know today as the USA. North America was, of course, home to many nations prior to European conquest. The rupture that the European colonial project constituted—and its distance from us in time—means that the complexity of earlier Native American history cannot be adequately addressed here.

[2] That is, in the spirit of Alexis De Toqueville, as an observer of American society who employed a wide and far-reaching scope in his analysis.

society are necessarily engaged in, or conscious of, the construction of their own 'Americanness' (whether they identify with the anxiety of exile as a component of their nationhood, for example), and whether or not this can be measured, is beyond the bounds of this thesis. But we can take as read that the disputed notion of American identity is a dominant and conspicuous discourse at a local and a national level. In other words, the ambiguities of American identity, though difficult to measure, are clearly a key part of American public life and private reflection. Furthermore, despite the notion of 'American exile' being a sweeping and panoramic concept, it is relevant even to the specificity of this thesis, and to the particularity of song structure as an object of study, as it is this aspect of the nation's self-perception that is so directly relevant to the immigrant experience, to the notion of home-coming, and arguably to modern urbanised alienation of the individual – all of which are the important aspects of this study. In short, the possibility and significance of different kinds of exile is an important guiding principle of this work, as is its converse, the notion of Home. And thematically and structurally the experience of popular song that we are concerned with enacts, and is an expression of, the tension between these two conditions. A brief portrait of conceptions of 'American exile' follows here.

In the first instance we might note that the establishment of the United States was via a literal exile from Old Europe. The USA is a country whose founders were already in a condition of exile at the point of arrival, whether it was the first New World sailors of the European Age of Discovery or New England pilgrims in the seventeenth century. Indeed, ever since the first Spanish colonies, the country has been in constitutive dialogue with its parent continent over a multitude of ongoing cultural tensions; American public discourse has always been bound up with questions as to what should be kept from the Old World, what should be discarded and what has been irretrievably lost in the transferal process. The engagement with, and rejection of, European social mores and cultural forms has remained a constant process ever since, resulting in a social and political world that is, from a European viewpoint, at once estranged and yet redolent— in exile from European forebears and yet irrevocably bound to them.

Moreover, the sheer size of the landmass, and the subsequent desire to colonise it, meant that exilic myth was not only built into the country's originary foundations but also into its developmental process. The idea of the frontier, of Westward settlement, of a potential

homestead for all,[3] and the fact of so many hundreds of thousands acting in pursuit of that goal, ensured that 'striking out' into unknown territory became a trope of American identity. Transient figures from the cowboy to the pioneer to the gold prospector, driven toward arduous travails by the potential of unexploited land, become storied heroes and, thus, the valorisation of the hero in exile became 'nationalised'.

In fact within so many defining and momentous episodes in modern American history an exilic narrative manifests, and often becomes indicative of those episodes. The Civil War, of course, left the South in mourning for itself and for its own past. The economic devastation of conflict and the cultural devastation of a peace that shook its racist, slave-built foundations (as well as the honour culture through which its social world was organised) were destabilising and estranging episodes for Southern identity. Thereafter, an almost prelapsarian conception of 'Dixie', a South of plenitude, peace and innocence, became the symbolic representation of exile for the Confederate states. Indeed, as is discussed elsewhere in this work, the image of 'Dixie' became a cipher an idyllic, lost home across American popular culture—notably parlour and popular song—whether or not the South was the explicit subject or the audience was Southern.

Relatedly, the horrific enslavement and eventual freedom of African slaves and their descendants, often only into the clutches of a system of mass economic and social discrimination, ensures that the exemplar of existential exile in American history, as a discrete sociological category, is the African-American experience. This is a post-colonial subjecthood robbed of culture, language and history, that remains in sufferance to a history of unimaginable violence, denials of human rights and racial oppression, and it is impossible to do justice to that legacy. In addition to this unshakable stain on American history, the identity of the USA from the early 20th century onward is bound up with the first Great Migration of free black communities from the rural South to Northern cities such as Detroit, Chicago and New York and the second wartime and post-war Great Migration westward, both of which occurred in the face of new urban, industrial economic realities and as a direct result of the Jim Crow South. This massive twentieth-century exodus only serves to remind us that the defining heritage for many and arguably all citizens of the USA is one of shared geographic exile.[4] Hitherto unmentioned are the gigantic population movements to the New World in the

[3] The Homestead Acts of the 1860s, which enshrined the right to settle a portion of federal land for those who applied, were the literal, legal manifestation of the Jeffersonian vision of a republic built on Yeoman Farmers.

[4] The exception to this might seem to be those who belong to the many Native American nations that predate European conquest. However, the designation of Native American Reservation areas also serves to create

nineteenth and early twentieth century from across the globe—typified by the arrival of Eastern and Central Europeans to New York via Ellis Island, but also consisting of mass Chinese immigration to California and the West. The USA has a populace for whom a whole host of exoduses—material, geographic, cultural—constitute the originating episodes for their presence there.

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Aside from these particulars of modern American history, there is a condition of exile, if we should choose to characterise it that way, that could be said to be built into much human experience. Many explanatory systems and fundamental systems of human meaning are constructed around some kind of exilic idea. Such a statement could seem open to a charge of being unverifiable, or simplistic, rhetoric. But whether or not there can be any kind of empirical measurement for a proposal that the concept of exile has a place at the heart of much human experience, we can agree that the *frequency* of the notion's occurrence within so many of our meaning-making systems is significant. At the very least, exile is an enormously powerful metaphor and is employed throughout Western systems of thought. The point of meaning-making, explanatory systems at all, arguably, comes from a kind of dissatisfaction – an exile from surety toward reality as it is presented to us. As the USA is a literal, political manifestation of many Judeo-Christian and/or Enlightenment discourses, it is cogent to briefly list the frequency with which notions of exile underpin so much thinking in 'the West', and its manifestations in so many discursive registers, from the religious to the literary.

It is worth remembering, in the first instance, that the Judeo-Christian myth underpinning so much 'Western' social organisation explains our existential position as that of being permanently cast out of Paradise. In fact many of the central figures of the Old and New Testaments (Adam and Eve but also Cain, Moses, Noah, the expectant Mary and Joseph, Christ, the Apostles, St John of Patmos) suffer a condition of exile as a fundamental part of their existence, and so many biblical episodes (Egypt, Babylon, The Temptation of Christ, amongst others) are exilic narratives. The effect of these as constituent parts of the essential metaphysics of Western society, and so the USA, cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, the anxieties brought forth by the Humanism and Positivism of the Enlightenment, with regard to the exile of Western society from a Judeo-Christian order and surety in God's word, have

another instance of 'internal' exile—in cultural, economic and geographical senses. The result of which is a series of indigenous nations in exile within their own country.

always informed many of the central debates of American society. Such conceptions of fundamental human exile were also echoed in the broader European Romantic period which the foundation of the USA sits within, concerned as it was with both the foundation of 'The New Jerusalem', free of exploitation, as well as humankind's return to the classical idea of 'The Golden Age' and equilibrium in nature.[5]

Furthermore, in the political philosophies of Locke[6] and Rousseau, our political systems are characterised as being the result of our having left various conceptions of 'the state of nature'. Of course, systems of thought that are not directly implicated in the founding of the USA as a political entity can be included here to demonstrate an even more fundamental position for 'exile' in Western thought and subjecthood. Here follow just a few examples. In the classical Marxist worldview we have been made *alien* from both our own nature and our own labour by way of capitalist exploitation. Freud describes our consciousness as one *separated* from the reality of our own unconscious, and so our 'true' selves. Lacanian psychoanalysis describes how a misrecognition of our individual identity compels us to *leave* the Imaginary Order where we previously perceived existence as being within a single unified ontology (henceforth suffering from an unresolvable 'lack' in our personhood). Later analyses by Guy Debord, Baudrillard and Žižek would have it that we are abroad in a phantasmagorical unreality of ideology and commodity. Poststructuralist philosophy emphasised the fiction of selfhood and the contingencies of language, in light of which we may not lay claim to locate stable meaning at all but must accept instead an interrogative project that undermines much of the basis of Western thought and through which we would dismantle the foundations of our intellectual and cultural history: a condition of exile from subjecthood and meaning themselves.

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Having given this potted account of exile within recent American history as well as a broader account of its place within the intellectual history of Western thought, we might contend—

[5] The Sierra Club and the foundation of the environmental movement in America in the late nineteenth century are, arguably, manifestations of these anxieties.

[6] As well contributing to this ad-hoc inventory of Western exilic discourse, Locke's inclusion here highlights how this list goes beyond academic throat-clearing. Locke's particular conception of Social Contract theory influenced Jefferson greatly in his drafting the American Declaration of Independence, and Madison the Constitution. Locke's version of a moral polity, resulting from his explicit belief in the metaphysical exile of humankind, is literally written into the foundations of the country. Rousseau's ideas, although not necessarily a conscious influence, had many similarities with Jeffersonian democracy.

even in a rudimental sense—that this dynamic finds expression in art, aesthetics, and so cultural commodities, mediated by our senses. We are, in terms of anatomy and physiology, already in exile from each other as individuals who inhabit separate bodies and have separate consciousnesses. The senses are most often conceived of as being the receptors with which the lifeworld 'enters' into and is enmeshed with our perception. Just as accurate would be to retain the idea that the epidermis, the eye, the eardrum, the olfactory systems are the literal thresholds of our anatomy; the limits which, to date, we cannot transcend, thus remaining without the possibility or capability of meaningful intersubjectivity. Art and cultural expression *can* be figured as an attempt to bridge our physical, political, 'spiritual' and material exile from one another through shared affective experience and shared cultural signifiers. Insofar as effacing such distance might be possible, the circulation of recorded music presents an exemplary cultural and technological gesture towards this. Prior to the cylinder and the gramophone record, we might consider the importance and popularity of public listening and the communal reception of musical performance as fulfilling a similar function.

Art, cultural expression and the employment of media that enable cultural representation are so often concomitant with exilic experience. Historically, the violence of exile and the fracturing, or ruination, of communities has seemed to manifest in cultural expression and the desire for intersubjective communion that such expression seems to promise. Such material or societal exiles are like a Lacanian Lack made manifest, and the anxiety to return to a sense of order and equilibrium can become written into a cultural identity. The market, as both the exploiter of, and the circulating engine for, vibrant cultural expression can seem to amplify this process, and indeed be a conduit for new formations of shared exilic identity, as was the case in early-twentieth-century New York. In the now thankfully discarded vocabulary of its first publication, Wilfred Mellers casts American exilic experience as containing the mythic currents of experience and identity that would flow into 'the melting pot' of Tin Pan Alley and would haunt the fantastical, consumer products that it rendered:

> The American Negro was literally uprooted from his home; the American Jew was a polyglot whose traditions had become so confused as to be inapprehensible… Both asserted the vitality of Low Life as against the vested interests of 'culture'; this may be why they had to seek, in Tin Pan Alley, a partial rapprochement…[7]

[7] Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land - Themes and Development in the History of American Music* (London: Faber, 1987. First published London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964), 263.

Such characterisations of Tin Pan Alley as being the product of Black-Jewish cultural forms are perhaps the most oft-repeated, and such a conception certainly only represents part of the actuality. That said, it is absolutely possible to discern the trace of these twin exilic experiences in the particulars of the popular song that would become the standardised product of the Golden Age. Such expressions of exilic experience and identity will be returned to throughout this thesis.

A Short History of Home-making

The general history of the country up to the establishment of the Alley is of course vast and contested, and for the most part its finer details are well outside the bounds of this work. However, there are some relevant episodes of which it is worth making the reader aware, by no means in order to give a comprehensive (or indeed, entirely impartial) account, but rather to highlight how certain discourses and ideas were circulating in society in significant ways, and how certain events already occupied the popular imaginary. The USA's own historicising of itself by this point was enormously important to the nation-building project that was in process during this period. Central episodes such as The War of Independence, the Louisiana Purchase, the opening of the West, the Mexican-American War and then the Civil War had ensured that, as an imagined polity and nation, the country was always already shifting. The boundaries of the new country had been in a state of periodic change and expansion since its founding, as had stable political identities – whether across a North/South, Urban/Rural divide, in terms of foreign policy[8] or disputes around the relation between Federal Government, State and the individual. By the late nineteenth century, the public discourse was frequently one of discord around these broader matters, as well as more specific ones such as temperance, the use of English as a national language and issues around immigration. The massive demographic changes across the century and especially towards its end (as detailed shortly), ensured that the idea of a distinct 'American' culture and identity, which had, in any case, only ever been at a developmental stage, remained in flux and, in fact, became even more contested.

And yet in spite of these instabilities, and because of them, projects of consolidation and nation-building were also in full flow. The iconic Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged Americans to strike out West and to settle their families there, with the promise of 160 acres

[8] For example, the tension between isolationist rhetoric and the embryonic Imperialism of episodes such as the Spanish- and Philippine-American Wars.

of government issued land for all.[9] Both the transport and employment consequences of massive railroad expansion would facilitate this process on an ongoing basis. That same year, the Morrill Act began national programmes of education for both men and women, focusing on agricultural and domestic sciences as well as engineering, in an attempt to address the complete running of the homestead. Through these acts, the government was legislating for the domestication of its national territory and enshrining into policy the notion that home and hearth was the central priority for American life.

Cultural representations of episodes such as these resonate to this day, ensuring that narratives of both exploration/expansion and settlement/home-making, would combine into a national myth of 'Manifest Destiny'. The popular fame of painters such as Albert Bierstadt and his contemporaries, who painted the West in the glowing and romantic style known as Luminism attested to this, and glorified the American West as a promised land. In the twentieth century, Hollywood would make hundreds of Westerns from the silent period onward, and an entire genre of commercial, popular music, that is 'Western' (and, later, 'Cowboy Songs'), would be exported (and generated) far outside the West, constantly reaffirming the notion that the nation was formed—culturally and ideologically—by the Westward expansion.[10] What the West stood for—identity formation, exile, individualism but also the creation of a familial Homestead—became a defining part of the country's sense of self.

Relatedly, from the Gilded Age into the Progressive Era, a 'Cult of Domesticity' was nurtured by both the state and private enterprise. By the 1880s, as a result of initiatives such as the Morrill Act, this was becoming a national preoccupation with the emergence of Scientific Housekeeping, Domestic Science and Home Economics as mass-educational disciplines. The print manifestations of this would include the *Ladies Home Journal* (first published in 1883), and *Good Housekeeping* (1885).[11] The domestic sphere, increasingly situated as an ideal site in the national consciousness, would consequently become the site of a new technological reality. When GDP soared under McKinley and then Roosevelt, from about 1896 onward, the results of this coincided with technological advancements which, newly affordable, would transform the home itself into a space of modernity and progress. As Painter describes:

[9] 'Homestead Act' *Library of Congress* https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Homestead.html (Accessed 15/12/2015)

[10] Such a notion would be formalised in key historical analyses such as Frederick Turner's 'Frontier Thesis' of 1893. See, Frederick Turner *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1920).

[11] *The Gilded and the Gritty - America, 1870-1912* National Humanities Centre Website http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/timeline.pdf (Accessed 14/01/2015)

> This extraordinary wealth brought the fruits of technological development into thousands of urban homes, most obviously in the form of electricity and telephones.[12]

Such technological affordances helped to exacerbate the distinctions between rural and urban settings, and the shift of the *logos* of cultural production—both actually and in terms of common perception—from the former to the latter would eventually begin to hold sway because of developments such as these.

Mass-urbanisation and industrialisation—and their political analogue 'Progressivism'—were amongst the most significant forces to affect individual Americans during these decades. Even for those outside the cities, the 'cultural imperialism' of the urban popular media ensured that, by the time publishers moved into Tin Pan Alley, the cities—and pre-eminently New York City—were on their way to becoming the sites of image and discourse dissemination for the nation. The second industrial revolution that would be the engine of the mass-culture, consumer economy was a product of people and money moving into cities. For Melnick the major events are:

> The collapse of federal Reconstruction and the ensuing migration of southern whites and African Americans to Memphis, Chicago and New York (as well as other cities) the huge wave of immigration of Russian Jews to the United States after 1881, and the centralization of capital and culture in modern cities.[13]

The locus of popular song production eventually residing in New York City can be seen as an inevitable symptom of the city's importance in many of these events. But, as important, the city's continual move towards being the centre of how such events were *reported*, *mediated* and *portrayed* in popular culture ensured that Tin Pan Alley, as opposed to Bostonian or Philadelphian equivalents, would be where popular music centralised.

Immigration

In his epic BBC television series, *Walk on By – The Story of Popular Song* (2001), producer Alan Lewens asserts, via the narrating actor, the multicultural openness of market forces to explain the distinctive characteristics of the new industrially-produced song. He cites specifically the "creative tensions" between the compositional techniques of the immigrant Jewish population and the music they encountered in the USA at the beginning of the

[12] Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon - The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1987), 171.
[13] Jeffrey Melnick, 'Tin Pan Alley and the Black-Jewish Nation,' in *American Popular Music: New Approaches to the Twentieth Century* eds. Rubin, Melnick (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 32.

twentieth century. This leads to the neat and creative leap that,

> It was Tsarist Russia that was unintentionally responsible for the popular song: it's anti-Semitism and vicious pogroms forced millions of Jews to flee to America. Among those refugees were the parents of George Gershwin and the four year-old 'Izzy Beilin'—Irving Berlin.[14]

Although this is, by itself, an instance of journalistic hyperbole, there are at least two immigration stories that are enormously important to this research: late-nineteenth-century immigration to the USA as a whole, and the specific experience for New York City as the entity absorbing so much of it. Prior to mid-nineteenth-century immigration, the demographic that was 'free persons' of the USA contained a majority of white Protestants who could trace their heritage back to Great Britain, the Netherlands and so on. In addition to this dominant demographic, Black-American Slaves, 'Free Blacks' and pockets of descendants from other parts of continental Europe made up the remainder. Even at the beginning of the century, annual immigration had only totalled about 5,000.

By 1880, the national population had grown ten-fold from its size in 1800 to about 50 million. In 1890 it was 62-and-a-half-million,[15] a 25% increase again, and by 1920 it had doubled once more to 106m.[16] Vaccination campaigns, improved sanitation, and advances in material conditions played a part in these increases but direct immigration, overwhelmingly from Europe but also from Asia, represented about a third of these totals. In many cases, untenable living situations in Old Europe – be they Russian pogroms, Irish famine or Italian economic collapse and cholera – ensured that the annual figure of entry had passed a million by the century's end.[17] This was a rate of increase that has seldom occurred elsewhere.[18]

Of course, the United States is so vast that the majority of the huge numbers who were processed at the turn of the century via Ellis Island in the port city of New York, were dispersed and settled across the nation. Some chose to remain, however, in this, the first city

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[14] '*From Russia with Love' – Walk on By: The Story of Popular Song,* Episode 1. Produced by Alan Lewens, 2001, 49 min. (BBC Four, Last Broadcast, 2nd April 2010, UK).

[15] United States Census Bureau, 'Census of Population and Housing, 1880 / Census of Population and Housing 1890' *Publications* 2011, https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html (Accessed 10th May 2015).

[16] United States Census Bureau, 'Historical National Population Estimates, 1900 to 1999' *Population Estimates* 2011, https://www.census.gov/popest/data/historical/pre-1980/index.html (Accessed 10th May 2015).

[17] Sanjek *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 346.

[18] As Adam McKeown has pointed out in his article 'Global Migration, 1846–1970,' *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (June 2004) 155–89, it is less well known that comparable numbers of long-distance migration did occur in Asia between the middle of the nineteenth century and 1940. However, the acute numbers coming to the USA at the turn of the century and crucially—the numbers being received by New York City—have only ever constituted emergencies elsewhere (for example after Indian partition).

they encountered, and the rate of growth at this time, for an already expanding single urban municipality, is remarkable. New York had already experienced a mid-century population explosion, from about 300,000 in 1840 to over 800,000 in 1860,[19] as a result of the arrival of Irish and German immigrants. The change would have been palpable, even if the population had dispersed completely uniformly: for every two people on a New York Street in 1840, five would be present in 1860. Of course, in reality, the perception of change would have been much greater as certain areas were so much denser than others. Then, in the thirty years between 1890 and 1920, during the largest, 'third wave' of European immigration to the USA, the population of New York City increased from 1.5m to 5.5m, with over a third of this final figure still constituting first generation, foreign-born immigrants.[20] The children of immigrants, so important to the make-up of Tin Pan Alley and the entertainment industry, made up the majority of the rest of this figure.

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As we shall see in Chapter Three, the significance to the popular music market of a nation built on mass immigration is that it encouraged the standardisation of sectional structure in popular song. The ethnic melting-pot of New York and the USA meant that a simple, intelligible song that communicated in broad strokes could sell across ethnic communities. The 'immigrant experience' and the attendant assimilation process, would quickly become a defining element of the production engine within the popular song industry in New York City. And as well as being a huge factor in production, first and second generation immigrants were also very much present at the point of consumption (a third of the domestic market for sheet music, that is the USA as whole, by 1920, comprised first-generation immigrants and their children.)[21]

It is interesting to note that within Nicholas Tawa's very general working definition of popular song he promptly includes a notion of immigrant assimilation as present in the songwriter demographic. He notes that

> [h]e *(sic)* was normally an American but was sometimes a European active in American life who had learned to conform to American vernacular patterns of culture,

[19] Department of City Planning, 'NYC Total and Foreign-born Population 1790 - 2000' *Population* 2014, http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/1790-2000_nyc_total_foreign_birth.pdf (Accessed 10th May 2015)
[20] Ibid.
[21] Timothy E. Scheurer, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 4, North America* (London: Continuum, 2012), 297.

> which he embraced as his own.[22]

'American' and 'European' identities, as we reach the turn of the twentieth century, are more slippery than is acknowledged here. It is probably more accurate to say that many songwriters were really both, in the sense of often being second-generation (American born, raised by European émigré parents) or third, or culturally self-identifying as Jewish, Irish, Italian etc. John Shepherd has noted that anxiety around assimilation may have been connected to the reasons for entering the Alley itself. He states that:

> Above all they [new immigrants] found it very difficult to enter respectable professions such as law, banking and medicine. As a result many immigrants went into the rather less desirable entertainment business… it was… acceptance which the immigrants were above all else keen to have. They were anxious to become 'good Americans'.[23]

Thus we might consider how such broader societal prohibitions toward immigrant social mobility may have found expression in the popular songs which many made it their business to write. The procession from first-generation immigrant who potentially transplants the 'old' culture wholesale, to the assimilative experience of their children, is itself a determining force in cultural production. Sanjek details how a "surge of immigration from North-Western Europe during the Civil War stimulated the growth of the foreign language theatrical tradition".[24] In similar ways, the American cultural landscape would become home to the traditional folk musics of Europe and elsewhere, and these would persist in their extant forms. As we will shall see in Chapter 3, via Jason Toynbee's 'Mainstreaming' thesis, new mass market popular forms—such as the eminently intelligible and predictable AABA— which could help transcend language barriers and sell a sense of a shared identity across different immigrant markets would enjoy huge success. Moreover, the interplay between generations was also crucial. Both the dispensing with, and revivalism of, traditional cultural forms from 'the old country' by later generations —and the tension between these attitudes—would have a formative effect on the new, domestic popular culture. The desire for new identity formation in a new country was a driving force for innovation and experiment in musical practice, but existing musical traditions would also inform and shape so much new music-making, in both conscious appropriation and automatic convention.

American popular song (and all its legacies) would not have sounded as it did, or been

[22] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 2.
[23] John Shepherd, *Tin Pan Alley* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 49.
[24] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 310.

disseminated in the same way, or fulfilled the same social and ideological functions were it not for the resettlement of this huge mass of people from across the globe who brought with them skills, traditions and taste-cultures. Sanjek explains how

> Germans and western Europeans brought art music and the resources for music education. Eastern and southern Europeans… not only stage performers of every caliber but…the newest popular song on a hand organ.[25]

The effects of the dissemination of immigrant community musics in the late-nineteenth-century USA, to which these examples contribute a tiny amount of the whole, are impossible to quantify. Moreover, it is not merely the numbers of immigrants which contribute to the mass cultural exchange underway, but also the patterns of movement that they undertook. The rate and consequence of exchange at this particular time are products of the specific interplay between mass-immigration and the changing, urbanising, industrialising United States. Immigrant communities, and their cultural forms, populated the new factories, travelled the new railways and met each other in urban labour markets. This process of population was reflected in mass-market cultural artefacts such as popular sheet-music and recordings, in terms of theme, imagery, subject-position and, as we shall see, sectional song structure. In these ways, the output of Tin Pan Alley can be a rich resource for understanding the qualitative effects, and influence of, immigrant communities.

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Tin Pan Alley and Manhattan – An Overview

The Tin Pan Alley institutions and community of music-making (both its first-generation and its 'Golden Age') had certain characteristics which make it an excellent test-subject for considering how the ideological preoccupations and fixations of the society from which it emerged may have become manifest within the themes and song structures it favoured. The social worlds of Tin Pan Alley—of its individuals and companies and their business practices—are links in a chain of production and consumption that runs between the musical objects produced and the larger apparatus of an advanced, industrialised economy. Frith has stated that the means and conditions of production are always implicated in aesthetic reception in the sense that

> [w]hat is possible for us as consumers—what is available to us, what we can do with it—is a result of decisions made in production, made by musicians, entrepreneurs and

[25] Ibid., 346

> corporate bureaucrats, made according to governments' and lawyers' rulings in response to technological opportunities.[26]

This is a kind of institutional account of modern cultural production, and one that this work certainly subscribes to. At the same time, and in a manner that is not mutually exclusive, we can consider overarching social and economic processes which in turn influence these institutions. Jeffrey Melnick has proposed that Tin Pan Alley's dominance was realised via four domains of American life. He states that

> Tin Pan Alley is where American music came into its own as a business through urbanization, nationalization and standardization, and a certain definitive brand of racialization."[27]

His emphasis on racialisation here refers to the proposed dynamic where interpretation of Black musical forms was performed by Jewish songwriters. Though this is a cultural-aesthetic dynamic that did indeed emerge in the Alley, it is perhaps more comprehensive to include it as one of several such tendencies that should also include cultural transmission and appropriation between Italians, WASPs, Irish, Germans, and many other groups. Similarly, the other overarching socio-economic trends mentioned here can be qualified, nuanced and problematised but, in broad terms, still explain important processes at play in the USA at the turn of the century.

Such a qualification for the emphasis upon urbanisation, for example, might be that it had an international character, and that some of the major cities in the 'The West' began to constitute a combined causality for change and development. Derek Scott identifies four key nineteenth century cosmopolitan sites of musical development—London, Vienna, Paris and New York respectively—whose combined influence precipitated a 'revolution' in popular music as we would later come to understand the term. These four, culturally and musically distinct metropolises shared aspects of a socio-economic context that contained

> features of musical life associated with a capitalist economy and the consolidation of power of a wealthy industrial bourgeoisie… Prominent among such features were the commercialisation and professionalisation of music, new markets for cultural goods, the bourgeoisie's struggle for cultural domination, and a growing rift between art and entertainment.[28]

And yet the contribution to, or legacy for, popular music for each of these places was distinct.

[26] Simon Frith, *Music for Pleasure – Essays in the Sociology of Pop* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), 6.
[27] Melnick 'Tin Pan Alley and the Black-Jewish Nation', 31.
[28] Derek Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, 8.

AABA and the sentimental song was not a necessary legacy of these cities merely because of certain similarities in political, social and economic organisation. Scott proposes that distinct stylistic innovations (timbral, harmonic, rhythmic, thematic) emerged in each of these places and eventually contributed to the character(s) of twentieth-century popular song. There are, no doubt, countless other important geographies of popular song development. The great cultural significance of AABA, Tin Pan Alley and the sentimental song for the society that produced it (and beyond) warrants study and remark. But at the same time, Tin Pan Alley was not the only location of popular song production in greater New York, New York was by no means the only city in America that exported musical products, and the USA has never had a monopoly on the popular music market globally. There are a great many lenses, narratives and trajectories through which the development of the popular song can be viewed, and of course, many other cities, ruralities, musical cultures and vernacular practices have been present and potent along the way.

Scott's work considers how certain stylistic innovations emerge and coalesce in four particular, musically-rich cities and thereafter inform commercial popular music. The enquiry of this thesis is similar yet distinct in the sense that it is not so much concerned with stylistic innovation itself. The 'innovation' of AABA as a song structure does not belong to turn-of-the-century New York City. By the time Alley songwriters began to rely on AABA, it was already a well-established option for structuring a song. The emphasis in this study is on why Tin Pan Alley business practices, and the audience they served, should settle upon this existing standardised song form—eventually alighting upon AABA as the default by the 1920s—and why that state of affairs should remain so resilient for decades thereafter.

Furthermore, and in a very real way, much of the combined influence of the cities named by Scott was realised in New York and Tin Pan Alley. This was as a result of the mass immigration to that city detailed above, and because of the ever-increasing links between New York publishers and London. This thesis is interested in certain abstract details and features (sectional song structure) of a specific musical phenomenon (sentimental and popular song), with reference to a particular site of emergence: a modest geographical area in a single urban conurbation on one coast of the USA, a country which itself is a single—if important—nation in the Anglosphere and the developed, urbanising, 'Western World' as it was configured in the early twentieth century.

The Meanings of the Term, 'Tin Pan Alley'

It is a commonplace to *geographically* identify the specific location of American film culture and the film industry. It is well known that from a tiny, recently-settled suburb in Los Angeles, a specific set of media corporations have produced and disseminated a majority of the cinematic images and narratives which the Anglophone world—and indeed many other geographies—has been exposed to. It is less commonly known, with the passing of time, that popular music in the Anglophone world, for the first part of the twentieth century—that is, before the Second World War—had a similarly concentrated industrial system of production and distribution. This also emanated from a relatively minute geographical area, and for a few years in the mid-1890s, [29] a single street in Manhattan, namely West 28th Street between 5th and 6th avenues, would comprise its epicentre, both actually and symbolically.

The nickname applied to West 28th Street and the group of music-publishers it housed was 'Tin Pan Alley'. There are a few competing myths for the origins of this name but the most widely reported one harks back to when the fledgling 'industry' was simply a collection of music publishers' offices—with the important inclusion of upright pianos for on-site song-writing. The oft-repeated, but unverifiable story of Tin Pan Alley's coinage is that the first concentration of songwriters *en masse*—on their timeworn, out-of-tune pianos—sounded metallic, percussive and grating. During the Manhattan summer, through open windows, this multitude of pianos sounded like the collective hammering of pots and pans. Sanjek attributes the coinage of the term to a separate but even more localised anecdote: a report in the New York Herald[30] when the journalist and composer Monroe H. Rosenfeld first heard a piano of Harry von Tilzer's "Fixed to produce the tinkling syncopation of a new kind of popular music by interweaving paper strips between its strings."[31]

The business of these publishers and their songwriters was to carry on the nineteenth century practice of writing songs for printed sheet-music. What marked them out from earlier publishing operations was, firstly, that they would focus solely on simple popular tunes and, secondly, that the marketing techniques they employed, to both the public and also towards individuals within the industry, would become famous for their pushy and assertive character. In the wake of hits such as 'After the Ball' (1892) they identified a market for solely 'popular

[29] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 402. 'A few' years refers to the specificity of Tin Pan Alley in its West 28th Street location. Of course the power of the New York Publisher/Songwriting nexus was referred to synecdochically as Tin Pan Alley until at least the fifties.
[30] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, x.
[31] Sanjek *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 402.

song', and concerned themselves with the new output of current songwriters rather than printing decades—and even centuries—old arias and marches as had hitherto been the custom. Thus the new, young publishers broke with the traditions of their predecessors, both in terms of their musical content and their business practices.

The unparalleled sales successes and visibility of the new West 28th Street operations meant that over time, the name "Tin Pan Alley" became a synecdoche for the American popular music industry in the first half of the twentieth century—or at least a division of it. As Jasen comments it was "the name given to the branch of the music publishing business that hired composers and lyricists on a permanent basis to create popular songs."[32] At different points it also came to reference other things: the collection of music publishers and songwriters in that whole area of Manhattan, and, as a descriptor, for a style of popular song—usually sentimental, 'disposable', and eminently hum-able in its simplicity. The fact that the term itself has a multiplicity of related meanings is redolent of how our notion of what constitutes 'popular song' is at once readily identifiable and yet persistently resistant to absolute definition. As Stephen Banfield has eloquently pondered:

> The case for Tin Pan Alley is strong, but for all that it has gloried in a local habitation and a name it is not an easy entity to define and, for a unified musical product of specific substance, dimensions, and characteristics, singularly lacks identification and anatomy.[33]

As is implied here, it is possible to make the case (not often attempted) that standardisation in the Alley has been overemphasised and that, in fact, there was a great variety of output over time. However, the widely-held *perception* of uniformity—amongst the music professionals and consumers of the day, as well as critics since—would itself give cause to a researcher to treat that *perception* of dominant majoritarian themes, imagery and structure as producing similar social effects as dominance itself. The study presented here accepts *both* the standardisation thesis, and the perception of standardisation thesis. These are two phenomena which interact with and reproduce each other.

Moreover, as much as the term Tin Pan Alley is but a "local habitation", that geographical specificity is bound up, in actuality and in imaginative terms, with the new 'popular-only' publishers of West 28th Street and the business practices that this location both promoted and

[32] David Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: An Encyclopedia of the Golden Age of American Song* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), ix.
[33] Stephen Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film' in *The Cambridge History of American Music* ed. Nicholls, David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 310.

afforded. The metaphorical import that the term for this geographical specificity came to communicate is inseparable from the wider meaning of mid-town-Manhattan-produced popular song of the early twentieth century, and the position it came to occupy in American culture.

The Distributed Factory of Tin Pan Alley

Indeed, Tin Pan Alley *proper*, conceived of as being confined to West 28th Street, is but the most iconic snapshot and the most well-known milestone of a far larger field of American entertainment. Tin Pan Alley, and the distributed factory of song production that the term became a shorthand for, was an urban phenomenon and its products were themselves a product of a specific built environment and geography. It is true that New York has never been exactly representative of the broader USA and indeed the city was deeply mistrusted during our period. And yet it undoubtedly became the dominant locus of image production in the USA—a dream factory, along with Hollywood—and crucially the logos of standardisation. By 1929 this seemed to be clear, even if at a cosmetic level of analysis, to a foreign visitor such as the British journalist Harry Collinson-Owen;

> Once back in New York I realised how utterly this was the metropolis of the whole country, and how its influence penetrates every other city in the country, and even the remotest small towns. Its magazines go everywhere, standardising ideas; its slang invades the remotest recesses, standardising speech; its melodies are in every home, standardising entertainment; the very thought of Broadway, the Main Street of all America, thrills millions who are scattered far and wide.[34]

And yet both the production and consumption of popular music shifted and developed over time, and across a huge geographical area, with cultural and commercial exchange on a transatlantic, even global, scale. Popular U.S. acts such as Harrigan and Hart, for example, could expect their songs to be sung in the cities of old Europe and beyond.[35] Even for music emanating from New York, the process of plugging could be on an international scale, to increase longevity and even assure a song's transatlantic return with improved credentials. Edward B. Marks explained a song's ideal trajectory for the early Alley men:

> With its initial break in the beer hall, a song might work up to the smaller variety houses, and finally to Tony Pastor's, on Fourteenth Street, or Koster and Bial's, whence some British singer might carry it home to London. If it scored there, it might come back here as a society sensation. And the whole process, from bottom to top, might take several years, during which gross sales mounted steadily.[36]

[34] Owen Collinson, *The American Illusion* (London: Ernest Benn, 1929), 197-8.
[35] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 12.
[36] Edward B. Marks, *They All Sang - From Tony Pastor to Rudy Vallée* (New York, NY: The Viking Press,

Recorded performance, on cylinder and later 78 gramophone record, increased even further the possibilities for cultural hybridity, where songwriter, performer, publisher and consumer could all theoretically reside in entirely different continents. A music fan in 1919 Algiers could conceivably have heard a New Jersey recording of a French translation of an American patriotic song, sung by a Neapolitan tenor, written by a New England Irish Catholic.[37] Conversely it would have been possible to purchase a recording of Tunisian Malouf music in New York City on the same day,[38] and for both records to be considered to be a popular music product, at least by some measures.

Even considering the commercial music industries of the contiguous United States in isolation, it should be acknowledged that New York was only one of several centres of production. Music publishers of sheet music had been perfectly common across all the major cities of the United States in the nineteenth century. There were important publishing industries in cities such as Boston, Chicago, St. Louis and Cincinnati across the nineteenth century, and of course regional and small town presses, entertainment circuits and theatres.[39] The USA of the Gilded Age and earlier had altogether different economic geographies across all commercial sectors (not just sheet music) prior to the emergence of New York City as the commercial centre of the country. Sanjek notes that the "[o]ldest and most important nineteenth century American publisher, [was] the Oliver Ditson Company of Boston" and he also notes that prior to Charles K. Harris' famous million seller 'After the Ball'—the song which 'built Tin Pan Alley'—there had been earlier million sellers from Will Rossiter's operation in Chicago.[40] Indeed, Chicago remained a popular music publishing force with Tommy Dorsey's company located there. Nicholas Tawa, in his study of Tin Pan Alley's emergence qualified the Alley's dominance thus:

> The songs published from 1866 to 1890 predate Tin Pan Alley. Many of the later ones, but by no means all, were associated with the music publishing world that came to be known by that term. In addition, a small but significant group of successful songs had little to do with the popular-music industry.[41]

1934), 3.

[37] The specificity of this example refers to Caruso's French/English rendition of 'Over There' in 1918. Hear the Library of Congress' archived version at http://www.loc.gov/item/jukebox.6728?loclr=blognsh (Accessed 19th March 2014).

[38] Geoffrey Clarfield, 'From Casablanca to Carnegie Hall: The Untold Tale of North Africa's Jewish Pop Stars' *Sephardic Horizons* 4/2 (2014) http://www.sephardichorizons.org/Volume4/Issue2/Clarfield.html (Accessed 13th January 2015).

[39] Tim Wise, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley,' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 8, Genres: North America* (London: Continuum, 2012) 498.

[40] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 402-4.

[41] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, ix.

Musical production and publishing continued outside of the Alley and Manhattan, of course. But in a sense, the influence of New York City (and therefore Tin Pan Alley) can be read as eventually setting the commercial agenda for those regional centres and cities of prior commercial dominance. Consolidation continued and was firmly entrenched by the time of the Golden Age. Hamm states that

> [e]ven more than had been the case during the formative years of Tin Pan Alley, [through the 1910s and '20s] the field was dominated by composers and lyricists born and trained in New York, writing songs for publishers who not only had their offices in New York, but were themselves products of the city. The style of the music and of the lyrics became a New York style, and general attitudes as to what a song should be and where it should fit into American culture were also shaped by the climate and taste of New York. There was little effective cultural input from the rest of America into New York in these days, and to the extent that Tin Pan Alley song reflected American culture in a broader sense, they did so because the rest of the country was willing to accept a uniquely urban, New York product… Hollywood was not a real exception to this, since it was musically a West Coast extension of New York.[42]

David Brackett gives a later example of this entrenchment where, by 1939

> [t]he New York centered music industry could not *perceive* the popularity of 'hillbilly' music… the music industry was set up to produce, promote, distribute, and above all *recognise the importance of* one kind of music only—the music centered around Tin Pan Alley.[43]

Increasingly, as the century had advanced, the music industry had taken on the character of a national echo-chamber with the source sound emanating from (or being re-produced in the image of) New York.

New York, it is also important to note, is more than Manhattan and this fact is very significant for the potential growth of a business located there. The engine of Manhattan has a direct relation with an immense metropolitan and suburban area—the four remaining boroughs,[44] as well as New Jersey, Long Island, and beyond. This does mean that, even ahead of national and international networks, the number of consumers locally available could help to build a publishing company into a large operation quickly, one which could then invest heavily to establish a national reach. If this 'greater' New York had been, for example, a culturally influential, but geographically smaller, locale—a New Orleans or a Cincinnati, perhaps—then

[42] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 378.
[43] David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 103. [Author's emphases]
[44] The outer boroughs were only incorporated into a 'city of greater New York' in 1898.

the scope of its musical significance would probably not have included its industrial scale. As Tawa notes of urbanisation generally:

> Popular song's development owes a great deal to the rise of public transportation—urban trolley lines connecting suburbs to a city's core and railroads connecting cities to the hinterland's towns—which aided in the formation of an immense and homogeneous market for musical recreation.[45]

So the popular music industry was not born, raised and reinvented each day in West 28th Street alone. However, the power (and perceived power) of a single street within a national and global network remains a remarkable phenomenon within the history of both music and commerce. So as much as we cannot link popular song, *in toto*, with the Alley, there was a gravitational pull of association, of connotation and crucially of perception, whereby the popular song, wherever it was produced, was felt, ultimately, to owe its lineage, and its conventions (and so its meaning), to West 28th Street. Even if the Alley did not beget a particular song, it was perceived as being responsible for the phenomenon as a whole.

The Dominance of the Alley

The presence of regional music publishing aside, in terms of actual sales and profile, Tin Pan Alley and mid-town Manhattan *was* the centre of American songwriting. From the 1890s onward, New York's actual and perceived primacy in popular song production began to be fully established. Of course, since the nineteenth century, alongside the prestigious profit-making relationships between music publisher and Broadway, there were more modest instances of commercial exchange between performance venue and songwriter. Sanjek details how, since the 1860s and 70s,

> the city's music rooms and concert saloons were performing a similar [promotional] function for songwriters, who supplied the entertainers with a steady stream of new material.[46]

As a publisher, recounting in 1934 his activities in the late nineteenth century, Edward B. Marks attests to this, stating that:

> [t]he best songs came from the gutter in those days… there was no surer way of starting a song off to popularity than to get it sung as loudly as possible in the city's lowest dives.[47]

[45] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 3.
[46] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 305.
[47] Marks, *They All Sang*, 3.

But from those humble origins, great institutions were sustained. Large vaudeville operations, such as those of Tony Pastor and Edward Albee, demanded musical content and, crucially, would also become regional and national headquarters for syndicated touring circuits. The United Booking Office, though in competition with Chicago's Western Vaudeville Manager's Association, sent Broadway shows across its touring circuits. The attachment of Broadway credentials (e.g. the words 'Direct from Broadway') to touring shows was enormously conducive to selling tickets.

As discussed, when we consider 'Tin Pan Alley' as standing for the American popular music industry across the first half of the twentieth century, we see that the term really stood for the publishers and songwriters across mid-town Manhattan. Arguably, there were several distinct 'Tin Pan Alleys', if we take the term to describe these periodic concentrations of the industry. Importantly however, they were not disparate; rather they tended to congregate at certain places at particular times and move *en masse*. West 28th Street was simply the most iconic of an early cluster of locations in the lower part of Midtown.

Scheurer has sketched the shifting location of the popular songwriting companies that made up the idea and the actuality of what we call Tin Pan Alley.[48] Initially in the 1870s and 80s, The Bowery and Union Square as far south as 14th Street had been the location where popular songwriting creativity and commerce were centred. In his own account, Goldberg noted how this extended into the 1890s when, "Fourteenth Street, the amusement centre of New York's early nineties was the magnet".[49] Sanjek also details how, towards the end of the 19th century, M. Witmark & Sons' offices south of Union Square became "a stopping-off place for professional songwriters looking for ten and twenty dollars in return for their newest compositions."[50] However, this new cluster around 14th Street was significant for the way in which it constituted the emergence of a purely popular song trade. The significance of this segmentation of the market cannot be overlooked and will be returned to in this thesis.

Other publishers who also typified a new, aggressive approach, such as Joseph Stern and Edward B. Marks, continued to locate to E.14th St during the 1890s, establishing the "veritable edge of a music- business miracle" that would eventually expand across much of the Tenderloin.[51] The Bowery and Tenderloin districts offered publishers easy access to the

[48] Scheurer, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, 297.
[49] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 108.
[50] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 315.
[51] Ibid., 316.

entertainment district—the Vaudeville theatre networks—and in the Tenderloin's case, it offered songwriters the endless activity, scandal and hustle of a down-at-heel, over-populated red-light district. Importantly, the rent in such areas was comparatively low and the potential for noise disturbance from rickety-piano composition would have competition from the street life. The comings and goings of musicians and chorus-girls, and the non-WASP contingents of both, would be more acceptable there than some other parts of the city.

The Witmarks' prominence amongst the new specialist popular music publishers meant that when they moved to 49-51 West 28th Street in late 1893, the centre of gravity moved with them.[52] It is this particular office relocation that is held to be the originating episode of Tin Pan Alley in geographical terms. As Tawa states:

> Although we freely use the term Tin Pan Alley to apply to all of the popular music activities that began in the 1890s, in truth the term came into common currency only after 1903, when a majority of popular-song publishers had finally moved their premises to the twenty-eighth street area…[53]

Witmark was also the first firm to take over a whole building at 8 West 29th Street,[54] ensuring that they fulfilled the quintessential New York demand that success is architecturally conspicuous.

However, as Goldberg chronicled at the time, the overall trend was that the publishers' offices, perhaps because of their relative manoeuvrability, tended to follow the locations of the successful theatres, and the newer theatres, through their variable longevities, "in [their] procession from fourteenth to twenty-eighth to thirtieth to forty-second".[55] It's worth noting that some classic Tin Pan Alley publishers were never resident in the Alley proper. Stern and Marks relocated to West 38th St, via stints at 20th and 21st,[56] thus circling West 28th but never resident in the street itself. Scheurer explains that the iconic 42nd Street gravitation began as early as 1903 for some publishers, and that the occupied area expanded amorphously across the 40ths and 50ths until well into the 1930s. Certainly, the theatre district that either bought the publisher's product, or conversely was paid to promote it, would be immortalised as early 1903, when George M. Cohan wrote the famous line celebrating the entertainment

[52] Ibid., 401.
[53] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, ix.
[54] Arnold Shaw, *The Jazz Age: Popular Music in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 101.
[55] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 108.
[56] David Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: An Encyclopedia*, 382.

district: "Tell all the gang at Forty-Second Street that I will soon be there".[57] Shaw explains that the reasons for the move north were threefold:

> The building of new theatres along West 44th, 45th and 46th streets, the location of the major network studios, and the opening of new hotels and restaurants.[58]

William R. Taylor, with useful specificity states that

> its [Tin Pan Alley's] focus and social centre after 1931 was probably the Brill Building to the north, on the southwest corner of Broadway and Forty-ninth street—a building that had a warren of small gyms and the offices of fight promoters and commission agents, in addition to demonstration rooms for vocalists, songwriters, pluggers, and other personnel of this unlikely combination.[59]

The classic 32-bar AABA songs of the Golden Age then—which today are the most readily referred to as 'Tin Pan Alley' tunes—more often passed through the offices between 40th and 50th rather than the West 28th that Monroe Rosenfeld actually nicknamed. Inevitably, the concentration of popular song production into a single street was a temporary symptom of new business practices and a newly specified product, and the operation would eventually expand (and return) to a national character. By the end of the 1940s, the music industry executive Shaw could confirm that

> [t]he 'Alley' is no longer a New York landmark. It is now a broad highway stretching from Radio City in New York's Rockefeller Center to Radio City in Hollywood, with an important nerve center in Chicago. Most publishers have well-staffed offices in all three cities, and some reach across the sea to London and the continent.[60]

A certain self-mythologising on the part of the Alley, with regard to a single, iconic West 28th Street location, is at play here (readily accepted and reproduced by its audience). West 28th was not, itself, the original location for the new 'popular-only' publishers given that some of them had been clustering previously around 14th. Perhaps by way of being the first move *en masse*, the new market and the new 'popular-only' music community came into sharper focus, and the coherence conferred by the relocation begged a name. Moreover, West 28th, as well

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[57] George M. Cohan, 'Give My Regards to Broadway' (Originally published New York City, NY: F.A.Mills, 1904). The significance of the references to Broadway and Forty-Second Street in the song being that *Little Johnny Jones*, the musical it appeared in had very little to do with New York or the theatre. Rather, the song was inserted simply in order to celebrate the location that the original audience was itself seated within, being as it was written for Broadway performance and was staged at The Liberty Theatre on 42nd St.

[58] Shaw, *The Jazz Age*, 102.

[59] William R. Taylor 'Broadway the Place that Words Built,' in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World* ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 216.

[60] Arnold Shaw, 'The Vocabulary of Tin Pan Alley Explained,' *Notes*, Second series Vol 7 / No.1 (Dec 1949) (Music Library Association), 34.

as being the location of a new publishing vanguard, was also one of the final locations of a popular music world entirely focused on live performance. In comparison to later locations which arguably produced more material that would be remembered as 'Tin Pan Alley Song', the 28th Street period still focused on sheet music only—for the parlour and Vaudeville—where later locations became hybridised production centres for recording and even film. The time at that location also included the height of the publishers' and songwriters' power and independence, formalised by way of ASCAP[61] and prior to Hollywood's wholesale purchase of many New York firms. Thus, a certain nostalgia and romanticising for the 'old days' was typified by West 28th.

For the purposes of this thesis, 'Tin Pan Alley' refers to the early-twentieth-century popular songwriting industry in mid-town Manhattan. It is just as significant to draw attention to the temporal distinction between the first generation of the Alley (c.1894 to c.1920) and the 'Golden Age' of the twenties and thirties as to geographical relocations. As Irving Caesar characteristically explained, Tin Pan Alley's shifting address was always, simply, "close to the nearest buck".[62]

32 bar AABA – Emblem of Standardisation

The New York music publishing industry of the early twentieth-century famously constitutes a high-water mark in the mass-standardisation of musical products in terms of theme, lyrical device, sectional structure and so on. This had been an ongoing tendency prior to Tin Pan Alley. Wilder describes how

> [a]t some point in time—probably just before the turn of the century—the American popular song took on, and consolidated, certain native characteristics—verbal, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic—that distinguished it from the popular song of other countries. It became a discrete musical entity.[63]

This process was formalised, institutionalised and industrialised by the mid-town Manhattan music publishing community that we refer to as Tin Pan Alley. Hamm states that, during this period,

> publishers concluded that the public wanted familiar songs, and new songs in a

[61] ASCAP is the acronym of The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, formed in 1914 as an alliance between the Alley's most significant publishers and songwriters in order that they could mutually protect their respective copyrights.
[62] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 19.
[63] Wilder, *American Popular Song - The Great Innovators 1900-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 – first pub. 1972), 3.

> familiar style. Tin Pan Alley songwriters soon reached a stylistic plateau, a much more homogenous style than had ever been the case in the history of song in America.[64]

Theme would become standardised, as well as imagery, and perhaps most famously, sectional song structure. During the Golden Age, from the 1920s onward, 32-bar AABA was favoured as a default song structure. There are numerous examples of Golden Age 32-bar AABA structures but for illustrative purposes we can consider something that remains very well-known such as the Gershwins' 'I Got Rhythm'. Following the sectional verse, the chorus follows a classic 32 bar AABA structure:

> [*A*] I got rhythm, I got music, I got my gal, who could ask for anything more?
>
> [*A*] I've got daisies in green pastures, I've got my gal, who could ask for anything more?
>
> [*B*] Old man trouble, I don't mind him, you won't find him 'round my door
>
> [*A*] I've got starlight, I've got sweet dreams, I've got my gal, who could ask for anything more?[65]

In part, the 32-bar AABA standardisation led to the term 'standard' being applied to those songs that were structurally recognisable to the point that they could be

> perceived as the same item whether crooned or belted, sung, or played, highlighted as a dramatic performance in the theatre or heard as foil, accompaniment, or background to some other function in film or in the ballroom.[66]

Crucially AABA could be present when many other markers of audience or genre distinction were present. So a listener might equally find AABA structures in rags, ballads, marches or novelty numbers. Banfield points out that even Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic dance spectaculars, at the outset of 1930s golden-era Hollywood, were frequently built upon relentlessly repeated AABA choruses.[67] One way to view this particular standardisation (of sectional structure) is that rather than being, simply, a cross genre formula, it was a stable and coherent structure that served many different audience needs. AABA is in some ways the unacknowledged compositional device that allowed publishers to perform what Tawa describes as the "constant task… the synthesis of diverse tastes into intelligible and wieldy

[64] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 290.
[65] George and Ira Gershwin, 'I Got Rhythm', (New World Music Corporation, 1930).
[66] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 311.
[67] Ibid., 333.

musical units."[68]

And yet, even at that point, 32-bar AABA was not universal. To reiterate, it can only be held up as being conspicuously majoritarian at a given time, and perceived as such thereafter, in an instance of received (and overstated) wisdom, as *having been* universal. However, AABA did constitute a structural formula that at once afforded the production-line standardisation that Tin Pan Alley was famous for, as well as—through its malleability—the "pseudo-individualisation" that Adorno accused it of, both of which were essential to the commercial viability and success of the popular song during the Alley era.[69] Banfield implies agreement with Adorno when he proposes that AABA (and ABAC) would be surrounded only with

> clothing or accretion, largely a matter of presentation by way of introduction, repetition, variation or embellishment.[70]

Other song structures are present amongst the tens of thousands of Alley numbers released, as well as augmentations and adjustment of the AABA orthodoxy. Knapp notes that ABAB and ABAC were by no means unknown.[71] More precisely, von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild explain how ABAC had actually functioned similarly, as an early Alley default structure, prior to AABA.[72] However, by the twenties such variations would be viewed as departures from a new standard: AABA would be generally and explicitly agreed upon as the 'first position' for songwriters and publishers alike. Moreover, it became bound up as an essential and prevailing constituent of the standardised popular song. Perhaps most telling of all, especially in light of the fact that ABAC actually functioned as the default when Tin Pan Alley resided in Tin Pan Alley proper (West 28th Street), is that AABA became *perceived* to be the Alley standard of old. Wilder explains how

> many people, including song writers who should know better, assume that this form [AABA] goes back much further than it actually does. There were few instances of it in any type of popular music until the late teens. And it didn't become the principal form until 1925-1926.[73]

Indeed, the eventual ubiquity of 32-bar AABA can itself be taken to be representative of the

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[68] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 4.
[69] Adorno, 'On Popular Music,' 78.
[70] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 310.
[71] Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and The Formation of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 78.
[72] Ralf von Appen and Markus Frei-Hauenschild, 'AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus—Song Forms and their Historical Development,' *Samples* Online Publikationen der Gesellschaft für Popularmusikforschung/German Society for Popular Music Studies Vol. 13 (2015), 7.
[73] Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 56.

power of Tin Pan Alley's production processes and commercial success. The banality of structural repetition can itself be taken to be an index of the Alley's dominance. Banfield notes that

> [t]he lengths to which a structure based on consecutive choruses of the same melody can be taken are an important measure of Tin Pan Alley's later achievement.[74]

So by the mid-twenties, certainly, the structure was standardised to a degree not seen in musical production before or since. Some variability was expressed in theme but it was seen especially in subject matter, for which there were seemingly limitless possibilities—from paeans praising the latest technological gadgets to ditties that celebrated or scolded the weather. And yet despite this variability, AABA remained robust. Before being able to consider further some of the ideological issues that affected Tin Pan Alley's preference for the closed, resolving, goal-oriented AABA structure, the story of Tin Pan Alley's standardisations, rationalisations and artistic/commercial practices, as a whole, is relevant. What follows is an attempt to sketch out some of these.

Standardisation as Organising Logic

Standardisation, convention and uniformity were, of course, not the invention of Tin Pan Alley. Sanjek recounts a professional singer's assessment of post-Civil War parlour song as being of four standard types: firstly one referred to as 'Rhythm' songs which "demanded a trained vocalist"; secondly those "full of musical platitudes and plagiarisms"; thirdly "singsong airs… [of] uniformity"; and finally "old folk music of Scotland and Ireland".[75] However, reliance on templates like these took on a new significance with the emergence of the factory-inspired industrial production of the Alley. In a sense, the difference we might propose is that in the latter we can identify the tropes and devices of convention falling into *the service of investment capital only* in such a way that it was no longer enough to consider that songwriters and publishers were working within tradition, but rather within formula.

We know, not least from the presence of How-to guides published at the time, informing the reader of how to execute the formula of a popular song, that standardisation itself was consciously pursued and celebrated. The musicologist Daniel Goldmark states that in the USA between 1899 and the end of the 1930s, at least fifty such guides were published.[76] The

[74] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 311.
[75] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume* II, 348.
[76] Daniel Goldmark, '"Making Songs Pay": Tin Pan Alley's Formula for Success' *Musical Quarterly* 98/1-2 (2015): 3.

number of publications of this kind in itself would point towards the presence of certain formulas and methodologies, even prior to any musical analysis of the songs themselves. A less well-known songwriter, Edward M. Wickes, wrote such a guide in 1913 and in the foreword he plainly stated:

> Among well-known song writers there is little that is secret pertaining to the general construction of a song, for approximately all of them apply the same fundamental principles.[77]

Uniformity and standardisation, therefore, were accepted logics within the Alley itself. Indeed, as previously stated, the Alley publishers merely accelerated a tendency toward standardisation that preceded them. By the time the first Alley publishers were establishing their new business practices and their focus on a 'solely popular song' market, a formula had already been discernible.

However, the dominance of the Alley hit in the early twentieth century was also aided by a particular congregation of musical, theatrical and cinematic products into which the standardised song could be inserted as an element. As Hamm notes in *Yesterdays*:

> There is no way to tell from listening to a song by Irving Berlin or any of his contemporaries, whether it was written for vaudeville, musical comedy, the movies, or simply composed for radio play or possibly recording.[78]

Furia emphasises the integration of the Victorian sentimental ballad with the syncopation and 'dialect' of what was designated in the racist terminology of the time, 'Coon Song'.[79] The combination of these two genres, according to Furia, provided a stable and enduring song-form, producing examples which "sound as if they could have been written anytime between 1910 and 1950".[80]

Such assimilation of cultural forms was vastly accelerated by recording, to such a degree that we should consider it a distinct phenomenon from the inter-musical exchange that had occurred previously in history. The microphone, the tube-amp and the shellac record are in part responsible for the powerful phenomenon—across the world—that is international musical exchange. And, as we shall see, the market inevitably managed to tame disparities

[77] E.M. Wickes, *Writing the Popular Song* (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1916), ix.
[78] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 295, n. 3.
[79] The thoroughly racist term for the song genre legacy of its racist forbear Minstrelsy. Indeed, it was also the site at which, most often, African-American techniques and innovations were both appropriated and bastardised.
[80] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 33.

between all sorts of regional and national traditions by favouring standardised song forms.

When we consider standardisation generally, however, we need not automatically assume an explicitly communicated, officialised model for the music business in late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century America. ASCAP did not explicitly issue guidelines on the preferred style, structure and thematic content of its members' compositions.[81] Rather, norms were internalised. As Tawa notes, by the turn of the twentieth century, popular song had developed "generally accepted ways of doing things, which though oftentimes unwritten, were observed by its adherents."[82] ASCAP as an institution was of course self-reproducing. In order to legitimise its members as a unified and identifiable body who should, solely, be entrusted with delivering musical content to radio, ASCAP did not generally favour innovation.[83]

Looking more broadly still, the publisher, as the central market-actor in the process, coordinated a range of functions, some of which were directed towards the consumer and some of which were indirectly so. It is important to recognise that standardisation was being established not only in the end product, but within the processes and products of the very organisations that created it: throughout the production process from composition, through to arrangement, manufacture, intra-industry marketing and sales, as well as consumer marketing and sales. For example, the product that circulated for performance, often at no cost to the band or musicians, itself had to be standardised:

> To suit the requirements of professionals, orchestrations for bands of twelve to sixteen players were made in the key that had been selected by the arranger but in four other keys as well: two higher and two lower. Moreover, variations were made to the lyrics to suit delivery by a man, a woman or different combinations of singers. Only the simple piano and voice sheet music versions were on sale.[84]

From such an account we can begin to understand the exactness with which the product was being rendered and targeted. Separately from the preparation of the consumer product for the larger, domestic market, the entertainment industry itself—which served as a conduit for that market—was segmented, and then provided for as such.

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[81] Although there were instances of this from the hand of powerful music industry figures. Chas K. Harris self-published his *How to Write a Popular Song* in 1906, covering his recommendations for lyrical, musical and publishing aspects of song-writing. See Charles K. Harris, *How to Write a Popular Song* (New York: Chas K. Harris, 1906).

[82] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 2.

[83] Ulf Lindberg, 'Popular Modernism? The 'urban' style of interwar Tin Pan Alley' *Popular Music* 22/3 (October 2003): 295, n.3.

[84] Tim Wise, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley - The Commercial Background,' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 8, Genres: North America* (London: Continuum, 2012), 498.

Centralisation and Syndication

Important for establishing the extent of product standardisation at all (and so the eventual standardisation to 32-bar AABA form) we must consider why the music industry centralised in the first place and why, particularly, in this area of New York. The specific character of Tin Pan Alley's dominance emerged as a specific consequence of broader societal trends at that time. Very briefly we might identify some of these as: (i) mass urbanisation and the entertainment districts this necessitated; (ii) an aspiration towards bourgeois propriety; (iii) the rise across the United States in 'Fordist' Production methods; (iv) the efficiencies achieved through syndicated business networks (agents, songwriters, pluggers, publishers etc.); and (v) an enormous and rapidly expanding ethnic diversity through immigration. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with (i), (iii) and (iv) although they were, of course, informed and sustained by (ii) and (v).

The networks of theatres that Minstrel troupes, and later Vaudeville acts, played in effectively became syndicated operations across the latter half of the nineteenth century. Minstrelsy in fact was the first instance of a nationwide theatrical form, with a standardised show—stock characters and songs—distributed through the many touring troupes. Audiences came to expect the overtly racist stereotypes they were used to and these were rolled out across the theatre networks in response. The process of standardising and relentlessly repeating racist images and messages served to make them normative, palatable and inevitable. And the enormous success and ubiquity of Minstrelsy is, of course, symptomatic of the broader anxieties that this entertainment helped to allay. As Raymond Knapp has explained:

> Among the cultural needs it served in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, blackface minstrelsy—with its personae as rigidly established and predictable in behaviour as any from the tradition of commedia dell'arte—served to reassure white audiences that the social order in America was just, and that blacks on the whole did not deserve better than they had.[85]

In the example of Minstrelsy, the standardising process was itself a balm for potential white discomfort regarding the disgrace that was the extreme racial injustice of the time. Minstrelsy proper, in the form of dedicated troupes, hit its peak after the Civil War.[86] Although many of its devices and tropes were residually wheeled out (even as late as the 1970s in the UK), it fell away in the 1890s in terms of its position as the dominant mode of American entertainment

[85] Knapp, *The American Musical and The Formation of National Identity*, 10.
[86] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 140.

with the emergence of Vaudeville as a standardised entertainment offer. However, the success of a system of standardised entertainment that would be distributed along centrally owned touring networks remained and developed. There were several loci throughout the United States for the centralisation of the entertainment industry, but the greatest gravity was Vaudeville's, and New York's. A relatively small number of Vaudeville agents built large performance empires and some of the biggest operated out of New York.

In addition to live performance, another centralising force was the strengthening of copyright laws towards the end of the century. During the nineteenth century there was a relative free-for-all on publishing. If a song was popular in one part of the country, music publishers in another city would simply print their own copies without paying any royalty. As enforced copyright came into law at the end of the nineteenth century, publishers realised that they would now need to secure a steady stream of composers, lyricists, musical secretaries, transcribers and song-pluggers to produce and shift their product. The gravitation of these professionals to one area would encourage a 'production-line' style operation—and New York was becoming a strong central locus for Vaudeville.

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New York and Industry

New York is an especially exalted site of longing and desire. In part this is a result of its position as the most cinematically mediated metropolis in history but there may also be specific qualities in the lines-of-sight of Manhattan, in the very geometry of the city which induce a kind of yearning. The grid system, and the skyscraping buildings, both confront the individual with great, untouchable distances and unknowable scale, apparent to the eye but always unreachable. So, even prior to considering its accommodations of consumerism, glamour and tumult, the geometrical frame of Manhattan itself, as so much rhapsodic prose attests, is a kind of metropolitan manifestation of desire.

The unique geography of the five New York City boroughs, with Manhattan as a bejewelled and towering beacon at the centre, accessible only across the water, imposes a sense of longing on those who live there, in a way that landlocked cities do not. Even before Manhattan became the most filmed and photographed conurbation on Earth, its' skyline—from the building of the Flatiron building onwards—would have already constituted a projection of its own romance and power. As the Brooklynite literary critic Alfred Kazin

remarked:

> "[T]he element of yearning: if you go to Long Island City, if you go to Brooklyn Heights and look across the water to Manhattan you have a sense of a goal that may or may not be reached by poor old you but which makes you feel this is the most important thing in the world…Someone said years ago that the longest journey in the world is from Brooklyn to Manhattan and that's absolutely true… I walked across the bridge everyday - even there you were full of yearning for what lay on the other shore… visible, almost in your hands before you get it.[87]

As much as any other, the new popular song market within that city was emblematic and analogous of (as well as an enactment of) the exchange of desire and longing themselves. Manhattan is often figured as a site of such exchange without equal. In the same film, the New York historian Jack Tchen comments that:

> New York has always been marked by an exchange process, being a port culture, being founded on trade, it's not just the trade of material goods… the underlying, under-girding thing that's being exchanged is really desires.[88]

The economic reality of Manhattan as a centre of trade, and the importance of this to the organisational logics of early Tin Pan Alley, is unarguable. As well as the significance of being located within the city's own entertainment district, and therefore sitting at the heart of the entertainment industry of the country as a whole, Manhattan's music publishers were located in a city that also dominated business, trade and manufacturing. Many large banks and corporations were situated there, as well the New York Stock Exchange. By 1919 there were 32,590 factories in New York and 825,000 workers were employed in manufacturing.[89] Some of the nation's products and goods (notably clothing) were produced in their largest numbers either in New York City or within the larger State. A culture of business efficiency and profit strategy prevailed throughout the city. Innovations in assembly-line manufacture, management structure and economies of scale, which came with the ability to borrow capital, informed the culture of the Alley publishing houses as much as they did any other business. In fact, according to Scheurer, the Tin Pan Alley publishing house came to embody "a very sophisticated vertical organisational structure emblematic of North American Industry."[90]

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[87] *American Experience: New York: A Documentary Film, Episode 5 - Cosmopolis (1919-1931)*, Ric Burns, 1999, 114 min. (DVD, PBS).
[88] Ibid.
[89] Industrial Bureau of the Merchants Association of New York 'Industrial map of New York City : showing manufacturing industries, concentration, distribution, character' *New York Public Library Map Warper* http://maps.nypl.org/warper/maps/14895 (Accessed 10th May 2015)
[90] Scheurer, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, 297.

Adorno draws explicit links between existing logics of industry and commerce and popular music. One instance where the case is made particularly compellingly (by way of its specificity) is the emphasis that he places on the links between Revue (and Operetta) to the historical garment industry. What he identifies as the "Economic Sphere of Distribution"[91] incorporates and is typified by the New York garment industry's distributive model of commerce which also, clearly, would enjoy close links and share personnel with musical theatre (and where the costume demands of the latter would constitute a sizable sales percentage of the former). The business model for the piece-work assembling of clothing items and their delivery to theatres would by no means be lost on those entrepreneurs who capitalised and organised sheet music publication and its dissemination to the same theatres. The general commercial possibilities of this model would have been conspicuous to them—indeed Adorno writes of a "sphere that provided models for the success of individual initiative".[92] Moreover, the notion of a fast-turnaround, standardisable product—for example in the terminology that Adorno uses to describe "the ready-to-wear business"[93] of Operetta—would be demonstrable to those schooled or exposed to garment manufacturing practices. One can imagine how the regular delivery of costumes and clothing to a theatre's backstage area opened up, for a garment worker or salesman, a whole world of theatrical production (and the sales possibilities therein) that was otherwise closed off to the public.

It is probable that the two industries shared personnel and even commercial space, not least since the geography of the two industries certainly overlapped. The garment district itself is exactly half a mile's walk from the original West 28th Street Tin Pan Alley.[94] Furthermore, it contained within it both the upper limits of the late-nineteenth-century New York Theatre District and the subsequent centre of gravity for popular music publishing from around 1903 onwards – both of which were situated at 42nd Street. Moreover, Banfield asserts—with reference to Adorno's analysis—that Jewish cultural and community links also connected these sectors of commerce.[95] Again there certainly would have been extensive formal and informal communication between the traditional Yiddish Theatre, the Jewish diaspora employed within the music publishing houses and the same community populating the

[91] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 23.
[92] Ibid., 24.
[93] Ibid.
[94] And of course the borders of both were porous and shifting over time. The Manhattan Stories project contains an account of #40 28th St, by architectural historian Tom Miller, in which he reports that by 1913, this particular building on the Alley had been home to both the York Music Co. of Albert Von Tilzer and the Well Made Garment Co. See Tom Miller, 'A Tin Pan Alley Relic - 40 West 28th Street' *fabricated projects* (2014) http://fabricated.io/projects/manhattan-stories/a-tin-pan-alley-relic [Accessed 24/08/2015]
[95] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 310.

garment industry (the latter well-known as the *schmutter* trade in Yiddish). One of the most famous crossovers could be said to be that of Stern and Marks, two men both apprenticed and successful in the sales and distribution of clothing, who then happened to write 'The Little Lost Child', a famous million-seller, and whose legacy was the Edward B. Marks Music Company. Similarly, Leo Feist, who at the time of his death could be described as "owner of the largest publishing house for popular music in the world",[96] had acquired his business experience and acumen from his early life as a traveling corset salesman.[97]

Close-Knit Geographical Networks

The proximity of songwriters and publishers to each other around Tin Pan Alley is a further reason why market research—and the sharing of compositional techniques and gimmicks—was quick and efficient. In his How-to guide, Chas K. Harris (the million-selling songwriter and publisher of 'After the Ball'), suggested that as an aspiring songwriter you should "watch your competitors. Note their success and failures; analyse the cause of either and profit thereby."[98] The consumer experience just prior to 1900 of purchasing a popular song as either a piece of sheet-music, a cylinder or the newer gramophone records, effectively meant purchasing the product of a multi-agent network. The attribution of authorship, publication, and oftentimes performance, as both legal and commercial necessities, would mean that specific individuals would be identified as the generators and originators of these products. However, in many instances the songs constituted the refined, distilled and commoditised sum of multiple individuals in the broader entertainment community. Credit for contributing was sometimes fairly apportioned, sometimes improperly commandeered. In many instances, the prospect of justly unravelling compositional credit would herald a process too complex and disputable to be practical or worthwhile. But themes, imagery, sayings and subject-matter were circulated, in close proximity to songwriters and publishers, as often as generated by them.

In part, the process of this circulation came about because of commercial imperatives quite separate to composition – yet clearly related to the business of music-making. Singers, publishers and songwriters all courted each other, along with band-leaders, theatrical producers and radio managers, in order to negotiate specific exclusivities and entitlements

[96] 'Leo Feist, Music Publishing King, is Dead at Sixty' *Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 24th 1930* http://www.jta.org/1930/06/24/archive/leo-feist-music-publishing-king-is-dead-at-sixty (Accessed 12/11/2015)
[97] Kenneth Kanter, *The Jews on Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1982), 17.
[98] Harris, *How to Write a Popular Song*, 59.

with regard to songs, performers, dissemination channels, venues and each other. There was an interdependence between their functions in the production and distribution chain that connected ultimately to the consumer. The figures of the song-plugger and the theatrical agent personify this process, in the sense that their raison d'être was to champion songs and singers respectively. 'Outside' pluggers, particularly, came to typify Alley spirit in the sense that they were so conspicuous to all – literally singing from flatbed carts to well-known singers in the street, in the hope that they might incorporate the new song into a popular show. For a time even 'musical waiters' were employed (including the young Irving Berlin) in the restaurants of the theatre district, where a dining (and captive) audience might include an influential performer.[99]

A song-plugger, could arm him or herself up with copies of songs and try to convince bandleaders and singers to perform their music. Indeed, this was one of the key ways that the new publishers of the nineties set themselves apart. They were engaged in actively and aggressively courting singers and venues as showcases for their songs and thus 'the plug' became the defining activity of the alley—whether carried out by a specifically employed 'plugger' or the publishers themselves. Edward B. Marks explains that

> it was in this matter of plugs that the new music publishing houses in the nineties differed from the old firms…These old-timers of the game maintained the same Dickensian dignity as the book publishers of their era.[100]

Touring singers, at this time, likewise had a kind of sales rep function: it was on the back of their performance—in Vaudeville, in saloons and in variety halls—that sheet music would be sold. Sanjek earmarks 1884 as the year that publishers began paying singers to boost songs rather than continuing with the previous (and inverse) strategy whereby singers would pay to be associated with a hit song.[101] Hamm relays that the 'folklore' of the Alley identified the Willis Woodward Company as the innovator of that practice.[102] The fact that the individual cameo singer of Vaudeville had, by the turn of the century, replaced the multi-person minstrel chorus as the method through which the majority of popular songs across the USA was experienced,[103] meant that these singers became the absolute focus of the music publisher, and this was because it was firmly understood that a dynamic performance in public was "the best

[99] Scheurer, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, 297.
[100] Marks, *They All Sang*, 22.
[101] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 403.
[102] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 288.
[103] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 21.

possible method of persuading potential customers to buy sheet music".[104] Moreover, singers became personally associated with certain numbers. The singer's success, biography and potential glamour could be yoked to a song and of course, whenever this was beneficial, the publisher would amplify the relationship—especially on the sheet music's front cover. The courting and negotiation process with singers became so important that, as Jasen details, some publishing firms eventually would even have small auditoriums built within their buildings so that singers could audition new songs, "…under conditions similar to those they faced when they performed in theatres".[105]

In terms of a song's success on either the mid-town or national circuit, it was also a given that singers would report back. Hamm explains that: "Through the singers who performed their songs, they [the publisher] had a finger on the public's pulse, and a good idea of what type of song would go over well."[106] But as well as appreciating testimony from the performer, the publishers' *modus operandi* was very often to experience the audience reaction first-hand. Hamm concludes his account by explaining how many publishers took it upon themselves to "spend much of their time in the variety houses, listening to as many songs as possible and observing the public's response to each."[107]

Such a ritual was at the core of the Alley's success, and is a neatly condensed example of the singular endeavour in which the Alley as a whole was engaged: the production, refinement and sale of *affective states*. Publishers, for reasons of commerce and profit, studied audience behaviour and—informally, at least—measured emotional response. They became versed in seduction, charm, social aversion, desire and audience indifference – and adjusted their product accordingly. In light of this, standardisations of product and process within the Alley can not only be conceived of as being borne out of a drive toward efficiency. Standardisations could also be alighted upon through the interpretation of the audience unconscious itself, and successful publishers became adept at reading the collective countenance of a crowd in order that they might divine a commercial advantage.

Everybody involved in the networking field was championing songs and singers whether they were a functionary (plugger) or the executive (publisher) of that process. The material and

[104] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 287.
[105] David A. Jasen, *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers, and Their Times: The Golden Age of American Popular Music from 1886 to 1956* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1988), 35.
[106] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 290.
[107] Ibid.

intellectual capital necessary to bring these cultural commodities to market in large-scale cost effective ways was dispersed across distinct roles in the music industry. Hence the absolute necessity of building and maintaining relationships. As Sanjek describes:

> The new music publishers were backstage regulars at the Vaudeville houses… they made fifty or sixty visits a week to pass around copies of their newest songs, buy champagne or beer, give out cigars, recommend tailors… the objects of their attention were, in addition to the women singers, comedy pianists, sweet singers, Negro delineators, baritones, tenors, bassi profundi, whistlers, balladeers, song and dance men, countertenors, female impersonators, duos, and quartets.[108]

Edward B. Marks attests to this. In his autobiography his first emphasis is on the publisher as plugger. He recalls how

> [i]n the nineties, a young music publisher had to know his way about the night spots… In his wanderings he saw as broad a cross-section of New York as any man… Sixty joints a week I used to make…we did it every week.[109]

Many of the organisations of Tin Pan Alley held within them an organisational paradox. On the one hand they thrived on a network of actors and agents,[110] in the broadest sense – down to the shoe-shine boy whose new slang might inspire a chorus or couplet. At the same time they were centralised operations that answered, ultimately, to the publisher, and very often these individuals were not silent partners. Hamm gives an account of how, "[p]ublishers controlled not only what songs were published, but to a large extent the style of these songs".[111] The conduit, and 'weather vane', relied on for this process by the publisher, was to a large extent the Vaudeville singer. In fact Hamm goes so far as to summarise the Alley as constituting, "a ferociously competitive industry dominated by the publisher, with the singer his most powerful ally."[112]

And this is only considering the reach of one set of relationships – that is, the new popular music publishers' interactions with Vaudeville performers. The investment in flattery, haggling, gossip and plotting was reciprocal and symbiotic. These were dynamic, well-nourished and well-practiced relationships. The significance of them—of their direct, in-

[108] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business -Volume II*, 339.
[109] Marks, *They All Sang*, 4.
[110] Both of these terms are intended in the sociological sense, although reading 'actors and agents' in terms of the lexicon of showbusiness would also result in an accurate interpretation, albeit more specific than the author intends. However, this lexigraphical overlap is probably indicative of how Tin Pan Alley, or Vaudeville, as exemplars of labour, performance, organisation and creativity networks, are phenomena that distil and typify so much human activity, since they provide the metaphors with which we describe others.
[111] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 290.
[112] Ibid., 289.

person lobbyist character and their breakfast-to-late-night cultivation—is that news *spread*. Successful themes, formats, gimmicks and formulas were pored over, proposed and refined. Fashion, and more importantly, standardisation, was both a top-down calculation made by business magnates at the same time as being borne out of an interested, alert, conversant community. And as well as publishers and Vaudevillians, a similar dynamic was replicated between songwriters and pluggers, or pluggers and gallery boys, or between songwriters and other songwriters, and so on. E.M. Wickes, in his songwriting How-to- guide, described an environment where formula and repetition was paramount but when innovations did happen they circulated at speed. He notes how

> [o]ccasionally, however, some writer will discover a novel device to please or to attract attention, but it will not remain his for long, as his contemporaries will soon learn of it and make it their own, provided his methods appeal to them.[113]

It is worth bearing in mind that the commercial function of a guide such as Wickes' is that it should communicate to novices in broad strokes. In studies of creativity and the music industry, music analysts, ethnographers and sociologists have often shown that relatively 'small' units of musical innovation and technique circulate subtly, unconsciously and, probably, constantly. As Toynbee notes in his sociology of popular music creativity, the artist, writer or musician

> [d]epends on planning, research and the constant monitoring of the outcome of decisions…Crucially, though, the musical creator is restricted in how much difference s/he can make at any given moment. In other words the unit of creativity is a small one… Quite simply, the small creative act is a common denominator in pop.[114]

Personnel

Tin Pan Alley, as a cultural force, can also be characterised by the demographic make-up of its professionals. As well as many who fit very real archetypes of Jewish songwriters, Irish tenors and publishers from clothing sales backgrounds, there was also a great diversity of backgrounds. Bars to entry were few, and the bottom-line of profit and loss was the organising principle, rather than any kind of elite-cultural capital. Indeed, the process for a 'civilian' to enter, or have the opportunity to enter, the songwriting industry could itself be monetised. Daniel Goldmark outlines how "even reputable publishers like Will Rossiter and Jerome Remick included at the end of their songwriting guides a short price list for having

[113] Wickes, *Writing the Popular Song*, ix.
[114] Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions* (London: Arnold, 2000), 35.

lyrics set musically, arranged and printed".[115]

This is not to say that connections and professional prestige couldn't open many doors but, rather, that a pushy songwriter with an irresistible hook could eventually get heard wherever they hailed from, and could set up an independent operation if they had any success at all. Goldberg explained at the time how "a chance hit, and a couple of hundred dollars was sufficient to open an office".[116] So this was a cultural form that did not necessarily demand the education or privilege of, say, a high-modernist community. There is something of the demos about the Alley – it was not unthinkable for a hit-writer to have no musical training at all and yet still make a great success from what Banfield calls "dittying", because a musical secretary could notate their ideas.[117] Just as valuable as musical training was a knack for novelty, a 'common touch', a feel for vernacular fashion and a capacity for translating the everyday back into its own vividness.

So despite the manufactured inauthenticity of many of the sentiments being expressed, the rendering, and the quality control—the 'ringing true'—of much Alley output benefited from maintaining a human link back to the communities it was serving. Tawa implies that the autodidact or the novice could have greater success than the virtuoso composer since "admired songs grew out of the experiences of ordinary life… To a certain extent, education hindered arrival at such truths."[118] Or at least, we might qualify such a claim and posit that the vernacular and stylistic elements required for expressing (or signalling) a particular community's experiences were often only available to somebody who knew that way of life.

Furthermore, the division of labour within the music publishing and theatrical industries sustained across the nineteenth century enabled such discrete positions as lyricist and top-line melody writer to become ever more viable by the century's turn. Band-leaders and arrangers had musical training that enabled them to furnish an orchestra with their parts from just a piano-oriented song-sheet. Songwriting, even—in certain instances—tune-whistling, could operate in tandem with technical musical roles. The songwriter (or lyricist, or tunesmith) could work independently from a single office, carrying out a bounded and discrete function, without necessarily needing secondary skills—whether musical, technical or commercial—but rather becoming the proverbial cog in a larger, Fordist-organised operation. So what

[115] Goldmark, '"Making Songs Pay",' 5
[116] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 108.
[117] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 311.
[118] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 27.

Banfield calls the "melopoetic"[119] strength of an Irving Berlin, for example, could be nurtured and at the same time would demand the employment of technical musical arrangers, adding ever more to the production-line quality of music at this time.

We might also consider the significance of the fact that Alley songwriters would now identify themselves as populists. In the nineteenth century, many enormously popular songs had been pseudonymised so that their composer's reputations would not be tarnished by association.[120] This would happen with lesser frequency as the popular songwriter was professionalised, and Tin Pan Alley can be considered the apex of this process, as its most conspicuous and emblematic formalisation and institutionalisation.

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Standardisation via Technological Affordances

To take a different tack temporarily, we might consider how the enormous technological developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries encouraged both specific standardisations and the general logic of standardisation within the popular song market. Technological developments can open up new spaces for, and means of, expression. The necessary limits of a technology, however, (also) always already impose constraints which may or may not become determinants for standardisations. Indeed, a technologically determined account of early-twentieth-century American popular song is apt. However, we might make the distinction between how a phenomenon is determined by such technology and how it is sustained by that technology. With this in mind we will consider printing, records and radio and these technologies' respective characters of standardisation.

Sheet Music

In economic terms, sheet music as a commodity possessed a dual fitness for two markets in the early-twentieth-century USA which were also symbiotically related: the theatrical and the domestic.[121] Pit musicians needed scores to play from (and in so doing create the musical

[119] In this sense meaning the aptitude for conjoining words with melody only, without necessarily having formal skill in harmony and especially arrangement (although it should be added that Berlin's 'informal' harmonic ability—by ear—was preternatural and he exercised exacting scrutiny over the harmonic arrangements of Helmy Kresa his musical transcriber). See Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 312.

[120] Scheurer, 'The Nineteenth Century - Introduction' in *American Popular Music*, 43.

[121] Wise, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley - The Commercial Background,' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, 498.

offer that would sell repeat theatre tickets), [122] but for the publishers this sale would then serve as advertising to the instrument-owning patrons of a show, for recital in the home.[123] In order to discover new songs for the domestic sphere, many families and individuals would attend musical theatre performances with an express intent to make a sheet-music purchase. This helped drive the market for new shows and therefore new sales to the pit.

Sheet-music's ease of transportation and potential for amateur music-making meant that it had an important relationship with rural areas and the distinct moral codes and prescriptions that prevailed within them. We can infer this when we consider how, in an age when urban and rural populations were still comparable, sheet-music was one of the few entertainment offers for the latter and so was often produced with them in mind. Tawa reports such a commercial concern as explicitly expressed by the publisher Witmark:

> Although his firm thrived on the recognition that songs were a part of one's home activities, it was not so much in large cities but in the smaller communities that he did the most business. City people had all sorts of professional performances they could attend and were never at a loss for an inexpensive evening's entertainment outside of the home. On the other hand, beyond the large cities, a greater dependence on home life existed. This resulted in a more constant use of the piano and an insatiable demand for popular songs with piano accompaniment, issued as sheet music.[124]

And so the importance of this extra-urban audience (and its potential to be censorious in light of its distinct social mores and standards) was an important concern for Alley publishers who wished to make inroads here.

The development of sheet music and its reproducibility (in comparison to, say, memorised stage performance) were without doubt determining factors in the long-term establishment of a free-market for music where non-musical actors and agents could participate and eventually assert authority over what were previously communitarian musical cultures. This is not to claim that a top-down conspiratorial and determinist process carried out by venture capitalists robbed the people of their collective musical culture. From one contrary perspective, the public were able to share in that musical culture outside of a single performance or ritual, and in a personal and private way. As Mark Booth has stated: "The writer of songs has had this power of conferring on readers, through the technology of printing, the instructions for

[122] Which as well as purchased in bulk by bandleaders, would be given out free by publishers as a 'pro-copy' or a 'black and white', so-called because they lacked the colourful pictorial cover of the consumer edition. [Terminology discussed in Shaw, 'The Vocabulary of Tin Pan Alley Explained', 40.]
[123] Notably piano-owning, but also others.
[124] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 13.

making the living song for himself."[125]

However, such notions of agency and autonomy can be tempered when we remember that the sheet music artefact, by definition, brought fixity to the musical experience. Booth notes that the same technology that contains "the instructions for making the living song" also "changed the nature of creative recomposition to artefact; and in the discussion of street ballad, that song as artefact became naturally an article in commerce."[126]

The significance of sheet music for the creation of an economy where music circulates as a commodity is affirmed by William Brooks when he states:

> Only when music can be widely disseminated in reproducible form does it become fully compatible with free-market ideology. In America this occurred when musical literacy became sufficiently widespread to make the mass production of sheet music economically viable.[127]

Of course, musical literacy increased symbiotically with the distribution of musical manuscripts themselves. The possibility of structural diversity, undulation and dynamism (referring to something as simple as the departing alterity of the 'B' section in an AABA structure) may in the very first instance have been an affordance and legacy of the historical transition from orality to literacy, centuries prior to the Alley songwriters. Middleton speculates that "Discursive repetition and hierarchically organised structures are more easily worked out on paper" and it is notable, for example, how little strophic song is produced in our period in comparison to its frequent presence in earlier Anglophone folk musics.[128] There is not much that can be definitively confirmed here, in terms of causality, when we are discussing changes in cultural practice across enormous expanses of time and across distinct cultures. One thing we can note, however, is simply the fact that written notation—as the medium of the office-based Tin Pan Alley songwriters—afforded them clarity between themselves over when a 'B' section departure actually occurred in a song performance. (By way of contrast, Middleton makes a similar connection between the principal technology of composition in the second half of the twentieth century [the recording studio] and changes in popular song structure, especially those which utilise the oral and improvisational traditions

[125] Booth, *The Experience of Songs*, 184.
[126] Ibid.
[127] William Brooks, 'Music in America: An Overview (Part 2) - Popular Music,' in *The Cambridge History of American Music* ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 262.
[128] That is, repetition at the level of sectional structure as opposed to smaller repetitive units such as riffs and short phrases. See Richard Middleton, 'In the Groove, or Blowing Your Mind? The Pleasures of Musical Repetition' in *Popular Culture and Social Relations* eds. Bennett, Mercer and Woolacott (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1986), 164.

of blues and jazz).[129] So as well as being the end product itself, sheet music—as the technology of production—enabled the 'standardising' work of the songwriters. It was possible to see, quickly and comprehensively, the status of a composition (in terms of what was necessary for its completion) and the structure of 32-bar AABA was easily viewable across one or two sheets of paper on the music stand.

Records

Tin Pan Alley was a set of institutions which, ultimately, sold a finished commodity, an object which could be traded and circulated, as opposed to a live performance that could vary over time.[130] The fixity of the musical experience, of course, was made absolute with the development of recording technologies. Sanjek points out the change from an active technology of re-creation and interpretation—sheet music—to the relative stability and fixity of the new recorded media. He asserts that, by 1900,

> [f]or the first time, the American public had a reasonably permanent souvenir of some of the music and songs from presentations it had taken to its heart, by means of player-piano music rolls and phonograph recordings and cylinders.[131]

In fact across our period there was a phenomenal change in the materiality of popular music. The first mass-produced audio-storage product was Edison's wax cylinder, widely used from the late 1880s. By the 1910s flat gramophone records were winning the commercial battle for the musical marketplace and replacing cylinders. Finally, both commercial radio and superior sonic fidelity on record were made possible by the inventions of vacuum tubes and electric microphones and these allowed for a new, delicate, confessional singing style called 'crooning'. The move away from sheet music to recorded music further emphasised the change from an amateur, collective musical experience to a professionalised, individualised listening experience. Music was not to be *interpreted* by way of an amateur or community and a piece of sheet music. Instead it had become 'ready-made' and therefore the finalised, fixed product had to have an appeal that was accessible to many. As with radio, difference was flattened in service of the medium.

Radio – A Further Consolidation

Although its commercial application and dissemination only applies to the very end of the

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[129] Ibid.

[130] Although Vaudeville could potentially 'unfix' that commodity in performance, the Alley itself was focused on fixity rather than interpretation.

[131] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 336-7.

period under discussion, we might nonetheless consider how the development of radio technology was the realisation of so much standardising practice, and how it helped to consolidate those standardisations which would constitute the Golden Age Alley song, as well as reaffirming Manhattan's primacy.

National programming originated in New York with NBC going coast-to-coast in 1928 using ATT telephone lines. The significance and power of NBC was that it was the commercial legacy of the American military's monopolisation of radio. In a sense we should note that culture, and song culture, was very quickly and easily adapted for a technology developed for that most 'nation-building' of activities: the prosecution of war. However, the geographical choice of New York for its commercial application was in large part due to the proximity to the entertainment circuit and the possibility of live band broadcasts from the city's many hotels. The need for this was accentuated because, at the outset of commercial radio, records were deliberately kept off the air by the Musician's Union in order that musicians' employment would not be threatened. Publicly, this practice was framed as protecting the public from being 'fooled' by recorded performance. Thus, New York as a live entertainment and show-business hub was crucial, and Tin Pan Alley standardisations were naturally aired and, in a sense, nationalised.

From this point on, the distinctive musics of geographical regions would need to be made more generally palatable – by way of a flattening of their specificities. Radio helped transform the USA into a single, national market with individual *national* 'stars' to be sold. The increased reach to such a diverse audience also encouraged the standardising trends in song conventions. As John Shepherd attests: "Songs that were written with radio and the big stars in mind… had to appeal to everyone… [they] also had to them appeal immediately."[132] And thus we see the consolidation of certain conventions on behalf of the vastness of radio's audience. The emergence of radio's reach at this time also increased the *perception* of a given standardisation. That is, radio audiences began to engage with a new imaginary – the vast simultaneous community of other listeners. Thus the *normative* was doubly affirmed by a mass-comprehension, or mass recognition, of the blanket coverage which a given trope is granted.

Radio brought with it a further policing of form, content and propriety by virtue of the

[132] John Shepherd, *Tin Pan Alley* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 72.

corporate interests who now bought advertising or sponsorship with a given show. The hope of many firms was that the popularity of a programme would become associated with their product. Ideally the glamour of celebrity or at least the glamour of radio itself would rub off. By the same token firms became aware of aspects of programming which could reflect negatively upon them. Sometimes, without direct interference, a process of pre-emptive second-guessing would see programme-makers self-censoring in order to satisfy what they imagined were the sponsor's requirements. In a very simple sense there was at least some diversity of taste within a sheet-music or record producing community. With radio, the association of otherwise unrelated products and brands inserted a singular, powerful filter of corporate propriety into the process of preparing music for market. It is difficult to imagine that the imposition of all kinds of social, ideological and aesthetic standards, or indeed the acceptance of standardisation as a guiding norm in itself, was not the result of this.

As a result of the material standardisations detailed in this chapter, a powerful and enduring cultural industry became established. Its historical foundation, unique demographics and new business logics would mean that an incredibly resilient and coherent product, the Golden Age Tin Pan Alley song, could emerge. These standardisations enabled this product to be distilled into a finely-tuned, reproducible reflection of the country's preoccupations, anxieties and aspirations. In Chapter Three, we will consider how the distillation of these anxieties extended to the very structure of the songs. Prior to this we shall consider how the Golden Age inherited and generated cultural forms—in both song performance and song lyric—that prioritised an overarching ideology of *propriety* within the process.

Chapter 2. A Decent Inheritance: Discourses of Propriety in the Theatre and in the Sentimental Song

In this chapter I will consider whether, in addition to the logic of standardisation detailed in Chapter One, a prevailing ideology of *propriety* structured and informed an increasingly 'official' version of early-twentieth-century American popular culture, with the popular song as its product. In the first instance, we will consider how Tin Pan Alley inherited (and produced) certain normative discourses and practices around censorship, theatrical practice and also around 'othered' musics and communities, notably Ragtime and Jazz. The remainder of the chapter will then concentrate on the dominant themes, narrational structures, character tropes and imagery in Tin Pan Alley sentimental song – again, both inherited and contemporaneously developed. In these ways the ideological *content* of the Tin Pan Alley popular song, which would inform the Golden Age, is established, prior to Chapter Three's investigation of sectional song *structure*. In the first instance we will consider certain societal norms within the communities that produced and consumed Tin Pan Alley song.

Normativity

A key criterion that helps to delineate whether a group of people can be categorised as a community is whether shared normative behaviours and 'normalising' discourses have been forged between them. From ancient Imperial regimes to the emergence of the Nation State in the early-modern period, we witness the binding (and disciplining) powers of language, trading customs, sexual politics and religious practice, even across vast geographical areas. Of course, there are historical instances where acceptance of difference in a community—to incoming immigrants for example—can vary considerably. Not all communities prove to be as censorious as others, and the importance of certain criteria of 'normativity' in one community can be an absurd irrelevance for another. In the young and fluid country of the USA, that which was normative was contested. For example, on the one hand a city such as New York held within it, at the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the greatest diversities of cultures and peoples in history. The farming communities of the Midwest, by contrast, did not. And yet these distinct geographies were in dialogue with each other: the former packaged and sold cultural products to the latter based on the former's imagined version of a simple, rural, *normative*, way of life.

New York was, by contrast in the eyes of many American communities outside of it, the

absolute locus of immorality and devilment. Contact with it often represented an existential threat to religiously rigid and conservative values. As Tawa describes, towards the end of the nineteenth century, even in the face of the burgeoning 'Progressive' values which that age heralded,

> [t]he fundamental core of rural society remained obdurately traditional in its view of secular entertainment…the variety stage that introduced popular song continued to be suspect if they betokened loose living and corrupt morality, particularly to the millions of Americans untouched by life in the large metropolises…[1]

This is an important point when we consider Tin Pan Alley's imagined audience. The publishers and promoters that provided titillation and transgression could easily, if discreetly, sell, "the raunchy songs heard in disreputable saloons"[2] to a repressed community – the populace may simply have had to drive to a larger town to avail themselves of it. Indeed, Edward B. Marks would make the point that visitors to New York itself were a significant demographic, especially if their relative naivety could be targeted within risqué establishments. He describes how

> [t]he dim lights and Vienna waltzes induced a mood of romance to which New Yorkers, familiar with the faces of the ladies working the spot, were inured, but which had great effect upon visitors from out of town… It meant a lot to have our numbers carried out to the sticks in the subconsciousness of a tipsy country cousin. The train of association whereby 'Annie Rooney' eventually appeared on the piano in a small town banker's house would have shocked many a fine community.[3]

Yet, in profitable antagonism with these illicit offerings, publishers and record companies could also sell chastity, sobriety and family values to rural and small-town USA. The intense focus on producing this wholesome material was the result of urbane New York City's assumptions regarding how New York City itself must be viewed from the outside. The Alley imagined the excesses that Middle America, pre-emptively attributed to New York, and was thus prompted to be over-compensatory in its messages of propriety.

It was because of their status as 'public' property by way of their reproducibility that popular songs, in the form of both sheet music and recordings, were especially subject to such disciplinary discourses at the time. And conceptions of normality/abnormality could become attached to minor musical conventions. We shall see how an ideology of propriety and public

[1] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 8.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Edward B. Marks, *They All Sang: From Tony Pastor to Rudy Vallee* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1934), 18.

morality shaped the market. But even at the level of minutiae, a couple of particularly popular songs could establish seemingly arbitrary conventions as normative, 'proper' and in that sense 'owned' by the listenership receiving them. In fact, the strict codification and disciplining of popular expression itself was recognised as a characteristic of the music. The journalist Goldberg wrote of contemporary rhyming conventions:

> They [the public] know… that moon and June and spoon and tune are inseparable as ham and eggs; if they don't come together, something is wrong with the normal order of things. To rhyme June with rune would be almost *Lèse-majesté*.[4]

Goldberg's use of the crime against the sovereign as his metaphor is telling. Goldberg asserts here that the listening public and the songwriter have assented to a prevailing order of norms, which extend even to what is acceptable at a couplet's close. June simply *does not rhyme* with rune according to the societal convention, despite meeting perfectly the linguist's definition of a rhyme. It could be that the particular pleasure of the moon/June trope is not arbitrary in its initial usages, and that the *u:* vowel sound has some unconscious pleasure or connotation that means it will be favoured (it would certainly be interesting to conduct a psychoanalytic reading of the propensity for *u:* and *a:* in twentieth-century backing vocals, for example). Regardless, what we can point to is the quick solidifying of moon/June/spoon/tune as a shared expectation; as an example of the popular song beginning to constitute a set of codified, fixed, 'normalised' conventions from which deviation is conspicuous.

Propriety and the Theatre

Songs in the form of sheet music and recordings were part of a matrix of cultural production that emanated from (and was perceived as emanating from) Manhattan. An equally contested arena, and one where, for a time, the majority of popular song was heard, was via public performance. The theatre, the Vaudeville and Variety house, the playhouse, the saloon, and other locations were public spaces where propriety was contested, reaffirmed or subverted. Of course, the nature of theatrical performance is such that, in the main, it charts and represents *the conspicuous*. The 'language' that theatre performance employs to represent human activity involves, for the most part, human action itself, and so as well as being able to intimate undercurrents and metaphor we are sometimes able to identify what is relevant *in plain sight*. In Chapter Three we will consider how a preoccupation with propriety can be sewn in to more opaque aspects of cultural expression, such as the sectional structure of a song. But the policing of public performance is often visible and overt. The primacy and

[4] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 9.

power of the stage toward the end of nineteenth century, and its employment of the human body itself, meant that the perceived relationship between acting, performing and prostitution (which, of course, can be traced back to Elizabethan England and many other antecedent contexts) was very much resonant. As Knapp has noted: "Vaudeville was once considerably less reputable than minstrelsy, housed, as it often was, within drinking emporia that functioned essentially like upscale brothels."[5]

The prevailing view was that Vaudeville and its touring productions were spaces where conspicuous impropriety was not just sung *about* but was enacted and indulged in, by performers and patrons alike. Hence, some of the distinct standardisations that occurred when Vaudeville emerged out of Variety in the 1880s[6] were a series of reforms that it should be polite and proper entertainment suitable for a mixed-gender audience. The overt tendency towards more decorous performance in Vaudeville displays a commercial preoccupation with propriety in explicit view—the market actor taking on the censorial role that had once been the preserve of a Church or a Lord Chamberlain. The advance of the policy of only "catering to polite tastes"[7] instituted by Tony Pastor and others meant that within a couple of years

> [b]y 1899… Vaudeville artists may have offended the taste of sophisticated Americans but they rarely offended their sense of decency. Male attire was forbidden to female performers, blunt language could bring instant dismissal and a high plane of respectability and moral cleanliness was demanded.[8]

The commercial benefit was immediate. A guarantee of decorum in performance virtually doubled Pastor's ticket sales overnight by enabling women to attend.[9] Such standards began to be expected by the audience and so by 1887, Pastor's 'family policy' had been adopted by several theatre owners in New York and other cities."[10] The presence of women in the audience at all was also considered to be beneficial to the overall theatre take (i.e. men, as well as children, would also be more likely to attend) and so playbills often advertised free entry for women at certain times.

Quality control against lewdness, sale of alcohol, bad language (and even the respectability of

[5] Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and The Formation of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 62.
[6] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 89.
[7] Marks, *They All Sang*, 12.
[8] Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - The First Four Hundred Years, Volume II - From 1790 to 1909* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 337.
[9] At the time the target demographic was in fact referred to as the "Double Audience" see Andrew L. Erdman, *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co Inc., 2007), 11.
[10] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business*, 337.

the private lives of performers) became a concern, and certain theatrical impresarios claimed to guarantee these standards in their show. Tony Pastor attempted to position attendance at his theatre itself as a marker of bourgeois propriety and aspiration, and would advertise that "[i]ts clientele are the best families of the metropolis, its endorsers the entire press of the city".[11] Contrary to Vaudeville myth, F.F. Proctor and Tony Pastor were only the most successful in terms of promoting their own reputation for providing 'decency' on the stage, it also had been a Vaudeville preoccupation—at least nominally so—during the 1870s. Facsimiles of mid-1870s Broadway Theatre playbills can be found advertising themselves as "The Family Resort - The Favourite Resort for Ladies and Children" alongside the claim that "The Company is Composed of Legitimate Artists!"[12]

Of course, this is not the totality of all performance possibilities of the time. Rather, it was a loudly-publicised departure from illicit performance which continued, or continued in modified forms. Sanjek details the rise of "indigo musical and theatrical material"[13] and, of course, sexually provocative performance with an emphasis on minimally-clothed female dancers was consistently available. In a sense, Pastor's 'cleaning-up' of Vaudeville was emblematic and conspicuous rather than definitive. By virtue of redefining the ideal of polite entertainment it also made more concrete a sector of entertainment that was often the opposite. Indeed, relevant to this study is the fact that burlesque houses and dance-based Revue drove popular song development with regard to the inclusion of vernacular language and slang,[14] which we will return to shortly. Furthermore, what was advertised on playbills was not always what would be delivered behind the closed door of the theatre. Edward B. Marks describes how

> [t]he combination of outward piety and essential raciness was characteristic of the time. Even at Harry Hill's on Houston Street… where bare knuckle turnups were part of the cabaret and the girls in the audience were just in from a patrol of the Bowery, no performer was permitted to use unseemly language.[15]

Here we see the ideology of propriety in a simple, straightforward example, essential to the theatre's own 'official' account of itself and yet existing alongside violence and vice. Such a policy claimed to protect audiences from lewdness, cursing, blasphemy and so on and many performers who risked even a single indiscretion suffered dismissal under its enforcement.

[11] Marks, *They All Sang*, 12.
[12] Ibid., 4.
[13] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business*, 341.
[14] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan* Alley, 32.
[15] Marks, *They All Sang*, 16.

Though it may seem puritanical to twenty-first-century consumers, such policies around language provided both audiences and the theatrical community with a standard that acted similarly to a broadcasting watershed today. The advantage for the concerned patron was that the entertainment experience being purchased was a known quantity, and it ensured that children (and 'fragile' female sensibilities) were protected from material which would otherwise surely harass and corrupt their minds. In a moral climate of temperance movements and Progressivist reformers that would lead, ultimately, to the prohibition amendment of the constitution in 1920, the family as an institution was widely considered to be under threat from the existing 'night-time' economy. Tawa provides testimony of this:

> When F.F. Proctor instituted "clean" vaudeville shows, with emphasis on music, around 1890, a judge from New York City told him: 'I've been going to your show every week for the past two months with my wife and little girl and little niece, because you've got the kind of show that keeps a family together… Men don't go sneaking off to corrupt places of entertainment now…'[16]

So the process of self-censorship did not herald the sanitisation of the entirety of the American stage, of course, and such policies (and the word Vaudeville itself, which became implicitly associated with those policies), would be claimed at times only "to go through the *pretence* of presenting, diversions free of obscenities and sexual innuendos".[17] Again, it was a commercial decision as much as an ethical one, whereby this guarantee was supposed to provide assurances that the whole family could attend and so would purchase tickets.

We should remain conscious of how that commercial advantage was, in a sense, also informed by the fulfilment of hegemonic pleasure. In fact, the safety and security of hegemonic stability is an explanation as to how the Alley—as the musical engine of Vaudeville—dealt with impropriety, jazz, and other parts of the social world that challenged orthodoxy. Even Harrigan in the nineteenth century, in his position as both famed performer and impresario, had championed the supposed bonding and pacifying capacities in popular song. He wrote of how popular songs

> [l]ighten the toil of the working people and were, and are now, potent peacemakers… admitting sunshine into many a darkened life. Virtue, disguised as music, enters the home of poverty… Make songs for the poor, and you plant roses among the weeds.[18]

[16] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 10.
[17] Ibid. [My emphasis]
[18] Stephen Albert Rohs, *Eccentric Nation: Irish Performance in Nineteenth-century New York City* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 193.

In an aside that prefigures the discussion of 32-bar AABA that will be conducted in Chapter Three, we might consider the censorious environment described here and imagine inserting an unbridled and ambiguous sectional structure into it – one that afforded, or indeed demanded, the confounding of expectations. Indeed, the illicit status, for the moralisers of the period, that was attributed the new Ragtime and Jazz fads speaks to these fears. By considering a counter-factual narrative such as this, the particular safety and stability of a closed song form such as 32-bar AABA is made visible – when otherwise its frequency and ordinariness might seem beyond remark. When situated within the reach of this increasingly-industrialising entertainment industry, we can begin to imagine how surety, and safety from deviance, could be administered in closed song forms.

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Blackness

Tin Pan Alley had a conflicted relationship with its own musical and social environment—both New York and nationally—especially its contradictory attractions and aversions to those communities considered less desirable by the prevailing white, if not entirely WASPish, hegemony. Often, these contradictory responses would be towards Black Americans enduring the depths of a deeply racist hierarchy and perceived as being overly sexual and sensual, most likely expressed in scandalous dances to corrupting music. At the same time as these prejudices circulated, Ragtime and 'Jass' were also taken to be modern, glamorous, exotic and arresting, and the Alley would appropriate any aspects of these scenes that might give a song a commercial edge.

Both the positive and negative attitudes towards Black cultural practice could be reactionary. Even the terms 'Rag' and 'Jass' themselves would be tacked onto song titles in order to enliven pieces that otherwise had no Black-American connection in style or derivation. In such ways, stylistic appropriations were often cosmetic and facile. However, appropriation went beyond mere signalling. Furia states that, in addition to the frisson that Tin Pan Alley felt in connection with Black America anyway, the fundamental rhythmic innovation of those communities—syncopation—would be drafted in to impart "the flavor of Ragtime" to popular song.[19] At the same time, the Alley has been described as being careful to not disturb the

[19] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 25.

prevailing' 'whiteness' of its product.[20] It seems to be a frequently repeated dynamic in terms of racial exploitation in music. Toynbee asserts how institutions such as the Alley

> [p]ositioned black music in two places at once: in the centre, where it was used as a source of vital energy; and on the outside where it was low, other and the exemplar of everything the mainstream was not.[21]

So, whilst the commodification of these communities was a core business practice, their musical and cultural forms were also considered to be a threat to order and stability. Typically, the *Musical Courier* stated in 1899 that Ragtime represented "[a] wave of vulgar, filthy and suggestive music [that] has inundated the land".[22] This was a view that had still not dissipated when *Musical America* was remarking in 1913 that Ragtime "exalts noise, rush and street vulgarity… it suggests repulsive dance-halls and restaurants".[23]

By contrast, Ragtime did not suggest, of course, the parlour, the concert hall (or the pleasure gardens of old) where manners and bodies were strictly disciplined. Sanjek's account of the attacks on Ragtime makes plain that such commentary was euphemistic for bigotry and that "a considerable amount of racism was involved in this operation… coated with a patina of concern for public morality".[24] The Alley, in comparison to many other institutions in the USA, could at times seem perfectly diverse and democratising. But also, at the same time, it internalised the censorious attitude that ultimately feared African-American equality or racial mixing. African American communities, their social rituals, vocabulary, and of course their musicians and musical forms, constituted both inspiration and anxiety for the dominant arenas in cultural production.[25] Indeed, as alluded to in the counter-factual narrative above, there was even incredulity and suspicion towards musical structure, where Jazz practices could be considered destructive or, at least, impertinent. In a *New Yorker* magazine cartoon of 1925, Tin Pan Alley was described as merely a resource for irreverence where the Jazz specialist is

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[20] Ulf Lindberg, 'Popular Modernism? The 'urban' style of interwar Tin Pan Alley,' *Popular Music*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (October 2003): 295, n.5.

[21] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,'154.

[22] Ian Whitcomb, *After the Ball: Pop Music from Rag to Rock* (New York City, NY: Limelight Editions, 1994), 16.

[23] Russell Lynes, *The Lively Audience: A Social History of the Visual and Performing Arts in America, 1890-1950* (New York City, NY: Harper & Row, 1985), 102.

[24] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business*, 411.

[25] And, of course, the argument for the radical possibilities of Jazz improvisation, and for the musical culture of Harlem in the early twentieth century, is relevant here. It is worth noting that the preeminent symbol of this radicalism is those musicians' *détournement* of the Tin Pan Alley standard. Jazz musicians in particular, from the beginning of the century (and arguably for many decades thereafter), seem to typify the gnomic description by Attali of the musician's paradox: "At the same time within society which protects, purchases and finances him, and outside it, when he threatens it with his visions. Courtier and revolutionary." Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 11.

seen smashing 78s, whilst a boy waits to repair them. The caption reads:

> [Visitor (to Tin Pan Alley): 'Good Lord, who's th' crazy guy?']
>
> 'Crazy! Him? That's th' slickest bimbo in th' place. Just busts phonograph records t' pieces, glues 'em t'gether again an' turns out ten new jazz hits a day!'[26]

There is a degree of bewildered affection in the cartoon, valorising the 'slick' prolificacy of Jazz restructurings, even if they are arbitrary. However, it is part of a larger public discourse that tied jazz to mania, irrationality and insolence. It is significant for this thesis (which posits the exemplary circulation of ideology by way of the popular song as a central tenet) that racism and fear could be expressed with musical forms.

Furia states that it was Ragtime that "killed" the nineteenth century sentimental ballad.[27] The new music can, in some senses, be read as a harbinger of later social change. It certainly interrogated the status quo, and the experience of this music (simply by way of its difference) brought forth unarticulated, inductive anxieties about a future that seemed increasingly unknown and, for some, increasingly foreign. The fear of African-American empowerment and indeed cultural 'mixing', that Ragtime foreshadowed, evokes Attali's pronouncements on the prophetic nature of musical practice whereby

> [i]ts styles and economic organisation are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code… [it is] the herald of the future.[28]

Dependent upon one's position relative to the prevailing social order, such qualities and potentialities in musical experience can be disquieting or salutary. And yet, despite such fears and paranoias, or maybe because of the pleasures of the illicit that resulted from these fears, black musical forms were appropriated and inserted into Alley songwriting.

The paradoxical attraction and aversion to African-American culture has, famously, repeated itself throughout twentieth- and twenty-first-century American popular music, typified by the white suburban consumption of—and hysteria toward— Rock 'n' Roll, Disco, Hip-hop and other forms. But although the primal scene for this dynamic is often taken to be Elvis Presley's early career, in fact the tension between cultural appropriation and cultural offence

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[26] Gardner Rea, cartoon in *The New Yorker* 1925 Mar. 7th (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-94819)
[27] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 25.
[28] Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 11.

was present throughout the sixty years of mass-produced American popular song prior to his first iconic recordings.[29] Middleton, points out that as well as there being thematic, representational and performance-related dimensions to this tension, it can be considered in terms of fundamental musical structures and that

> Tin Pan Alley song, from 1900 to 1939, can, from the point of view of repetition practice be seen as a constant struggle between the two traditions.[30]

Certainly, musical conventions *perceived* as being, by turns, either white, bourgeois and proper or black, crude and undesirable are as relevant to the institution of the Alley Golden Age as they are to the rise of Elvis. Toynbee provides an excellent precis of Middleton's explanation of this process as being part of a longer-term exploitation of 'low-other' musics:

> The mainstream has always depended on the importation of musical authenticity, a primordial sense of energy from without… The need derives from a pervasive lack in Western music which Middleton traces back to the elevation of bourgeois art music to an autonomous realm during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In effect this shift effaced the sensuousness and immediacy of music that had been the spur to autonomization in the first place. The response of composers was to turn to the popular … these strategies are used in popular music as a way of translating and controlling African-American music, the mainstream's chief source of otherness.[31]

And yet it was not only and absolutely the blackness of Jazz or Ragtime which could threaten the social order within the business hierarchies of music and the stage. There were anxieties around popular, 'low' art that could propel composers themselves toward reputational patrolling of their own work, in pursuit of the propriety perceived necessary for acceptance into the high-culture establishment. Banfield describes how

> until the end of the 1920s dance-band cover versions of theatre songs or domestic ballads could still be regarded as parodies or burlesques of 'straight,' if popular, material—almost as knockabout comedy acts where the antics of some early bands, not to mention the dancers, were concerned. Kern, for one, so objected to the levelling treatment of the dance bands that he legally protected one of his scores…[32]

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[29] It is also a defining dynamic in Minstrelsy, and aggressively so. The appropriation/aversion dynamic no doubt has a lineage longer than this again, but for the purposes of this thesis, the author is concentrating on its manifestation in Tin Pan Alley.

[30] By 'repetition practice' Middleton is referring to different orders of repetition between Afro-American musical traditions and European musical traditions. He characterises the former as being generally built upon shorter, phrasal repetition (which he terms 'musematic') and the latter as favouring longer sectional repetition (which he names 'discursive'). Richard Middleton, 'In the Groove, or Blowing Your Mind? The Pleasures of Musical Repetition,' in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, eds. T. Bennett, C. Mercer and J. Woollacott (Milton Keynes: OUP, 1986), 166.

[31] Toynbee 'Mainstreaming,' 154.

[32] Stephen Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 327.

As we see from such examples, Alley songwriters and publishers were in constant negotiation, both consciously and unconsciously, with those musical communities that were both a great resource of vitality and a site of potential impropriety. The re-appropriations of Alley material by Jazz combos and burlesque served as a live critique of an increasingly 'official' popular culture.

WASPishness

The tension between what was considered to be normative propriety, and the commercial pursuit of affective, sensorial material, was also yoked to an imagined ideal of American identity in the form of bourgeois WASPishness and their (again, imagined) residual Victorian disavowal of embodied pleasure. In the Alley and Vaudeville, this identity could function as a disciplining ideal, whether transmitted through the work of Jewish, Catholic, Black, Irish, Italian or other ethnicities' performers, songwriters or publishers.

The dominance of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men as a de facto hegemony in the USA was a symptom of the ongoing legacy of the country's earlier Northern-European settlement (or, put more precisely, conquest). Inevitably, the huge demographic changes of the period up to the First World War would begin to challenge this, even if these challenges were initially symbolic. As Painter points out,

> During the 1870s virtually every one of the tiny minority of Americans who had attended college and practiced a profession was Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and male. But by the end of the European War thousands of others had joined the professional ranks: women (mostly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, but a few blacks, Catholics and Jews) and men from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. The new professionals, often from families of modest means, faced considerable prejudice on account of their class, gender, race, and religion. Their numbers were so small that they were never more than tokens…[33]

In light of a single community's economic and cultural dominance we can comprehend how its social conventions, behavioural tropes and shibboleths could become aspirational and, potentially, internalised by those seeking parity or at least a better life than their background automatically afforded them. And yet we are not discussing an all-powerful ruling class who 'own' a peasantry. Instead, it is probably more appropriate to think of the WASPish elite as being at its most powerful once a perception of its natural superiority came to reside in the minds of the middle-class. The literary critic James D. Hart wrote in 1950 of how by the

[33] Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon - The United States, 1877-1919* (New York City, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 1987), 386.

middle of the nineteenth century, the American middle-class

> [e]mulated upper-class standards, but their sophistication was softened and transmuted by subconscious memories of working-class mores. Establishing *its own uncompromising criteria*, this new bourgeoisie told the lower class to aspire to them…[34]

As carrier of the middle-ground, the middle-brow and the political centre, the middle-class can be seen as the demographic most responsible for re-producing the notion of WASPish cultural superiority. Middleton cites Gramsci's claim that "the bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the whole society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level".[35] Likewise, Toynbee also endorses the Gramscian view that

> [l]eading social groups attempt to make their world view legitimate across the divided terrain of capitalist society. Crucially, such a hegemonic project depends on negotiation and alliance with subordinate groups rather than simple domination.[36]

As will be expounded in the second half of this chapter and beyond, both the contents and the structures of popular song are a key site for these tensions. Indeed, the particular ethnic diversity of the Alley, and the conflicted relationships that it had with Black urban American musical communities, rural American consumers, and so on, ensure that this 'negotiation' is very difficult to unravel. And there is also a distinction between how this complexity manifests in the products of the Alley, as opposed to the social world of those who produced it. There is, on the one hand, an assimilation dynamic which continued to prevail across the twentieth century with regard to immigrant communities, their children, grandchildren and so on. Regarding the promotion of homogeneity in popular music of the thirties, forties and fifties Hamm has described (in perhaps overly-general terms) how

> [m]embers of ethnic minority groups who wanted to be accepted and to succeed in American society deliberately assimilated the tastes, customs, mores, and life-style of this group … Eastern European immigrants, blacks, second-generation Italians, Jews and others deliberately turned their backs on their own heritage, at least in their public life, and embraced the way of life of white, educated, English-speaking Americans.[37]

Thus, the 'WASPishness' of WASP hegemony was not always necessarily only its whiteness.

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[34] James D. Hart, quoting from the *Token of Friendship* (1844) in *The Popular Book - A History of America's Literary Taste* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1950), 85. [My emphasis]
[35] Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 10.
[36] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,' 150.
[37] Charles Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' in *Contemporary Music and Music Cultures*, ed. Charles Hamm, Bruno Nettl and Ronald Byrnside (New Jersey, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975), 126.

Or, rather, we might contend that a normativity of 'whiteness' was not the explicit expression of this hegemony. Indeed, as George Lewis (with reference to John Fiske) has stated, a process of "exnomination" can prevail with regard to racial hegemony,[38] where the class dominance of whiteness does not need to be articulated, but rather is insidious and reproduced by way of *not* being named. As Toynbee notes, the dominant messages and forms of Golden Age Tin Pan Alley can be construed as "[a] mainstream which denied racial difference while remaining predominantly white."[39] In a country where class has always been racialized and race has always determined the affordance or denial of (class) rights, we should consider the aspiration toward WASPish identity as a racialized, class-inflected phenomenon.

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Popular Song and its Lyrical (Dis)Contents

At this point the thesis turns from a consideration of Tin Pan Alley's communities of consumption and production to the lyrical and thematic content of popular songs themselves. Indeed, the work of cultural studies is very often to intuit larger social structures and ideological systems within the material culture and rituals of a given community—to read objects and practices as if they were a text with grammar, vocabulary, signifiers and referents. Of course, reading the actual texts of a community, whether it's handwritten correspondence or the print culture of its publishing institutions, is probably the ur-example for such an analysis. But additionally, and in their own distinct and valuable ways, the lyrics of popular song will also contain sociological 'data', from which a picture of that community might emerge. Tawa describes how the popular song of the late nineteenth century served its audience in fundamental ways; that it "conveyed a unified fantasy life pertinent to American society, so that what the composer said had unconscious significance to his contemporaries."[40]

Such a statement projects the uncontroversial position that an underlying interplay between popular song and broader societal trends, events and anxieties is at work. In the first instance, this interplay will manifest via cosmetic and conspicuous examples within lyrics: the specific cultural references to place or to shared historical events; the inclusion of local vernacular; the explicit affirmation of mutually agreed common-sense 'values'. Very likely there will be a

[38] George E. Lewis 'Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,' *Black Music Research Journal* 16/1 (Spring, 1996): 99.
[39] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,' 153.
[40] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 14.

relatively narrow range of identity tropes and *dramatis personae*. In fact, many of these tropes can be found across the popular music of otherwise distinct times and places: the enchanted young lover; the love-at-first-sighter; the heartbroken ex; the libertine; the stoic. Hearts burn, heads are spun and touch is longed for, whether the year is 1895 or a century thereafter. That the subject matter of popular music should have some bearing on the fears, desires and sensibility of its consumers was clear enough to contemporary critics during our period. Goldberg noted how

> [a] graph of the thematic content of our street songs over the past thirty years [1900-1930] would read like a miniature history of our national morals.[41]

The lyric can, conversely, be all the more revealing when comparatively ambiguous or impressionistic. To lyricise at all is to labour, and the subjects that a community chooses to decorate and illuminate with song often betray the mythologies (in the Barthesian sense) to which a culture is beholden.[42] The ideological implications of the subject matter of, say, sentimental love songs of a particular era, may invite a particularly critical reading that ascertains what they had in common with, say, a song based upon the directness of a political slogan.

Close readings of popular song lyrics as text—whether an analysis of the dramatic action therein or thematic analyses—are now an established practice in English Studies and Popular Musicology. Analyses of theme, trope, symbolism and other aspects of song content, when carried out across large, representative sample groups of songs, add a sociological dimension to these readings. A famous example of this kind of analysis is Horton's 'The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs', a survey of two hundred songs from 1955 which illustrate how

> [t]he popular song provides a conventional conversational language for use in dating and courtship, one whose highly stylised and repetitious rhetorical forms and symbols are confined to the expression and manipulation of a narrow range of values.[43]

Horton's conclusion was that popular songs and the gestures of its singers provide a dramatic framework within which listeners play out imagined behaviours in courtship settings. In so doing he claimed that popular song was instructive for its largely teenage listenership, especially with regard to propriety and normative behaviours. The songs he sampled most

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[41] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 100.
[42] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 1972). The thesis of Barthes' essays being, in a general sense, to reveal the 'mythic' structures which seemingly neutral commodities and common-sense practices reproduce.
[43] Donald Horton, 'The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs,' *American Journal of Sociology* 62/6 (May 1957): 569.

often contained "dialogue expressing *appropriate* standard attitudes and sentiments".[44] Corresponding content analyses of songs have been carried out since, by James Carey in 1969 and Bridges and Denisoff in 1986, to chart how themes and dramatic action in popular song can be seen to develop with larger societal change.[45]

Such surveys also chart how certain themes and preoccupations abide in the face of musical change. For example, it is a commonplace assertion to say that, in a very real sense, the idealisations of 1950s love songs in the doo-wop/pop-crooner tradition—in contrast to the 'realisms' of rock 'n' roll— were a direct legacy of the sentimental love song of Golden Age Tin Pan Alley. They fulfilled similar functions for the listener and, furthermore, it is no accident that there are similarities and continuities in the business conventions of the companies which produced both, whether we wish to point to their Fordist rationalisations, their use of gimmicks, or other similar practices.

Questions of Style

In a given survey of popular song there will be, as well as explicitly articulated subject matter, a picture of its listening community which is implicit, diffuse and not necessarily apparent even to its authors. There will be the traces and manifestations of ideology and structuring structures, of over-arching determinant and productive forces[46] and affordances, which in order to be discerned require a critical reading extending beyond what is expressed in the texts themselves. This thesis subscribes to the inherent value of performing such an enquiry, and this chapter interrogates the dominant themes, narrative tropes, character tropes and rhetorical techniques within the lyrics of a great deal of early Tin Pan Alley sentimental songs.

However, stepping beyond a purely technical analysis of a text, these components of song content are to be explored with the express purpose—where appropriate—of finding resonances with both the broader socio-political environment and with *sectional song structure*. The emphasis on the latter is around possible connections between lyrical content, and the Alley's eventual reliance on the 32-bar AABA structure that constituted a goal-oriented, resolving and closed-form song experience. As stated elsewhere in this study, it is

[44] Ibid., 577. [My Emphasis]

[45] James T. Carey, 'Changing Courtship Patterns in the Popular Song,' *American Journal of Sociology* 74/6 (May, 1969): 720-731. John Bridges & R. Serge Denisoff, 'Changing courtship patterns in the popular song: Horton and Carey revisited,' *Popular Music and Society* 10/3 (1986): 29-45.

[46] As noted previously, these are most often taken—within the history of critical theory—to be the socially structuring capacities of either capital, economic relations, gender, the body, the unconscious, language, colonial relations, institutional history etc. or a combination of these.

arguable that popular song of the age was an emblematic carrier and reproducing engine for a powerful ideology of propriety and it is interesting to attempt to identify this in theme, trope *and* structure and consider whether there was interaction between these elements. This chapter takes into account those Hamm identifies as "first generation Tin Pan Alley songwriters"[47] as well as the 'Golden Age'. We can really consider the Golden Age—and AABA—to be eventual legacies of that first generation. We are concerned with how the particular characteristics of the Golden Age coalesced and became fixed as much as what occurred within the Golden Age itself.

Thus I would request that whilst the dominant themes and lyrical tropes in early twentieth century American sentimental song (as documented by Furia, Hamm and others) are considered here, the reader keeps in mind the broader social changes detailed in Chapter 1, as well as the eventual standardisation of sectional structure from the 1920s onward (as will be further explored in Chapter 3). With regard to the latter, the notion of musical structure having a bearing on the character of lyrical expression does not equate to a bearing on mood or theme per se. It does offer some explanation for *the lack of ambiguity* in how theme and mood is often expressed in Tin Pan Alley sentimental song: a song that structurally repeats and resolves may be especially effective at emphasising a singular, unified lyrical concept, as opposed to, say, stream-of-consciousness complexity.

The Alley had many lyrical techniques for communicating ideas in broad strokes and there are other technicalities of composition that we can ascribe a social effect. Stephen Banfield makes an interesting suggestion that the simplicity of the poetic meter for Tin Pan Alley,[48] set to melodies that divide into multiples of two, four and eight (as many simple Alley songs do), encourages directness of expression. Causality one way or the other is difficult to be precise about (it may be, in fact, that the desire for directness of expression also produces simple melody) but it is pertinent nonetheless that

> The placing of rhyme, according to offset from the ballad norm (of four-beat lines of verse) that is the poetic corollary to quadratic melody, will cast the discourse *epigrammatically*, be its mode one of sentimentality or of wit.[49]

And so here we have an argument for how minute technicalities of poetics can embolden

[47] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 360.
[48] By which we can probably read 'later Golden Age' Tin Pan Alley, rather than the output of W. 28th Street at the turn of the century.
[49] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 310. [My emphasis]

discourses around, say, 'sentimentality' for example. The links between sectional song structure and propriety can be considered analogous to this.

Intentionality and Reception.

Adorno, in his famous critiques of the Alley, certainly drew connections between the industry's exploitation of the consumer, its lyrical preferences and its structural choices. For him, standardisations of both 'form' and 'content' were ultimately an abdication and suppression of possibility, and the *appearance* of novelty was most insidious of all:

> Complications remain without consequences: …the pop song leads back to *a few basic perspective categories* known ad nauseum. Nothing really new is allowed to intrude, nothing but calculated effects that add some spice to the ever-sameness without imperiling it. And these effects in turn take their bearings from schemata.[50]

There is no doubt that particular themes, images and tropes were relied upon in early Tin Pan Alley sentimental song. However, as well as eliciting "calculated effects" upon the audience (as in Adorno's account), there are more subtle, productive capacities that the popular song is able to advance, even by way of a crudely gendered or conservative lyric. By no means least, we should keep in mind that the sentimental or traditional song themes to be detailed in this chapter afforded *spaces of community and belonging* for listeners, as well as any Adornian 'anesthetisation' to an alienated reality. The notion of 'singing along' is a powerful one. The word 'along' always implies *another*, or *others*. Even in solitude, the singer sings along with the song and thus the songwriter *in absentia* and their authorial voice. Singing along is always, therefore, a description of a human connection, even if a faint one. There is also something to recommend the "few basic perspective categories… [and their] ever sameness". The more open or even banal a lyric the more inclusive it might be, in order to involve people in what is arguably a more significant phenomenon: the act of singing. The nondescript lyric that does not contain controversy can, potentially, be as community-building as a tub-thumping rabble-rouser. Or even more so: it may be that it is less exclusionary as it operates at the level of a shared experience of the everyday.

There are many historical examples where a simple, seemingly apolitical song can become explicitly political – where the everydayness of a particular lyric can unify a community to the point that it even becomes a tub-thumping rabble-rouser itself. Charles B. Lawlor's 'Sidewalks of New York' is one such instance. It describes the halcyon days of a New York

[50] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' 26. [My emphasis]

childhood where,

> Down in front of Casey's old brown wooden stoop
> On a summer's evening we formed a merry group
> Boys and girls together we would sing and waltz
> While Jay played the organ on the sidewalks of New York.[51]

The simple, anecdotal verses became the campaign song for Presidential candidate Al Smith. Throughout his political rallies mass, communal singing of this song was used to articulate a shared, homely, nostalgic vision of positivity, and to affirm Smith's everyman persona – the governor who had come up from the streets. What was sung with power and gusto in New York City was viewed with suspicion in the mid-West, and the powerful song choice was considered one of the reasons for Smith's losses in the rest of the country.

Examples such as this serve to remind us that song lyrics are very often not experienced as literal, declamatory statements, as say a political slogan might. There are theorists who have argued, in fact, that the melopoetic mode (that is, the combining of words and music) functions somewhat contrary to this – semantic meaning can in fact be entirely suspended. Lawrence Kramer, for example has proposed a quality of "Songfulness" which includes "the ability of the singing voice to envelop or suffuse both melody and text so their independent existence is obscured…"[52] In Kramer's wake, the literary critic Lars Eckstein has also commented on an uncanny suspension-retention dynamic often present in singing, song and the song-lyric. He proposes that

> [t]he loss of verbal meaning in songfulness cannot be explained acoustically. Verbal meaning is suspended here, despite the fact that words remain perfectly audible and intelligible; instead they are suffused with another, larger semantic realm.[53]

It may be that the shared practice of singing songs that might have been considered banalities (in terms of some *literary* standard), would actually provide more opportunity for the act of singing—rather than the explicit meaning of the song—to have primacy. An example could be something as commonplace as 'It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary'. It begins,

> Up to mighty London
> Came an Irishman one day.
> As the streets are paved with gold

[51] Charles B. Lawlor and James W. Blake, 'The Sidewalks of New York', (Howley, Haviland & Co., 1894).
[52] Lawrence Kramer, 'Beyond Words and Music – An Essay on Songfulness,' in *Musical Meaning – Toward a Critical History* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 54.
[53] Lars Eckstein, *Reading Song Lyrics* (New York City, NY: Rodopi, 2010), 80.

> Sure, everyone was gay,
> Singing songs of Piccadilly,
> Strand and Leicester Square,
> Till Paddy got excited,
> Then he shouted to them there:
> It's a long way to Tipperary…[54]

And yet, despite the specifics of the song's 'plot', it became one of the most popular singalongs and marching songs for British Tommies during the First World War. Homesick as they may have been for Essex, Teeside or the Clyde, the lyric that saw its protagonist forsake Leicester Square and Piccadilly for Tipperary was the uniting force that enabled a commonality and a shared articulation of longing. Indeed, we might venture that it was the fact that the majority of the British army had no relation to Tipperary whatsoever that meant it translated so well across regiments.

Eckstein's notion of a "larger semantic realm" might explain how songs that seem—especially on the page—to employ fixed and conservative categories and imagery, may in fact have provided a degree of agency and even 'mental space' by being sung. Song reception is very often multivalent and any semantic aspect of a lyric could be received in ways that are distinct from the literal text—quite alternative meanings can emerge in its actual usage. The joint singing of a song about loneliness or isolation or lost love could easily enact a sense of community and belonging. The journalist Travis Hoke, in a 1931 piece for The American Mercury entitled 'Corner Saloon' reminisced about an earlier age of public house where at,

> About ten o'clock… there were deep harmonics through which permeated occasional accessary words recognizable as silvery moon, you wouldn't dare insult me sir, she may have seen better days, dear old girl, blinding tears are falling…when the whole song had been properly rendered, false starts and all, it was only fair to insist on self-requested encores… they met with profound appreciation from simpler and sadder souls.[55]

This seems to be a testimony emphasising the importance of communal singing itself, rather than the faithful reproduction of an exact lyric for its own sake.

The dominant themes, imagery and tropes as discussed in this chapter are not intended to

[54] Jack Judge and Harry Williams 'It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary' (Chappell and Co., Ltd., 1912).
[55] Travis Hoke 'Corner Saloon' in *The American Mercury* 19 (March 1931): 321.

constitute a monolithic 'lore' that listeners and consumers were simply subjected to. Rather, familiarity and repetition of such lyrical content might afford a shared experience in a way that a lyric that draws attention to itself by way of its own *difference* would not. This being said, the conscious employment of a narrow band of sentimental tropes, figures and themes was not incidental on the part of the songwriters. Lyricists chose imagery and rhetorical techniques with the intention of producing specific effects, and these effects were seen to have a proven capacity to drive sales. The million-selling songwriter Harry Von Tilzer gave an insight into the intentions of the Alley songwriter, at least as he perceived it. In the introduction to a 1916 songwriting manual he wrote that:

> The sagacious and analytical song writer sees his public in a certain number of groups. Experience has taught him that one group likes sweet rustic sentiment, a second romance and humor combined, a third maudlin sentiment, a fourth philosophy, and so on. The emotion which pleases each group, he realizes, is the preferred one for the time, but he also… aims to appeal to some paramount emotion, feeling confident that what he loses in one he will find in another group… his success will depend upon his ability to put his lute in tune with some dominant emotion in mankind.[56]

Alternatively, rather than aspiring to a universal (and, thus, financial) connection with the masses through standardised song tropes, a justification of moral purpose was periodically claimed. The great populariser of 'After the Ball', the Vaudevillian J. Aldrich Libbey, defended the artlessness of the new popular song trade as offering the compensation of simple virtue. Sanjek quotes the *New York Herald* report where Libbey stated:

> 'Of course to the trained ear of a professional these songs are somewhat disappointing. But the recompense comes in the wider audience that a singer has for his simpler themes.' Though the songs he said might be 'tawdry from a classical standpoint, still [they] contain *a homely sentiment that is beneficial in its moral influence*'.[57]

The question as to whether Libbey spoke insincerely to justify his own considerable financial gain from these songs, or whether he really did believe that they promoted moral rectitude effectively, might be eschewed in favour of a recognition that the link between popular song, propriety and 'homeliness' was a matter of public interest. In summary, we might consider that the agency, 'mental space', and community-building/political potential in song reception could be profound, but in the case of early twentieth-century sentimental song, it always remained bound within certain discursive limits, consciously drawn by its producers. As Toynbee has noted, "Consistency and inertia are the truistic qualities of mainstreams".[58]

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[56] Harry Von Tilzer, introduction in *Writing the Popular Song*, ed. E.M. Wickes (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1916), xvi.
[57] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business*, 323. [My emphasis]
[58] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,' 153.

Specifically, this research is interested in how propriety, the WASPish ideal, nostalgia, longing, the idealised female, and the idealised homestead, constituted the most often reproduced thematic bounds of the early-twentieth-century American sentimental song, or are *perceived* by both producer and consumer to be representative of Alley output and public appetite. There are plenty of exceptions of course. Considering the sheer number of songs that came out of the Alley, in whichever distinct phase we might wish to consider (first generation, Golden Age, whichever), we can be sure that there is probably an example of sheet-music or a recording to satisfy an enquiry into a great variation of theme. As Goldmark comments with regard to the variation he finds in contemporary songwriting How-to guides: "The figurative Alley was far too long and wide for there to any consistent agreement on what would or would not sell."[59] However, there were themes *perceived* as dominant, typical and exemplary, as identified by many of the authors included here. Ideological prohibition and 'disciplining' might be said to reside within this *perception* of what was dominant, as much as the most oft-repeated themes themselves.

Requirement for Subject Novelty

The irony of mass-standardisation, in one sense, is that it was only sustained by way of a continuous re-glossing of subject matter. At the same time that structural, melodic and thematic elements of popular song seemed to consolidate towards greater consistency and formula, novelty in the specifics of song subject matter was always at a premium. Scheurer explains how, prior to the Great War "there seems to have been virtually no subject the songwriter did not broach from the sinking of the Titanic to Red Cross nurses".[60]

Strangely, the slavishness toward novelty in subject matter was temporarily interrupted by the imprecision of early recording, where 'newness' suddenly became a potential disadvantage in commercial terms. In early recording on cylinder, for example, the acoustic horn's lack of clarity could make the lyrics of new, unknown songs largely indecipherable, and the result was that the reproduction of "a well-known hymn, lullaby or chanson" became the saleable object.[61]

[59] Goldmark, "'Making Songs Pay",' 3, n.1.
[60] Timothy E. Scheurer, 'The Evolution and Triumph of Style in Lyric Writing,' in *American Popular Music: Readings from the Popular Press, Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century and Tin Pan Alley* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 107.
[61] Nyre, *Sound Media*, 186.

The precision of electrical equipment from the twenties onward re-conferred the ability of a musician and songwriter to audition new material, which they had always enjoyed in live situations, and which had always been a key element of the production cycle of sheet music. The clarity of electrical recording equipment would mean that subject matter could again contain new specifics, to be discerned by the listener. New subject matter could be experimented with at least in so far as the unfamiliar theme or subject was now audible. Electrical recording allowed the economy of novelty, that is the premium quality of *newness* in popular song (whether topicality, novelty as song category, or something else), to be exploited in the production and sale of recorded music. But aside from that particular episode in early recording where technical limitations encouraged a 'revivalist' market of already known songs, we should generally consider the business of producing and consuming popular song in our period as being propelled and sustained by the quest for newness and novelty, and this certainly continued in the sheet music market.

Popular Song as News

This research is especially concerned with those songwriters and publishers engaged in the composition of new, original material, and whose modus operandi was therefore to pursue the modish and the faddish. Every new technological advance, consumer gadget, triviality, fashion or news story could have a popular song built around it. A Witmark song such as 'In My Merry Oldsmobile' could build a romance around the new glamour and exclusivity of the motorcar with its chorus:

> Come away with me, Lucille
> In my merry Oldsmobile
> Down the road of life we'll fly
> Automobubbling, you and I.[62]

Famously, Howard and Emerson's 'Hello Ma Baby!' told the story of a telephone romance at a time when the invention was still relatively new, and it linked the new invention to the novelty of ragtime. It began:

> I've got a little baby, but she's out of sight,
> I talk to her across the telephone.
> I've never seen my honey but she's mine all right,
> So take my tip and leave this gal alone.
> Every single morning you will hear me yell,
> Hey Central! Fix me up along the line.
> He connects me with ma honey, then I rings the bell

[62] Vincent Bryan and Gus Edwards, 'In My Merry Oldsmobile', (M. Witmark and Sons, 1905).

> And this is what I say to baby mine,
>
> Hello, ma baby, Hello ma honey. Hello ma rag-time gal. [63]

An example of a song based on contemporaneous journalism would be 'The Tramp that Slept in Astor's Bed', based on the imagined testimony of John Garvey, a vagrant who became a tabloid sensation when he was arrested for sleeping in John Jacob Astor's bed. At the time Astor was thought to be one of the richest men in the world and Garvey's anti-hero status was boosted by the song, in which 'he' sang,

> I am the tramp that slept in Astor's bed you see
> All of his servants were polite to me
> But when they heard me snore,
> A cop broke down the door,
> And yank'd me from the lap of luxury.[64]

Such examples are indicative of the fact that there *was* an enormous variety in Tin Pan Alley at the level of ostensible, immediate subject matter. As Goldberg noted at the time:

> Tin Pan Alley deals in musical journalism—in emotional tabloids of the passing phase. It is preéminently [*sic*] opportunistic. For this reason its history is one of the true indices of the changes that have come over popular taste.[65]

What Goldberg refers to in metaphorical terms—musical journalism and emotional tabloids—was in actuality a centuries-old function of 'popular' song, hailing from the time of broadside ballads, which performed the function, literally, of newspapers (and, of course, bequeath us the term 'broadsheet'). Such a relation between popular song and the news had also continued through the embourgeoisment and domestication of sheet music for the parlour. Long before Tin Pan Alley teams were scouring newspapers for topicality, there had been similar practices equally centred on taking as their subject matter the current events of the day. Scott reminds us that in nineteenth-century parlour song it was "…accepted practice to reconstitute gory events into merchandise for the drawing room pianist".[66]

One of the tendencies of the new 'popular song only' Tin Pan Alley publishers was that the more gothic edges of this practice should be rounded off. Tragedy was best when it was

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[63] Joseph E. Howard and Ida Emerson, 'Hello Ma Baby!', (T.B. Harms & Co., 1899).
[64] Charles B. Lawlor and James W. Blake, 'The Tramp That Slept in Astor's Bed', (Howley, Haviland & Co., 1894).
[65] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 99.
[66] Derek B. Scott, 'Introduction: Changes in Perspective,' in *Music, Culture and Society – A Reader*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 2.

sentimental and picturesque rather than violent, and by 1919 this was codifiable, accepted wisdom, as when Jack Gordon advised budding songwriters that "morbid subjects, such as murders, suicides and such things, should never be used for song titles".[67] E.M. Wickes concurred: "[t]hemes dealing with physical deformities, morbidness, or slum life should also be shunned."[68] Such a shift was a reflection of public appetite, insofar as this directly translated into sales figures. The 'public mood' itself—most conspicuously that translated through the press—was the target in the new popular music publishers of the Alley. This is notable when we realise that it was frequently accepted practice for the publisher himself to dictate the title of the song from his reading of the press.[69] And yet the publishers and songwriters were themselves mediating and editing the process: by no means simply regurgitating news reports but rather understanding that only certain themes and subjects would be fitting in song, and shaping these accordingly.

Such novelty was also performative. As well as a song that embedded itself with the listener by way of 'soundtracking' their interest in gossip or a new gadget, it was the perception of 'newness' itself that could be the principal attraction. As Adorno noted: "[a] pop song must meet minimum requirements. It probably must show some characteristics of arising from 'an idea'."[70] Likewise, in an age when the circulation of information was not yet fully, electrically driven at speed, and radio was only on the cusp of emergence, the promise of what was 'current' could be enough in itself. Edward B. Marks recalls Tony Pastor's boasts that, central to his theatre's offering was that it would always be "[f]ully up to current times and topics."[71] The spectacle of a new idea has always, for a consumer economy, been a currency in itself (it is a commonplace to restate here that the pursuit of 'the new idea' is at the core of speculative investment capitalism at a macro-economic level). And yet in the instance of the popular song, where identity, belonging, and consolidation are affirmed at the same instant as glamour, excitement and possibility are being purchased, there is a fundamental paradox at play. The 'newness' in the popular song commodity of the early twentieth-century is never destabilising or, indeed, revolutionary. Instead, the old steadfasts of propriety, order and the status quo must be made to *seem* new, exciting, diverting. Even Adorno, in fact, praised the particular achievement of those songwriters able to fulfil what he called

> [c]ontradictory desiderata. On the one hand it must catch the listener's attention, must

[67] Goldmark, "'Making Songs Pay",' 11.
[68] Wickes, *Writing the Popular Song*, 53.
[69] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 22.
[70] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' 34.
[71] Marks, *They All Sang*, 12.

> differ from other popular songs if it is to sell, to reach the listener at all. On the other it must not go beyond what audiences are used to, lest it repel them.[72]

And in fact such sentiments were echoed by songwriters, publishers and the How-to manuals themselves. The significance of the pursuit of newness at the level of subject matter is that, conversely, we see the pursuit of stability and repetition for both theme and sectional structure. Moreover, it is arguably novelty in subject that sustains the stability of theme and structure, and vice-versa.

Rise of Vernacular

However, there *were* other changes—newnesses—during the first generation of the Alley, which eventually bring us to the Golden Age. A significant one was the rise of vernacular speech in popular song generally. The songwriting orthodoxy at the turn of the century had still rested on a notion that sentimental song would be sold for performance in the parlour. Furia contends that "[t]he lyricist usually adopted an elevated 'poetic' diction" for technical reasons but, of course, the aspirational social function of mannered speech, as well as its disciplining, chastening function cannot be overlooked.[73] The residual thinking was that singing was first and foremost a family practice and therefore the requirement for propriety—especially on behalf of parents and grandparents—must be satisfied. In his 1906 guide *How to Write a Popular Song*, Charles K. Harris still felt it necessary to advise that the budding writers should: "Avoid slang and vulgarisms; they never succeed".[74] Furthermore, the influence of Operetta was still strong. As Leonard Bernstein has described, in these performances, formality had a dramatic function and as such it was:

> [o]ne of the prerequisites of operetta that it be fancy and somewhat remote from the audience's experience. The characters must be unfamiliar and sometimes improbable. The language they use is stilted and overelegant.[75]

A very important shift within the sentimental ballad and the popular song more generally was from formal diction to vernacular speech. The latter would become prized as an essential characteristic for high sales in the Golden Age (typified in many of the song lyrics of George M. Cohan and, latterly, Lorenz Hart, for example), and it is striking that such a stylistic volte-face would take place, when previously the sentimental ballad of the century's turn would be

[72] Adorno, 'Popular Music' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (1962) 31.
[73] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 23.
[74] Harris, *How to Write a Popular Song*, 59.
[75] Leonard Bernstein, *The Joy of Music* (London, Panther: 1969), 172.

defined instead by its very *lack* of "[v]ernacular ease".[76]

What we can read as the emergence and inclusion of vernacular speech in the sentimental song owes a considerable debt to ragtime and, relatedly, vestigial forms from Minstrelsy, again almost exclusively known and marketed under the racist designation 'coon song'.[77] Within the latter, what in fact constituted a perverse caricature and, indeed, downright falsification of Black-American dialect and vocabulary, especially that of the Deep South, proved, for some audiences, titillating to the extent that the spectacle of vernacular speech was made somewhat normative by way of this genre's ubiquity. Furia points to the Ragtime pianist Max Morath's proposal that, "The coon song loosened language for the songwriter generally; it licensed his use of slang and colloquialism, even bad grammar".[78] It is of course reasonable to read this linguistic trajectory as the product of casually racist expectations in itself. 'Low' speech, as opposed to the 'poetic' diction of the Victorian sentimental ballad, was more acceptable from black and blackface performers than their white counterparts within a censorious environment that sought to 'clean up' Vaudeville.

Likewise the increasing public exposure to rural blues forms, through live performance and recording, and the rural dialects therein, had a similar effect.[79] Slang and vernacular speech became more and more public, and their repetition and reproduction gave them status, via the logos and approval of mass-production. Eventually, the arch-Darwinism[80] of popular song production—steered by both enterprising and covetous artists, songwriters and publishers—would ensure that the pleasure of 'low' speech itself would be gradually introduced into the sale of balladry and the sentimental song.

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Adorno asserted that the Alley song will always follow, "[t]he basic culture industrial

[76] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 24.
[77] Ibid., 26.
[78] Max Morath, 'Introduction,' in *Favorite Songs of the Nineties: Complete Original Sheet Music for 89 Songs*, ed. Robert A. Fremont (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 1981), ix.
[79] Although it should be remembered that emergence of 'the blues' is not a separate, binaristic phenomenon from Vaudeville where the former is rural and folk-derived and the latter urban and commercially-produced. In fact to some degree many of the initial encounters that the urban public had with blues-forms would have been via professional, commercially focused networks of Minstrelsy and Variety. For example, in the case of Ma Rainey's early employment with the Rabbit-Foot Minstrels.
[80] The notion of a 'Darwinian' dynamic within popular music development is outlined in work such as Joe Bennett, 'Collaborative Songwriting - The Ontology of Negotiated Creativity in Popular Music Studio Practice,' *Journal of the Art of Record Production 2010* (Leeds: Art of Record Production, 2011).

principle: affirmation of life as it is."[81] Indeed, young people of the 1910s and 20s were often consuming the same music as their parents—the height of generational rebellion might be something as controversial as the act of sitting out a waltz.[82] On those terms it is clear that, as the Golden Age conditions emerged, popular music was not overtly interrogative or subversive in the way that, say, rock 'n' roll's generational distinction would assert youth, rhythm, the corporeal, and so on.[83] However, where the Alley *did* enact a profound stylistic break from the past was in terms of speech representation. The fact of slang and vernacular speech becoming a dominant mode of expression within popular song constituted a public mass-witnessing and affirmation of vernacular culture. To an extent this was done in the service of profit, and its realisation came by way of the culture of racist caricature and exploitation detailed above. But a consequence of this process was also, surely, a shift in the public imagination with regard to what culture was and who it was for. Such developments seem to typify the link between a culture in a state of identity-formation and how theme, trope and imagery in popular song might assuage anxieties around propriety and normativity. It is to the latter part of this nexus—the lyrical content of sentimental song in particular—that we will turn to now in some detail.

The Sentimental Ballad

At the turn of the century, the sentimental song could still be found to operate within earlier nineteenth-century thematic modes, that is, those which expressed "[i]dealised, uncarnal, blushingly Victorian emotion."[84] And the resilience of the love song was itself lamented at the time. As Alley chronicler Isaac Goldberg complained in 1930, "[b]allad never died; it lives on, the eternal Sick Man of Tin Pan Alley."[85] It is not entirely clear what Goldberg means with this metaphor, but he may be characterising the ballad as, either, perennially on the brink of flagging sales and unpopularity, or as an inferior genre – perhaps with the former a result of the latter. Either is telling of the reputation of the ballad and the love song for being sickly and dependent on formula.

However, both the 'speaking subject' and the object of sentimental popular song seemed to

[81] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' 37.
[82] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 131.
[83] Of course, there are problems with viewing rock 'n' roll as being revolutionary or as an agent of meaningful social change. Adorno, for one, would no doubt have detected the logic of consumer degradation in the post-war rock 'n' roll landscape.
[84] Edward Pessen, 'The Great Songwriters of Tin Pan Alley's Golden Age: A Social, Occupational, and Aesthetic Inquiry,' *American Music* 3/2 (Summer, 1985): 193.
[85] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 89.

mutate as the early twentieth century progressed and a sentimental song, recognisably distinct from its Victorian forebear, would be in place by the onset of the twenties and the Golden Age. First of all, in terms of the literary shape via which theme or subject would be expressed, popular song would move away from sprawling, incident-led narrative and towards the sustaining of a single image or mood into a kind of ideal tableau. Furia states that, across the work of Charles K. Harris (and not least in the lyric for his million-seller 'After the Ball') he regarded, "[t]he lyrical formula for the sentimental ballad as one of strophic *storytelling*".[86]

Such convoluted narrative structures (and narrative expectations of audiences) deriving from folk-song were vestigial and would, over time, decline in number. At the turn of the century, however, the ballad could still be recognisably a derivation of an older tradition of story-telling. An example such as 'The Fatal Wedding' by Gussie L. Davis and William H. Windom featured the following plot events: a wedding; a poor mother and baby denied entry; an accusation of bigamy; the death of the baby; the suicide of the groom and their dual burial.[87] Such plot-led compositions are typical of the turn of the century 'tearjerker'.

For such inheritors of Victorian parlour aesthetics, description of the interior feeling of *being in love* was not the goal. Rather, 'love' and 'the sweetheart' could be a stable, rather cosmetic aspect of a broader tale of intrigue and tragedy told through a narrative "As convoluted as a soap opera"[88]. However, the gradual process of a move away from incident-filled verse to the 32-bar chorus that would portray singular, romantic emotion had already begun. Hamm contends that the change had already been instigated before the Gay Nineties:

> Increasingly in the period after 1885, the drama sketched in the verses became simpler, while the chorus becomes more important and self-contained both musically and dramatically.[89]

We can discern how much the sentimental song had moved on toward stationary tableaux by the late 1920s in an example such as George Whiting's lyric for 'My Blue Heaven', a song which essentially describes a serene and static room, with "Just Molly and Me and the Baby"[90], and the *feeling* of being there. This is in quite definite contrast with the "Song-

[86] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 25. [My emphasis]
[87] Gussie L. Davis and William H. Windom, 'The Fatal Wedding', (Edward B. Marks Music Corporation, 1893).
[88] Ibid., 22.
[89] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 293.
[90] Walter Donaldson and George Whiting, *My Blue Heaven* (New York City, NY: Leo Feist Music Publishing Co., 1927).

stories"[91] of a writer such as Harris. Indeed, this was apparent to a songwriting 'How-to' author such as E.M. Wickes who, in observing the change, noted the following:

> Years ago, about the time that the modern popular song had become well-established, there was a big demand for dramatic themes—the stories evolving from the theme-idea leading up to a well-planned climax, sometimes to an unexpected finale, as one finds in a short story.[92]

He goes on to advocate the more modest "Clean-love theme" as the contemporary alternative. By way of such a rationale, complex narratives became less common for the songwriter, whilst the condensing of subject matter via symbolic and impressionistic means would become more prevalent. The previously cloying and sentimental plot-led form (where virtually *every* character-trope was a simplification) became unfashionable and eventually, the new publishers would begin to choose songs that did not contain these Victorian hallmarks. Thus, by the time of the Golden Age, the sentimental songwriter would increasingly rely on the construction of a mood or a feeling from a single, abstract image. Knapp has noted that "as this kind of fluidity became the ideal, a specific narrative *within* a song was not only mostly beside the point, but also a potential source of interference" [Author's emphasis].[93]

By the late 1920s even a million-seller such as Harris' 'After the Ball' would be seen by the journalist Goldberg as the definition of a bygone era. In comparison to what he witnessed coming from the contemporary Alley, Harris now seemed to be working within a quite distinct aesthetic that

> unfolded endless tales of woe; in triple decker centring ever about the re-current refrain… Condensed melodramas, tight stuffed with villainies—with women wronged, with children abandoned, with lovers severed, reunited, with Vice reproved and conquered, with Virtue at last restored to her glittering throne.[94]

Indeed for the sentimental ballad particularly, there was a long-term narrowing of subject matter toward romantic love. As Furia states the sentimental ballad of the 1890s "could be about virtually any subject, from 'The Pardon Came Too Late' to 'The Picture That is Turned to the Wall'" [a story of a disowned, probably fallen, daughter].[95] Although novelty and a variety of subject matter would continue to be celebrated in popular song more generally,

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[91] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 25.
[92] Wickes, *Writing the Popular Song*, 47.
[93] Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and The Formation of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 78.
[94] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 94.
[95] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 22.

sentimental song became increasingly concerned with romantic love, and the description of what it was to experience it. The implied relation of the singing subject to a broader community, via a common store of stock characters, narratives and symbols, fell away in favour of an individually-framed expression of interior feeling.

The Tragic Feminine

The progression toward the Golden Age tableaux had been gradual. For the first generation of Alley songwriters, the love song would still often use the tropes of its Victorian parlour song predecessor. In this formation, females were unobtainable but the portrayal was often tragic and even Gothic, instead of the rather more sublime fantasies that would follow in the second generation. Hamm relays opinion of the popular culture critic Gilbert Seldes who in 1924 stated that "[t]he sentimental ballads before 1920 were often about babies, separation, death".[96] The world of the nineteenth-century ballad was a harsh and unforgiving place where the purest love was that which had been cut short by illness or social prohibitions. The effect of hearing this sort of song was not ardour or romance but rather sorrow. Some of the sheet music covers of the age advertise their contents as 'A Pathetic Song', and such 'weepers', "sob-hit[s]"[97] and 'tear-jerkers' in the Victorian mode were amongst the first, huge, national hits of the Alley in the last years of the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth-century popular song had already, of course, rendered the ideal woman in explicit stereotype until it was a given that she was: "native American [*sic*],[98] who is pious, gentle, pure, sweet, and graceful. Her hair, eyes and skin are light; her figure is slender. While a girl, she is carefree and smiles easily."[99] Distilled and simplified evocations of perfect femininity were the norm and in the middle of the nineteenth century, femininity was very often tied to a notion of nature and the pastoral. Tawa describes how

> [w]hen the beloved is described, the setting is often one of cheerful sunlight, singing birds, glittering brooks, verdant meadows, and blooming flowers. The weather turns mild; the season is spring or summer. Melodious sound and gay activity prevail.[100]

[96] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 376.
[97] Marks, *They All Sang*, 18.
[98] Meaning American-born, but undoubtedly with white European heritage, rather than contemporary understanding of the term as referring to the indigenous peoples of the continent who predated European conquest and settlement.
[99] Nicholas E. Tawa, 'The Ways of Love in The Mid-Nineteenth Century American Song,' in *American Popular Music: Readings from the Popular Press, Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century and Tin Pan Alley* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 50.
[100] Ibid., 51.

However, alternatively, many portrayals utilised a different character trope, where

> regrettably, her health is often poor. She may die young, leaving a loyal lover to lament nostalgically over her passing. If she is widowed, or the man she loves dies before he marries her, or if he casts her aside for another, she is expected to either endure severe and lasting agony or lose her life.[101]

Of course the idealisation of the love-object as consumptive, frail or tragic was really a possibility for the expression of male heroism and female dependence, in order to express that neat and comprehensive patriarchal fantasy. And this particular ideal of frailty and sickliness was again a representation of femininity that remained from the age of Victorian melodrama and indeed before. The perceived link between tuberculosis, spiritual purity and a 'sensitive' nature goes back at least to the eighteenth century, when women would powder themselves pale and sickly, and when the association even transcended gender (John Keats' illness, and 'thus' his poetry, is an exemplar of this).

As the new century developed, a portrait of the enraptured male in the grip of a fantasy of feminine beauty, almost cinematic in character, would become more prevalent than the lament over her tragic life or weakness. Indeed, as the century progressed, the gravity of portrayals of idealised love and idealised femininity in song developed into what Richard Rodgers himself would later refer to as "A vital avocation—romance".[102] However, though she was no longer sickly (in fact in some ways, the portrait of love interest in the early twentieth century is of a kind of feminine deity), the result may be, in fact that both the speaking subject and the object now resided in a state of total passivity. The former in a state of contemplation and devotion and the latter an inert woman—a statue that only has a physical countenance. Goldberg reinforces and basically endorses this view:

> Woman has always been the inspiration of song rather than the writer of it. By nature, by convention, even in these days of toppling social values, she is the passive, rather than the active, voice of love.[103]

Charlotte Blake, Dorothy Fields, Kay Swift, Dana Suesse, Ann Ronell and many other songwriters notwithstanding.

Of course the Marxian would have it that the move towards a state of contemplation and inertia is good for consumption: "Reality considered partially unfolds, in its own general

[101] Ibid., 50-1.
[102] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 377.
[103] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 98.

unity, as a pseudo-world *apart,* an object of mere contemplation."[104] At a very straightforward level, the romantic love song produced a worldview that was intended to be soothing and full of solace. However, such Adornian analyses would have it that, instead, this is a pacifying and mollifying effect. As Dave Laing wrote of the sentimental ballad in 1969:

> Magical status is conferred on the most prosaic occasion because the inexplicitness of the ballad is rooted in a human universe which, though shrivelled, is the one towards which all the institutions of our culture are intent on propelling us.[105]

The question arises as to whether a closed, goal-oriented, resolving song *structure* came to occupy the ideological territory of propriety and *inert* normativity that had previously been the preserve of lyrics and lyrical theme in such forms as the sentimental song.

Mother

The objectification of the female was not limited to romantic love. There were also plenty of instances of mothers and motherhood occupying a very similar role of idealised female. "The relative absence of the father song can hardly be an accident", wrote Goldberg.[106] Goldmark quotes W.H. Harrison's advice to the novice songwriter that, "Father is never pathetic in song",[107] with the implication that, of course, the opposite was true for Mother, and that it was the songful longing for her that was most lucrative. When songs seemed to confound this convention and would feature a father or grandfather figure, it would often be from that figure's point of view (rather than a figure described or simonised within the text itself). We see this in a lyric such as Lew Brown's for 'Sonny Boy' which, although most readily remembered as a father singing to his son, did not actually allude to gender, and so could also be recorded by female artists such as Ruth Etting (1928).[108]

In fact, the 'Mother Song' can be regarded as having further ideological significance. It is plainly a synthesis of both the idealised fantasy female and the picket-fence Home trope. The female is often portrayed through the same imagery as the sexless love object: eyes are gazed into, hands held, warm embraces felt, with the additional longing for the homestead on top of these. It is not cosmopolitan, or even urban mothers who are missed. They are rural, simple and unchanging figures who profoundly stand for Home: its innocence, its protection and its

[104] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 2010. First published 1967). Ch.1, Thesis 2.
[105] Dave Laing, *The Sound of our Time* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 60.
[106] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 101.
[107] Goldmark, "'Making Songs Pay",' 10.
[108] Lew Brown, Ray Henderson, Bud DeSylva, 'Sonny Boy' (DeSylva, Brown and Henderson Inc., 1928). Ruth Etting, 'Sonny Boy' (NY: Columbia, 1928).

warmth. As Scheurer has noted of perhaps the most acute and emblematic of separations, that visited by enlistment for conflict:

> The Earthly spirit summoned in war songs… was mother. There are hundreds of good-byes to mother in song, and, as an icon, she came to represent what one fought for: home, family, security, love, and, perhaps, tradition.[109]

The 'Mother Song' was indeed such a popular song staple that it was perceived as a fixed cultural touchstone which, to some, signified the worst of the Alley's sentimental excess. As a genre category it was both well loved by those songwriters who appreciated its sales, and disparaged, either on the grounds of taste, or from a commercial position that its cloying banality could not be sustainable. In his assessment of Alley Songwriting guides, Goldmark explains that How-to writers occupied both positions: "[o]ne states that you should write as many 'mother songs' as possible, and two more declare the mother song 'trite of late' or altogether 'obsolete'."[110] Of course, the latter position was continually shown to be premature and the endurance of the matriarch as a focus for devotional song was remarkable. Goldmark provides an example of industry resignation to this fact: Harry B. Kohler's Knickerbocker Harmony Studios' guide acknowledges that "Tin Pan Alley might be tired of mother but… the rest of the world 'will find the public always ready to sing the praises of Home and Mother'."[111] Goldberg also allied 'Mother' and 'Home' themes together as "the staples of balladry", both in Tin Pan Alley and "the world over".[112]

In order to reflect the United States' practice of enslaved, or in service, black women effectively parenting the white children they served (especially, but not exclusively, in the South) there were songs that specifically evoked the connection fostered between those children and their foster-carers. This specific idealisation, the contemporary journalist Goldberg calls "mammyhood". Indeed, the figure of Mammy, as a romanticised, quiescent, Black southern mother-figure ties together many aspects of this chapter: Racial anxieties, the idealised female, 'Mother', longing, nostalgia, Home and, as we shall see shortly, the fantasy space of Dixie.

Home

Via the idealised female—and particularly succinctly via the 'Mother' and 'Mammy' tropes—

[109] Scheurer, 'The Evolution and Triumph of Style in Lyric Writing,' 112.
[110] Goldmark, "'Making Songs Pay",' 10.
[111] Ibid., 16.
[112] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 101.

we are able to reaffirm the importance of the *domestic* sphere as the domain of the sentimental popular song. Contemporary accounts could be hyperbolic about this and, of course, the trope could be found in the broader culture, outwith popular song. A nineteenth-century 'gift-book'[113] declared:

> Home is the empire, the throne of woman. Here she reigns in the legitimate power of all her united charms. She is the luminary which enlightens, and the talisman which endears it. It is she who makes 'home, sweet home'."[114]

The evocation of 'Home Sweet Home', "the most popular song of the entire century"[115] here would not have been accidental. As with so many themes and aesthetics that become nuanced, implicit and contested within the complexities of the twentieth century, the nineteenth century often provides uncomplicated sincerity in the first instance. Sir Henry Rowley Bishop's 'Home Sweet Home' is one such example. The impact of this song in the USA can be measured in so many ways. There are famous episodes in the crucible of the Civil War attached to it. It was reportedly the only song which opposing armies would sing in concert and mutual homesickness, when they were in earshot of each other,[116] and it was said to have been banned at one point because of its power to encourage desertion.[117]

Even if these stories contained exaggerations, the frequency of their retelling still speaks to a society that absolutely agrees upon the importance of the concept – perhaps even more so than if the accounts were authentic. As Derek Scott remarks, it was

> [p]erhaps the first song that established firmly the kind of sentiment that was to be emulated by all songwriters who saw the middle-class home as their market… Even at the end of the [nineteenth] century, it was still felt to possess a remarkable moral and emotional power.[118]

We might add here that the emulation of this song in pursuit of that particular market was carried out via songs with similar or identical subject matter, i.e. the idealised, domestic space.

The domestic sphere became increasingly seen as the physical location for the popular song as product. This is despite the campfires and battlefields of the Civil War, or male-dominated

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[113] Anthologies of literature often exchanged during courtship.
[114] James D. Hart, quoting from the *Token of Friendship* (1844) in *The Popular Book*, 86.
[115] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 165.
[116] Ibid., 231.
[117] John D. Wright, *The Language of the Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 148.
[118] Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis*, 66.

work places, also enjoying 'popular song' perfectly frequently. However, the domestically-situated piano, and later gramophone, encouraged a notion of popular song as an element of the household, and by extension as a gendered phenomenon. Goldberg goes so far as to tie these elements to larger societal determinants: that conformity, the hearth, popular song and women are all of a piece. He claims that

> [o]ur popular song, in its industrial phase, begins largely under the influence of women. It is women who sing songs in the home. It is women who play them on the piano… They rocked the cradle instead of the boat, and ruled the world."[119]

As well as 'Mother', domesticity could also be firmly tied to other notions, notably romance and the idealised female as mother-to-be. As Toynbee has noted, "…if they [standard songs] offered a utopian dream of romance this was also domestic and quiescent in character."[120] Songwriters would also use the 'Old Folks at Home' trope interchangeably with 'Mother' – again usually emphasising a rural setting. Goldberg asserts that, despite the dearth of father-*only* material, dads could be represented in a family setting. He remarks that: "Ballads center about the home (mother, dad, children) cabins, shacks, cottages for two… and later more. They may be racial (especially Irish); they may be rustic."[121]

However, even a sophisticated, urban romance could be domesticated. Rodgers and Hart's 'Manhattan' (1925) begins with the assurance that the singer has

> …a cozy little flat in
> What is known as old Manhattan,
> We'll settle down
> Right here in town.[122]

In such examples, the 'homestead' as theme remained incontrovertible well into the 'Golden Age', when witty, distinctly urban sensibilities of 'High-Style' Tin Pan Alley also emerged, in celebration of detachment, independence and the glamour of globe-trotting. However, despite their considerable influence and fame, the latter as a body of work was always small in number. Pessen describes those themes which remained persistent in spite of these new developments, and continued to be recycled through a great number of 'Golden Age' releases as,

> suggesting a continuity between earlier and more recent American moods…[:] a

[119] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 95.
[120] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,' 152.
[121] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 213.
[122] Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, 'Manhattan', (Edward B. Marks Co., 1925).

> carefree optimism, a simple materialism in which attainment of a cottage seems to be the meaning of life, glorification of nature, and nostalgia for a simpler rural past.[123]

The resonances here with the Jeffersonian ideal of the yeoman farmer are clear, and it was new immigrant communities who would take up such tropes and reproduce them in the early part of the nineteenth century. As well as the standardisation of sectional structure, mass immigration also ensured that particular themes or lyrical tropes from the nineteenth century—the idealisation of the homestead, for example—would find new interpreters and new audiences. Although they had differing language and customs, what many of the immigrants had in common was their lost past or lost homeland. Indeed, one of the strangest phenomena of nineteenth-century sentimental song—the universality of the 'Irish Song'—became ever more accentuated with the huge rise in mass immigration at the turn of the century.

Nostalgic Fantasy - The Strange Cases of Ireland and Dixie

Via the popularity of songsters such as "Moore's Irish Melodies",[124] a peculiar tendency had emerged in the middle of the previous century, whereby Ireland became a generalised cipher for 'Home' amongst non-Irish immigrants *as well as* the Irish themselves. In addition to the specifically Irish "Culture of Exile"[125] predicated on Irish immigrants' lost homeland, Scheurer relays how Ireland typified, for many non-Irish, their own 'old country' and provided

> [s]omething haunting for all listeners in the images of a green land kissed by angels and filled with simple values like home, mother, and an easy pace of life. There were in the Irish tunes [up to around the 1910s] reminders for all of our immigrant heritage and a nostalgic yearning for home and roots.[126]

The potency of this portrayal saw the 'Irish Song' develop as a genre of its own, and the practice of singing such songs was used by other immigrant communities to signal longing and nostalgia. In addition to finding a listenership outside of its own community, the genre also became one which was seen as available to all songwriters, Irish or not. This gave rise to bizarre censure. Goldmark includes remarks from Butler and Cobb's Songwriting Guide in 1921, criticising Irving Berlin by stating:

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[123] Pessen, 'The Great Songwriters,' 195.
[124] Thomas Moore, *Moore's Irish Melodies* (Philadelphia, PA: M. Carey, 1815).
[125] Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles - Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), 102.
[126] Timothy E. Scheurer, The Evolution and Triumph of Style in Lyric Writing,' in *American Popular Music: Readings from the Popular Press, Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century and Tin Pan Alley* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 108.

> I am one of those who does not believe, generally speaking, that a songwriter who was born and bred on the east side of New York of Russian parents, can express the thoughts, sentiments and aspirations of the Irish Race. So-called Irish songs written under such circumstances are a drug on the market.[127]

The paradox of the Alley's quest for *both* the expression of some 'authentic' feeling as well as the repeatable schematisation of that expression is typified by such inter-ethnic exchange (as explored in more detail earlier in this chapter with regard to Ragtime). In fact, there was no shortage of further cultures and identities that were appropriated by songwriting professionals but, perhaps in part because of a degree of simplicity and a host of stock 'characters' built up from the nineteenth century, the 'Irish Song' was enormously prevalent. It may be that the portrayal and representation of exile was particularly well developed; that "the enduring motif of exile-emigration as reluctant escape from political oppression … [and therefore such] imagery had a long history in Irish culture."[128] Furthermore, it is worth remembering that Irishness in America has not historically been considered to be a minority identity but, rather, has been held to be rather central, with well-established historical connections to law enforcement and the political arena. (The minority position—culturally speaking—of Irishness in the UK, for example, can be considered in contrast). And thus, Irishness as a specific instance of American immigrant identity, and Ireland as a 'lost' homeland, has always been particularly conspicuous amongst others. Indeed, the practice of singing Irish songs by other communities may well have been an assimilative gesture, in light of the Irish's ability to 'pass' in American society. It also enabled a shared gesture of nostalgia, and belonging, to be carried out in the restaurants, bars and music-halls in cities that were the sites of such multiplicitous exiles. Finally, the tradition and perceived centrality of Irish tenors to the performance landscape, from parlour song onward, meant that an Irish accent had become an affectation of 'propriety' amongst many non-Irish singers (who would roll their 'r's accordingly).[129] The mass-appropriation of the 'Irish Song' no doubt perpetuated such an affectation but, vice-versa, the notion that 'proper', formal singing benefitted from an Irish lilt sustained the orthodox position of the 'Irish Song' as genre.

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[127] Goldmark, '"Making Songs Pay",' 8, n.10.
[128] Phil Eva, 'Home Sweet Home? The 'Culture of Exile' in Mid-Victorian Popular Song,' in *Popular Music* 16/2 (May, 1997): 132.
[129] Detectable in recordings of artists such Nora Bayes, for example, despite her mid-Western roots, or Sophie Tucker.

Ireland was not unique as an appropriated homeland for a dislocated populace. It is clear that 'Dixie', and an idealised South, functioned similarly. Again an entire genre and aesthetic grammar was the result. As Scheurer has noted, there was

> no better symbol for the past, no spot that resonates more with nostalgic feelings or utopian fantasy than Dixie. Dixie songs luxuriate in evocative images of nature and home—they are, in fact, *de rigeur* for the type… Dixie songs and the nostalgic song, in general, draw on rustic imagery, memories of childhood, or young love, to paint a picture of a dream-like world in our collective past, a world which probably never really existed.[130]

The Alley was enormously prolific when it came to songs about Dixie. In his study *Reinventing Dixie: Tin Pan Alley's Songs and the Creation of the Mythic South* (2015), John Bush Jones states that between 1898 and the 1930s a steady growth of Dixie-themed songs were published, peaking in the 1910s and 1920s with upwards of twenty such compositions per year.[131] In a feedback loop of nostalgia for nostalgia, many of these compositions harked back to, and often quoted, Dan Emmett's 'I Wish I Was in Dixie's Land' (1860), a song which was often taken to be the originary rendering of Dixie in song.[132] The strangeness of that composition and what it stood for was manifold: it was written or transcribed by an Ohioan in New York City,[133] became the anthem of the Confederacy but was also Lincoln's favourite song and was played at his inauguration.[134] It is possible—though there are competing explanations—that it was the song itself (in the shape of Emmett's version) that actually attached the term 'Dixie' to the South during the Civil War.[135] It became, and still is, irrevocably associated with the South, and yet the myths around its etymology also posited that it could have originally referred to a slave plantation *on Manhattan*, one that had been run by a benevolent slave-owner named Dix or Dixy, and one that slaves of the south actually longed for.[136] This was reported as early as 1861 (and probably earlier) in the *Albany Patriot*,

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[130] Timothy E. Scheurer *'*The Evolution and Triumph of Style in Lyric Writing*'* in *American Popular Music: Readings from the Popular Press, Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century and Tin Pan Alley* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 109.

[131] John Bush Jones *Reinventing Dixie: Tin Pan Alley's Songs and the Creation of the Mythic South* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2015), 1.

[132] Daniel D. Emmett, *I Wish I Was in Dixie's Land*, (New York City, NY: Firth, Pond and Co., 1860).

[133] The song is also attributed to the Snowden Family of musicians, who are said to have taught an existing song to Emmett. See Howard L. Sacks, *Way Up North in Dixie: A Black Family's Claim to the Confederate Anthem* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003) 161.

[134] Robert B. Kane, 'Dixie,' in *American Civil War: The Definitive Encyclopedia and Document Collection*, ed. Spencer C. Tucker (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2013), 537.

[135] Christian McWhirter, *Battle Hymns: Music and the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 69.

[136] Robert Hendrickson, *The Facts on File Dictionary of American Regionalisms* (New York City, NY: Infobase Publishing, 2000), 59.

which stated—contrary to perception today—that, "the fact that it is not a Southern song cannot be rubbed out."[137] At the very least, the ambiguity of the term, and the possible link to Manhattan, could have added to the resonance of the place for those outside the South, who consumed songs about Dixie in great numbers.

Much like Ireland, Dixie had become a cipher open to all. Goldberg proposed of the Alley's fixation with the South: "[p]aradise is never where we are. The South has become our Never-never Land—the symbol of the Land where the lotus blooms and dreams come true".[138] And as with Ireland, this phenomenon seemed to be robust, whether considered in terms of audience reception, performance or composition. Jewish lyricists such as Irving Caesar ('Swanee')[139] or Jack Yelland ('Are You from Dixie? Cause I'm from Dixie Too')[140] would write comfortably of a promised land that they, along with much of their urban audience, would never likely visit. Dixie was even portrayed as a site of longing for newly-freed slaves, who apparently yearned to return to bondage, as in Charles White's 'I'se Gwine Back to Dixie' (White was particularly adept at racist absurdities which warned against free slaves' dislike of their own freedom). Dixie represented, for a hassled, increasingly atomised, urban culture, an idealised past and a mental space: "[a] region that was distinct from the rest of the country and yet distinctly American".[141]

What is particularly striking is how both of these places, Ireland and Dixie, became the site of a kind of fantastic longing for a bucolic, and now-forfeited, idyll, *and* that this idyll resonated with non-Irish, non-Deep Southerners. Indeed, the fact that this is a phenomenon that repeated itself across two actual/imagined territories grants the possibility of a larger ideological explanation that applies to both. It is my contention here that episodes as turbulent as pan-Atlantic immigration and the Civil War had subjected those involved (and their children) to experiences of such rupture and exile (both actual and psychological) that they had imprinted emptied-out fantasies of lost contentment upon the popular culture. These had formed a backbone for steadfast public and private discourses—or to reiterate Raymond

[137] 'Dixie Land,' *The Albany Patriot*, 4 July, 1861.
[138] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 46. This quotation is part of a larger, muddled statement that romanticises and exoticises Black Americans as the poetic source of the Alley's Southern fixation.
[139] Irving Caesar and George Gershwin 'Swanee' (T.B. Harms & Francis, Day & Hunter, 1919).
[140] Jack Yelland and George L. Cobb, *Are You From Dixie? Cause I'm from Dixie Too*, (New York City, NY: M. Witmark & Sons, 1915). Appropriately without a connection to Dixie, the Philadelphian born Irish-American tenor Billy Murray would record the most famous version.
[141] Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 10.

Williams' term, a 'structure of feeling'—around refuge, home, longing and belonging.

It is possible to consider the Alley's preoccupation with 'exotic' music, and its exoticisation of foreign cultures, as working along similar lines to Ireland and Dixie. For many years songs and sheet music depicted Hawaiian paradises for example, and in terms of straightforward escapism, the island could be considered a fantasy song space along the same lines as Ireland and Dixie. Its prevalence within late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century sheet music is certainly significant. However, the idea of Hawaii was not bound up in the same discursive specificities of *loss* and *nostalgia*, and thus it did not resonate as part of a particular semiotics of American *identity*. As such, it does not represent the same link between mass-immigration, discourses of exile/home, and popular song as that provided by Ireland and Dixie.

Urbane Love

So far in this chapter we have considered a propensity for the mawkish and sentimental: idealised love, Mother, representations of Ireland, Dixie and so on. Indeed, this is often the reputation of the Alley that its contemporary critics settled upon. By 1949, with a good deal of Tin Pan Alley then to survey, music publicity executive (and subsequent musicologist) Arnold Shaw could distinguish that

> [u]nlike the ballad of 1900 or the folk ballad, which were simply 'sung stories,' the popular song ballad is the 'June-moon-spoon' type of tune. Its subject-matter is romantic love. Its mood is sentimental, devotional, and/or romantic. Its tempo 'adagio' to 'funèbre', that is, it is played slow, slowly or very slow.[142]

As always with the Alley, there were also alternative currents circulating. Indeed, entire aesthetic movements confounded such conventions, especially from later 'high-style' writers of the Golden Age, when "prudishness was effectively sidestepped by the urban, urbane, worldly-wise men and women writing lyrics."[143] As the first decades of the century progressed, the potential character for love expanded in new directions: there were possibilities for love that was breezy and happy-go-lucky, and later Cole Porter and others would render a new sophisticated, urban style of courtship that was carefree to the point of being detached. The popular song, subject to the uneven and combined trajectories of its own progress, was quite capable of selling a distinctly modern and non-sentimental identity alongside devotional, romantic fantasy. Lindberg details how the eventual emergence of

[142] Arnold Shaw, 'The Vocabulary of Tin Pan Alley Explained,' *Notes*, Second Series, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Dec 1949): 39.
[143] Pessen, 'The Great Songwriters,' 193.

'high-style' Tin Pan Alley composers such as Cole Porter constituted a

> 'Cool', urban sensibility, representing a crucial reassessment of Victorian emotional style … 'unsentimental, even anti-romantic'.[144]

Furia states that 85 percent of popular songs in the 1920s and 1930s were love songs.[145] But such a figure conceivably contains this new character of love, pitched at a sophisticated, urban slant, as well as the traditional pastoral fancy. Lindberg gives an account of those later writers (probably beginning with Rodgers and Hart, and moving through to Cole Porter) who portray cooler, performative courtship:

> Wit deflects passion by transforming it into intellectual games, which favours representations of a modern, companionship (if not functionalist) type of love relationship… displaying a strong affiliation with the heroes and heroines of contemporary romantic film comedies, whose chief attraction is their way with words.[146]

Melancholy was still possible, but rather than being the result of cruel fate it was more likely the result of love unrequited, and it would tend to focus on the interior feeling of heartbreak rather than tragic events. Certainly by the 1920s onward, a new vocabulary was being fashioned for a new, increasingly individualised and introspective consumer. Pessen details how

> [t]he new love was tinctured with moods learned from Freud: suggestions of masochism, cynicism, love for sale or love on loan, addictive love ('You're Getting to Be a Habit with Me'), emotionally imperialistic love, concerned only with conquest ('You're Mine, You') and, above all, carnal love—craving body more than soul.[147]

Again, this was not the bread-and-butter Tin Pan Alley love song. These songs stood out and became famous in part because they were a departure. The sophistication of the 'high-style' songs separated them out from the mass as being part of an elite, rarefied component of the market. In a sense the enduring fame of these works is due to their enormous sales in comparison to the more regressive, unimaginative Tin Pan Alley love song – achieved via a far smaller song count. They were precious and praised because they were not perceived to be dashed off for quick profit.

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[144] Lindberg, 'Popular Modernism?', 283. [In part quoting Furia, P *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Great Lyricists* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 15-16.]
[145] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 287.
[146] Lindberg, 'Popular Modernism?', 290.
[147] Pessen, 'The Great Songwriters,' 193.

In contrast, as already stated, the conspicuous majoritarian aesthetic attributed to Tin Pan Alley was the overly-sentimental schmaltz continuing on from the first generation, and the fetishisation of female beauty, virtue and loyalty continued to be its dominant tropes. Importantly, whether or not the portrayals tended towards overly-sentimental schmaltz or pithy, jousting combatants of courtship, the new century tended to favour the middle-class as the romantic subjects in song. Courtship amidst economic destitution would have been a distinct possibility at the century's turn, but no longer. There was an idealism and aspiration at work here, certainly. Middleton describes how

> [t]he romantic-lyrical ballad style of twentieth-century Tin Pan Alley clings stubbornly to its role in the representation of gender relations within the norms set by the stereotype of the bourgeois couple, despite attempts from time to time to move it into new patterns with new meanings.[148]

It is interesting to note Pessen's inclusion of the idea of expressions of love as possessing a transactional, consumerist or acquisitional character. The democratising of consumption via mass production brought with it a new consumer subjecthood, inflected with the logic of bourgeois consumption on a mass scale. We can read, within the thematic shifts of the sentimental songs of the day, the larger social changes from an agricultural, and vulnerable, economy of subsistence to a rationalised, industrialised urban existence. Progressively, the values of loyalty, thrift and chasteness expressed previously were replaced by the notion that there was freedom to choose one's life partner on the basis of personal, individual desire. Hamm states that from the 1920s onward, "the expressive range of popular song narrowed. Texts began dealing almost exclusively with personal emotions, almost never with events outside the person."[149] Tawa, similarly states how, at the turn of the twentieth century

> [p]opular song felt the influence of the restrained materialism and preoccupation with status that increasingly affected individual Americans. This influence is detectable in the self-centred, rather than other-centred, tendencies on the song lyrics.[150]

On first glance this can be perplexing when we consider the number of devotional, sentimental love songs that seem to contradict this. Of course, the idealisation of the female as impossible fantasy *object* is in fact an entirely self-serving act of covetousness, rather than a declaration of empathy.

It is no coincidence that this change came about at the same time that a privatised,

[148] Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 10.
[149] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 376.
[150] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, 4.

individualised, listening experience became ever more widespread in the form of the cylinder and phonograph record. It was then accelerated greatly by the advent of electrical recording and its hitherto unknown fidelity and intimacy with the singer. The link between the phonograph record and an increasingly urbanised, privatised subjectivity, which could dispense with (and/or could not avail itself of) older forms of community, is also relevant here. The 'fitness' of a commodity for such environments, one that could mass-produce and mass-circulate intimate human expression, should be plain. Moreover, we might infer that the fitness of the phonograph voice for this function had already been prefigured and foreshadowed by a change in arrangement practice, even prior to the age of recording. Already, the beginnings of the individual, privatised relation with the singer (who would become the Vaudeville singing 'star') can be read in the move away from the mid-nineteenth-century practice of four-voice refrains toward sheet-music that prescribed this part for solo voice. Hamm recounts, by the 1890s "an important difference from songs of the previous era: the chorus is given to the solo voice, rather than to a quartet of mixed voices."[151] Increasingly, songwriters and publishers would be focused upon tailoring individual works to specific singers who they thought could 'put over' the song to the audience. In contrast to the mid-nineteenth-century, the song was increasingly a personified phenomenon. The professionals of the Alley were increasingly of the realisation that, as Banfield has described, "[a] singer's style and persona can fix or transform a song's generic identity and fulfil its quality or specific gravity."[152]

This was contemporary with the standardisations of Vaudeville where, "[b]y the 1880s and 1890s more Americans were hearing songs in Vaudeville than in any other form of live entertainment",[153] and where the star-singer was becoming increasingly central. Indeed, one of the most interesting points that Furia makes about lyrical development up to the Golden Age, and then beyond, is that a standardisation of a kind occurred with the singer's subject-position itself: a very strong 'I' emerged. Furia describes how this would eventually become fixed into the image of the "thoroughly American rainbow-chaser",[154] a living embodiment and articulation of the questing, yearning, and aspiration, of 'The American Dream' myth. Even if many other subject positions continued to thrive, it is significant that this one in particular came to be perceived as both typical of the Alley's output as well as emblematic of the Alley *itself* and its plucky, determined, idealistic songsmiths (both real and mythologised).

[151] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 292.
[152] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 312.
[153] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 287.
[154] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 44.

Love Instead

By the 1930s the popular song was resolutely *not* the arena for political—or critical—discourse. Hamm states that by this point,

> [p]opular music had become concerned mostly with personal, private matters. Love – romantic, idealised, sentimental, sincere love… such events as the Great Depression, the takeover of much of Europe by totalitarian governments, the Second World War, the infringements on basic human rights in so many countries after this war, passed by almost completely unnoticed by the men who furnished lyrics for popular music.[155]

This tendency had been in process for several decades and, in many ways can be seen as concomitant with the rise of the Alley and it's refining of 'the hit', through the new publishers' attention to sales figures, and their observation of audience response. Sixty years prior, the Hutchinson Family's songs of political protest were a definitive part of the American cultural landscape. An overt political position would by no means be disqualified from the compositional process. By 1916, E.M. Wickes would advise in his guide to songwriting:

> Topics that hold the interest of intelligent minds, such as Eugenics, or votes for women, do not appear to have any serious place in popular songs… The masses have a general idea of these national issues, but forget all about them once the hours for pleasure and amusement arrive… the girl in the adolescent period [i.e. the perceived target audience] seldom bothers with eugenics or other problems, and if she does, she is not likely to be of the kind that revels in popular songs and ragtime.[156]

In order to throw this into relief, we might compare it to that which came later on in the century, when crudeness of vernacular, impropriety of theme, hedonistic dancing and rhythmic 'primitiveness' looked—to a shocked establishment—like a fully-blown social revolution. The difference in popular music, as a perceived totality, post-1955 would be one where

> [t]he cynicism toward the institutions and values of Middle America… a much wider range of subject matter, including commentary on the injustices perpetrated on the poor, the weak, the outsider, the black, the uneducated, was part of this new music… some songs still dealt with romantic love. But many of them dealt with sex, loneliness, poverty, religion, prison, old age, drugs, suicide, man's destruction of his environment, and other topics never mentioned in the songs of Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, and never sung about by Kate Smith, Rudy Vallee, Bing Crosby, and Doris Day.[157]

[155] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles, 127.
[156] Wickes, *Writing the Popular Song*, 52.
[157] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 149.

By contrast, the outsider figure in early-twentieth-century popular song would more often than not appear as a lovable vagabond, happy with their lot and aware that most of life's ills were surmountable by way of whistling a happy tune. Many of the most popular singers committed to cylinder or gramophone record in the early twentieth century fit Hamm's description of "the voice speaking for the status quo, the voice directing attention away from social and political problems in America".[158]

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Legacy

The creation of BMI in 1939 set in motion legal and institutional reform and a new commercial landscape. Non-ASCAP genres such as rhythm 'n' blues and country received national exposure, which would eventually coalesce in the mid-fifties into rock 'n' roll. This episode is generally taken to be the undoing of the Alley's dominance. However, the legacy of the simple, sentimental popular song, for which the Alley had become so well-known, would actually (in some form or another) weather these and other musical developments up to and including the present day.

Initially, the 1950s, for example, were dominated by wholesome songs for the whole family – the nuclear family and white picket-fence homestead continued to feature in the music of artists such as Patti Page and Eddie Fisher, in order that they would be suitable for children, parents and grandparents (Johnny Ray, by contrast, was something of a departure). Twenties years later, this product would still be derided as "watered-down, easy-listening", a criticism that would have not been out of place at the turn-of-the-century.[159] Indeed, a certain strain of sentimental and closed song-form musical products continue to this day through a lineage of Doris Day-types in the 1960s, artists like Barry Manilow and Daniel O'Donnell, to a variety of 1990s boy-bands, and countless others, who employ the techniques and lyrical steadfasts which, in their own way, constitute a further legacy of Tin Pan Alley.

In the legacies of the Tin Pan Alley sentimental song, a dominant, normative culture is still

[158] Ibid., 145.

[159] George H. Lewis, 'Taste Cultures and Culture Classes in Mass Society: Shifting Patterns in American Popular Music,' *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8, No. 1 (1977): 42-43.

‘imaged’. The domain of Anglophone popular music is enormously variable and at times, indeed, proceeds via a market logic of opposition and ‘reinvention’, to the extent that the commercial, conservative, sentimental love song cannot lay claim to occupying the territory of the *conspicuous majoritarian* by itself. However, it does remain a central point in the constellation and, perhaps as importantly, a central reference with which the market and the consumer still orientates itself.

Chapter 3. Structuring the Return Home: Why AABA?

By the 1920s, certain structural and teleological conventions in popular song production, specifically the 32-bar form of AABA, solidified into a dominant 'default' for those publishing houses and songwriters solely focused upon commercial success and high product turnover. It may be that the pragmatic and material affordances of 32-bar AABA happened to coincide with the pleasure of satisfying broader social and ideological demands and therefore it was this structure that became favoured. This chapter will consider both pragmatic and theoretical determinants for the default, but proceeds with the acceptance that these cannot necessarily be resolved into a single theory.

Overview

Despite the fact that its use became pan-national and indeed international, AABA was perceived as a product of Tin Pan Alley,[1] and indeed it came to be emblematic of Tin Pan Alley song itself—with connotations of standardisation, disposability and sentimentality. As previously stated, it should be noted that AABA, though inextricably attached to Tin Pan Alley in folklore, was not, in fact, the default song structure when New York music publishing was primarily located at 'Tin Pan Alley' proper i.e. West 28th Street.[2] Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild identify ABAC as the most common pre world-war I song structure.[3]

As proposed previously, the combined social importance of AABA and ABAC taken in tandem is that they are *closed* song structures that resolve. However, 32-bar AABA, specifically, became emblematic with both professionals and the public. Adorno's well-known critique is to a certain extent a product of that reputation. Put plainly, 32-bar AABA sounded 'correct' to its producers and consumers. There was, very much, a shared expectation as to 'how popular songs go' and 32-bar AABA was the principal architecture for that. Sometimes, in both contemporaneous and subsequent accounts, the structure is given to be a kind of *sui generis* phenomenon. Certainly its prevalence is often cited in the literature without cause for speculation as to its providence. 32-bar AABA, in the Adornian analysis, is taken to be symptom of the larger determinant force: the commercial imperative for simplicity

[1] Or, at least, 'Tin Pan Alley' as a term that stood for a far smaller geographic area than popular song production in New York and the USA actually inhabited by this point. AABA was perceived as a product of 'an idea of' Tin Pan Alley, one that stood as a kind of synecdoche for all locations of popular song production.

[2] Rather, AABA is the eventual 'master' standardisation that emerges after others. Its dominance thereafter, and its defining role for 'Golden Age' Tin Pan Alley assures its importance.

[3] Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild, 'AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus,' 7.

and repetition. The implication is that it is the source of a symbolic, ideological or affective capacity via this simplicity, repetition and standardisation.

We can note what is perhaps the most striking contrast: that after 1955 (with exceptions and augmentations of course) we see dominant structures in American popular song differ in rock 'n' roll by way of 'Simple verse-chorus form', and subsequently the 'Contrasting verse-chorus' form. Variations and reiterations of these song structures, along with a resurgence of AABA in the 1960s,[4] were the dominant practice of the American popular songwriter across the century—whether produced by the publishing house's professional or, later, the self-composing performing artist. Infrequent but periodic wholesale digressions from this dynamic in, for example, through-composed song,[5] were conscious departures from these normative, dominant forms. So at different times, particular song structures have held sway as the conspicuous majoritarian option. What happens in the second half of the twentieth century makes the prior emergence of 32-bar AABA during the Golden Age default all the more striking. And yet, the literature has often neglected to consider whether these structural distinctions have social or ideological meanings for the generation which favoured one or the other.

Song Structure as Object of Study

As described in the introduction to this work, studying popular song as if it were a coherent, consistent phenomenon would demand that an author forgo and dismiss all sorts of difference and variation.[6] However, even moving beyond the question of the scope and variety of the phenomena, when the *sectional structure* of popular song is specifically focused upon, we do not even enjoy the clarity of shared terminology. As Appen and Frei-Hauenschild contend,

> Common terms like 'chorus', 'verse' or 'bridge' are subject to historical transformations. Accordingly they are often assigned contradictory definitions in the literature. Due to the organic evolution of these terms, it is not possible to assign authoritative definitions to them…[7]

Similarly, what is referred to in this thesis as 32-Bar AABA, is sometimes referred to as

[4] Typified by much of the output of the Brill Building and individuals such as Carole King and Phil Spector.
[5] Certainly epitomised in the structural explorations and extensions of Prog and much of the 1970s rock 'project'.
[6] Again, consideration of 'conspicuous majoritarian' aspects of popular song at a given time, and the acceptance of a *perceived* commercial mainstream that presents dominant forms and aesthetics (and so defines what is on the periphery), are very much worthy of study.
[7] Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild, 'AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus,' 4.

quaternary form, or "'Standard Tin Pan Alley' form"[8] or simply '32 Bar form'.[9] Even the use of the term 'sectional structure' presents a possibility for lexicographical confusion, since some authors choose the term 'form' instead. 'Sectional Structure' is preferable in this work not least because the term itself implies delimited, movable parts—sections—and so connotes the 'A, B, C…' codification that best describes the standardisation present within the thirty-two bar model.[10] Hence, I will continue to utilize the term '32-bar AABA' where appropriate, or 'AABA' if the emphasis is on the contrast with another 32-bar structure, ABAC for example. Furthermore, 'chorus' is generally used within the term 'chorus-form' but when used to refer to the larger unit category for 32-bar AABA or ABAC, this will be referred to as a '32-bar Chorus'.

The Politics of Popular Song Structure Overlooked

Via a variety of registers and methodologies, and with varying success, popular music studies has addressed and investigated an enormous range of phenomena which make up constituent parts of the domain of popular music. Musicological enquiry has engaged with lyrical content, thematic tendencies, fan communities, 'star' systems and many other phenomena. Sometimes in tandem with sociologically-informed inquiries, but often quite distinctly, the discipline known as Popular Music Analysis, has conducted harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, timbral and other assessments of components considered immanent to the 'work' (with semiotic import or otherwise)— most often concentrating on either notated or recorded phenomena.

In terms of sociological and philosophical approaches, musicology (and indeed popular music journalism) has tended to identify elements other than sectional structure as those in which the political and social relations between human beings can be discerned. Although consistently useful and instructive, much of this literature is testament to a broader omission, in accounts of popular music, of the possible links between the social world, its explicit and implicit 'ideologies', and how popular song *structure* could potentially provide an analogue and an exemplar of these. Rather the periodisation of the sectional structure of song is often

[8] Middleton, entry for 'Song Form' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World,* 515.

[9] Either of these can be confusing if unqualified, as they are sometimes used to denote several similar structures which contain thirty-two measures (AABA, ABAC, ABAB and so on), and are sometimes used as a shorthand for AABA, as the most famous iteration of these.

[10] By contrast, 'Form' seems to allow for far wider possibilities, including musical expressions that could have what amount to relatively 'unstructured' qualities – for example, improvisatory or aleatory material. 'Sectional structure' then is really a subset of 'form', and yet many authors address popular song 'form' when discussing AABA, ABA etc.…

presented as a matter of fact, without cause to further investigation. In their recent survey of twentieth-century sectional structure, von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild state:

> We are not aware of studies that examine the historical development and dissemination of various song forms in greater depth, which gives the impression that popular music is limited to a few conventional standard forms.[11]

In fact there *are* examples of work where the political and ideological import of sectional song structure is certainly approached or at least features—we might not make so strong a claim as to imply that there are *no* such studies – Toynbee's 'Mainstreaming…'[12] for example is an instance where this kind of question has been asked with productive outcomes. It is preferable, rather—as ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel wrote of academic popular music studies in 1985—to note a tendency that is conspicuous:

> Scholarly attempts to relate music to broader socio-economic phenomena have tended to concentrate on such relatively tangible musical parameters as text, style, or performance context rather than formal structure, which, being an inherently more abstract concept, has been regarded as having less ideological content. A few writers, however (especially Maróthy 1974), have argued that formal structure in music reflects, expresses, and is in many instances strongly influenced by social economy, and, on a more specific level, that sectionally structured, closed, goal-oriented song forms are archetypically characteristic of capitalistic societies (as opposed, for example, to feudal societies).[13]

So stopping short of claiming complete omission in the literature, it is reasonable to assert that a tendency in much popular musicology (especially before Manuel was writing) was that *sectional* structure in pop was not thought, necessarily, to have much to do with either the agendas of certain meta-determinants (gender, capital, colonial power etc.) or indeed any other theories of how ideology may structure desire and thus inflect our experiences of musical phenomena. As Richard Middleton concurred in an essay the year after Manuel's:

> What is largely lacking so far is any sustained examination of the pleasures produced by musical syntaxes themselves.[14]

Manuel's claim of a tendency toward *omission* of such sectional structure-ideology analyses, is certainly too broad to be applied to music writing as a whole and is not necessarily the case outside of popular music studies. It is not the case with regard to writing on certain other historical periods, or geographical territories, or taste-cultures and their musical outputs. Two

[11] Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild, 'AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus,' 1.
[12] Which will be discussed shortly. Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming', 149-163.
[13] Peter Manuel, 'Formal Structure in Popular Music as a Reflection of Socio-Economic Change' *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 16/2 (Dec, 1985): 163.
[14] Middleton, 'In the Groove', 159.

distinct such examples would be either Charles Rosen's or Susan McClary's discussions on determinants of the sonata form in *Sonata Forms* and *Feminine Endings* respectively, and in fact, it may be that the passing of time allows critics to discern the social, symbolic and ideological import of musical structure only when it has tended to pass from common use.[15] The spirit of Manuel's criticism seems to apply to a lot of popular musicology, where 'mechanical' musical analysis is often principally concerned with the closed systems of its own discipline, whilst, somewhat separately, cultural studies style musicology considers the meanings of social contexts—and the *social* relations that musical practices inform—at the expense of engagement with the immanent codes and patterns of harmony, melody and so on. It is often interesting when these two modes of analysis attempt to converge.

Similarly in popular music journalism—for example in workaday BBC histories of post-Bill Haley youth cultures—ideology and desire are present but are generally presented as being elsewhere than the sectional structure of the songs.[16] The societal adoption and repetition of popular music themes, aesthetics and modes of representation is considered entirely relevant to understanding what a particular culture felt like, and what it's popular culture 'stood' for. Lost within the popular narrative of teenage cultural rebellion is an acknowledgement that the dominant (or 'go-to' or most oft-used) popular song structure also shifted alongside more visible social changes. From accounts of Elvis onward, structural song analysis —in popular histories—tends to give way to discussion of style, sound and star-persona. Of course, what rock 'n' roll also heralded was the re-emergence of the dominance of the 'Verse-Chorus' structure, initially 'Simple', and later 'Contrasting'.[17] The importance of Elvis and his peers, tends to be expressed in descriptions of music as a youth/social movement at the expense of investigating the continuities and departures of rock n' roll in post-war song structure. Discussion of *popular song* is subsumed into a discussion of *popular music* which is in turn becomes a euphemism for a cultural product that includes all the extra-textual elements of the *pop star*.

This tendency is not limited to distinctions between late-Tin Pan Alley and the Sun Records

[15] Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980). Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[16] There are seemingly endless occurrences of this particular BBC and wider journalistic blindspot, where the advent of rock 'n' roll is taken to be the advent of popular music itself. For a typical example of this 1955 fixation, see *'1955-65 - The Birth of the Fan': The People's History of Pop,* Episode 1. Directed and produced by James Giles. 2016, 59 min. (BBC Four, Last Broadcast, 15th April 2016, UK).

[17] See John Covach, 'Form in Rock Music: A Primer' in *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis* ed. D. Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

'moment'. In contemporary accounts, it is expected that, say, Bowie's costume, cover-art, lyrics or performance gesture—and their effects—would be situated in their social and historical context. Moreover, how these elements enjoy influence both within and beyond the world of musical production and performance, may well also be analysed. And yet, analysis of the song structure he employed is less likely to be shown to contribute to these larger, social domains. There are of course exceptions to this. The *brevity* of both 1950-60s 'bubble-gum pop' and late '70s Punk songs are both held up as being indicative of the extra-musical, ideological concerns of the communities that engaged with them. Similarly, the contrast between the brevity of Punk singles, and the 'endless guitar solos' of late 1970s rock groups (and the supposed political/ideological meanings within both), is a structural distinction that is repeated in much commercial music journalism.

And there are of course excellent reasons to consider elements other than sectional structure. Music-making and reception is such a manifold process that any number of elements *could* be assessed for how they intersect with extra-musical, social, political or ideological currents. The political or nationalistic resonances of a given instrument for example; the literal and figurative resonances between early hip-hop and concrete urban environments in the 1980s and so on. The extra-musical is always conspicuous and discernible in the materialities of music-making. It is also often easily detected in certain discrete parts of musical works—a musical scale, or chord or melody that signals an 'exotic' influence and so invokes a cultural othering and/or the cultural capital attached; or the BPM imperative that comes from a musical economy which sells 'dancing', are just two examples. Timbre selection—by a composer, producer, engineer or musician—will always trouble a mind-body dualism by virtue of being at once a materiality that acts upon our anatomy and also a repository of cultural *connotation* (especially as we become increasingly subject to a putatively ahistorical, post-identity-politics, web-enabled archive of endless sampling and quotation). Indeed, there was an explicit system of timbral codification in the early twentieth century similarly employed for its semiotic import – to produce connotations and associations. As Pearsall notes of live cinema accompaniment at the time:

> The orchestra worked out formulas—a violin meant interior love, a muted trumpet meant exterior love, study was denoted by the use of French horn, and the idiot was represented by the bassoon.[18]

Richard Hoggart, in his classic 1957 survey of British mass-culture, including the local

[18] Ronald Pearsall *Popular Music of the Twenties* (Vancouver: David Charles, 1976), 14.

performance of American pop songs, similarly noted a propensity for dramatic signalling. He describes how

> [i]mportant are the clichés in melodic movements, such as those that announce that we are approaching the intensely sad part in a song of lost love; or the half-dozen notes played in a certain way… which indicate at once… that this is a song about childhood.[19]

These sorts of semiotic expressions are important to discern and assess. And so a still richer study should consider effects such as these, in conjunction with the nature of the sectional structure in which they are positioned. Considering how the 'parts' of a song structure are ordered and how they interact with each other is as significant as what harmonic, melodic, motific or timbral material is used to populate them. So it is notable that sectional song structure, a prevalent organising principle within musical form, is not necessarily always credited as being part of a pattern of the wider social world in which it manifests. As Raymond Williams stated with regard to the then nascent discipline of cultural studies: "a key-word, in such analysis, is pattern: it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins."[20]

Perhaps it is the ubiquity and repetition of a given song-structure at any one time that can make it seem normative, and so unremarkable. Perhaps a tendency towards the oversight of structure in the literature has come about because of the difficulty of reading the semantic or symbolic import of the patterning (i.e. the sectional structure) of song form by way of sections which change, undulate, repeat and so on. Patricia Tunstall's assertion, much neglected, is that

> [m]usic's value for structuralism may lie precisely in the fact that it is not semantic… its elements are not signs, but the relations between them are coherent and meaningful. It is these relations, the formal operations performed upon sonorous elements, that are the essence of musical structure. Perhaps, then, that structure is a uniquely lucid and unmediated reflection of the formal operations of cognition.[21]

The notion that the pleasure of musical structure might be its relation to the 'formal operations of cognition' is one that we will return to at the end of this chapter.

In fact such structural changes and developments do not necessarily in the first instance hold

[19] Richard Hoggart *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Penguin, 1992. First Published 1957), 161.
[20] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 47.
[21] Patricia Tunstall, 'Structuralism and Musicology,' *Current Musicology* Vol 27, (1979) 51-64.

meaning as if they were signifiers, or punctuation, in a spoken sentence. Rather, they create effects which enact or convey meaning—very often physical and non-semantic, and felt instead. And not only are these effects potentially difficult to discern at all, they will also inevitably be subjective and contested. And yet, that does not mean they can be ignored. In an excellent and purposive statement of intent, von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild summarise some of the affective capacities of sectional structure when they propose that

> …anyone involved in the enterprise of interpreting songs should be aware that expressive content such as tension and boredom, calm and impatience, departure and homecoming, order and impudence, chaos, change, surprise, satisfaction, or unease can be both reinforced and undermined by song forms.[22]

To summarise, dominant sectional structures such as the 32-bar AABA structure, or the rubric of verse - chorus - verse -chorus - bridge - reprise, adhered to as the 'go-to' song structure at a given time—have seldom been as readily attached to broader *social* meanings as much as the costume of the singer, lyrical imagery or, indeed, the implied semiotics of timbre. At times, in fact, the acknowledgment of song structure has had ideological import, though as much to enable a shorthand for the prejudices of the commentary as for the structure itself. As Middleton has recounted elsewhere:

> …the term 'song form' has also been used by some musicologists, especially in the nineteenth century, to refer specifically to *ternary* (ABA) form…and in relation to ideological critique…there is suspicion that this usage is intended to signal the relative aesthetic lightness of songs compared to the allegedly more complex structural processes (e.g., sonata form) featured in more 'serious' instrumental movements.[23]

This work attempts to add to that small body of literature that explicitly proposes popular song structure as significant carrier and generator of ideological resonances and import. Such an inference or inductive criticism with regards to extra-musical currents harks back to the tradition of the New Musicology from the 1980s onwards. As McClary wrote of that movement:

> Without some sense of shifting musical strategies and priorities, we cannot adequately address issues of power or history as they involve music: we cannot account for how musical styles, genres, conventions, artists or songs participate in social formation.[24]

As mentioned earlier, we might see the solidifying of 32-bar AABA's dominance in the 1920s as a musical analogue and expression for an ideology of propriety and a preoccupation with

[22] Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild, 'AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus,' 2.
[23] Middleton, entry for 'Song Form' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World,* 513.
[24] McClary, 'Same as it Ever Was,' 32.

'the normative'—expressed elsewhere in the themes of the sentimental ballad and the standardising business practices of Tin Pan Alley.

Cantometrics

Correlation is not causality of course. Historically, there have been attempts to figure certain song, and singing, phenomena as indicators of underlying structures in a given social group, by virtue of statistical, empirical measurement. Alan Lomax's 'Cantometrics' system, for example, attempted to discover connections between certain cultural practices (attitudes towards sex; status of women etc.) and particular vocal expressions. In the foreword to his study, Lomax writes that he could report "its principal finding - that song style symbolises and reinforces certain important aspects of social structure in all cultures."[25]

This quotation, uninterrogated, would lend some support to a study, such as the present one, that considers sectional song structure a set of phenomena produced by, and in interaction with, its social, political and ideological environment. However, Richard Middleton's criticism of 'Cantometrics' as leaning toward homological "reductionism" is relevant here also.[26] The use of the word "symbolises" by Lomax is perhaps of its time and also perhaps a reflection of the anthropological foundations of the project. The proposal of this thesis is not that 32-bar AABA maps onto a single homogenous version of 1920s New York culture or, indeed, is its cultural symptom. Instead, I suggest that in retrospect, we might identify social and material instances which *afforded* the particular emergence of a particular and extensive market-standardisation of a cultural artefact. At the same time the project is concerned with recognising that AABA is a cultural form that *afforded* the maintenance and sustaining of certain dominant notions of social organisation and identity. As Middleton continues in his critique of homological conclusions, it is prudent to retain

> the notion of homology in a qualified sense. For it seems likely that some signifying structures are more easily articulated to the interests of one group than are some others… This is because, owing to the existence of what Paul Willis calls the 'objective possibilities' (and limitations) of material and ideological structures, it is easier to find links and analogies between them in some cases than in others… it is clear that for objective structural reasons, it was, during a certain long historical period, easier for the bourgeoisie to make meaningful use of … [symmetrical solo song forms].[27]

[25] Alan Lomax, foreword to *Folk Song Style and Culture* (London: Transaction, 2000. Originally published by the American Association for Advancement of Science, Washington (No.88, 1968), vii.
[26] Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 10.
[27] Middleton is quoting Paul Willis, *Profane Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 198-201. Middleton *Studying Popular Music*, 10.

However, before discussing, further, the possibility of both pragmatic and ideological functions for 32-bar AABA structure—and how such functions may provide part of the explanation for its replacement of ABAC as the new default for the Golden Age of Tin Pan Alley—I will first attempt to explain 32-bar AABA in musical terms, and how it differs from the favoured structures of the periods which precede and follow it.

32-Bar AABA in Depth.

Hamm describes the patterning of AABA:

> With few exceptions, popular songs of this period [The Golden Age] consist of 32 bars or measures divided into four symmetrical sections. The most common pattern is AABA—an 8-measure phrase, the same phrase repeated, a somewhat different, contrasting section, perhaps with some alteration near the end.[28]

He then goes on to describe some of the occasional, minor variants of this convention, where, "Sometimes the B section is shortened, and functions as a transition or bridge back to the repeat of the main tune. Now and then a song is cast in an ABAB pattern".[29] In fact, more common than a strict ABAB form was what we might refer to as ABAB', where the second B section is similar but with some slight differences, probably at the very end. An example would be something like Klenner and Lewis' 1931 composition 'Just Friends' which has a structure as follows:

> [*A*] Just friends, lovers no more; just friends, but not like before.
>
> [*B*] To think of what we've been, and not to kiss again seems like pretending; it isn't the ending.
>
> [*A*] Two friends drifting apart; two friends but one broken heart.
>
> [*B'*] We loved, we laughed, we cried, and suddenly love died. The story ends, and we're just friends.[30]

More importantly, and as already stated earlier in this thesis, ABAC had been a favoured structure prior to the First World War. AABA, though occasionally used earlier, only rose to prominence in the mid-1920s.

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[28] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 131. For a typical example of 32-bar AABA see the section entitled '32 bar AABA – Emblem of Standardisation', Ch.1 of this thesis.
[29] Ibid., 131-2.
[30] Sam M. Lewis and John Klenner, 'Just Friends', (Robbins Music Corporation, 1931).

The ‘A,B,C…’ level, or register, of analysis does not posit that ‘A’ always refers to sections that share exact properties—they are not necessarily wholesale repetitions and a melody, for example, could replicate rhythmically whilst, say, varying intervallically in the second ‘A’ section. Rather the nomenclature simply delineates distinctiveness, change and relationality i.e. ‘B’ is not ‘A’. It enables description of difference over time. The other important aspect of AABA is that it encoded into a structural formula certain key effects relevant to us here, and in doing so became emblematic of them. That is, when we discuss AABA throughout this thesis we are, for the most part, assuming that ‘forward momentum’ and eventual ‘resolution’ are concomitant qualities with it. Charles Hamm gives a good working definition of the kind of song form we are concerned with, which he notes persists until the 1950s (and actually has remained commercially viable until the present day) but “was derived from—and was still more or less close to—a general, ‘common-practice’ style of eighteenth and nineteenth century European music.”[31]

Hamm does not mention AABA specifically here, and of course, Strophic forms, as well as simple and contrasting verse chorus Forms can also progress narratively and enact tonal and structural ‘closure’. In this sense, 32-Bar AABA is really a subset of a far larger field of popular song that Hamm describes as,

> Sectional, linear, goal oriented music. A song consists of several segments, sections or phrases, each usually corresponding to a formal division in the text. It is ‘linear’ because the music is constructed so that one section, one phrase, leads to the next. The sections or phrases have been put together in some logical order, and rearranging this order—or omitting some of the sections or phrases—would disturb the logic of the piece.[32]

Indeed, this larger over-arching tendency, which Hamm claims (in a possible overestimation) can be seen in “Most Western music in recent centuries” does not speak to the particularity of AABA, at the expense of, say ABAA or ABBA, or—as was common in many ragtime compositions before Tin Pan Alley appropriated them—a simple AB structure.[33] It is not, even, incompatible with the AAAAA… structures of an Appalachian folk tune. Similarly this goal oriented logic could have applied to structures which preceded and followed AABA.

As we shall see later in this chapter, AABA can be seen to have some social and technological affordances that suited the musical communities it served, and it may also have satisfied and

[31] Ibid.,128.
[32] Ibid.,129.
[33] Ibid.

enacted a certain ideological consonance for them. However, hindsight can strengthen apparent resonances between the character of a time and place and the structure of its popular music. It is possible to overstate, after the fact, connections which would have been difficult to verify in a meaningful way at the time, never mind a century thereafter, and there are always alternative nuances and emphases that can be drawn between a song structure and the society which favours it. In a discussion as to why this sectional structure enjoyed the longevity and re-production that it did in the Alley, it is worth considering whether it could have been one of many equally effective alternative possibilities and therefore we turn to what was favoured before and after its dominance.

Precursors / Alternatives to the Form

Prior to 32-bar AABA being produced and reproduced as the conspicuous formula of popular song, there were other conventions, and indeed similar formulas in use. After the Civil War but prior to Tin Pan Alley, parlour songs were often composed with certain structural similarities in attendance. Dale Cockrell states how, from the mid-1860s onward,

> A standard song-form was arrived at: a keyboard introduction prepared the principal melodic idea; the verse was sixteen measures long with four complementary melodic phrases; the lyrics were organised into two to four verses; the song climaxed in a four-part vocal chorus; and it was closed off with a short keyboard postlude.[34]

Hamm provides some further information as to what preceded the AABA default in the Alley and in some senses its defining features are not the sectional algebra of A sections and B sections in the chorus alone and how these were ordered, but rather the relations between verse and chorus. He states how prior to the 1920s, the "first generation" of Tin Pan Alley songwriters favoured

> [s]trophic solo songs, with two or three verses, with a chorus after each verse sung by the solo singer; verse and chorus of approximately the same length, with the chief melody in the chorus.[35]

And even when recognisably ABAC and AABA structures did emerge, to begin with, they could be half as long. As von Appen and Frau-Hauenschild state,

> Until the 1920s, when this [32 Bar] layout became the dominant template, it existed alongside various other popular chorus models, which were 16 measures in length but

[34] Dale Cockrell, 'Nineteenth Century Popular Music,' in *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 182-3.
[35] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 360.

> otherwise shared the same characteristics.[36]

So prior to their emergence as the standby sectional structures for commercial music, 32-bar structures had existed amongst several other prevailing song structures and did not enjoy pre-eminence. Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild also contend that, with regard to the first generation of Alley songwriters, ABAC was favoured, and furthermore, that AABA emerged *out of* this preceding form.[37]

Extended, Multiple Verses

Verse-Chorus form—whether simple or contrasting—is obviously not a post-World War II invention. The singing of a refrain, and the returning to it, is a musical practice that has endured across many different cultures and periods. Both simple and contrasting Verse-Chorus forms were popular in the nineteenth century providing an opportunity for communal singing, whether in a parlour, saloon, campfire or theatre setting. However, a significant development in sectional structure between the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been the move away from music that featured extensive verse sections. Sanjek explains how, as always, song structure—and its particular pleasures—interacts with extra-musical phenomena, whether it is the fervours of nationalism or the performance location. With regard to chorus form he explains how just before the American Civil War, "Popular music was beginning to spread widely and rapidly, a process that usually began out of doors…Listeners joined enthusiastically in the refrains."[38]

The Civil War itself had a particular musical culture that this outdoor choral practice fed into, namely the encamped soldiers' patriotic and sentimental songs sung acapella. However, with his always acute detection of the commercial response to such a practice,[39] Sanjek elaborates on how these environments and their relation to song structure were always scrutinised by those monetising the experience. He details how

> Publishers cherished the long verses that developed these songs, during which the crowds were usually silent, for in order to learn them and their music people had to buy the published product.[40]

We might infer from this an interesting duality between developments in sectional structure

[36] Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild, 'AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus,' 10.
[37] Ibid., 14.
[38] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 347.
[39] Honed no doubt from, not only his time in the archives, but also his own substantial career at BMI.
[40] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 347.

and developments in performance practice and technology. On a very simple level of assertion we know that there is a link between oral cultures, verse memorisation, and collective refrain singing. Anglophone folk musics and folk songs are by definition the adaptable and ever-developing products of multiple authors, often operating prior to modern conceptions of legal authorship, where the composition and insertion of new verses was common practice. It is interesting that we see a reduction in verse number, length (and eventually verse inclusion at all) as musical performance becomes professionalised and the musical experience becomes bound up with consumer purchase.

When communal recitation was the musical experience itself (whether in the war theatre, in the parlour or in the saloon) publishers might be interested in collecting and including multiple verses because the potential to take part in collective music making—which otherwise demanded extensive memorisation—could drive sales of sheet music. As musical performance became increasingly professionalised in Minstrelsy and Vaudeville, the musical experience became something that was witnessed rather than partaken in, and this meant that in addition to the purely functional aspect of sheet music as aide-memoire or script, it also became a souvenir of the glamour of performance. Rather than simply containing within it the content necessary for participating in communal music-making, sheet-music increasingly became a referent to the aura of the musical experience rather than just the guidelines for it. And so the 'value' of multiple, extensive verse inclusion for collective singing became less essential: there was a new consumer demand for the object whether the verses were present or not.

Sectional Verse and its phase out

As well as the notion of the active implementation of 32-bar AABA, we might also consider the change as simply a more passive process of progressively shortening the traditional nineteenth century ballad. The sectional verse became an eventual casualty of what Furia has termed "the integrated song" of the Golden Age, that is, songs that were largely inseparable from the narratively-coherent Broadway show for which they were written.[41] At least, there was far less requirement for the initial scene-setting of introductory verses when story, character and *mise en scène* would do the job.

[41] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 42. Of course, there have consistently been singers, up to the present day, who choose to 'revive' the original sectional verse of a standard for reasons of 'authenticity' and indeed, the effect of surprise on an audience.

Hamm defines the sectional verse as

> [a] verse of 8, 12 or 16 bars, the text of which sets the mood or situation for the song proper; such an introduction could be omitted in any given performance."[42]

It might be added that it is often sung *Rubato* and/or functions as recitative. The sectional verse was what remained by the time of Golden Age Alley (and can still be found in the performance of some jazz standards) of the strophic, multi-verse popular song of the nineteenth century. As stated above, there was a gradual decline in the number of verses in popular songs during the late nineteenth century. Hamm details how the decline can even be discerned across a few years at the century's end. By way of a sample of sixteen of the 1890s' most commercially successful songs, he reports

> [a] steady diminution in the number of verses. The oldest song [1892]… has six verses, the eight songs written between 1892 and 1899 have two or three verses and each of the seven written after 1900 has only two.[43]

One very practical reason for the phasing out of the sectional verse was the apparatus of the narrative-driven Broadway musical for which many songs were written as constituent parts. Scheurer describes how, set within the plot of a given musical, songs

> emanated from or commented upon a dramatic context … [and therefore] functioned less as stand-alone narrative pieces. The classical North American popular song then evolved from one featuring an extended verse, which told a story and carried the substance of the song's message, and a refrain with a fixed lyric, to one that de-emphasised and often shortened the verse in favour of a longer refrain, often in 32 measures and often following a thematic structure of AABA.[44]

In this sense the sectional verse functioned rather like a Shakespearean prologue, it was scene-setting at least, often in the authorial 3rd person, and at its most ambitious, it constituted a kind of 'voice of history',[45] commenting on the proceedings from a timeless, seemingly omniscient position. It has also been argued that the lyrical economy required for AABA encouraged semantic units that could only accommodate very limited imagery and information (even when elegantly woven or cascading). An example of this would be how the B section of the Gershwins' 'They Can't Take That Away From Me' is only completed by the return of the A section:

> [*B section*]
> We may never, never meet again

[42] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 132
[43] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 293.
[44] Scheurer, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World,* 298.
[45] With thanks to Matthew Ord at Newcastle University for this coinage.

On that bumpy road to love
Still I'll always,
Always keep the memory of...

[*Return to A section*]
The way you hold your knife…[46]

Furia, quoting Sheila Davis, describes AABA as constituting "such a 'seamless web' [it] made narrative, characterisation, or social commentary practically out of the question."[47]

It is worth developing this further, especially with a view to considering what *remains*, thematically, lyrically, and in terms of subject position, when the sectional verse recedes and the AABA refrain/chorus becomes the sole carrier of the song's meaning and scope. The sectional verse often performed the function of contextualisation. Location, time, mood, characters and their relevance were often communicated in the sectional verse, (Knapp refers to them as "clarifying and situating verses") sometimes from an objective, or third-person, authorial position (though this was not necessarily the case).[48] By contrast, the AABA refrain/chorus would be more likely (again not exclusively) to function as *expression*, a communication of how the singer felt about the action of the song, or the situation they were in. Critics such as Knapp have also tied this development to the time-allowance of the gramophone record in contrast to the length affordances of live performance:
"Within the time-restrictive environment of recording in the 1920s, the new Tin-Pan-Alley song, uprooted from the stage, worked best without its verses, as a fragment of expressivity whose specific context remained somewhat fluid" presenting an unspecified combination of the song's original stage setting (if it had one), the singer's personae or projected self, and some vaguely universalised feeling shared by performers and audiences alike."[49]

It is interesting to plot this development as also being generally favourable to the eventual move away from the shared social practice of parlour song, and sheet-music as the facilitator of that ritual, towards the individualised relationship between the gramophone record consumer and the recorded, spectacularised voice of the singing-star. The regression of the sectional verse, then, may be seen to be of a piece with the thematic and ideological

[46] George and Ira Gershwin, 'They Can't Take that Away From Me', (George Gershwin Music and Ira Gershwin Music, 1937).
[47] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 14 quoting from Davis, Sheila, *The Craft of Lyric Writing* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Writers Digest Books, 1985), 194.
[48] Knapp, *The American Musical and The Formation of National Identity*, 77.
[49] Ibid., 77-78.

resonances discussed elsewhere in this thesis. It was preferable for song texts that increasingly dealt with interiority, and less frequently with events external to the person, that a section of the song given over to scene setting and context be omitted.[50]

Tri-Partite Structures after AABA

Another way of viewing changes after 32-bar AABA is that tri-partite structures of Verse-Chorus-Bridge (e.g. ABABCB) would eventually become favoured, replacing AABA's alternating movement between only two sections. Post-war tendencies included an increase in compound AABA forms—where two thirty-bar formats pivot around the fulcrum of a 'C' section, which again would constitute an example where a tri-partite Verse/Chorus/Bridge dynamic was modified, elongated or augmented rather than reversed, subverted or disregarded. Even when, much later on, lyrical or sonic choices became overtly politically radical—within Punk for example—we can still divine the Verse/Chorus/Bridge's traditional structuring. Of course, these dominant tendencies by no means constitute the totality of popular music. That there are practices and products which ignore these processes—and are listened to in great numbers—is not in dispute. But there is a significant structural thread that transcends genre and sub-culture in the second half of the twentieth century—and whilst visual, lyrical and social semiotics reinvent themselves with every new generation of teenagers, dominant song structures remain surprisingly stable.

In the second half of the century, the reliance on tri-partite musical structures by these dominant institutions is pervasive, even with regard to cultural production outside their reach. When a truly alternative electronic counter-culture emerges in acid-house, for example, which radically restructures the listening experience as being a function of the *dancing* experience,[51] it is the implementation of a Verse/Chorus/Bridge dynamic which eventually makes it palatable to a broader, commercial market. The build/drop/breakdown dynamic of much electronic music is the structural analogue here. Whether independently coincidental or derived of a tri-partite sense-making faculty, the market in the second half of the twentieth century jumps on this homology, and verse/chorus/bridge song elements help to assimilate electronic music, from the last days of disco onwards, into a larger 'popular song' tradition. The sustainment of the market's refinement and repetition of a tri-partite dynamic begs analysis, but is outside the bounds of this study.

[50] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 376.

[51] See Rupa Huq, 'Raving not Drowning: Authenticity, Pleasure and Politics in the Electronic Dance Music Scene,' in *Popular Music Studies* eds. David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus (London: Arnold, 2002).

In summary then, it is important to acknowledge that ABAC and then AABA were departures from that which preceded them, in nineteenth century American popular music, as well as differing from the structural tendencies that followed, and thus 32-bar sectional structure was something of an anomaly between two long periods favouring verse-chorus forms. The distinctiveness of 32-bar AABA thus established, we can now turn our attention toward a discussion of reasons, or rather explanations, for *why* it may have been favoured for the period that it was. What follows is a discussion, and in some cases a reassertion, of certain pragmatic and ideological affordances that AABA potentially provided for its producers and its consumers.

In the first instance, a straightforward technological determinism is in play. It is no coincidence that the emergence of AABA comes about at a similar time to the commercial victory of the 78rpm gramophone record over the cylinder. Hamm describes how the AABA form, by way of certain elaborations, fitted the time capacity of the new recording medium:

> The chorus (32 bars) took about two minutes to sing. By adding an instrumental introduction, playing part of the song again at the end, or having the singer repeat the last eight bars, perhaps with some minor changes, the time of performance would become three or four minutes, the proper time for one side of a 78rpm phonograph record.[52]

The number of grooves on 10-inch phonograph 78s provides a pretty solid reason for the standardisation of popular music releases at 3 minutes and 30 secs, but it does not, by itself, explain the organisation of music into an AABA pattern within that time-limit. Both AABA and the phonograph record achieved market dominance in the same decade, but other song structures could also produce songs of similar lengths. The length of the 78 record alone is far from satisfactory, and should really be viewed as an affordance rather than a sole determinant. With this in mind, we will now consider some of the institutional benefits of AABA.

The Function of Simplicity

It is difficult, this far removed from the Alley's heyday, to reconstruct the compositional process of its songwriters. The most often repeated Alley-lore is the absolute slavishness to formula and simplicity. George M. Cohan was said to never use more than four or five notes,

[52] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 132.

or deviate from major keys.[53] Wise states that Alley songs rarely exceeded an octave.[54] It is appropriate to consider whether 32-bar AABA was a symptom of an absolute drive towards simplicity, rather than, say, resolution or forward motion etc. The simplicity of AABA certainly served a number of commercial and community functions. It enabled the participation of a large diverse immigrant community and it also benefited amateur pianists, both of which we will discuss further. Famously, and crucially, it also allowed for the transformation of the musical commodity into its own marketing tool by ensuring it was easy to remember and easy to sing. Knapp describes how

> [t]he repeated 'hook'—which was often and most usefully simply the sung title of the song—thus served both expressively and as a kind of built-in 'jingle' through which a song advertised itself.[55]

This was a key aspiration for publishers, because of the possibility of longevity and a long sales 'tail'.[56] Songwriters and publishers would be motivated by the prospect of making their works memorable—of making them 'catch' or 'stick'. To this end, simplicity, and indeed, brevity, were considered key. In a very straightforward way then, we can acknowledge that a large part of Tin Pan Alley's attraction to 32-bar form (AABA, ABAC or otherwise) and indeed the dispensing of the verse, was that the song could function as a mnemonic device for itself. Publishers were already conscious of such a possibility prior to the emergence of the AABA default. Recalling his promotion of the English music hall song 'Elsie from Chelsea' during the 1890s, Edward B. Marks would distribute only the refrain because, in his words, "The verse doesn't matter. Nobody remembered it anyway".[57] A 32-bar chorus, then, was the simple, memorable element which publishers came to believe drove sales.

Such an emphasis on simplicity, when combined with mass-repetition across theatre and vaudeville networks and/or the medium of radio, as well as huge dissemination in retail contexts (whether on manuscript, cylinder or record) would be figured by contemporary and later critics as the key component of the Tin Pan Alley popular music experience itself. Banal and endless repetition via mass-dissemination technologies was taken to be the defining aesthetic itself and the principal constituent in the experience of a popular song. This position is typified in Adorno's 'Popular Music' polemic in *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* by

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[53] Sanjek *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 331-2.
[54] Tim Wise, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley Song ' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 8, Genres: North America* (London: Continuum, 2012), 499.
[55] Knapp, *The American Musical and The Formation of National Identity*, 78.
[56] And even the occasional possibility for a song's resurgence and a second sales 'life', after its initial marketing.
[57] Marks, *They All Sang*, 8. For the song, see Harry Dacre 'Elsie from Chelsea' (Edward B. Marks Music Corporation, 1896)

his claim that

> [d]ue to the preponderance of its commodity character over any esthetic one, the mechanisms of distribution carry at least as much weight as that which they distribute. Each single song hit is its own advertisement and a boost for its title, just as in the American sheet music the phrases that repeat the title are usually set beneath the notes in capital letters.[58]

It remains remarkable that the term 'Tin Pan Alley' can still, today, be presented as either one thing or the other: either the source of throwaway, mass-produced banality or the legacy of nuanced and complex works of great American composers. In reality, it was a complex and contradictory set of institutions that produced both.

Compositional Simplicity

As a compositional process, AABA presents to the songwriter a fast and efficient way of achieving the appearance (and to all intents and purposes the listening experience) of a composition that is diverse, variable and undulating. In fact, there was a feeling, both with the public and professionals in the early twentieth century, that a novel idea - melodic or lyrical - was the compositional battle won. The fact that the novel *proposition* of a song—in this case most often the lyrics of the 'A' section—could be come by with relative ease[59] meant that a sectional structure which relied on this section as its main component could potentially flourish. And since this was the identity and veritable 'branding' of the song it was commercially expedient to have it be repeated hence 'A' followed by 'A'. Furthermore, it could potentially take the pressure off a requirement for the 'B' section to be of any great 'quality', complexity or sophistication itself. Rather, the songwriter could, if need be, consider the 'B' section to be merely place-marking - a holding section prior to, and emphasising, the return to the 'A'. Gershwin himself noted that the Alley had a reputation for favouring this specific ease (and cynicism) when relying on AABA. As he bemoaned in 1930,

> Often one hears that composing a song is an easy affair. All a number needs for success, it seems, is thirty-two bars; a good phrase of eight bars used to start the refrain is repeated twice more with a new eight-bar added which is much less important.[60]

This commercial imperative can be figured in both production and reception terms. Furia

[58] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 34.
[59] In a frenetic and constantly changing urban environment of new consumer products and social vignettes.
[60] George Gershwin, introduction to Isaac Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2010. Originally Printed New York: The John Day Company, 1930) vii.

grandly states of the final 'A' section that "all listeners, like Shakespeare's Duke Orsino, want 'that strain again'".[61]

But there was a strong production incentive also - the quantity of songs in a 32 bar AABA structure are a simple testament to this. The variety and range of subject matter that so many of these songs utilised is also testament to the structure's "relative flexibility".[62] Simplicity, then, does not necessarily constitute banality. Indeed the simplicity of AABA as a structure demanded and promoted ingenuity. Furia asserts how the structure provided,

> A pattern of musical repetition and variation inviting deft turns of emotion, from straightforward sentiment to flippant irony, from grandiosity to self-deprecation, from lamentation to insouciance.[63]

In this account, the structure was a tabula rasa that could be populated in such myriad ways that Tin Pan Alley took decades to tire of it. And yet other structures, by turns, may have allowed for similar license. And it is notable that what the 32 bar form did not tend to promote was sentiment that was open-ended, ambiguous or dissolute. We might propose the modified claim that AABA was indeed relatively flexible in allowing a massive variety of expressions to describe a limited number of rather fixed and bounded themes and subjects. As already stated, the other key production incentive that the structure afforded was speed. The ease and simplicity of generating minutes of material more quickly must not be neglected in analysis of AABA's attraction to the songwriters of the day. Via the AABA formula, the composition of an 'A' section potentially constitutes the composition of three-quarters of the song's harmony and melody. Such possibilities for quick repetition in production enabled the Alley to operate in the mode of a high-output factory as opposed to artisanal craft operation.

Once AABA was established and familiar the simplest compositional and commercial choice was to reiterate it, whether it was the absolutely 'simplest' song structure that could possibly be expressed or not.[64] Of course simplicity was a modus operandi for elements other than song structure but AABA was of a piece with such aspirations and a well-trodden explanation of AABA's popularity was that its simplicity was received as authentic and unadorned expression. In this view its virtues were a lack of pretension - insofar as *AABA was a grammar that did not announce its own distinction*.

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[61] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 14.
[62] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 339.
[63] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 43.
[64] For argument's sake, we might contend that a song-structure consisting of a single 'A' section would be deemed less complex at the 'sectional structure' level of analysis.

Relatedly, the simplicity of AABA, as a compositional convention, was also, potentially, a democratising process. The requirements of the convention—the folksy wisdom of 'how a popular song goes'—would have been intelligible enough to many musically untrained amateurs, who nonetheless had a slogan or a rhyme that could be turned into a fully-fledged song via a musical secretary. As Sanjek has detailed: "Music publishers were looking for trained people to put down on paper promising songs offered for publication by musically illiterate amateurs."[65]

AABA as industry standard would not disqualify a great source of material outside of the publishers' offices—that of the charismatic or pithy (or pushy) layperson. And in so doing an Alley mainline to the public unconscious could remain intact, resulting in many direct instances of co-option and monetisation. Indeed, in the case of Irving Berlin, his lack of training was advertised as a benefit. In one songwriting guide he is quoted saying,

> I never studied song writing. To be frank about it, the less you know about music and the less you know about verse, the better chance you have got to make a public hit.[66]

At other times the common touch (or indeed vulgarity and lack of 'sophistication') would itself be manufactured. Couched within a rare concession to the skill of the compositional teams of popular music, Adorno insults the corruption (what he terms the "bad conscience") of their abilities:

> Boneheadedness is shrewdly calculated and revved up by highly qualified musicians, and there are many more of those throughout the realm of pop music than the serious one's sense of superiority likes to admit.[67]

Compositional Complexity

As Adorno himself acknowledged elsewhere, 'simplicity' in composition itself can be decidedly difficult to achieve. Prior to the Golden Age, Harry von Tilzer complained that public perception was that,

> A song looms up as the result of momentary inspiration—finished, one might say, almost at its very inception, complete and ready for the public to sing, without any artifice necessary on the part of the author.[68]

Furthermore, the charge of simplicity when considering popular music of the era must be

[65] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 330.
[66] Goldmark, '"Making Songs Pay",' 7.
[67] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 32-33.
[68] Harry Von Tilzer, introduction in *Writing the Popular Song*, xv.

tempered by the relative (and often overt) sophistication of certain composers, especially during the Golden Age. Within the work of some of the most celebrated composers of popular song – Gershwin, Kern, Rodgers or Porter for example – we often encounter complex scansion, assonance, punning, sophisticated topicality and themes, and a reasonably prevalent use of a given triad's available tensions as well as the skilful employment of chromatic harmony.[69] Banfield rather boldly asserts that chromaticism takes "the tonal language of Tin Pan Alley roughly as far as Rachmaninov".[70] Gershwin's work, in particular, eventually transcended both songwriting and theatre to make him one of the most significant American orchestral composers of the early twentieth century.

Moreover, the constancy of AABA, as much as providing a simple, known pattern for the songwriter to follow, itself forced invention. In order to make their work distinctive (in the face of a crowded market that generally shared a default sectional structure) and perhaps in pursuit of the personal challenge to which this gave rise, many Alley songwriters pushed AABA to its limits and explored its less obvious capacities. Lindberg explains how, in order to express narrative and character in so tight and brief an allowance, lyricists would work meaning and textual richness into every measure:

> Lyricists learned how to turn these narrow confines to their advantages, perfecting colloquial diction and sound patterning as well as 'ragging' texts: 'reversing verbal accents, breaking up phrases, splitting words'.[71]

Examples are numerous. Take Rodger's and Hart's 'Thou Swell':

> Both thine eyes are cute too,
> What they do to me
> Hear me holler,
> I choose a sweet lollapaloosa in thee.[72]

The internal rhymes of "cute to / do to", "Holler / lolla" and "Choose a / paloosa" are examples of ragging still relatively early on in the Golden Age having been published in 1927. One of the most striking examples of lyrical, rhythmical complexity is Berlin's 'Puttin' on the Ritz':

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[69] E.g. "The basic three-note triad is often expanded to seventh and ninth chords by adding one or two additional thirds, and notes foreign to the triad, usually the second and/or sixth, are frequently added for additional colour". Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 131. Epitomised by, but by no means limited to, Gershwin, Porter, Kern and Rodgers.

[70] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 315.

[71] Lindberg, 'Popular Modernism?', 288. Quoting Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 28.

[72] Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, 'Thou Swell', (Harms Incorporated, 1927).

> Spangled gowns upon a bevy of high browns
> From down the levee, all misfits
> Puttin' on the Ritz.[73]

It is often notated in 4/4 but the syncopation, internal rhyming and 'early' anticipated realisations of line breaks makes it a melody that requires considerable practice for most skilled performers.

In our own age, the use of augmented and diminished passing chords has come to epitomise Tin Pan Alley harmony, not necessarily because the vast majority of Alley songs always employed it (the majority were diatonic)[74] but because the number of 'surviving' songs that *do* serve to draw a distinction between Alley-style harmony and the blues-derived compositions of post-1955 Rock 'n' Roll.[75] Indeed, one of the elements that helped the Alley to define its own distinctiveness at the time was the inclusion of such harmonic conventions which did not appear in other popular offerings very often. They helped Tin Pan Alley define itself as possessing a distinct aesthetic. As Hamm relates,

> While this music is tonal, the frequent chromaticism and the shifting to notes and chords not in the tonic scale or key make for a tonality quite different from that of a church hymn, a Sousa march, or a Verdi aria.[76]

The relative sophistication of a 'Golden age' song such as Kern's 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', (particularly the harmonic modulation and lyrical scansion of the 'B' section, but also in the precision of the titular metaphor and lyric) gives the lie to charges that the Alley only produced derivative, throwaway 'bubble-gum'.

However, even the relative sophistication of chromatic progressions in the harmony could, once learned or even chanced upon by the composer, be reused, re-purposed and become part of a 'standardising' toolkit. Apparent complexity and sophistication can, in this sense, be considered similarly to Middleton's summation of spontaneity (after Adorno) that "Even the smallest nuance (for example the choke in the voice…) can be formularised".[77]

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[73] Irving Berlin, 'Putting on the Ritz', (Irving Berlin Inc., 1925).
[74] Wise, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley Song,' 499.
[75] The strength of this distinction owes more to certain perceived exemplars of each period rather than categorical difference. Composers as varied as The Kinks, The Beatles, The Beach Boys, the 1960s Brill Building writers, Nina Simone, Joni Mitchell, Scott Walker, Stevie Wonder, Paul Simon and a host of others, made similar harmonic progressions a defining aspect of much of their work.
[76] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 131.
[77] Richard Middleton, entry for 'Form' in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Vol. 2,*

Working Conditions

The compositional ease of AABA detailed above is of course going to be welcomed when understood within the context of the rationalised, factory-inspired work rate. As Goldberg described in 1930: "[i]nspiration in Racket Row punches a time clock. Time, tide and mass production wait for no man."[78] The daily workload and targets of this incessant production operation were very often divided into partnerships of two: a musical composer and a lyricist usually, although a transcriber or arranger could also often be present. Such an emphasis on collaboration meant that the limited and rationalised physical space in which the songwriters had to work was itself significant. One can imagine that a luxuriant physical distance between contributors could have promoted a concomitant degree of mental space, and we can only speculate as to whether a more open-ended approach in compositional terms could have been the result. Instead the environment was more like the one Wilder evokes: "A small room… cigar smoke… gross faces leaning over the piano."[79]

A closed-song form would potentially be more satisfactory for a *shared* commercial imperative and the pressured environment in which they worked, at the very least because it provided a clear, measurable marker that the songwriters had delivered a finished product to the publisher. An intelligible, clearly defined resolution might gain favour in an environment of close proximity, and time-pressure, between creative partners, in light of the anxiety of expectation that each would assume of the other. Relatedly, it may be that AABA as a constant in that process, allowed for some mercurial, outlandish and striking ideas (or, indeed, creative ideas)—in terms of a single line, or briefly diverting musical figure—to be explored more safely. Even Adorno accepted that hits require,

> …the old-fashioned individualistic moment which in the production process is voluntarily or involuntarily spared [from the banality of the standardising process].

And although for him this was in order to "…hide the all-governing standardisation, the ready-made aspect of form and feeling" we might instead reflect on how the ready-made nature of AABA simply ensured that the volatility of 'transcendent' creativity was regulated, at close quarters, for pairs and teams of songwriters.[80]

Performance and Production (London: Continuum, 2003), 509.

[78] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 9.

[79] Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 394.

[80] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 31.

Printing for Amateur Pianists

Significantly, the figure of the amateur pianist may well have been a factor in the popularity of AABA. Staff arrangers were specifically employed within publishing houses to shape a commodity which would be useable for the amateur. Even if the composer had a facility and/or tendency for writing a complex song, there was often a member of staff whose job was to simplify the piano accompaniment and make it accessible.[81]

For the sight-reader AABA was a recipe that incorporated an element of elaboration (the 'B' section) and yet was easily followed. In some ways we might think of it as the simplest sectional structure after straightforward repetition (AAAAA etc...) in that there is only one harmonic departure to take account of. So it is worth remarking upon how the ability of the sight-reading pianist to keep track may have contributed to its ubiquity. Much of the research presented in this work concerns production, listenership and reception: that is, the experience of AABA for the songwriter or the consumer. Evidence is presented for what may have been probable attractions to them: that AABA was democratically simple; that it contained some diversity and structural dynamism; that the melodic, lyrical or titular 'hook' - the apex of the commodity in some ways - was in fact reaffirmed after the departing 'B' section; and so on.

Of course, in a society only on the cusp of recorded music—and certainly prior to the large-scale *public* listening of recorded music—practitioners and recitalists, via their instruments, were the delivery system for popular song. And where a composer might be described—in the spirit of Barthes' 'Death of the Author'—as the first *listener* amongst equals, we might think of the amateur and professional pianist as a kind of *first transmitter*.[82] In light of this, the physical and cognitive demands of delivering AABA—as opposed to the pleasures of receiving it—should be taken into account, and there is some fortuitousness here for the pianist. Both a rudimentarily-skilled amateur and a sight-reading professional benefit from certain characteristics of AABA: that there only two parts to accomplish and that repetition of the initial section allows the player to ready herself—or indeed look ahead—to the divergent section.[83]

Assessments of 'playability' were part of the production and development process for amateur-focused sheet-music. It was a commercial concern across a multitude of styles, from

[81] Wise, entry for 'Tin Pan Alley - The Commercial Background,' 498.
[82] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana, 1977).
[83] With thanks to Rachael Hales at Newcastle University for this notion.

Romantic Lieder to Scottish folk song to De Sousa Marches to new syncopated innovations from Southern black communities.[84] An act of translation for those outside of a given musical community or a tradition would produce a tempered and simplified version for the home. As John Shepherd has noted,

> The ragtime sold by Tin Pan Alley had to be easy enough to be played by amateur white pianists… syncopation and rhythmic conflict were in fact the last things that Tin Pan Alley wanted in its ragtime. They made the music very hard to play, and thus of little appeal to amateur white pianists.[85]

Thus, overall trends toward simplification were becoming evident to contemporary critics and journalists as they emerged. Sanjek quotes WSB Matthews in an 1891 work *A Hundred Years of Music in America* as recognising that much popular work was written in order to be

> [s]imple and easy to be executed by players of small attainment…It might be said that [such works] represent the effort of composers to adapt themselves to the newer and more democratic and untrained public.[86]

Similarly, periodic cost-cutting in Vaudeville theatres would often see pit-orchestras reduced to single pianists in both rehearsals and performance, which placed similar demands on the player which in turn could see a favouring of the specific affordances of AABA.[87]

In fact, playability itself could be the agreeable, marketable aspect of a piece of sheet music, even if the work was otherwise considered to be an instance of 'high' culture. Even the class and education-based barriers to Art Song of the period could be transcended by way of a more rudimentary piano arrangement. Indeed, as discussed previously, 'popular music' as a category was not the commonly held perception of a particular genre, with particular conventions and particular business practices. Rather, until Tin Pan Alley's linking of 'popular' with sentimental, novelty and patriotic song specifically, the phrase would only have meaning in describing that which sold well, rather than having stylistic or aesthetic connotations. It was simplicity that was the commodity, and complexity the barrier. Tawa explains how Art songs were

> usually created by highly trained composers who intended them for vocalists and accompanying pianists of some technical ability. Their expected audience was small and composed of Americans with a large degree of musical sophistication. Because a

[84] All coming under a general notion of 'popular music', prior to the Alley's distillation of a distinctly popular market offering from the very end of the nineteenth century on, as detailed in Chapter 1.
[85] Shepherd, *Tin Pan Alley*, 29-33.
[86] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II,* 348-9.
[87] Ibid., 339.

> few of these songs managed nevertheless to attract a much larger public—their melodies proving agreeable, their texts easily comprehensible, and their performance not too demanding—they deserve consideration as a special category of popular song.[88]

Thus we see that simple piano arrangements had always attracted a larger audience. It seems to be the case that when the 'popular song only' (i.e. Tin Pan Alley) publishers established themselves and their new market from 1884 onwards, the style of the material changed but the link between playability and sales was not forgotten. Eventually, 32-bar AABA would not disturb this logic and on the contrary, would be an excellent realisation of it.

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Ideology

The pragmatic affordances of 32-bar AABA described above challenge the notion that the pleasure of this sectional structure might only be for its own sake. Certainly, it was depended upon for the sake of production efficiency. It was quicker, easier and more reliable to default to a known and tested song structure—a "model of efficient repetition"—especially within Fordist, schematized, high-turnover, Alley operations.[89] But in some accounts, the pleasure of the form is characterised as being straightforwardly within the form itself. Hamm proposes that, after ASCAP is taken into consideration as the key driver of standardisation at an institutional level, the prevalence of the 32-bar standard was simply a result of the fact that, "this style was a vital, viable, successful, somewhat flexible, and relatively new one."[90]

Words like "vital" and "viable" might seem to imply that the attraction of the 32-bar standard was immanent, that its pleasures are merely the inevitable unfolding of a linear patterning; a trajectory and a *telos* that is only subject to, and only produced by, its own internal logic. As Hamm states:

> Within each 8-bar section the notes are put together so as to lead the listener through the musical phrase… the effect of a sequence is one of continuity and forward movement, of easily comprehended logic and motion.[91]

Without Hamm's further extrapolations the implication of such a statement in isolation could be that there is a 'naturalness' to this process. It implies that the exchange between music and

[88] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, x.
[89] Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 13.
[90] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, 339.
[91] Hamm, 'The Acculturation of Musical Styles,' 132.

listening is a one-way 'guiding' by the former of the latter and that this is where its pleasure lies. Furthermore it could imply that the perception of continuity, forward movement, logic and motion are intuitive, and intrinsically pleasurable, and indeed objective categories. In fact, the hegemonic 'trick' of such a structure is instead the very *appearance* of a logic and a trajectory that seems always already to be in place, one which satisfies an ideological anxiety. The listener, in fact, brings with them much of the aesthetic 'material' of the process in the form of their own anticipation. But the pleasures of 'anticipation' in music listening do not arise in a vacuum. They occur within a lifeworld where we are subject to deep ideological anticipations and desires. The demands of consumerism, or patriarchy – to become a 'happy', realised, *perfected* subject, are present within musical listening. Anticipation within music listening is always occurring within bodies and subjectivities that are ideologically shaped and curtailed. So the listener is potentially bringing with them a somatic, felt, 'lack' and dissatisfaction which acts in concert with music that itself relies upon temporal, spatial and physical tension. It is possible, therefore, that such a lack is, paradoxically, integral to the real pleasure of a music so intent on resolution. We might choose to characterise the commercial process of producing and distributing popular song as in fact a manifest expression of deep-set desires for resolution.

At the time, the conscious decision taken by songwriters and publishers to employ 32-bar AABA would often be perceived as simply the pursuit of the commercial popularity it offered—already proven by way of its sales record. For sure, the active employment of 32-bar AABA was not propagated via a conscious acceptance that it was some kind of propaganda for bourgeois normativity. Rather, its emergence as a dominant commercial choice was perceived by its' users as a more random phenomenon that, for entirely prosaic and pragmatic reasons, was merely the most reproducible sectional structure available at a time when new business practices and technologies required one. It is true that these new business practices and technologies are an important factor in the dominance of AABA, but not merely in economic and material terms. The claim of this thesis is that AABA was not simply one of many sectional structures, as equally suitable to the commercial, social and ideological demands of the time as any other. Rather, the claim is that AABA worked in correspondence with underlying assumptions, preoccupations, ideologies and affective pleasures that also drove those material developments. This chapter attempts to insert AABA into the broader context already detailed earlier: an ideology of propriety; the demand for markers of a unified American identity in the face of massive multi-cultural immigration; and the new ideological spaces produced by product standardisation and Fordist business

management strategies. The previous chapter made some attempt to illustrate, where appropriate, how these larger societal phenomena might be apparent within the thematic, dramatic and rhetorical content of Alley sentimental song lyrics. This chapter extends this analysis to integrate the sectional structure 32-bar AABA into this picture.

In addition to the relationship between sectional song structure and socio-economic forces are many aspects of musical practice that are beyond the bounds of this work: performance gesture, instrumentation and in-depth harmonic or rhythmic analysis to name a few. It may well be that within these aspects of musical performance, the traces of social change can be apprehended—or speculated upon—in a similar regard to AABA. And again, even if the view is taken that the immanent qualities of a musical expression do not have an extra-musical bearing, it may still be significant if there is a widely conspicuous or majoritarian *perception* that they do so. For example, the notion of propriety may not be inherent to the phenomenological experience of AABA[92] but if, for audiences, composers and publishers, there is a perceived connection which circulates as truism, then AABA and propriety can become for all intents and purposes bound up with each other. The effect of hearing and witnessing closure and resolution via this structure within song may produce an intuitive affective response that in some way has ideological resonances. But it may also be that this closed song structure signals, rather more symbolically, a set of shared, ideological assumptions that are reproduced and enforced by its repetition.

In other words, if AABA is perceived to be polite and proper, then it can become imbued with these qualities as components of its aesthetic power, whether or not these qualities are in any sense immanent to the structure. No doubt this may also be true for other musical elements that can be made subject to analysis. Propriety, or the perception thereof, may also have become associated with certain performance gestures, instrumentation, harmonic conventions and so on, during this period. The following example constitutes just one example of such associations. Isodore Witmark wrote of the period circa 1893-98: "the taste of the nation swung… away from the servitude to three-quarters time and the *polite, moral,* four-four of the sentimental ballad."[93]

There is arguably nothing more polite or moral about 4/4 as opposed to 3/4 in terms of those time signatures' immanent qualities—unless one wishes to make the case for the relative

[92] And this kind of connection is not something for which empirical evidence can be easily sought.
[93] Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business - Volume II*, 403. [My emphasis]

lasciviousness of the waltz as a dance. However, that a publisher as notable as Witmark would use these terms is significant, and is instructive to us in relation to how musical conventions, social ideologies and commercial decisions interact with each other. Aesthetic forms can reproduce (or indeed undermine) hegemonic relations, and this is by definition intensified when mass-culture networks of distribution become involved.

Such contributing factors are put forward in service to the idea that the AABA structure is not taken to be either immaculate or arbitrary in its origin, nor is it simply technologically determined. The practical, institutional and commercial utility of AABA might be subordinate to larger, ideological possibilities. It may be possible to forge an amalgamated theory, one that centres around an ideological conception of 'Home'. Such a theory would potentially link together the dominant themes of sentimental song, the sanitisation of American entertainment, and the realities of immigrant experience, which together would underpin the commercial preference for the closed, resolving, and repeating AABA structure. In this sense, this is the ideology of Propriety, as established in earlier chapters, delivered through a unified aesthetic effect of home-coming, which can, therefore, include the resolving, closure of AABA. Such a conception of Home is not only concerned with portraying or evoking the physical, material space, but also the desire for it, the connotations of it and the idealisation of it, via a variety of symbols, motifs and tropes.

Furthermore, a conception of Home is useful here on at least two fronts: the notion of bourgeois propriety, and, metaphorically speaking, Home as the assuaging of physical anxiety—that is, a *lack* in the Lacanian sense. We might begin by characterising the permanence of the bourgeois Home position in song. Middleton makes the proposal that

> [i]n bourgeois song in general, sequence is a way of holding on to at least some of the power of repetition while … stitching it into other structural processes … it makes us aware of rise and fall, a discursive hierarchy, and thus refers us to irreversible experiences.[94]

Such a position points us toward a theory of the bourgeois fixity of categories, where every clause or assertion has its correct and proper place—indeed has a sense of Propriety. Nothing is random and nothing is left to chance but, at the same time, change and development *seem* to be present. This is especially significant when considered in tandem with the eventual fixity of *themes* that the Alley rested upon, at the same time that novel subject matter was a commercial imperative, as detailed in Chapter Two.

[94] Middleton, 'In the Groove,' 165.

Middleton is explicitly evoking theories of song structure put forward by the Hungarian/Soviet musicologist, János Maróthy, in his critical study *Music and the Bourgeois, Music and the Proletarian* (1974). Although Maróthy does not discuss Tin Pan Alley at great length (he mentions it mostly in regard to the commercialisation of 'proletarian' jazz) he includes it as a manifestation of "bourgeois lyrical song". When this is combined with his situating of the Alley as the location of cultural appropriations on an industrial scale (as well as his discussions of the urban character of the bourgeoisie) we can infer that for Maróthy, the specificity of the Alley song would represent a quintessential bourgeois musical form.[95] This is a similar notion to that put forward by Ian Watt in his 1957 account of the birth and development of the novel form, *The Rise of The Novel*, in which he argues that the rise of the novel was both the product of, and contributor to, the rise of the bourgeois subject and the mercantile class.[96] Maróthy would have it that, "bourgeois lyrical song" provides for the listener, structurally, a kind of promotion of the "separate individual".[97] This is by virtue of the closed melodic shapes: the listener returns to where they began, has mastery over the experience and thus subjecthood is reaffirmed.

In AABA, the central musical passage—the 'A' part—is stated twice. This is the affirmation of our Home position. Building upon a theory such as Maróthy's we might say that part of the pleasure of AABA is that the function of the 'B' departure is the anticipation of returning back to where we started—the closed musical shape. Of course the notion of a piece of music that makes a statement, then departs from this before returning, is common in much of our music history. The sonata form in particular rests upon a structure of Exposition - Development - Recapitulation. We might conclude that this affirmative and resolving closed structure speaks to notions of safety, stability and resolution. So it is important to see this as an inherited dynamic, rather than one invented for 32-bar AABA. As Middleton has reported, European antecedents of American popular song had already established "[a] stress on symmetry (out-and-back, away-home patterns), complete with a sense of narrative closure."[98]

Home-away-home, in 32-bar AABA, is of course not usually indicative of a demanding, challenging musical trajectory. Rather, via the forward-moving sequence of melodic and

[95] Janós Maróthy *Music and the Bourgeois Music and the Proletarian* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974), 530-1.
[96] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Pimlico, 1957).
[97] Middleton, Richard 'Reviewed Works: *Music and the Bourgeois: Music and the Proletarian* by János Maróthy, Eva Róna' in *Music & Letters* 55/4 (Oct, 1974): 478.
[98] Middleton, 'In the Groove,' 164.

harmonic progression, the trajectory away to the 'B' section and the return is often felt as a fitting continuity rather than a veering departure. As Banfield has described, within AABA "[c]ontrast and conflict of material within the musical unit generally play no part in the point of the thing.[99]

On the one hand it would be convenient to be able to align AABA and the ideology of the white-picket fence as being indisputably connected. That is, as Maróthy figures it, the closed, goal-oriented song structure is a symptom of bourgeois ideology and its expressions: private property, social propriety, and (in the case of the USA) an aspiration toward WASPish identity, and so on. We will shortly be considering in detail Toynbee's 'Mainstreaming' thesis, which states plainly that the standardisations of style and theme within Golden Age Alley output represent

> [a] hegemonic style which, in hailing subjects from diverse social groups, actually reflected middle-class interests and capitalist order.[100]

Similarly, we will also consider a more affective, bodily experience and explanation of the home-away-home dynamic toward the end of this chapter. But first it is necessary to further unpack this connection between Home, Propriety, WASPish aspiration and AABA. It may be that the links here cannot be made so neatly, or at least, the reality must be far more nuanced. For example, at the beginning of the century AABA was favoured in Black-American, working class musical communities and Ragtime contexts. Theories such as Maróthy's would lead us to expect to find AABA more readily emerging within white middle-class sentimental song.[101] We might have expected to see a closed, resolving song form where the harmony and melody return to a 'rightful' and 'correct' original position, incubated within a social and compositional tradition that had emerged from the bourgeois parlour. However, such middle-class arenas of musical practice often drew on the strophic structures of folk tradition and music that was, nominally, 'of the people'. In contrast to the proposition that AABA would be nurtured within WASPish bourgeois, arenas of musical practice, it could be that the innovation and perceived social threat of Ragtime syncopation required a domesticating structure via which it could be made more commercially palatable. If we consider how AABA became, later on, to be considered a hegemonic musical structure or at least emblematic of an anesthetising, capitalist, industrial hegemony, then there might be a

[99] Banfield, 'Popular Song and Popular Music on Stage and Film,' 311.
[100] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,' 150. Toynbee includes Hollywood as the locus of production for 1920s – 1950s popular song, leading him to a combined category of Tin Pan Alley-Hollywood or 'TiPAH'.
[101] Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild, 'AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus,' 14.

tenable logic for this.

And there may even be resonances for a 'homeward' resolving structure with the broader social possibility of rootlessness and homelessness during these decades. It is striking that the delivery system for popular song – that is the travelling musician – laboured under a condition of 'exile' of their own. Perhaps it is a little too neat to say that the resolving 'homeward' sectional structure of AABA and themes of longing which they no doubt were performing nightly, was potentially inflected – for both performer and audience – by the figure of the singer themselves. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the 'comforts' of these song conventions were felt by the itinerant musicians and singers playing them.

To depart from this ideological reading of AABA momentarily we might contrast it with what came after. There is a point at which strong, conspicuous elements within popular music markets dispensed with their old function of affirming the homestead, and other symbols of the status quo. 1955 and the 'birth of rock 'n' roll' is often figured as the beginning of a social movement driven by newly-moneyed teenagers, American consumerism and a deliberate generational distancing by those for whom the war was not a directly lived experience. In fact, as discussed by Hanif Kureishi in his introduction to *The Faber Book of Pop*, it is clear that an essential and distinct characteristic of post-war popular music is that it expressed a new condition of existential *exile*:

> There is no precise origin of pop as we now understand it: as a culture, a way of perception and an industry, as well as a kind of music. With hindsight, though, it is possible to isolate a range of factors that conspired to create it: technological developments; a Fordist-style economy retained from wartime (quick turnover, mass production, instant obsolescence); the spread of American influence in the world; the democratizing thrust of the projected consumer society; a post-war, post-nuclear sensibility that could be best described as existential.[102]

Indeed, one of the key music consumer spaces for post-War suburban America became the car and its AM radio, as opposed to the hearth and the phonograph. Such material and aesthetic developments were part of a change in the structure of feeling that popular song seemed to now be a part of – one that could affirm the exhilarations of exile and alienation rather than only resisting them. Such periodisations of rock 'n' roll in terms of estrangement and homelessness, in these and more conventional historical narratives, would seem to imply a Home position, prior to Rock 'n' roll, which had, in some way, been departed from.

[102] Hanif Kureishi and Jon Savage, *The Faber Book of Pop* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 5.

Melting Pot

A complementary but distinct theory of AABA's ideological fitness is provided by Jason Toynbee in his article 'Mainstreaming, from Hegemonic Centre to Global Networks', in which he makes the following proposal:

> A mainstream is a formation that brings together large numbers of people from diverse social groups and across large geographical areas in common affiliation to a musical style.[103]

This is a proposition that reminds us that, as much as folk and community musics generate and maintain sub-cultural identities, the sales-driven products of large, centralised companies are also potentially capable of creating shared spaces of belonging at a far greater scale. According to Toynbee, amidst huge cultural and linguistic diversity, AABA's simplicity had a consolidating function, especially in a rapidly changing country where the formation of a new American identity was so pressing. 32-bar AABA constituted a standardised and binaristic structure, potentially intelligible to an American melting-pot, even in the face of language discrepancies when listening to lyrics in English. Toynbee describes how

> [e]thnic difference… represented a barrier to the formation of an integrated national culture of the sort required in America's emerging mass consumption economy… In effect the 32-bar, 'standard' song form represented a hegemonic first base. It enabled a significant variation between songs in the areas of harmonic development, melody and phrasing. Yet it also provided consistent structure and therefore easy recognition for a diverse audience, many of whose members did not speak English as a first language.[104]

The suitability of the popular song for the new ethnically diverse city (and wider USA) was not lost on Alley chronicler Goldberg at the time: "Say no word of a folk-song of the melting pot," he wrote.[105] The traditional folk forms brought from Europe were of course too specific, too filled with the stuff of the old country (not least the language) to articulate the new situation: in the great variety of the American metropolis, everyone was the same because everybody was different. Hence, there was now both the space and the desire for simple, intelligible popular songs that could provide a communal experience across cultural difference. Tawa describes how the children of first-generation immigrants,

> [e]ager to acclimate themselves to conditions unknown to their parents… turned to the theatre and popular songs for relaxation and for making themselves au courant with

[103] Toynbee, 'Mainstreaming,' 150.
[104] Toynbee 'Mainstreaming,' 151.
[105] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 92.

present American thinking.[106]

We must remind ourselves that this is still a time when news and topicality could be communicated in song form and that radio was only in a developmental stage. We can imagine how the popular song of the day was a mainline for the individual who wished to experience the 'sensibility' or the 'feeling' of the community they had recently joined. In being able to attest to this knowledge—to know what was modish but also to speak or pose as a 'local—cultural capital would of course be accrued.

Disciplining

Having proposed the presence of both pragmatic and ideological affordances which AABA provided to commercial institutions and their consumers, it is cogent to attempt to describe, in further detail, some of the affective qualities of AABA which underpin them. Middleton recognises that the Adornian efficiency/standardisation analysis of repetition in popular music composition—repetition of the 'A' section or repetition at all—must be weighed against the fact that commercial expediency, is not the whole story. In his essay 'In the Groove…' he explains how

> [r]epetition (within a song) can be assimilated to the same category as what Adorno termed standardisation (as between songs). Of course the significance of the role played by such techniques in the operations of the music industry… can hardly be denied; it is, however, equally difficult to reduce the function of repetition simply to an analysis of the 'political economy' of popular music production and its ideological effects…Mass-culture theories such as Adorno's… [see] repetition as a function of a specific mode of production and its associated social relations.[107]

Notions such as discipline, order and safety, as well the pleasures of anticipation and the perception of time passing, can be considered as affective processes in themselves, which in turn structure and order the listening experience. The possible causality of these pleasures, ideological or otherwise, can be weighed against the possibility that affective processes are not necessarily or only ideologically inflected. The following sections of this chapter therefore consider such processes in pragmatic, ideological and phenomenological formations.

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The function of the aesthetic commodity, in one sense, could be said to be the *curtailing* of

[106] Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, x.
[107] Middleton, 'In the Groove,' 160.

human expression and the disciplining of its potential in order that chaotic and unmappable aspects of human experiences can be made into discrete and representational, saleable units. Paradoxically, this curtailing then affords the consumer a degree of mastery over the disciplined, bound, cultural commodity and the expression therein. The sale of the popular music artefact provides an especially palpable example of this. As Mark Booth has stated:

> The fan will buy the latest record and then the successive latest record to have the power to seize each performance while it is the performance of mode, and to be able to command its recurrence... there is the profound hurry of change, and there is the profound desire to deny it.[108]

Moreover, rather than this discipline and 'command' being an end in itself we might instead wish to categorise it as being a symptom of the pursuit of safety, security and surety. If we accept that the result of a record playing or a score being performed can be profound affective and mental experiences, and inducing the sonic creation of virtual environments, then it is not a leap to accept that surety, or indeed apprehension, in the listener regarding how these experiences and environments will manifest is an attendant part of this process. The repetition of a known experience ("to command recurrence") is one example of this. The possibility of mental relief, protection and 'escapism' from the adversity and pressure of the outside world is another, as Negus describes when he remarks that "[t]he cyclical popular song and the way it can be endlessly replayed offers a ritualistic experience, providing retreat from the anxieties of time compression and speed."[109]

There is significance in the relationship between such ideas and the particularity of AABA. Firstly we can restate that, of course, AABA as a song structure enacts closure and the resolution of a structural tension, at least in the sense that alterity is disciplined. Middleton's concept of "Discursive Repetition"—the repetition of larger, structuring and narratorial sections (or in his words, simply, "complete sections")—has a bearing here.[110] *What* is repeated and *when* tends towards a condition that he calls "a hierarchically ordered discourse". The particular positioning of a 'B' section might be said to place it in a hierarchical relation to the 'A' section, in the sense that the latter—the dominant, principle, normative section—is where we begin and end. The departure to 'B' and the alterity therein (alterity which is often harmonically realised in a very literal sense) is ultimately a temporary

[108] Booth, *The Experience of Songs*, 196.
[109] Negus, 'Narrative Time,' 494. 'Time compression and speed' are terms which Negus uses here to characterise the demands of modernity, urbanity and the demands of Capital.
[110] As opposed to repetition at the more granular level of a riff or a short phrase (which he calls "musematic repetition"). Middleton, 'In the Groove,' 163.

flight. The normative 'A' identity of the song disciplines the B section that would subvert it, and in so doing defines and affirms itself further.

Safety and Security

Middleton further detects a more generalised drive towards safety and security in dominant melodic gestures across the history of Western musical performance. He notes that "arch-shaped vocal intonations" have been a prevailing element in the Romantic ballad since the European Renaissance onward which

> [g]esturally … suggests a bodily and psychological reaching out, an assertion of energy and control, but always on the knowledge that this will be followed by a gathering in, a return to the safety of the Self's own world.[111]

Perhaps in this identification of "arch-shapes" within these smaller musical units we see further evidence for some kind of pleasure in the home/away binary. Negus identifies Middleton's melodic arch in such a common-place as The Beatles' 'Yesterday' for example,[112] where a melodic departure and return home—even within the 'A' section itself—seems to chime with the *longing* of the lyrical sentiment:

> The self reaching out [by engaging in an act of remembering], and then withdrawing, returning to its own world (the pattern of tensing and relaxing).[113]

In this case, and perhaps in many others, the 'A' section or the 'B' section of a work can contain within them a Home - Away - Home dynamic: ABA. This simple formation can be described as an arch-like expression across temporal and spatial axes. Or, to put it in musical terms, the harmony and melody strike out from the I chord, to reach the pitch peak of the verse at the VI chord (the furthest 'Away' point), before making their way back down to the Home position of the tonic. We can start to see such a formation—what Middleton calls "Arch-shape"—in other discrete units, in addition to its presence in the sectional structure of AABA.

The Pleasure of Staged Possibility

A caveat to the emphasis upon the safety and security that a closed song form such as AABA may produce, is that the pleasure of the structure may actually be derived from the staged alterity within it, and the subsequent making safe of this alterity within the otherwise closed

[111] Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 113.
[112] A song which, in sectional structure terms follows an AABB (and back to A) essential structure.
[113] Negus, 'Narrative Time,' 487.

structure.[114] The *pleasure of anticipation* in the musical experience and other cultural forms is well documented.[115] As in sports spectatorship, it is sometimes explained in terms of being a simulation of primal drives—that is, the pleasure experienced when food or shelter is found and the jeopardy of scarcity is assuaged.

Tin Pan Alley commentators were aware of the potency of popular song as an experience that could stage anticipation for the listener. The Golden Age journalist Goldberg wrote of how songwriters used specific techniques for signalling the forward movement and trajectory of popular song which consumers were conditioned to recognise. The recognition of these signals, and the resultant anticipation of one's expectations being met, was something that Goldberg could note as being a pleasurable element of the experience itself. Interestingly he does so within a question that implies there must be an underlying explanation for this:

> [W]hy for example, did [songwriter] A suddenly interpolate that couplet at the end of the verse—it is known among lyrists [*sic*] as the 'vest'—*which caught the imagination of the public and made them eager for the chorus to follow*.[116]

It was already established, in the early twentieth century, within the practice of marketing the popular song, that anticipation had particular import. The watchword of 'familiarity' was a guiding characteristic for the market-actor. Consumers seemed to favour forms and themes they were familiar with and so it follows that, even within a single piece of music, the *anticipation of such familiarity* being realised could become part of the seduction process. Thus, a familiar teleology in popular song like AABA was introjected, 'known' and implicitly expected by the consumer, to the extent where deviation would be conspicuous but confirmation and realisation of the conditioned expectation could be pleasurable. Again, this is not to say that deviation was not common, but it was certainly perceivable, and could be used to produce an effect of its own. All of this, of course, was recognised by Adorno, who described the process as one where "the composition listens for the listener".[117] One might alternatively formulate it in terms of a partnership, one where the structure depended on the *a priori* knowledge of the listener, and the listener found themselves to be *in concert* with fundamental dimensions of being, including, as we shall consider in the next section, time itself.

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[114] With thanks to Dr Jennifer Hodgson for her assistance in formulating this idea.
[115] For example see David Brian Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)
[116] Goldberg, *Tin Pan Alley - A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket*, 7. [My emphasis]
[117] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 29.

Time and Repetition

The staging, and revelation of temporality itself may constitute an epistemological pleasure - a pleasure of knowing - of which AABA is an expression. Negus proposes a reading of the pop song as a whole, where it enacts and expresses the human experience of time, but also our capacity for ordering and disciplining events within what Paul Ricoeur calls "the grid of narrative".[118] The philosophical difficulty and ambiguity of 'time' as an intelligible concept is underpinned throughout by Negus' specific employment of Paul Ricoeur's temporal categories, especially a notion of "lived…phenomenological time". Negus discusses how songs can "convey, connect with, and mediate a sense of experienced time" by way of lyrical and melodic processes, as well as via the material and temporal specificities of recorded media and the listening rituals that attend them. By way of detailing these capacities, Negus makes the case that, similarly to Ricoeur's claims for literary narrative, popular songs help us to understand our own temporal identity: "The flux, the mess, the chaos, the uncertainty of temporality is given meaning, and is provided with a sense of order and continuity through narrative."[119]

An important claim of this thesis is that, in addition to those aspects of the popular song, described above, which have a bearing on our understanding of our temporal identity (and the experience of Ricoeur's lived/phenomenological time), we should likewise consider sectional structure. The first principle of sequential narrative (leaving aside literary experiment) might be considered as describing difference over time where 'A happens, then B happens'. A song's sectional structure can be thought of as the analogue of a work of literature's chapter structure (or indeed several other possible delineations for the ordering of narrative). And moreover, sectional structure in song can be considered a useful addition to these elements by way of its enactment and occupation of the passage of time (or in Negus' terminology *connecting with* and *mediating* time itself).

There is potentially a perceived mastery of (or indeed pleasurable subjection to) past, present and future which is in play here. Frith quotes sociologist (and phenomenologist) Alfred Schütz on the capacity for holding virtual music in the head that is distinct from that being played in 'real-time', and for the anticipatory interplay between these:

[118] Negus, 'Narrative Time,' 484.
[119] Ibid., 484-6.

> The composer, by the specific means of his art, has arranged it [the musical work] in such a way that the consciousness of the beholder is led to refer what he actually hears to what he anticipates will follow and also to what he has just been hearing and what he has heard ever since this piece of music began. The hearer, therefore, listens to the ongoing flux of music, so to speak not only in the direction from the first to the last bar but simultaneously in a reverse direction back to the first one.[120]

Perhaps the pleasure of AABA is the revelation of passing time itself. As Lefebvre reminds us:

> Music is movement, flow, time, and yet it is based on recurrence; all transmissible themes are potentially recurrent - the more so when transcribed; all music included in the sound continuum is repeatable; all melodies tend towards an end that may start a repeat … there can be a recurrence of motif, of theme and of combined intervals in a melody. Emotions and feelings from the past are re-evoked and moments recalled by and through music … music is nothing else but number and proportion (intervals, rhythm, timbres) and it is at the same time nothing else but lyricism, profusion and dream. It is all vitality, exuberance and sensuality and all analysis, precision and permanence.[121]

Lefebvre points out what is less than intuitive about the study of music: those components that act upon us sensually can be measured in mathematic and geometrical metaphor—be it note value, bar-line, sectional structure, whichever. But, crucially, Lefebvre also implies that both the conscious and unconscious processing of those mathematic and geometrical values, as they appear to manifest, are sensually pleasurable or affecting in and of themselves. Perception of distance, of space, of duration, and the apprehension of the bounds of the physical world in a non-metaphorical way is pleasurable. Units of time are not only metaphorically employed as a measurement to delineate the duration of musical components; music also reveals the phenomenological experience of lived-time itself. The epistemological importance, and the pleasure of this revelation of lived-time, is such that we might begin to consider that the sectional unfolding and development of a piece of music—its large-scale structure—has a relation to the life-world, and a bearing on our understanding of it.

A sectional structure such as 32-bar AABA is always a functionary of these larger pleasures first. We cannot claim that AABA, or some similar musical structure, constitutes an irreducible scaffold that underpins—or metaphorises—pleasure, or a given society, or experience itself. But we can venture that a given society might be conducive to AABA being employed as a context-specific mediation of our irreducible relation to time (and its structure

[120] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites - On the Value of Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 146.
[121] Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 1971), 19-20.

and perceived repetition). Negus has written of how popular music can 'narrate' time. He states that,

> Most pop songs narrate time in a cyclical manner as a consequence of recurrent lyrical patterns (refrains, repeated choruses, phrases, and words) and due to the way that songs are structured around loops, strophes, hooks, chants, and riffs.[122]

This notion of 'narrating time' is as relevant to turn-of-the-century sentimental song as to the post-war rock 'n' roll that he is discussing. In the same article Negus, after Ricoeur, writes about a "temporal identity", which is also a salient notion here.[123] Time, and all of our varying perceptions and mediations of it, is essential to our understanding of the self. The perceived continuity of consciousness—that an individual's sense of personhood appears to have a stable relation in the evening with the memory of the morning—is amongst the most basic abstractions that we perform. 'Self in time'—this notion of a temporal identity—is a description of the self on a crucial stratum of being. Anxiety, anticipation, resolve, resignation, hope, satisfaction, and all attendant memory, are just a few dimensions of experience that we could propose as helping constitute this 'temporal' self. Such dimensions clearly resonate with Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild's description of the capacities for "expressive content" of sectional structure, earlier on in this chapter. Being as musical experience unfurls across time, it is not too difficult to accept that the duration of affective states and emotions, and the structured manipulation of them, *en masse*, via industrialised musical products, might have an effect on, or be a symptom of, the way we organise a particular society.

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Repetition, as such a basic feature of musical experience, seems to testify to the importance of how our perception unfolds over time, or indeed, recurs in time. Middleton describes (again similarly to Von Appen and Frei-Hauenschild) how repetition

> [b]ears closely, in all its manifestations, on questions of like and dislike, boredom and excitement, tension and relaxation: in short the dialectics of musical pleasure. Almost all popular songs, to a greater of lesser extent, fall under the power of repetition.[124]

This statement about musical repetition alludes to a greater discursive territory than simply matters of consumerism and 'taste' (a term which is a proxy, in any case, for the internalisation of aesthetics as class-based and gendered, disciplined norms etc.) Rather this

[122] Negus, 'Narrative Time,' 491.
[123] Ibid., 484.
[124] Middleton, 'In the Groove,' 160.

statement speaks to notions of anxiety and also, relatedly, to feelings of mastery and control. In this context, terms such as 'like', 'dislike', 'tension' and 'relaxation' should be considered as gravitous and reflecting profound difficulties, reconciliations and assuagement between human subjects and their environment, even if such terms might appear light or trivial, and indeed be understood as such by individuals themselves. Indeed, a profound affordance of recording technology at all is that, via its retention capabilities, we will not be subject to the fleeting nature of sound itself. As Booth states,

> The idea of records is the idea of keeping something that is threatened with being swept away, the idea of not forgetting. It has do to with marking a reference point in the extension of time, with a view to mastering that time and staking it out like a territory.[125]

A sense of the ideological and political effects that repetition in music can perform upon the subject is very much in keeping with a key tenet of this thesis: that aesthetic experience is absolutely produced by, and has an effect upon, wider discursive, social and political domains. Middleton's essay is a welcome development that attempts to integrate notions of discursive hierarchies and ideological effects as being present within the phenomenological experience of repetition in music, whilst still recognising that commercial expediency is also part of the nexus of factors to be considered. The Adornian analysis that

> [a] song chosen for bestseller-dom will be drummed into the listeners' ears until they cannot help recognising it and hence—as the psychologists of compositional advertising correctly figure—will love it[126]

is fine as far as it goes. However, Middleton's essay attempts to broach the question as to what the *cultural, cognitive and symbolic* structures might be that ensure the 'drumming in' is pleasurable, as opposed to it being merely Pavlovian, or simply functioning within the parameters of Skinnerian Behaviourism.

Dramatising a Structure of Cognition

There could be biologically deterministic factors put forward as reasons for how and why a market wishes to structure the song commodity in a particular way. The changing sections that the market ensures are present across the popular song, from A section to B section, could be dismissed as, say, the products of auditory fatigue. However, the interpretation of song structure, the sense making capability, is surely indicative of a profound cognitive capacity in

[125] Booth, *The Experience of Songs*, 183.
[126] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, 34.

human beings for perceiving changes over time, for situating this within an enormously complex system of cultural expectations, and for all this to happen at the border of conscious and unconscious thought, manifesting in the affective responses of the body, tying the body to ideological pleasure and prohibition via something as straightforward and commonplace as a change of chord progression and melody. The popular song is already dependent on intensive cognitive functions, even if these are reduced to, say, the interpretation of the sense-transmitting properties of sound, the cognition of linguistic information through the lyric, and so the generation of meaning of song with reference to our social relations. (This is not unlike the "trialectic" of meaning in music as put forward by Lars Eckstein).[127]

However, it is also possible that pleasure and investment in, and commitment to, particular structural conventions of popular song are due to their capacity to *dramatise* a structure of cognition, i.e. dominant song structures are favoured by the market because they dramatise the teleology of the affecto-cognitive instant. It is not *affect in toto* that song is a dramatization of but, rather, an aesthetic rendering of one's recognition of being affected: that there is '*something* happening here'. Consequently, the experience of its duration, and how it undulates, is aestheticised.

Whether or not there exists a linear process where thought travels from affect to cognition, there is a perception of it. There is a perception that propositional thought wells up from the body, or is at least is in correspondence with it. As Thomas Carl Wall remarks in *Radical Passivity* (1999), "There are flows of what is and is not subjectivity making their ways across fields of flesh, touching some parts and not others."[128] A further claim made here is that this 'dramatisation' is not in the theatrical sense but rather using that word to describe a 'sense-making' instant – the point at which we perceive the escape of affect and our own vitality.

If we *perceive* our cognitive processing to be an actualisation and articulation of affect, then it is plausible that the *dramatisation* of this process would be pleasurable to us, that we would practice and, in history's due course, eventually monetise it. Building such a bridge between the phenomenon of popular song and the consequences of electro-chemical signals in the human body is a speculative task. Until the medical humanities render such a relationship measurable, the discussion must utilise those philosophical categories that provide a lexicon for the limits of art, science and their relationship i.e. consciousness, perception, culture,

[127] Eckstein, *Reading Song Lyrics*, 74.
[128] As cited in Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008) viii.

representation and so on. The dynamic journey of tension and resolution – across multiple affective and linguistic planes – over the course of the 'three-minute popular song' may even reveal to us in some way the instant when affect is transformed into a residual cognition – the process whereby memory is constituted. Just as the Gauloises is the exact length of a 'profound' thought, so is the popular song.

Conclusion

The consequences of a censorious atmosphere in Progressive-era USA are probably most clearly crystallised in the opening remarks of *The Hays Code* (1930), which laid down explicit directions as to what *could* and *could not* be included in motion pictures. It is a document that, to contemporary observers, seems out of place in the country of the First Amendment. It states: "No picture will be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it… Correct standards of life shall be presented on the screen."[1] It goes on to make about forty specific prohibitions regarding activities and themes which should not be shown on screen. These include such corrupting images as

> [t]he use of liquor in American Life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterisation…Excessive passion…Miscegenation… Child birth, in fact or in silhouette…[2]

And, in a clause that placed film writers and directors in thrall to established authority, there was also specific protection for public institutions. It was decreed that: "[m]inisters of religion in their characters should not be used as comic characters or as villains" and, significantly, that "[t]he use of the Flag shall be consistently respectful."[3] Having been first mooted in 1927, the code was published in 1930. It was observed in Hollywood until it began to be challenged in the 1960s, and only in the latter years of that decade was it finally abandoned to make way for the comparatively discomforting transgressions of the 'New Hollywood' period.

At the time of the code's publication (with the 'Golden Age' of Tin Pan Alley well underway) the professional songwriter would also find themselves subject to a new legal code of conduct, at least if they wanted their work to be broadcast on the radio. The Radio Act of 1927 prohibited "obscene, indecent, or profane language" from being broadcast on the airwaves.[4] Indeed, the Hays Code itself affected the Alley at least as significantly, as so much song product was increasingly destined for Hollywood musicals. Because of this, songwriters became subject to the clause that expressly forbade "obscenity in word, gesture, reference,

[1] *A Code to Govern the Making of Motion and Talking Pictures* (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America: 31st March 1930) http://www.asu.edu/courses/fms200s/total-readings/MotionPictureProductionCode.pdf (Accessed 18/06/2015).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] The Radio Act of 1927, 47 U.S.C. 4 (1927).

song, joke or by suggestion".[5] In their respective forms of both legal and industry-policed decree, these initiatives made binding a practice of censure that had tended, previously, to operate on a self-regulatory basis in public performance. Tony Pastor's 'clean' Vaudeville policy, some forty years prior, is the emblematic example cited in this study. Indeed, throughout the Progressive era, lewdness and profanity on the stage (and, by proxy, in popular song) was certainly a matter of public debate, but pressure most often came only periodically, from civil society in the form of Church-based and reformist groups, and organisations such as Anthony Comstock's New York Society for the Suppression of Vice (although the latter also had quasi-legal authority). Such organisations were at their most agitated with regard to conspicuous, and often visible, offences to their sensibilities, including nudity on stage and erotica in novels. They were less often exercised by sheet music or recordings.

But it is significant that the self-regulating culture of the Alley, as described throughout this thesis, ensured that professional songwriters were not very likely to offend. The lyrical contents of the most ribald saloon songs, once committed to sheet music and recordings, would only ever feature innuendo and suggestion, and certainly avoid profanity, in the actual, finalised printed or recorded lyrics. Even in the permissive and adventurous releases of the late 1920s, songs such as Eddie Cantor's 'Makin' Whoopee' (1928)[6] and Helen Kane's 'I Want to Be Bad' (1929) were indicative of such euphemistic modes. In the B section of the latter Kane sings,

> This thing of being a good little goodie is all very well,
> What can you do when you're loaded with plenty of health?
>
> And vigour.[7]

Such styles of address, though chided in the press, were rarely going to be officially sanctioned in terms of the content of the words and music themselves.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, the dominance of ASCAP promoted a regulation of content of sorts. Entry to the organisation was on the basis of sales success but did also depend on mutual sponsorship, and, therefore, to an extent, on an individual's 'standing'

[5] *A Code to Govern the Making of Motion and Talking Pictures*.
[6] Gus Kahn and Walter Donaldson, 'Makin Whoopee', (Donaldson Publishing Co., 1928).
[7] Buddy DeSylva, Lew Brown and Ray Henderson, 'I Want to be Bad', (DeSylva, Brown and Henderson, Inc., 1928).

within the songwriting community (it certainly favoured white, notating composers).[8] However, the expectations of ASCAP were more often than not assumed and unwritten. A Hays Code for songwriting was not needed as the Alley was, as an institution, attitudinally predisposed towards making the most accessible products possible for a broad majoritarian market. Its products could be more dynamic and direct than those of their nineteenth-century equivalents, but stopped well short of ever troubling any *legal* standards of decency, whether enforced at state, federal or industry level. Hence, rather than attempting to identify instances of censorship of egregious transgression in early-twentieth-century American popular song, this study has sought to address the *implicit* workings of Alley culture, and uncover an ideology of propriety that was promoted and enacted, even within the structure of its songs. Moral offense is by definition conspicuous; notable transgression will immediately define the foreground itself. In contrast, propriety and normativity, though they may find conspicuous expression in, say, an etiquette book, are the *background* architecture of behaviour and assumptions. It is this background which the thesis has been concerned with.

The purpose of this thesis has been to employ a variegated approach that considers demographics, institutions, business practices, and dominant lyrical themes and imagery, in order to establish the pervasiveness of an ideology of propriety within the Alley and its songwriting output, and to explore the possibility that this is a pervasiveness that ultimately resulted in the standard structure of songs themselves. For the most part, the first generation of Tin Pan Alley, prior to 1920, has been considered, in an account of the commercial and aesthetic *foundations* that led to the Golden Age – the period for which the Alley has been elevated into national myth. This is to establish the broad context of standardisation, and the 'structure of feeling' (after Raymond Williams) between individuals, institutions, texts and daily life, that proved to be the conditions for the 32-bar AABA sectional structure becoming the commercial default.

The significance of 32-bar AABA is broader than just its operations within songs and the effects these have on listeners. 32-bar AABA is also, for a song structure, a relatively well-known phenomenon, especially in the USA. This is because it has become, arguably, the most emblematic aspect of the Alley's formulaic approach. In fact, the structure is emblematic of what is itself an all-American emblem, given that the rationalisations and commercial proficiencies of the Alley have come to epitomise a particular view of American

[8] Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the U.S.A* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011), 31.

society that the nation retains of itself: entrepreneurial, inventive, dynamic and absolutely market-oriented. The particular appropriation of this institution, Tin Pan Alley, as being one that typifies the efficacy and merit of American venture capitalism is not least because it happens to be an institution inherently imbued with romance and glamour. The same is true of Hollywood filmmaking, but it is interesting to note that the unavoidably collectivist endeavour of film production itself does not seem to be as indicative of the American Dream as the plucky songwriter or singer who rises to success through their own tenacity and individuality. Part of the meaning and power of 32-bar AABA, ideological and otherwise, is that it is itself considered a famous *product*. The USA is not the only country that has cultivated a national discourse of pride around certain consumer products, but theirs is a particularly vibrant one. In the same sense that American motorcycles are exported on the basis of their Wild Western glamour, and bourbon is advertised as being imbued with the authenticity of the Deep South, so part of the reason American popular song was exported throughout the world was on the basis of the myth of that single street, and a simple, American ingenuity of expression that manifested across 32 bars.

The Trajectory of the Argument

This work employs multiple angles of analysis and the conclusion will probably benefit from a brief recounting of what has been covered, alongside the logic of the argument presented. In the Introduction to the thesis, after addressing issues around the complexities of musicological scholarship with specific reference to song structure, this study attempted to establish an 'ecological' model of popular music production and circulation made up of institutions, actors, historical conventions, consumers and so on, in order to draw attention to the mutability of the popular song product, and to reassert the case for a multiplicitous approach in analysis. Such an ecology always works in correspondence with the lived experience of those individuals who populate it as well as being emergent and shifting, so the recognition of a 'structure of feeling', in Raymond Williams' formulation, was introduced here. Moreover, the popular song commodity was proposed as an exemplary component for how such a structure functions. Specifically, in the case of the Alley, it was proposed that in the context of a nation constituted of exilic narratives, constantly engaged in a process of identity formation, Tin Pan Alley's institutions, personnel, practices and products helped a structure of feeling to emerge which was preoccupied with propriety, and evidence for this can be read through a multivalent aesthetic of Home being present throughout mass-produced culture, not least popular song. As well as being involved in the production of this structure of feeling, the Alley was also a product of it. Finally, the significance of the microphone, as a

'technology of longing' was addressed as perhaps the most important development in performance practice, as the post-1925 'Golden Age' approached.

At the commencement of Chapter One, an account of both 'exilic' identity and the importance of 'home-making' discourses in American history, was followed by an account of mass-immigration to the USA and New York. This is significant not only in terms of mass-immigration's relevance to these twin cultures of exile and home-making, but also because of the significant demographic impact that immigration had on Tin Pan Alley. The figure of the immigrant songwriter is a personification of the link between 'the homestead' in the Alley's song product and the exilic experience of the nation that the Alley was selling its product to. Next, the case for Tin Pan Alley standardisation was made. It is more accurate to describe 'standardisations' in the plural. These were a series of cultural, commercial and organisational tendencies within the Alley which eventually produced the default sectional structure of 32-bar AABA, and thus a broader account of standardisation, linking the specificity of Manhattan with the Alley's logics of rationalisation and centralisation, was rehearsed here. (Through this the importance of particular commercial roles: publisher, singer, songwriter, plugger and so on, was also explored.) Moreover, the dominance over the music industry that the Alley asserted as a result of these standardising tendencies was described, so as to establish the national significance of Alley output. Indeed, the self-perpetuating myth of *a* single Tin Pan Alley can be contrasted with the geographical reality of Tin Pan Alley as a distributed factory that ranged across midtown, and enjoyed both national and international relationships. Again, the significance of the myth of West 28th Street is enormously important to the notion of industrialised popular song written-to-order, and to public discourses around Tin Pan Alley.

Following this predominantly materialist, socio-historical account of the Tin Pan Alley nexus, Chapter Two took a distinct change of direction to develop an account of how discourses of propriety specifically manifested in both theatrical practice, as well as within the content of sentimental song. The latter was the genre that became most closely associated with the Alley and its standardisations. Much of the discussion explored discursive and social inheritances from nineteenth-century notions of propriety, and how the particular character of these in Alley songs was distinctive. In the first place, concerns over what was considered 'normative' in the entertainment sphere became racialised in a new way, not least because of the gradual move away from Minstrelsy constituting a singular, black 'public' culture, towards more agentive practices such as Ragtime and Jazz. A key tension for Tin Pan Alley

between the creative possibilities of, and censure toward, black-American musical forms, shaped its product and business practices, and significantly impacted the sentimental song.

An in-depth investigation of the lyrical, thematic and narratological preoccupations of sentimental song followed, in order to chart their progression from the ballad of the nineteenth-century to the love song of the Golden Age. And throughout this progression we could discern the disciplining effects of an ideology of propriety, including the pursuits of formula, narrative simplification and thematic stability. In a more specific example, I considered the progression from the nineteenth-century trope of the tragic female, first towards portrayals of idealised, sexless romance, and then towards an adversarial, individualistic style of courtship, well-suited to an urban, consumerist paradigm. In another example we also saw how idealised fantasies of homecoming and a return from exile were rendered within the imagined song spaces of Ireland and Dixie respectively, and how these became accessible to all. Significantly, also, the resilience of The Mother Song was shown to have drawn together the tropes of the idealised female, the homestead and, in the subset of the Mammy Song, an encoding into song of the desire for the assuagement of racial anxieties.

Finally, in Chapter Three, having established a picture of (i) a nation in need of ideological surety, (ii) Tin Pan Alley standardisation and (iii) the imprint of propriety on so much of the lyrical, thematic and musical content of early-twentieth-century American popular song, I moved towards a dual analysis of 32-bar AABA. An account of its pragmatic, material affordances was given alongside a proposition that it is a song structure which, in an exemplary way, channels and enacts a feeling and sense of propriety—of everything returning to its correct, Home position. Finally, an alternative, yet complementary proposition was proposed: that pleasure in such a structure is a product of an immersive revelation of the passing of time and, moreover, of a dramatisation of this and other functions of consciousness.

Alternative Listenings

Throughout this thesis, there has been an emphasis on Tin Pan Alley and its products and it is possible that, in an attempt to provide a deep context for a complex proposition about ideology and musical structure, this account has generalised the figure of the listener as one who is, more often than not, susceptible to the impositions of a manipulative music industry. It is an ongoing process, aided in part by the writing of this work, but still in need of much refinement, to acquire the skill to conceptualise ideology as only one node of a rhizome of

lived experience, which—though important and significant across different domains—is not necessarily all-pervasive and does not only operate as a didacticism upon a duped consumer. To that end, it is incumbent upon me to state that the argument made here is at once modest as it may appear to be totalising. If anything, the reader might consider the propositions here to represent an account that has *some* bearing on the experience of *some* listeners *some* of the time.

Indeed, when making a case for the circulation of ideology in material culture, especially in matters of semiotics and/or structure, there is a risk of neglecting to recognise the diversity of possibility in reception. This is meant in the sense of the classic Hebdigean theorisation of the subcultural appropriation of mass-cultural materials,[9] but also, as a recognition of the multiplicity of potential requirements and priorities of a given community, or indeed a given individual. The dismantling and reconstructing of the Tin Pan Alley standard by Harlem Jazz musicians would probably be the most vivid example of how the intentionality of a publisher or songwriter in the Alley, cynical or otherwise, could be subverted, transcended or downright ignored. But within the listening experience also, it is important to recognise that what can constitute ideological encroachment for one listener may constitute a space of community, or alterity, or respite, for another.

One of the problems with a term such as ideology, even if used in a sense that ultimately aspires to a complex, post-Althusserian conception of the term,[10] is that it tends to presuppose a flattened, singular subject. However intricate, imbricative and multifarious the interactions between ideology and subject might be, there are always specific domains, capacities and limitations ascribed to the subject in order to build a generalisable theory. The potential for differences between individuals or communities, whether experiential, perceptual, material or historical, is minimised. Similarly, the notion that distinct forms of social organisation, or the distinct *episteme* of a given community, might result in an existential—and even ontological—distinction between human beings is certainly not foregrounded. We might consider whether generalised notions of ideology, or even generalised notions of a unitary unconscious, would be robust if the theoriser were considering cultures that may be radical outliers in terms of their relation to modernity. Even within the conditions of urban, consumer-capitalist New York City, the heterogeneous and

[9] See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).
[10] As articulated in: Louis Althusser 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Ben Brewster, trans. (New York City, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

contingent nature of how cultural inheritance, physiology, lived experience and so many other factors, might produce subjectivity and subjecthood, means reduction to these terms is wanting.

It may be that an 'ideology of propriety' itself, transmitted via the medium of song, is empowering or enabling for a given community or individual in particular contexts. Indeed, the strictures of ideology or social prohibition may very well be circumvented even by the possibility that a popular culture product—a sentimental song or otherwise—allows a degree of dissolution, i.e. that it 'does' nothing at all, and the experience of some kind of temporary dissolution may be in itself a valuable one. In so far as Frith is quite correct when he states at the head of Chapter 7 of *Performing Rites* (1996) that "what all music affords us…is a way of being present", it may also be the case that music can enable a humane, and very necessary, absence. The very banality of a work in terms of 'literary quality' may be the aspect that affords us a temporary leave from the conditions that we are subject to.[11] As Mark Booth has commented:

> It is of the nature of song in general to stand still … A recorded song is a grasped chance for the owner-listener to seem to escape from time, or to escape from seeming to be bound to linear time.[12]

Moreover, the potential for the suspension of semantic meaning in *songfulness*, as considered in Chapter Two with reference to the work of Lawrence Kramer and Lars Eckstein, implies that song, as a practice, is a phenomenon that can belie what it would seem to present to the empirical analyst. The register of the melopoetic, when combined with specific social or experiential contingencies, enables words, theme or structure to be conferred with meanings and functions quite distinct to how they initially appear.

A further benefit, potentially, to this thesis would be to integrate a more generous notion of standardisation. In opposition to Adorno's critique we might propose that standardisations will occur within all institutions even, say, within the 'challenging' or 'confrontational' practices of serialism or other high-modernist practices. (Indeed, even Maróthy would state that "the same bourgeois world picture [is presented in] the trends of *serial and punctual* music which dissociate themselves from commercial popular music with aristocratic

[11] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 145.
[12] Booth, *The Experience of Songs*, 161.

disdain)."[13] Rather than necessarily representing the curtailing of creative potential, it is worth bearing in mind that institutional standardisations may be the very utility of those institutions. The standardisation of processes, products or institutions themselves may provide the potential for enormous shared productivity and mutual achievement, and standardisation may, in fact, elevate these beyond any non-standardised potential. Moreover standardisation, at the very least, constitutes evidence of mutual understanding,[14] and can potentially be read as a mark of community itself. In the case of Tin Pan Alley, the standardisations of 32-bar AABA generated music which, to many listeners, is full of wonder and human potential. Moreover, the ingenuity involved in simultaneously challenging and adhering to sectional structure, thereby revealing previously unknown capacities that the structure affords, constitutes an inspiring negotiation between human creativity and material constraint. As Toynbee has proposed:

> Musicians are exemplary agents who, through their creative practice, demonstrate how one might act differently, and in so doing rebut, at least to some extent, the exigencies of the capitalist system.[15]

We might consider how the spectacle of a songwriter's capability to render minute adjustment to a well-worn theme or structure (and so perhaps even reconceptualise an individual's understanding of the nature of love itself) might prove to be similarly empowering or valuable. Indeed, one of the challenges of writing this thesis has been to be able to emphasise both the extent of standardisation as a function of industrial control and profit motive, whilst also leaving space for the dynamic and creative production capabilities that it enabled.

Contribution and Future Possibilities

The value of a study such as this, if it has been successful, is that it constitutes an instance of deep contextualisation with regard to its subject, and that the particularly diverse assemblage of elements (encompassing consumer materialities, the built environment, historical inheritance, technology, commerce, musical practice, textual tendencies, as well the physiological, cognitive and notions of reception) has managed to produce a multi-faceted account of propriety in early-twentieth-century popular song. Hopefully, the process has thrown up specific conceptualisations that have provided what may constitute some novel means for working through some of the issues that this thesis has sought to explore. I will detail here those examples that I hope might approach such a distinction.

[13] Maróthy, *Music of the Bourgeois*, 531, [Author's emphasis].
[14] With thanks to Dr Ian Biddle for drawing my attention to this notion.
[15] Toynbee *Making Popular Music*, x.

In the first instance, and in a very general sense, it was useful to attempt to work through a distinctive definitional process for conceiving of what we mean by the term 'popular song', by paying attention to those instances where writers and musicologists have made a proposal for 'the very first popular song'. This process, though not empirical, has been useful in considering the terms via which popular song is discussed, and also for identifying some of the elements considered foundational to it. It has also, of course, been an effective way of producing a multi-authored definition.

Also, I hope it may have been productive to have drawn more attention, for methodological reasons, to a tendency (especially within popular accounts) towards emphasising the politics (and indeed the musical significance) of post-World War II popular music, as opposed to that which came before. Furthermore as a potential remedy for this, I hope that the specific identification of sectional song structure as a potential repository for the deep-set social, psychological and ideological currents of the period prior, has been a worthwhile exercise.

Future avenues of research that might expand upon these ideas could consider other sectional structures in the round, and investigate the possibility of whether more recent examples of sectional structure can also be read as a connecting point between ideological formations, human pleasure and social contexts. As outlined in the Introduction, even post-World War II Anglophone popular musics in the broad genre families of rock 'n' roll and rock have only received limited attention with regard to the extra-musical implications of sectional structure. And very recent developments regarding quite radical changes in the sectional structures of preeminent popular music commodities and formats may also be a route of further enquiry. In particular, it may be productive to consider those innovative re-imaginings of structure in pop, hip-hop and other genres which increasingly operate in short spaces of time online and especially within social media platforms, where musical content is compressed or simplified so as to be translatable as meme. Furthermore, the commercial co-option of sectional structure innovations, to the extent that they have lost their particular social or community validity, may also be a line of enquiry worth investigating. Future study which would investigate and propose a taxonomy of persona in early-twentieth-century popular song is another possibility. Finally there is the possibility for a research project that attempts to take account of the ideological import of 32-bar AABA in an international context – within, say, the closely connected British market or in the export of American culture and values to other territories and cultures. It would be interesting to investigate how the structure has functioned

within musical practices outside of the USA, how it has been taken to function in terms of its social meanings and how it may have operated in *emblematic* ways.

In terms of some specific conceptual emphases that I think are particular to this work, it is possible that the positing of 'Mammy' as a *nexus* figure within early-twentieth-American popular song is significant. The particular articulation of one who is situated between, and interacts with, discourses around racial anxiety, idealised femininity, 'Mother', the South, Home, longing and nostalgia is potentially a profitable one. Furthermore, I have not yet seen the *connection* made between Ireland and Dixie and their functions as fantasy song-spaces and communal signifiers beyond the actuality of their own geographical and cultural meanings. I am also pleased to have had an opportunity to attempt to develop on Adorno's remarks about the historical connections between the clothing trade and the popular song trade, and the inheritance of a logic of distribution from the former by the latter.

Finally, I hope that the idea of the *conspicuous majoritarian* tendency within cultural consumerism is, potentially, a useful addition to academic discourses pertaining to notions of 'the popular' and 'the mainstream'. Indeed, I feel that this concept speaks to an important and valuable position that the study attempts to emphasise throughout. That is the distinction to be made between the social or material reality of a given society, and the possibility of a generalised (and potentially inaccurate) perception of that reality. As an example of how such self-mythologising occurs, we only have to consider the term 'Tin Pan Alley'. I have been glad to have an opportunity here to situate the myth of West 28th Street in its proper geographical context. I hope that this study has drawn attention to the ideological work that a particular cultural commodity—the popular song or 32-bar AABA, say—carries out, but especially that which it does emblematically, outside of its own musical function. What has become more apparent across the course of writing this thesis, is that ideological work is carried out not only within the sphere of the commodity's own functionality but also in the associations, significances and connotations that attend *the idea* of it, and that how this idea circulates is of course, itself, an object of significant ideological import.

In Defence of the Popular Song

Adorno's critique of mass culture, conducted via his sustained attack on the Tin Pan Alley popular song, is an important signpost in the history of criticism and was a pioneering act of resistance at a time when investment capital began to appear omnipotent and omniscient. The manipulation and subjugation of a nation's (and a global proletariat's) *feelings* and so,

potentially, its will was at stake. For Adorno, a dazzling and corrupting object that presented itself as innocence and respite—the popular song—was harnessed with a single express purpose: to lull the consumer into a degraded existence so that they would be malleable enough to pursue their own degradation further and repeat the purchase. In this analysis, recordings and sheet music were agents of seduction: powerful avatars with human faces, voices and sentiment. And for a classically trained musician such as Adorno, who's surety of human potential he had himself experienced through the almost Derridean complexity of serialism, where new knowledge might be apprehended in the gaps between the brain's sense-making capacities, Tin Pan Alley song had nothing to offer. Indeed, it was worse than this: it was only malign. It would shut down those sense-making capacities themselves. Famously he wrote, "Popular Music is objectively untrue and helps to maim the consciousness of those exposed to it."[16] It is a stunning statement, seemingly subjecting popular music to an empirical test of 'veracity', and describing the violence that it perpetrates when it fails that test.

Such a critique is still very much with us, in the 'common wisdom' of condemnation of popular music markets. Condemnations of supposed simplicity, of derivativeness, of a lack of authenticity and so on. With each passing year, popular music markets provide products that are widely disparaged via such reasoning. And yet, with each passing year, Adorno's critique, and this 'common wisdom' conclusion, also loses power. Recorded popular music is exponential in the possibilities it presents for meaning-making. It is a treasury of interacting works which reference or subvert each other's influence in a moment. Adorno's omission in his critique was an acknowledgement or an affirmation of difference within a particular living context. By a living context I mean, the society and economic system that an individual finds themselves born into. Popular music presents a possibility for emblematic agency within that context, for social experiment, for dream, for new imaginings of future social relations. Reception of a popular song is not only *not* uniform between individuals but not even stable or singular within one individual. It is difficult to assess, empirically, the revolutionary legacies of popular recorded song across the twentieth century. But one of the key tenets of this thesis is that popular song operates at a level more deeply than it appears; that its effects are difficult to discern. There is an argument to be made that popular song helped to remake notions of masculinity across that century, for example. Or that it created a space for the legacies of empire and slavery to be borne witness to. And crucially these trajectories and

[16] Adorno, 'Popular Music,' Introduction to the Sociology of Music, 37.

tensions are not always voiced explicitly within semantic, lyrical content. They are communicated and felt in the minutiae of song. In a lingering pause, in a troubling texture, in a momentary vignette of mundane domesticity.

A recording of popular song is a cross-section of the life-world, a representation of lived experience, but not only in the text of the lyrics or the audio of the recording. It is also a part of that life world itself, in the materiality of the object and as a living element within communities and individuals, whether at the point of production, circulation or reception. It is an object that is made up of interplay between so many interdependent elements: pulse, timbre, harmonic and melodic tensions, sectional structure, gesture, metaphor, speech, the symbolic import of instruments, phonetics, musical idiom, quotation and so on.

It's true that popular music is a fantasy realm, one that deals in heroism and myth-making. But the audience is always already appraised of this. When Adorno places an emphasis on 'truth' he neglects the place of fiction, artifice and representation in how we experience the world. Crucially, the popular song draws attention to, and enacts, and embodies, its own tensions between truth and artifice. It has the capacity to represent human experience via a 'fictionalised' rarefied, idealised account, at the same time as offering the listener the possibility of a real-time, physical and mental connection to that experience. The singer can show the workings of cognition, of feeling and of memory using the same pace at which those things unfold in the body.

Sectional structure is one of the elements, often neglected in scholarship, where so much productive meaning, and tension between multiple meanings, can lie. A structure as simple as AABA, for twenty years or so, was able to contain within it so much human experience. It is an example of how a formal constraint, the artifice of a default musical structure, can emblematically show and display the possibilities of human potential. Time and again, audiences have cherished songs which elegantly epitomised the classicism of the form, as well as songs which stretched and troubled its edges and rules in order to render an experience that was both new *and* recognisable, and all the more potent for being both. Possibilities and potentials in the 'real world' will also, always, at a given time, be subject to constraints and structures and contexts. The revolutionary who does not account for the fact that there are only sixteen hours in the day will exhaust. Those who organise around this constraint will at least be able to work towards a shared goal. One way for deep, secluded, human experiences

to be shared has been through the accepted constraint of 32-bars, with a B section that begins at bar number seventeen.

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